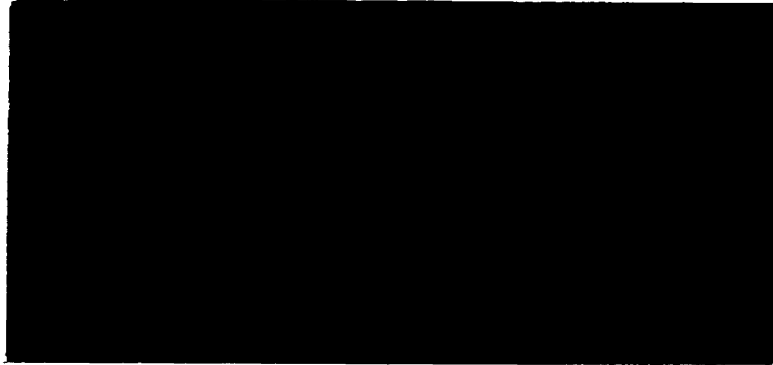




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**"Narrativity, Narrative Identity, and  
Social Action: Rethinking English  
Working-Class Formation"**

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**NARRATIVITY, NARRATIVE IDENTITY, AND SOCIAL ACTION:  
RETHINKING ENGLISH WORKING-CLASS FORMATION**

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## Introduction

The nineteenth century English working class bears a most peculiar burden and embodies a most peculiar paradox. Like Auden's academic warriors who spar with "smiles and Christian names," historians, economists and sociologists have pushed and prodded early nineteenth-century English working people into procrustean political positions to support or disconfirm Marx's predictions of revolutionary class conflict erupting from the the contradictions of capitalism. A manichaeian concern locks the debate into an impasse: Were early nineteenth-century workers revolutionary or reformist? Was there a class struggle in the industrial revolution? The questions remain unresolved. Yet surely it is the history of English working peoples that has suffered from this burden of praising or burying Marxism through competing interpretations of their early stories?

The burden has been made heavier, moreover, by the weight of continual excoriation from all sides of the ideological terrain for the "refusal" of English workers to precisely fit either of the categories of proper revolutionary or reformist behavior. Indeed "why the peculiarities of the English?" has been an intellectual complaint since the birth of the theory of class.<sup>1</sup> It is the paradox of this phenomenon, however, that is most striking: the yardstick against which the English working class is measured "peculiar" was constructed by classical sociological conceptions of class formation for which English working people served as the putative historical model. Surely something is amiss when the original historical actors whose lives were appropriated for a theoretical schema of class formation are subsequently judged deviant by that same theory.<sup>2</sup>

The paradox and the burden clearly point to a fresh agenda: Rather than asking yet again what explains the "peculiarities" of the English (or the "exceptionalism" of this or that national working class) the time has come to call

into question the peculiarities of this theory that judges as deviant each empirical case it addresses.

These observations and claims are at the heart of this paper which aims to offer a critical evaluation of class-formation theory--a theory which seeks to explain how and why the working class comes to act in the ways that it does. In this rethinking of class formation theory I am of course joining with and benefiting from the critical and historical energies of many other students of class formation and social theory.<sup>3</sup> My approach, however, will have a particular twist. I will argue that the means to achieve this end must be through an engagement with the concept of narrative and, more generally, with the constitutive place of narrativity in social theory. Indeed my overall aim is to demonstrate the theoretical and historical significance of narrative and narrativity not only for studies of working-class formation, but for social science research more generally.<sup>4</sup>

My argument about narrative and the core problems of class-formation theory is two-fold: First, I will argue that one particular story--the classical story of England's transition from traditional to modern society--is at the core of the problems of class formation theory. This single master-narrative was the substantive vessel which carried the theoretical innovations of those we now recognize as founders of the social sciences--Adam Smith, Ricardo, Marx, Mill, Durkheim, Weber, Freud. Ultimately this storied dimension of modern social science was lost from sight, but not from significance. In a curious inversion the narrative of classical modernization became merely a subfield of the social science disciplines ("modernization theory" which is now long discredited, especially in its 1950's-1960's incarnation), while in an utterly fragmented form, the story was abstracted into the foundations of class-formation theory. The conceptual and methodological vocabulary of this theory is built upon these "frozen" abstracted fragments of the classical narrative of English socio-economic development.

The consequences seem clear: Class formation theory cannot be successfully revised by theoretical revision alone. Instead there is much to gain if we recognize, reconsider, and challenge the particular encoded narrative. But if we accept this as the case, it also seems unlikely that we can or should we attempt to escape altogether the narrative dimension of social explanation (Somers 1990, 1992a); thus we must rethink, rehistoricize, and ultimately retell that foundational story of the English.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, I propose that this historical deconstruction must be accompanied by a conceptual one. After all, the classical story of English socio-economic development was constructed, like all narratives, through a particular conceptual filter. That filter was the social naturalism of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries--an attempted epistemological escape from all we associate with historicity. In social naturalism, temporality, spatiality, relationality, and concrete linkages all gave way to the abstract ideals of nature's self-regulation. But nothing could have been more ironic and paradoxical: a master-narrative of modern English society was produced through the lens of a self-consciously, indeed belligerently so, anti-historical, anti-narrative, naturalistic conceptual frame.<sup>6</sup> As a result the foundational story deeply encoded within modern social science has all the formal components of an analytic narrative--a beginning (traditional society), a middle (crisis of industrial revolution), and an end (resolution into modernity), as well as leading protagonists in action (classes in struggle) and causal emplotment (the engine of industrialization, proletarianization). The only thing missing, however, is conceptual narrativity--social concepts that can embrace historicity. The story's conceptual core--classes, society, tradition and modernity--is comprised of abstractions, unseen, and atemporal.

The results are the strange hybrid we unconsciously live with today--a social science theory sprung from a vision of escaping the past (history) that is

nonetheless constituted upon a narrative framework. And in this paradoxical combination can be found the source of many of the problems of class formation theory. In the task of recognizing and rethinking the master-narrative of class formation theory we must therefore also reconstruct concepts which are historical. In this paper I will introduce the two central terms of this revision: narrative identity and relational setting. Part I examines recent theories of English class formation to demonstrate the presence of an encoded master-narrative and the paradoxical problem of this being a "denarrativized" (conceptually ahistorical) narrative. Part II addresses the concept of narrative in both its old and its new incarnations. Part III examines the conceptual implications of narrative for social science research. Finally, Part IV outlines a retold story of English class-formation.

## **I. THE 'DENARRATIVIZED' NARRATIVE OF CLASS FORMATION THEORY: THE CASE OF THE ENGLISH**

Studies of English working-class practices are embedded and emburdened within the theory of class formation. Yet the paradox is that encoded within the theory is a "de-narrativized" master-narrative about the long term processes of English socio-economic development. Such a naturalistic rendering of history is abstracted into a general model of the relationship between industrialization, proletarianization, the birth of class society, and the expected behavioral response of the working classes. Whether the term is worker, social actor, industrialization, culture, society, or class, each element of the theory bears within it the master-narrative. And from this obscured but powerful master-narrative comes the problem that drives all studies of working-class formation: Why the failure (or incoherency, peculiarity, or deviance...) of the "real" working classes?

This section argues that the incoherencies and peculiarities attributed to actual working-class practices are not those of the English or any other historical case. Rather they are the incoherencies of class formation theory. The incoherency stems from inferring a teleological prediction (class in itself-class for itself, or working peoples' objective interests will eventually translate into revolutionary class consciousness) not from a genuine theoretical generalization but from a wrong-headed master-narrative based on an anti-historical conceptual framework. There are many new stories to be written; the work of renarrativization, however, first requires careful attention to the ways in which previous studies have been confined by class formation theory.

The vast literature on English working-class formation in sociology and history are typically grouped around three explanatory paradigms. The English working-class in the industrial revolution was either: 1) reformist;<sup>7</sup> 2) revolutionary in the 1830's but suppressed by the 1850's;<sup>8</sup> or 3) "backwards-looking" and composed of artisans (not factory workers) who were "reactionary radicals."<sup>9</sup> With all injustice duly acknowledged, I am not going to address either the important complexities within or the differences among these three approaches; it is the points of commonality among the three that are of interest to this paper.

Despite their important differences, each of these approaches are different answers to the same question: why did the English working class in the industrial revolution either conform to or deviate from the revolutionary behavior predicted by class-formation theory? That is to say, why did or did not they act in "class-like" ways? And in all three paradigms, this question is addressed not to empirical cases of variation, but to "deviations" from a prediction: Why, in other words, did the class in itself-class for itself prediction fail? Each approach embodies the same prediction--namely that under normal conditions there should



be a causal link between the societal and economic changes of the industrial revolution (class in itself) and the emergence of a revolutionary class consciousness (class for itself).

The main difficulty with this prediction is that the English working class (and just about all working classes) have resolutely "refused" to behave properly. Yet when faced with divergences between observed behavior and theoretical predictions, scholars of class formation have all too rarely asked why workers did what they did in comparison to other working-classes. Such a strategy would have led to a healthy multitude of competing empirical explanations to be tested and refined. Instead the "non-revolutionary" behavior of working people has been redefined into problems of deviance or anomalousness. Yet (as we know from Michael Polanyi (1958) and T.S. Kuhn) once an empirical finding has been defined as anomalous, it cannot be used to test or falsify a theory. Instead, it is the theory and the prediction that remain pristine (Polanyi has called this position of privilege one of "tacit knowledge") while countless "alibis" are generated for the deviations.<sup>10</sup> Thus class formation theory has been reduced to a measuring rod used to chastise the shortcomings of working peoples. The result has been a scholarly preoccupation with what I have elsewhere called an epistemology of absence (Somers 1989a).

Recently several scholars of working-class formation have criticized just this problem. Katznelson (1986) and Zolberg (1986) in particular have tried to reframe the theory by jettisoning the constricting teleological expectation built into the concept of class consciousness and converting the explanandum to variations in class formation. Their efforts have been heroic but unsatisfactory. For the problem of failed expectation will not be solved by changing the dependent variable from revolutionary class consciousness to variations in working class dispositions. The problem is much deeper: the tenacity of the prediction is

inexorably grounded in the tenacity of a single representational narrative. Indeed most striking about all three above theories of working-class formation is that they are in essence three different versions of the same story, that is, three different "endings" to the same beginning and middle of an encoded master-narrative.

There is, moreover, a ghostly familiarity to this narrative. Quite simply, it is the story of The Industrial Revolution--the emergence of an industrial capitalist society from a pre-industrial past. It is, of course, a story told in many idioms--the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the emergence of market society, the emancipation of civil society from the state, the increasing division of labour, and the rationalization of the modern world. For each the social structural transformation--whether it's called industrialization, proletarianization, or the division of labour--ushers in the "birth of class society." It is a story which has an economic, a political, and cultural component to it. In the economic realm it is a process by which commercialization, an increasing division of labour, and technological development gradually break the bonds of relatively static pre-industrial economies into industrial and capitalist growth. Politically it is the story of the emergence of the liberal state which provides the framework and/or actively supports the new laissez-faire economy and its subsequent class relations. And it is a process by which "traditional" relations are transformed into class relations, and communitarian artisanal cultures organized by moral economies are supplanted by the force of new class allignments--from the "bread nexus to the wage nexus."

Rather than debating whether working-class behavior even should be explained by the birth of class society, these different paradigms reflect only the different views about how the working class responded to a presupposed causal primacy of societal transformation. Here is the depth of the problem: each theory defines a priori the same the independent variable--proletarianization and

"objective" class structure. This leaves for empirical research only the historical variations of this process. Katznelson's (1986) theory, no less than the prevailing paradigms of English working-class formation, continues to build an a priori causal argument into the question and retains by assertion precisely that which requires demonstration, namely the causal primacy of proletarianization (or industrialization, or the transition from feudalism to capitalism, or modernization) in explaining the social practices of working peoples. The different approaches, moreover, do not represent disagreement over the precise nature of the transformation. Each version follows the same sequence from pre-industrial, pre-capitalist to industrialized modernity in order to make its case.<sup>11</sup> Indeed when all is said and done about the particular exogenous influences on social action--religious, moral, cultural, political, and community factors--each makes the same point explicitly. First Harold Perkin (1969):

At some point between the French Revolution and the Great Reform Act, the vertical antagonism and horizontal solidarities of class emerged on a national scale from and overlay the vertical bonds and horizontal rivalries of connection and interest. That moment...saw the birth of class.

Now Edward Thompson (1966):

When every caution has been made, the outstanding fact of the period between 1790 and 1830 is the formation of the working class. This is revealed, first, in the growth of class-consciousness: the consciousness of an identity of interests as between all these diverse groups of working people and as against the interest of other classes. And, second, in the growth of corresponding forms of political industrial organization (pp. 212-13).

Finally, Craig Calhoun (1981):

All were essentially movements of those [nineteenth-century "reactionary radicals"] who would fight against the coming of industrial society, who had traditional communities to preserve (p. 4).

A sequential development from traditional pre-industrial society to industrial capitalist society, and a radical rupture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century are thus the essentially non-contested concepts at the heart of

theories of class formation. The real lynchpin that holds the theory and its prediction together is thus the story of the rupture and transformation from a pre-industrial to an industrial/capitalist society. The chain of linkages is inexorable: only the presence of the prediction leads to the problematic of "failure" and "peculiarity" of behavioral outcome; yet the content of the prediction--the expectation of class structure producing class consciousness--is solely predicated on the explanatory master-narrative of classical modernity and its conceptual infrastructure. As long as the question of working class social action is bound a priori to the structural transformations of industrialization and the birth of class society, the research task will be confined to elaborating different versions of a presumed (but not demonstrated) linkage between societal transformations and working class patterns of action.

## II. WHAT IS NARRATIVITY?

From contesting the master-narrative embedded in theories of class formation it is only a small leap to suggest that new stories need to be constructed about the long-term history of the English. But new stories cannot merely be the product of one assertion against another. The original master-narrative of modernity, as I have argued, was itself constructed from a naturalistic, epistemological attempt to escape from historicity. The paradoxical consequence is that the master-"narrative" at the core of class formation theory is conceptually both anti-narrative and ahistorical. From this odd hybrid often come the many incoherent predictions which render social life and social action fundamentally unintelligible. Indeed class formation theory exemplifies incoherence. Given the foundational role of the theory's master-narrative and the self-conscious expungement from that narrative of a conceptual narrativity, it is arguable that class formation theory has been in a sorry state from the beginning. If our new

stories are not to sound relentlessly like variations on the old, what we need, then, is more than the deconstruction of the master-narrative of English modernization. We need also to develop a conceptual narrativity.

### **Narrative and the Historians**

While narrative has always been the non-explanatory and non-theoretical "other" for the social sciences, historians themselves have had a conflicting and changing relationship to the concept. In France in the 1940's the Annales historians rejected both traditional political history and narrative in favor of more anthropological, structural and quantitative analysis (Stoianovich 1976; Bourde and Martin 1983; Hunt 1986, 1989). Instead of rejecting narrativity, meanwhile, a sector of Anglo-American historians led by Carl Hempel (1942, 1962) argued that narrative itself was a science of history and, if done correctly would produce general laws capable of both explanation and prediction. In spite of two decades of vigorous debate, this particular view of narrative faded (Gardiner 1952; Gallie 1968; Dray 1957; Atkinson 1978). There was by then in the 1960's a new kind of rejection of narrative developing on both sides of the Atlantic. In this heyday of the social sciences, historians in North America produced "social science history" while the revival of Marxist and Weberian theory in Britain generated "social history" in Britain (Kammen 1980; Stearns 1985). Social science methods and theories became favored and narrative now rendered as non-theoretical storytelling about elites.<sup>12</sup>

In the late 1970's, however, the leading social historian Lawrence Stone (1979) led a "return to narrative" movement. A vigorous "auto-critique" of social science historical methods allowed Stone to argue that their overbearing influence had eliminated any historical concern for meaning. Despite his terminology, however, Stone was not really advocating a return to the traditional notion of narrative. Newly influenced by Geertz (1973) and the emerging "anthropological

turn" it was an interpretative approach he was advocating.<sup>13</sup> Indeed the new "post-social" history has by no means returned to traditional narrative methods. In the present era where the central debates among historians take place among post-structuralist, interpretive, macro-structural, and most recently advocates of the "linguistic turn" very few defenses can be found of what came to be defined as a non-theoretical mode of history writing (e.g. Scott 1988a; Megill 1989, 1991; Novick 1991).

But what exactly was it that was being rejected or rediscovered? Despite the broad debates, each of these positions shared a common definition of narrative as a mode of representation--discursive, rather than quantitative; non-explanatory, rather than conditionally propositional; and non-theoretical, rather than the theoretically-driven social sciences. The conflict among historians was solely over how to evaluate that representational form. For "traditional" historians narrative was ideal because representing history accurately was the essence of the historian's craft; while for the social science historians, traditional narrative representational form was inadequate to the task of explaining and interpreting the past.<sup>14</sup>

### Reframing Narrativity

While over the last two decades historians debated and increasingly scorned the value of narrative, scholars from a wide spectrum of disciplines (including psychology, medicine, psychoanalytic theory, education, philosophy, political science, gender studies, and anthropology) quietly appropriated the abandoned concept and often used it to produce major conceptual breakthroughs in their fields.<sup>15</sup> But the concept employed by these disciplines was radically different from the older interpretation of narrative as simply a representational form. The new notion recognizes narrative and narrativity to be concepts of social epistemology and social ontology. They posit that it is through narrativity that we

come to know, to understand, to make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities. It therefore matters not whether we are social scientists or subjects of historical research, we come to be who we are (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing) by locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives rarely of our own making.<sup>16</sup>

### **Common Features of Social Narrativity**<sup>17</sup>

From diverse sources it is possible to identify four features of a reframed narrativity particularly relevant for the social sciences: 1) relationality of parts to whole, 2) causal emplotment; 3) selective appropriation; and 4) temporality, sequence and place. Narratives are, above all, constellations of relationships (connected parts) embedded in time and space, constituted by what I call causal emplotment. Unlike the attempt to explain a single event by placing it in specified category, narrativity precludes sensemaking of a singular isolated phenomenon. Narrativity demands we discern the meaning of any single event only in temporal and spatial relationship to others. Indeed the chief characteristic of narrative is that it renders understanding only by connecting (however unstable) parts to some notion of a whole (however incoherent or unrealizable). In this respect, narrative becomes an epistemological category.

The relationship of parts to a whole is precisely why narrativity turns "events" into episodes whether the sequence of episodes is presented or experienced in anything resembling chronological order. It is causal emplotment that gives significance to independent instances, not their chronological or categorical order. And it is emplotment which translates event into episode. Without emplotment, moreover, events or experiences could only be categorized according to a taxonomical scheme (Polkinghorne 1988). As a mode of explanation, then, causal emplotment is an accounting (however fantastic or implicit) of why a narrative has the story line it does (Veyne 1971; Ricoeur 1981;

1984-86). Causal narrativity allows us to test a series of "plot hypotheses" against actual events, and then to examine how--and under what conditions--the events intersect with the hypothesized plot.<sup>18</sup> Polkinghorne (1988) comments on the difference between emplotment and categorization when he notes that social actions are not as a result of categorizing oneself ("I am 40 years old; I should buy life insurance") but rather in the context of a life-story with episodes ("I felt out of breath last week, I really should start thinking about life insurance") (p.21). Similarly, it is also apparent that serious confusion is rarely due to one's inability to place an event or instance in the proper category. Rather we tend to become confused when it is impossible or illogical to integrate an event into an intelligible plot (MacIntyre 1981). To make something understandable in the context of what has happened is to give it historicity and relationality. This makes sense since when events are located in a temporal (however fleeting) and sequential plot we can then explain their relationship to other events. Plot, then, can thus be seen as the logic or syntax of narrative (Ricoeur 1979; Veyne 1971; Polkinghorne 1988).

The significance of emplotment for narrative understanding is often the most misunderstood aspect of narrativity. Without attention to emplotment narrative's explanatory dimension can easily be overlooked and be misperceived as a non-theoretical representation of events. Yet it is emplotment that permits us to distinguish between narrative on the one hand, and chronicle or Annales (White 1987) on the other. In fact, it is emplotment a narrative that clears away the underbrush so we can see that a narrative is a significant configuration of relationships.

A third crucial element of narrativity is its evaluative criteria (Linde 1986, L. Polanyi 1985, Steinmetz 1992). Evaluation enables us to make qualitative and lexical distinctions among the infinite variety of events, experiences, characters, institutional promises, and social factors that impinge on our lives. Charles Taylor



(1989), for example, argues that the capacity to act greatly depends on having an evaluative framework shaped by what he calls "hypergoods" (a set of fundamental principles and values) (cf. also Calhoun 1991). The same discriminatory principle is true of narrative: in the face of a potentially limitless array of social experiences deriving from social contact with events, institutions, people, the evaluative capacity of emplotment demands and enables selective appropriation in constructing narratives (Somers 1986). A plot must be thematic (Bruner 1987; Kermode 1984). The primacy of this narrative theme or competing themes determines how events are "processed" and what criteria will be used to prioritize and render meaning to events. Themes such as "husband as breadwinner," "union solidarity," or "women must be independent above all" will selectively appropriate the happenings of the social world, arrange them in some order, and normatively evaluate these arrangements.

#### **Four "levels" of narrativity**

So far I have presented the meaning of narrative in its most abstract dimensions. These relatively abstract concepts, however, can also be expressed through four different "levels" of narrative--ontological, public, conceptual, and meta-narrativity.

**Ontological narratives** are the stories that social actors use to make sense of, indeed to act in, their lives. We use ontological narratives to define who we are, not just to know what to do. Locating ourselves in narratives endows us with identities--however multiple or conflicting they may be (hence the term narrative identity (Somers 1986). To have some sense of social being in the world requires that our lives be more than series of isolated events; ontological narratives process events into episodes. People act, or not act, in part according to how they understand their place in any number of given narratives--however fragmented, contradictory, or partial. Charles Taylor (1989, pp. 51-52) puts it this way,

"because we cannot but orient ourselves to the good, and thus determine our place relative to it..., we must inescapably understand our lives in narrative form, as a 'quest'."<sup>19</sup>

But identity, like the self, is neither a priori or fixed. Ontological narratives make identity and the self something one becomes (Nehamas 1985). Narrative embeds identities in time; ontological narratives help to structure all our actor's activities, consciousness, and beliefs (Carr 1985; 1986). Like all narratives, they are structured by emplotment, relationality, connectivity, and selective appropriation. So basic to agency is ontological narrativity that if we want to explain, that is to know, to make sense of, to account for, perhaps even to predict, anything about the practices of social and historical actors, their collective actions, their modes and meanings of institution building, and their apparent incoherencies we must first recognize the place of ontological narrative in social life.

But where do they come from? How are people's stories constructed? Above all, narratives are social and interpersonal. Although psychologists are typically biased toward the individual sources of narrative, even they recognize the degree to which ontological narratives are constructed inter-personally in the course of social interactions over time (Sarbin 1986, Personal Narratives Group 1989). To be sure, agents adjust stories to fit their own "identities" and, conversely, will tailor "reality" to fit their stories. But it is the interpersonal webs of relationality that sustain and transform narratives over time. Charles Taylor (1989) calls these "webs of interlocution," others (MacIntyre 1981) call them "traditions," I will call them "public narratives."

**Public, Cultural and Institutional Narratives** are those narratives attached to "publics," to a cultural formation larger than the single individual, to intersubjective networks or institutions, however local or grand, micro or macro--stories about American social mobility, the "freeborn Englishman," the

emancipatory story of socialism, and so on. Public and cultural narratives range from the narratives of one's family, to those of the workplace (organizational narrativity), church, government, and "nation."<sup>20</sup> Like all narrative these stories have drama, plot, explanation and selective appropriation. Families, for example, selectively appropriate events to construct stories about their descent into poverty. The mainstream media order and connect events to give us a "mainstream plot" about the origin of social disorders. The church explains the theological reasons for a national famine. Government agencies tell us "expert" stories about unemployment. Charles Taylor (1989) emphasizes the centrality of public to ontological narrative when he states:

We may sharply shift the balance in our definition of identity, dethrone the given, historical community as a pole of identity, and relate only to the community defined by adherence to the good (or the saved, or the true believers, or the wise). But this doesn't sever our dependence on webs of interlocution. It only changes the webs, and the nature of our dependence (p.39).

**Conceptual/Analytic/sociological narrativity** refers to the concepts and explanations which we construct as social researchers. Because neither social action nor institution-building is solely produced through ontological and public narratives, our concepts and explanations must also include the range of factors we call social forces--market patterns, institutional practices, organizational constraints, and so on. Herein lies the greatest challenge of analytic and conceptual narrativity: to construct a conceptual vocabulary which we can use to reconstruct and plot over time and space the ontological narratives of historical actors, the public and cultural narratives which inform their lives, and the crucial intersection of these with the relevant range of other social forces.

For the purposes of this paper, it is the conceptual dimension of analytic narrativity that is most important.<sup>21</sup> To date, few if any of our analytic categories are in themselves temporal and spatial. Rather, our modern sociological usage of

terms like "society," the "actor," and "culture" was for social science purposes intentionally abstracted from their historicity. The conceptual challenge that narrativity poses is to develop a social analytic vocabulary that can accommodate the contention that social life, social organizations, social action, and social identities are narratively constructed through both ontological and public narratives.

**Meta-narrativity**, the fourth level of narrativity, refers to the "master-narratives" in which we are embedded as contemporary actors in history as well as social scientists (Jameson 1981; Lyotard 1984; Foucault 1972, 1973). Our sociological theories and concepts are encoded with aspects of these master-narratives--Progress, Decadence, Industrialization, Enlightenment, etc.--even though they usually operate at a presuppositional level of social science epistemology or beyond our awareness. These narratives can be the epic dramas of our time: Capitalism vs Communism, the Individual vs Society, Barbarism/Nature vs Civility. They may also be progressive narratives of teleological unfolding: Marxism and the triumph of class struggle, Liberalism and the triumph of Liberty, the Rise of Nationalism, or of Islam. The example I discuss of the master-narrative of Industrialization/Modernization out of Feudalism/Traditional Society, is only one of many cases in which a presuppositional story gets in the way of historical social science. But I have also pointed to what is perhaps the most paradoxical aspect of master-narratives: their quality of denarrativization. That is, they are built on concepts and explanatory schemes ("social systems" "structures" "social forces") that are in themselves abstractions. Although master-narratives have all the necessary components of narrativity--relationality, transformation, major plot lines and causal emplotment, characters and action--they are thus nonetheless missing the crucial element of a conceptual narrativity.

### III. SO WHAT FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE HISTORY?

So far, I have explained some elements of the new narrative and have identified the major levels of narrativity. What, then, are the implications of this new conception of narrative for social and historical research? How can narrative help us do empirical research about social life and social practices? Although all four levels of narrativity must be captured in our social science, if we are to adequately account for working-class formation and social action, the important one is the third: conceptual and analytic. A conceptual narrativity demands temporality, spatiality, and emplotment as well as relationality and historicity. Narrative identity and relational setting represent concepts which have worked best in my own research.

**Narrative identity.** I have argued that narrativity is an ontological condition of social being, social consciousness, social action, institutions, structures, even society itself. If narrative is indeed a constitutive feature of social life, then our first challenge is to develop concepts that allow us to capture the narrativity through which identities are constructed and social action mediated. The concept of a narrative identity is predicated on just this premise: Narrativity is not a form imposed on social life but that social life and human lives are themselves "storied" (Sarbin 1986a; Carr 1986). If social identities are constituted through narrativity, social action is also guided by narrativity, and social processes and interactions--both institutional and interpersonal--are narratively mediated.<sup>22</sup>

Class formation theory, by contrast, explains action with the concept of interest. "Interest" is determined from the logic and stages of social structural development. In this way the social analyst imputes to people, as members of social categories (e.g., traditional artisans, modern factory worker, peasant), a particular set of interests. For example, historians commonly argue that the decline of traditional domestic modes of production and its concomitant threat to

custom created an "artisanal interest." Although social science historians almost always demonstrate with subtlety how these interests are mediated through intervening factors (including culture, gender, religion, residential patterns, etc), the social interests derived from social structure are the foundational explanation for working-class practices and protests. Making sense of social action thus becomes an exercise in identifying social categories, deriving putative interests from them, and then doing the empirical work of looking at variations on those interests (e.g. McNall et al. 1991; Wright 1985).

To understand action, however, why should we assume that an individual or a collectivity has any particular set of interests simply because one aspect of their identity fits into one social category? Why should we assume that artisans have "artisanal" interests simply because they are members of the "declining artisanal mode of production" category? To let 'class' stand for a determinative experience is to presume that which has not been empirically demonstrated--namely that identities are foundationally constituted by categorization in the division of labor.

One way to circumvent this problem is to substitute the concept of identity for that of interest. An identity approach to action assumes that social action can only be intelligible if we recognize that people are guided to act by who they believe they are rather than by interests we impute to them. Whereas the latter is a matter of how we as analysts categorize people's role in a division of labour, the former is a matter of how people characterize themselves. While a social category is an internally stable concept which assumes that under "normal" conditions, entities within that category will demonstrate appropriate "categorical" behaviors characterization, by contrast, embeds the person within patterns of relationships that shift over time and space. These temporally and spatially shifting configurations form the relational co-ordinates of ontological, public, and

cultural narratives. It is within these numerous and multi-layered narratives that identities are formed; hence narrative identity.

The "narrative" dimension of identities presumes that action can only be intelligible if we recognize the one or many ontological and public narratives in which actors identify themselves. Rather than by interests narrative identities are constituted by a person's temporally and spatially-specific "place" in culturally constructed stories comprised of (breakable) rules, (variable) practices, binding (and unbinding) institutions, and the multiple stories of family, nation, or economic life. People's experiences as workers, for example, were inextricably interconnected with the larger matrix of relations that shaped their lives--their regional location, the practical workings of the legal system, family patterns--and the particular stories (of honor, of ethnicity, of gender, of local community, of greed, etc.) used to account for the events happening to them .

Although social action is only intelligible through the construction, enactment, and appropriation of public narratives, this does not mean, however, that individuals are free to fabricate idiosyncratic narratives at whim; rather, they must choose from a repertoire of stories. Which kinds of narratives will socially predominate is contested politically and will depend in large part on the actual distribution of power (Ortner 1991). This is why the kinds of narratives people use to make sense of their situation will always be an empirical rather than a presuppositional question. The extent and the nature of any given repertoire of narratives available for appropriation is always historically and culturally specific; the particular plots giving meanings to those narratives cannot be determined in advance.

**Relational Setting.** Social action and narrative identity are shaped not only through ontological and public narratives, but also by social environments. We thus need a conceptual vocabulary that can relate narrative identity to that

range of factors we call social forces--market patterns, institutional practices, organizational constraints, and so on. Another challenge of analytic narrativity is therefore to locate the actors as characters in their social narratives and to emplot them in a temporal and spatial configuration of relationships and cultural practices (institutions and discourses). We therefore need concepts which will enable us to plot over time and space the ontological narratives of historical actors, the public and cultural narratives which inform their lives, as well as the relevant range of other social forces--from politics to demography--which configure together to shape history and social action.

Society is the term that usually performs that work for us in social analysis; order and social structure are variants on the term which claim a more abstract ground. When we speak of understanding social action we simultaneously speak of locating the actors in their societal context. But society as a concept is rooted in a wholistic way of thinking about the world. If we want to be able to capture the narrativity of social life we need a way of thinking that can substitute relational for totalizing metaphors for that environment. Here I concur with Michael Mann who has written "It may seem an odd position for a sociologist to adopt; but if I could, I would abolish the concept of "society" altogether" (Mann 1986, p. 2).

For virtually all practicing social science research, a society is a social system. As a system, it has a core essence--an essential set of social "springs" at the heart of the mechanism. This essential core is in turn reflected in each of the broader societal institutions that together comprise the system. Thus when sociologists speak of feudalism, for example, we mean at once "feudal society" as a whole, a particular set of "feudal class relations" at the core of this society, a "feudal manorial economy," and a concomitant set of "feudal institutions" such as feudal political units and feudal peasant communities. Most significantly for historical research, each institution within a society must co-vary with each other.



Thus in "feudal societies," the state by definition must be a feudal state whose feudal character co-varies with all other feudal institutions; feudal workers must all be unfree and extra-economically exploited peasants. And in "industrial society," a "modern industrial/capitalist" state must be detached from civil society and the industrial economy, and industrial workers must be individual and free. To be sure, the synchrony is not always perfect. In periods of transition from one society to another, there occurs a "lag effect" and remnants of the old order persist against the pressures of the new. But despite these qualifications, the systemic metaphor assumes that the parts of society co-vary along with the whole.

If understanding working-class formation is to be more than an exercise in extending a unifying core outward to the assumption of "interest," these systemic typologies must be broken apart and their parts disaggregated and reassembled on the basis of empirical clusters. To make this possible I am suggesting, then, that we substitute the concept of a relational setting for "society." A relational setting is a pattern of relationships among institutions, public narratives, and social practices. Identity-formation takes shape within this relational setting of contested but patterned relations among people and institutions. As such it is a relational matrix, similar to a social network.<sup>23</sup>

One of the most important characteristics of a relational setting is that it has a history (MacIntyre 1981), and thus must be explored over time and space. Temporally, a relational setting is traced over time not by looking for the indicators of social development, but by empirically examining if and when the interaction among the institutions of the setting appears to have produced a decisively different outcome from the previous times under examination. Social change, from this perspective, is viewed not as the evolution or revolution of one societal type to another, but by shifting relationships among the institutional arrangements and cultural practices that comprise one or more social settings.

Spatially, a relational setting must be conceived with a geometric rather than a mechanistic metaphor; it is comprised of a geometric matrix of institutions linked to each other in variable patterns contingent upon the interaction of all the points in the matrix.<sup>24</sup> A setting crosses "levels" of analysis, and brings together in one setting the effect of, say, the international market, the war-making policies of the state, the local political conflicts among elites, and the demographic practices of a community. This cross-cutting character of a relational setting assumes that the effect of any one level can only be discerned (for example, the proto-industrial textile sector) by assessing how it is affected interactively with the other relevant ones. To do so requires that we first disaggregate the parts of a setting from any presumed co-varying whole, and then reconfigure them in their temporal and geographic relationality to each other. In this way, for example, different regions of England are no longer cast as variants of a single society, but as different relational settings which can be compared against each other.<sup>25</sup>

#### IV. NARRATIVE IDENTITY, RELATIONAL ANALYSIS, AND CLASS FORMATION

So far, I have outlined several features and levels of the new narrativity. I have noted two implications of narrativity for engaging in social science: first, that we need to substitute the concept of narrative identity for that of interest, and second, that we need to substitute the concept of relational setting for that of society or social system. This new narrative and relational analysis can potentially liberate us as analysts from the overarching grand narratives that have constrained class formation theory. In this final section, I will briefly note how the conceptual apparatus I have just outlined can be used to rethink research on working-class formation and retell the story of English class formation.

One important outcome of making relational settings and cultural narratives the basis of working-class social action is to eliminate class formation theory's perennial concerns about the "inconsistency," "failed predictions" or "deviancy." The identity approach, in contrast, expects absolute historical contingency between social practices and the industrial revolution (or any other societal transformation). The effect of such historical interactions is what must be explored empirically, as must be the question of whether they will enable or constrain social action. The assumption of contingency thus challenges the assumptions that workers' behaviors which do not conform to categorical assumptions are anomalous, irrational, or "backwards-looking"; the settings in which identities are constituted have no endogenous directionality or a priori definition of rational action. If the contexts which give meaning, contingency, and historicity to identity have no teleology, no actions can be assessed as more objectively rational than others. All working class behavior therefore becomes potentially intelligible.

Another implication of the narrative identity approach is that our research must begin not from a single category but from the network of relationships and institutions in which actors are embedded and exploit these in their varying relationships to each other--varying in social and political distances as well as interactive effects. Substituting a relational setting for the abstraction of "society" allows us to induce empirical connexions among institutions rather than presupposing co-variation. The positions and distances within a relational setting help to make sense of what kinds of social practices were possible, both at the level of structural opportunity as well as at the level of purpose, identity, and meaning. Thus identity-reconstitution becomes a two-step process. The first involves finding and interpreting the clues that the historical actors have left regarding the narratives that have guided their actions. The second involves using those clues

as well as research on broader social and structural relationships to configure these elements and repertoires into geometric social networks.

My research on the English case can schematically illustrate these points. In the years from 1800 to 1850, English labouring people violently broke machines and marched peacefully to Parliament; they mobbed unpopular workhouses and they petitioned to retain or reinstitute apprenticeship and wage regulations; they demanded new forms of state intervention into the length of the working day and they tenaciously fought for the right to outdoor poor relief and for local control over its administration; they waged militant strikes, and they formed self-help and community based educational organizations; families 'huddled' and exercised political influence by boycotting selected merchants; and at critical periods they linked these practices to the political demand for working class participation in Parliament and universal suffrage.<sup>26</sup>

Let us leave aside the question of whether these were revolutionary, reformist, or "backwards-looking" goals. Who cares? Let us note, instead, the central narrative that ran like a thick thread through all the multiple social practices, goals, and movements. Quite simply, this narrative theme was that working people had inviolable rights to a particular political and legal relationship. They claimed these rights as citizens and focused on a particular understanding of the law, a particular understanding of the 'the people' and their membership in the political community, and a particular conception about the legal relationship between the people and the law. This conception of rights defined independence and autonomy as inexorably linked to the property rights of working people (Prothero 1979; Stedman Jones 1983a). But those rights were only in part the fruits of individual labour; they primarily rested on membership in the political community (Somers 1986, 1992b).

The most notable result of this narrative was that in the midst of the worst economic distress of their lives, English industrial families based their protests not on economic demands or those of a "moral economy," but on a broadly conceived claim to legal rights to participation, substantive social justice (Poor Laws), local government control, cohesive family and community relations, "modern" methods of labour regulation (trade-unions), and the right to independence--be it from capitalists, the state, or other workers. They relied on plot lines driven by a conception of justice and rights in membership to explain their distress and guide their action. Consistently they targeted their protests toward the law, legal authorities, legal ideals of universality and equity, local political and legal institutions, and toward enhancing the solidarity of the community itself. The relationship between "the people and the law" was thus the prevailing public narrative of these working people, and the plot-line which configured this narrative was that of a political culture of rights.<sup>27</sup> The history and projected future of this rights culture was the theme through which events were evaluated, explained, and given meaning. They provided the guides to action, the methods for the remedies of wrong and distress.<sup>28</sup>

This characterization does not prioritize either a language of class or one of politics. There is no question that a language of class developed from the 1830's on, just as there is no question that that same language identified the state as controlling the levers of social power.<sup>29</sup> But most significant is that the language of rights embraced both politics and class; indeed it was the explanatory prism through which class issues and other aspects of social distress were mediated and made sense of. Rights-claims were thus political in the broadest sense--they established the claim to empowerment deriving not only from constitutional and "natural" rights, but from community cohesion and autonomy in membership. Because they conjoined artisanal conceptions of property-based citizenship rights,

these rights-claims also conjoined our usually separate notions of social and political rights. Rights-bearing identities included class rights as one part of a bundle of rights attached to political membership under law; they combined social power, politics, individual rights, and membership.<sup>30</sup>

To explain these practices through narrative analysis enjoins us to reconstruct the relational settings in which these identities unfolded. But in what did such settings consist? How do we know where to begin the task of reconstitution? After first recounting the prevailing ontological narratives, we must then follow their themes and plots--about the law, about the communities in which the law operated, and about the local interaction between communities and the law. And from these we can configure into geometric and temporal form the shifting and varied relational settings in which our actors lived. This is of course not the place to summarize such a massive project of identity-reconstitution; I will hint only programmatically at my findings.

The identities of nineteenth-century English working peoples can be traced to and compared among to four roughly different relational settings: 1) pastoral, rural-industrial, later northern industrial communities; 2) agricultural labouring communities; 3) urban/artisanal communities; 4) and French pastoral and rural-industrial communities. After first reconstructing these settings I then compared historical and geographical anthropologies among the four from 1300-1850, looking especially at the following: 1) variations in productive activities and working relations; 2) variations among English and Continental legal institutions, doctrines, statutory claims, ideals, promises, and policies--especially the differing political and legal rights attached to property relations, statutory labour regulations, legal administrative procedures, and discursive ideals of jurisprudence; 3) variations among communities--kinship, demographic, inheritance, and migration patterns among England's urban and rural (both freeholder and

labouring) popular communities; and 4) differences in the practical workings of English law and justice at the local level of the contrasting English communities.

Doing comparisons through relational settings involved specifying linkages and constructing networks at two levels. In the setting as a whole, each institution formed a point or a 'domain' in a geometric pattern. Connecting lines represented the actual interactive links between the institutions. Rather than imputing an a priori function to a type of production, for example, I asked what kinds of relationships did it generate (or what kinds of relationships must have existed in order for it to have taken root in the first place?) and what were the patterns of these connections? Thus, for example, in the eighteenth-century rural domestic industries, I plotted the connections of merchant capitalists to their family "employees" and followed the processes by which work was distributed, wages negotiated, infractions of contract dealt with, and payments organized. This led me to plotting the daily treks of a middleman, as well as directly to local administrators of statutory labour law. This in turn led me to the participatory mechanisms through which these laws were carried out, which would require an understanding of class relations in the community. Relational analysis therefore neither dismisses nor reduces production to "the economy" (with all the systemicization that category invokes), but rather constitutes economic production as one institution among many; as merely one of a multiple network of competing institutions and practices which bear upon identity-formation.<sup>31</sup>

At a second level relational analysis transforms each institution from a single entity to a set of relationships. The state, for example, may well be an instrument of coercion, but more important is its actual amalgam of sub-organizations and their relationships among each other. The "law" is another example that as a category means little. The historical meaning of law only begins to take shape by charting its numerous institutional and discursive

expressions, from the highest courts to the most trivial of local juries to the discourses of social justice and the statutory preambles. This kind of network analysis makes it possible to study the continual shifts in the kinds and consequences of interactive patterns and institutional arrangements. Substituting the term place for that of "role" (part of the systemic metaphor) allows us to locate institutions and practices in their relational settings.

The significance for identity-formation of each relational setting only emerges by comparing patterns of power, economics, and culture over varying times and places. Thus it would be a mistake to presume that the lives of seventeenth-century rural-industrial families can be understood by simply invoking the category "proletarianized unit of production." Instead I looked at the setting as a whole: what sorts of family and work ties had to exist, for example, in order to sustain certain kinds of inheritance practices? Inversely, what sorts of relationships did different inheritance practices produce and support? Similar questions can be addressed to institutional power relations (rather than relying on a priori categories of "strong" or "weak" states: what administrative power did the crown have available for certain policies? How was this power implemented in local communities?

My alternative story can be briefly summarized. The meaning of working-class formation cannot be found in the 'birth of class society' but rather in the long-term consequences of the legal revolutions of medieval England. Alone among European state-builders, only the English created a national public sphere by appropriating from below and extending throughout the land the legal conventions of both the medieval cities and the public villages. In legal practices the state became the city 'writ-large'; remedies of procedural justice ensuring rights in autonomy and independence coexisted with both national redistributive



policies, as well as legal institutions which commanded community participation in the administration of law.<sup>32</sup>

This mandatory participation in legal administration by all freeholders may have been the most crucial factor in English working-class formation.<sup>33</sup> The most notable result of this participatory system was that which I have dubbed a system of narrative justice--the local contextualizing and negotiating of legal processes. This "legal narrativity" generated different patterns of justice, indeed different legal cultures in different types of settings. There were historically persistent patterns of difference in the structure of early labour markets, in the degree of popular participation in political and legal institutions, in the character of corporate village institutions, and above all in popular conceptions and social narratives of justice and rights. Popular empowerment varied in the degree to which communities were able to appropriate the law into rights. Most remarkably, because local communities administered a formally uniform national law, the multiple narratives of community politics were institutionalized into the heart of the national legal and political apparatus.

Narrative analysis produces a different picture of English class formation.<sup>34</sup> What we recognize as nineteenth-century working-class formation developed from patterns of protest almost exclusively in the northern industrial villages--the inheritors of those strong popular legal cultures of early pastoral and rural-industrial relational settings. Working families carried with them into the nineteenth century a robust narrative identity based on a long culture of practical rights, one honed, revised, and adjusted over many centuries, and one which they were not likely to readily dismiss at the crossing of an 'event' which historians only years later were to dub as the "industrial revolution."<sup>35</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper has been to explain why class formation theory is so problematic, and how it might be reconsidered. My definition of the problem is similar in part to that recently articulated by Katznelson and Zolberg (1986) in their influential volume on working-class formation: the theory with its predictive teleology of class in itself-for itself forces an accounting not for actual patterns of variation, but for "an epistemology of absence" (Somers 1989a). Ultimately, the theory has continually measured and chastised social action against a societal yardstick. These problems are reflected in the three prevailing approaches to nineteenth-century English class formation I discussed above: each defines working-class practices ("reformist," "revolutionary," "backwards-looking") against the presuppositional backdrop of the "in itself-for itself" theoretical prediction.

But there is a deeper problem to which I have called attention, namely the a priori assumption that the rise of capitalism must be THE foundational causal factor in shaping these practices. Regardless of the ideological persuasion, each paradigm roots the explanation of nineteenth-century working class social action in the "birth of class society." The response to that birth on the part of workers is what distinguishes the approaches. The conceptual limitations of Katznelson's (1986) own revisions show just how intractable a problem this is. Although he is able to avoid the teleology through a comparative approach to the dependent variable (class dispositions and actions), he is unable to envision a theory that can escape from ultimately reducing these to the a priori causality of proletarianization and, more generally, the emergence of capitalism.

The true challenge for theorists of working-class formation is to be able to liberate the study of class action not only from the constraints of an a priori teleological outcome as Katznelson has done, but more importantly also from the constraints of the a priori independent variable--the master-narrative of English proletarianization. I have tried to show, however, that freeing the theory from

these constraints is no simple matter. The underlying problem is the conceptual vocabulary which is the universal parlance of existing discussions of class formation. Contained within this vocabulary is the massively entrenched and conceptually encoded "denarrativized" story of the making of modern English class society.<sup>36</sup>

Thus explaining and recovering the meaning of working-class social action (which is, after all, the goal of class formation theory) demands not only recognizing the centrality of the classical master-narrative and systematically loosening its hold. It also requires renarrativizing our conceptual language of social action.

**ENDNOTES**

1. This particular phrase of course derives from E.P. Thompson's (1965) famous response to Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn's "Origin of the Present Crisis" (Anderson 1964).
2. "Te Fabula Narata" (I tell your story), portended Marx in his dedication to the workers of the world in Volume I of Kapital. For the locus classicus of the relationship between English working-class history, class formation theory, and capitalist development, see Marx's (1977) Chapter 10 of Capital "The Working Day." On the centrality of the English case for modern sociological theory see also Stedman Jones (1984), Giddens (1981), Collini et al. (1983), Somers (1986, 1992a). For classic examples of theory distilled from the English case, see also Rostow (1960), Marshall (1950), Rimlinger (1971).
3. It would be impossible to begin to do justice to the exciting recent work in the history and theory of class formation. I would just call particular attention to Baron (1991); Canning (1992); Davidoff and Hall (1987); Fantasia (1988); Katznelson and Zolberg (1986); Kimeldorf (1987); Rose (1991); and Steinberg (1989; 1991)
4. For elaboration, see Somers (1986, 1990, 1992a).
5. Since it is historical narrative that is the subject of this paper, I will thus limit my use of the term narrative to convey the constructed representation of history, and will use the term history itself to convey the "actual" historical processes believed to be appropriated and rendered into representational form by historians.
6. Karl Polanyi (1944) still presents us with the deepest understanding of the discovery of society. See also Collini et al. (1986) and Block and Somers (1984).
7. Musson (1976), Thomis (1970), Perkin (1969), Smelser (1959).
8. E. P. Thompson (1966), Foster (1974), Saville (1988).
9. Calhoun (1981); Bauman (1982).
10. On sociological alibis for working-class formation see Eley and Nield (1980), Somers (1986); Katznelson and Zolberg (1986).
11. It is a case which is most important for the communitarians (see especially Calhoun 1981). Without the view of traditional society which they hold and the concomitant destruction of that society by the triumph of industrial capitalism, their social actors would not be 'looking-backward' or fighting for 'traditional' artisanal values in the face of the new capitalist relations.
12. Social history as "history from below" was perhaps best represented by the History Workshop Journal edited in London.
13. The historians he cited as exemplary of the new trend were anything but traditional narrative historians. Natalie Davis (1975), Robert Darnton (1985), and Carlo Ginzberg (1982) were all anthropologically-influenced historians who took interpretative approaches to the past and worked to reconstruct the inner worlds of historical actors.
14. This view of narrative as methodology was importantly substantiated by the philosophers and historiographers. White (1973, 1981, 1984) and Mink (1965, 1974, 1978) both

argued that whatever the methodological value of narrative, it had to be seen as a superimposed form that analysts/historians placed over the chaos of "reality" to organize it into coherency. See also Danto (1985). The major exception to this position, and a major influence on the new narrative approach, is Ricoeur (1979, 1981, 1984-86).

15. In sociology (Brown 1977; Reed 1989), in psychology (Hales 1985; Kemper 1984; Bruner 1986, 1987; Sarbin 1986; Gergen and Gergen 1986), in medicine (Williams 1984; Kleinman 1988), in psychoanalytic theory (Spence 1982; Schafer 1981, 1983), in education (Witherell and Noddings 1991), in philosophy (MacIntyre 1981; Walzer 1982; C. Taylor 1989), political science (Hart 1989, 1990, 1991), in gender studies (Zerilli 1991; Bell and Yalom 1990, Miller 1991, Personal Narratives Group 1989, Maynes 1989, Gordon 1986, Graham et al. 1989), in anthropology (Daniel 1984); Turner and Bruner 1986, Ortner 1991).
16. Cf. especially the "life stories" scholarship of Bertaux (1981), Bertaux and Kohli (1984), Freeman (1984); Linde (1986, 1987), L. Polanyi (1985).
17. For a range of discussions of narrative theory, see Scholes and Kellogg 1966; Genette 1980; Mitchell 1981; Jameson 1981; Brooks 1984; Barthes 1966, 1974.
18. This is indeed a different approach to the concept of explanation that the strictest of analytic philosophers of science would accept--causality as a deductive instance of a generalization. Indeed the very strength and utility of the latter is its valid "denarrativization" or abstraction of instances, elements, or events from time and space into categories.
19. Samples of different approaches to what I'm calling ontological narratives can be found in Polkinghorn (1988); Sarbin 1986; MacIntyre 1981; C. Taylor 1989; Bruner 1987; Bell and Yalom 1990; Bertaux 1981, and Kohli 1984; Crites 1986; Ferrero 1986; Freeman 1984; Gergen (1973, 1977, 1985); Gergen and Gergen (1986); Didion (1992); Swift (1983).

20. Organizational theory is one area of the social sciences that has used narrative analysis in particularly creative ways. Cf. Meyer and Scott (1983), DiMaggio (1988), Martin et al. (1983), Mitroff and Killman (1975), Smircich (1983a, 1983b).
21. On narrative methodology in sociology and history, cf. Brown (1988, 1990); Abbott (1990); Somers (1990, 1992a).
22. This discussion of narrative identity and relational settings draws from Somers (1986).
23. On the epistemological significance of networks and relational analysis over categories in understanding social structures see White et al. (1976); for applications in historical sociology see Mann (1986) and Bearman (forthcoming).
24. The epistemological implications of recent work in historical geography have been little noted by sociologists. Exceptions include Aminzade (1992) Mann (1986).
25. An important view of the value of theoretically disaggregating society can be found in Bell (1976).
26. On machine-breaking and Luddism, see E. P. Thompson (1966, Chap. 14); Hobsbawm (1964); Dinwiddie (1979); Bronte (1979). On petitioning to Parliament and Chartism, see D. Thompson (1984); Briggs (1959); Jones (1975); Gammage (1969, rpt.); Hovell (1966, rpt.); Stedman Jones (1983a); Epstein (1989b). On storming work houses, see Digby (1978); Tilly (1982b). On the fight to retain apprenticeship and wage regulations, see Rule (1986); Prothero (1979); Hammond and Hammond (1919, rpt.); Mantoux (1961, rpt.). On fighting for a ten hour day, see Ward (1962); Driver (1956); Gray (1987); Deb (1963); Hutchins and Harrison (1926); Grant (1866); Kydd (1857). On fighting for the right to outdoor poor relief, see Edsall (1971); Driver (1971); Ward (1970). On strikes, see Kirby and Musson (1975); Foster (1974); Musson (1972); Rule (1986); Prothero (1974). On self-help, community education and Owenism, E. P. Thompson (1966); B. Taylor (1983); Vincent (1981); Stedman Jones (1983a); Yeo (1971). On Boycotting merchants, see Foster (1974). On crowds in general, see the classic by Rude (1964); Holton (1978). On Britain and social movements, see Tilly (1982a, 1991).
27. On the concept of "the people," cf. Hill (1981); Rogers (1987); Prothero (1979).
28. On workers' self-narratives and autobiographies see Burnett et al. (1984; 1987; 1989) and Vincent (1981).
29. The classic article on the language of class in the nineteenth-century is still Briggs (1967). For recent discussion on "language of class," see Stedman Jones (1983b); Scott (1988a); Steinberg (1991); Gray (1986, 1987); Belchem (1981); Claeys (1985); Cronin (1986); Epstein (1986).
30. For the convergence of constitutional and natural rights rhetoric, see E. P. Thompson (1966); Epstein (1989a); Belchem (1989). On the link between artisanal skills, property, and political rights, Stedman Jones (1983a); Rule (1987); Hobsbawm (1984); Scott (1987, 1988b, 1988c); Sewell (1980). See Scott (1988a) for a critique of Stedman Jones' opposing of political and class claims. For critiques of the opposition of rights-claims and community membership identities, see especially M. Walzer (1982); Sewell (1988); Minow (1987); Hall and Held (1989). For an especially important view of rights-formation, see Tilly 1990.

31. These are of course the premises of economic sociology. See Hirschman (1986, 1984); K. Polanyi (1944); Granovetter (1985); Block (1989); Swedberg (1987); Block and Somers (1984); Bell (1981); Sahlins (1976).
32. This is further elaborated in Somers 1991.
33. For the centrality of legal participation see especially Herrup (1985, 1987) and Beattie (1986).
34. The import of the "law in context" was originally developed in the early twentieth-century American "school of legal realism." See Kalman (1987). More recently, the contextual focus has been taken up by anthropologists; see Geertz (1983); Moore (1978). Some social historians have also been attentive to this; see E. P. Thompson (1975); Brewer and Styles (1980); Stone (1981).
35. Arnold Toynbee (1884; 1969) is believed to be the first.
36. Such entrenchment and encoding is only surprising if we find it difficult to accept that all theory is not only theory, but also part narrative and part epistemology. Just as we have come to accept the impossibility of setting aside epistemological assumptions, so it is time to accept the impossibility of setting aside the centrality of narrative in theory. The appropriate question we must put to ourselves is not how can we do away with these distorting meta-narratives; rather, it is which of many possible narratives are we going to live with for now, until--as the case must always be--we think different ones provide greater truth criteria (Alexander 1987, 1991).

