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**"Sociology's Trajectory at Century's End:
Smooth Extensions, Normalized Discontinuities
and Reflexive Turns"**

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SOCIOLOGY'S TRAJECTORY AT CENTURY'S END:

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INTRODUCTION

This presentation is above all meant to initiate discussion about the trajectory of sociology in the USA and at the University of Michigan. It is meant to raise questions for both the insiders and outsiders to the discipline. It is not based on systematic research, either in terms of the collection of new data or in terms of a new and sustained review of the literature on sociology's self definition; it is rather based on an effort to put into a coherent perspective some of my observations of my discipline at large and my department. I am obliged to do this not only because I was asked to make such a presentation for CSST, but also because I am preparing a series of lectures to be delivered in May for Lviv University in Ukraine about the relevance of contemporary US sociology to post-communist social transformations.

My thesis is this: I believe it is wrong to identify, as many sociologists do, the tension between fragmentation and integration as the fundamental contradiction defining the discipline's condition. Sociology's malaise should not be cast in terms of a burgeoning number of specialities lacking a common ground either in terms of a methodological foundation or unified theoretical ambition. I believe we should rather think about sociology's dilemmas in terms of a more profound underlying problem, a deeper problem for which the apparent contradiction around fragmentation and integration is but a symptom.

This deeper problem is based on important shifts in the way some of sociology's key ingredients, most notably its epistemological link to science and the conceptual centrality of structure, are being changed. In effect, sociology is undergoing a cultural revolution without being able to acknowledge it as such. Explaining the formation of identities, the discovery of problems and the genesis of concepts is becoming increasingly central to our sociological imagination and is no longer merely a speciality of the sociology of knowledge. In fact, by elevating identity

formation to the center of sociology, sociology might at once be able to obtain greater coherence and self confidence in its intellectual mission by treating the discipline's own intellectual field as one of the central problems of the discipline. By doing so, it might even recover the scientific label it once wore without hesitation.

I try to avoid justifying my prescriptive account with appeals to intellectual fashions; instead, I try to root the transformation in sociology's internal development, both at a disciplinary and departmental level. In order to do this, and reflecting the paper's title, I make three basic moves today:

- 1) I identify the "smooth extension" with the argument by some sociologists that the principal problem of the discipline is its internal dissonance, and the only way to deal with this is to revalue sociology's scientific status;
- 2) I identify the "normalized discontinuity" as the elevation of "structure" to the "core" concept of the discipline; and
- 3) I argue that a "reflexive turn," extant in our practice, is weak because we have not elevated culture to a sufficiently central place in our disciplinary vocabulary. Indeed, we should make our tentative reflexive turn a central part of our disciplinary identity, rather than see it as a sign of weakness before fiscal crisis and conservatism's renaissance.

FRAGMENTATION AS CRISIS

Dissonance about the "essence" of sociology is a normal condition in sociology, but recent debates about sociology's nature are linked to a discourse of crisis for two obvious reasons:

First, the political and cultural renaissance in the 1980's threatened the relatively secure position of the university in the USA. In the cultural arena, especially after the collapse of communism and the need for a new "threat", conservatives found the "multiculturalism" of the "tenured radicals" to be the main obstacle to a civilized world. This was combined later with a criticism of the rate of inflation for the costs of higher education, which implied that not only were

universities run by "leftists", but by greedy leftists at that. Although this conservative offensive has as its target most departments in the university, sociology felt itself especially threatened.

Reaganomics and the rightward political shift across the globe in the 1980's¹ had a disproportionately negative impact on sociology in comparison to political science, history, and economics, although I am not so sure about the comparison to anthropology. There are a number of reasons for this, but I think preeminent among them is sociology's hegemonic liberal/left culture. While contests between left and right occurred within other disciplines, most notably in literary studies and history, giving conservatives clear allies within these fields, in sociology the contest was mainly between liberal democrats and more radical social critics.² It is not surprising that a conservative wave would be unfavorable for the various kinds of resources on which sociology has depended, from government research grants to student enrollments. One anecdote: a couple years ago, one Polish sociologist even asked me in all seriousness whether he should identify himself as a political scientist here because of the association of sociology with various "marginal" interests like "minorities, women and homosexuals".

The second major condition producing a sense of crisis is the budgetary crunch in many universities. Conservatives helped this too, of course, as Reaganism reduced the distribution of federal revenues to states, and states then had to reduce their support to public education. The recession has also, of course, afflicted private universities as well as public universities, leading many universities to consider how to cut their staffs and offerings.³

1 For one perspective on this, see Seymour Martin Lipset, "No Third Way: A Comparative Perspective on the Left" in Daniel Chirot (ed.) The Crisis of Leninism and the Decline of the Left: The Revolutions of 1989. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991.

2 The Task Group on Graduate Education argues that the identification of sociology with radical causes is one of the discipline's vulnerabilities. The liberal/left disposition of most sociologists is reinforced by apparent difference of sociologists like James Coleman and especially E. O. Lauman at the University of Chicago, who are the very important exceptions which prove the rule.

3 See the Report of the ASA Task Group on Graduate Education, March 1992 for a discussion of the "hostile environment" for sociology.

After geography, sociology feels among the most threatened by the "organizational" streamlining proposed in a few universities, a streamlining which threatens to weaken (as at San Diego State and Yale) or eliminate (as at the University of Rochester and Washington University) sociology departments. Hence, sociology is pushed by the fiscal crisis to examine itself to find internal "weaknesses" which affect its external reputation. One weakness on which to focus is to elevate the issue of "fragmentation" into a central problem. This, however, is a smooth extension of the past, if with a new wrinkle.

DISSONANCE AS A HISTORIC THEME IN SOCIOLOGY

If there has been a dominant theme in US sociology's self examination, and thus an appearance of "continuity" in our discourse, it has been a concern for the discipline's internally divided character. This internal diversity has usually been cast in terms of dichotomies, however. In the 1930's, the main contrast was illustrated by Charles Ellwood's critique of W.F. Ogburn and Stuart Rice; Turner and Turner (1990:66), in their institutional history of the discipline called The Impossible Science, defined the conflict as that "between those who defend a narrow view of the aims and methods of sociology, based on the philosophy of science of Mach and Pearson, and those like himself (Ellwood) who are methodological pluralists and accept a role for synthetic reason and criticism in sociology".

Such a dichotomy, although changing over time in terms both of sophistication and the logic of opposition between categories, can be found reproduced throughout the history of the discipline in the contests between those "scientific" sociologists and reformists, or between those who oppose the quantification of the subjective and those who advocate it (Turner and Turner, 1990:67). In the 1960's, the division was described in terms of the "two sociologies", one concerned with action and the other with structure. According to rumour, Erik Olin Wright, puts it more provocatively: that sociologists are divided between professionals and intellectuals. Recently too, in a paper encouraging sociology's more serious humanistic turn, Mayer Zald (1988) distinguished between those sociologists who are concerned with "civilizational" issues (much as

Robert Lynd advocated in the end of the 1930's) and those who wish to develop sociology with an eye toward "becoming a science".⁴

One of the great values of the Turner and Turner book (1990) is to establish in considerable detail the institutional foundations for these historic divisions.⁵ Obviously, the quantification of the subjective, or the development of the "professional" or "scientific" identity of sociology, was grounded in large part in the development of large scale survey organizations, like the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan.⁶ Even within our department, the Detroit Area Study, frequently described as one of the "jewels in the department's crown", has provided a resource base for identifying the quantified study of surveyed opinions as the preferred form of empirical research.⁷

4 While Zald advocated the humanistic turn, he also argued that we should not lose our concern for scientific method and explanation (which he associates with positivism, empirical evidence, concern for the scope of generalization and the range of its application (p.4)), criteria of progress, evidence that error is eliminated and truth approximated, that theories which explain more with greatest parsimony will replace those that perform more poorly (p.16). He also argues, however, that we cannot base our vision on some artificially unified discipline. To that subject I shall return in the end.

5 This book is not just another intellectual history, and in that sense it is "pioneering". See Dennis Wrong, "The Present Condition of American Sociology: A Review Article" Comparative Studies of Society and History 1993 pp. 183-96.

6 See it mentioned in Turner and Turner, 1990, pp. 103-04.

7 As this mode of research became increasingly identified with what it meant to be "empirical", the "empirical" was a codified requirement in sociology dissertations produced at the University of Michigan. As Turner and Turner describe it, such a survey paradigm became the model research project by the end of the 1950's, with peculiar consequences for the "other side" of sociology. For a commentary on this work by one of American's leading sociologists and survey researchers, see Howard Schuman, "Possible Science, Impossible Discipline" Social Epistemology (forthcoming). His assessment is particularly useful because he argues we need to replace the science/non-science dichotomy with a science/non-science continuum that "outside research funding" is much less significant for shaping sociology's direction than is its student base, and finally, that without a comparison to other disciplines, the Turners miss an important opportunity to clarify their thesis about the basis for sociology's recruitment. One of sociology's basic problems, he writes, is that we lack a common sensical "core" field in the way that political science has politics, economics has the economy, anthropology has culture and history has the past. He argues that the core issues of sociology like stratification, are typically thematized *within* sociology courses (although I believe this is slightly overstated, especially if we think that class is to some degree convergent with stratification studies).

The other side of sociology was typically attached more to a kind of theory associated with the history of social thought, or with linking theory to civilizational problems. It also tended to minimize disciplinary boundaries between sociology, history, anthropology and philosophy (as Harry Elmer Barnes did, see Turner and Turner, 1990:122). While through the early 1930's these two modal modes of sociological inquiry could more or less easily coexist, by the end of the 1940's "empirical" sociology's obsession with the refinement of measurement left the old theorists, like Harry Elmer Barnes, without purpose within the discipline as theory became subordinated to survey driven aims of clarifying operationalizations and making hypotheses (Turner and Turner, 1990:123). The theorists who survived, like Merton and even Parsons, identified with the project of attaching theory to empirical research (ibid, 121). Although in general the "theoretical", "reformist" or "civilizational" concerns of sociology have survived, as the tradition from Barnes through C. Wright Mills and Mayer Zald illustrate, they maintain their position without large institutional resources, like an Institute for Social Research, at their disposal. That situation, however, is changing. Those with "civilizational" concerns are increasing their power within universities and within departments because of the changing basis for the internal diversity of sociology itself.

There are no longer two sociologies. Instead, there are at least fifty sociologies that are offered as specializations in graduate schools, and within our own department, there are eleven possible "sociologies" one can study for the preliminary doctoral exam. These concentrations had been based on the major "wings" of the departments, which are supposedly distinguished from one another by their "perspective", those of "population and human ecology" (although the latter is much less represented than it was when the field was led by people like Amos Hawley and O.D. Duncan here at Michigan), social psychology and social organization. Unlike the others, however, the social organization "perspective" emphasizes its internal diversity by offering exams based on putatively substantive areas: social change, status and power, cultural belief systems, formal organizations, deviance, gender and race and ethnicity. There are also two new fields, one based on family and kinship, and the other based on health and aging. While these new specializations

are based on substantive foci like social organization's prelims, they justify their autonomous status from the existing three "perspectives" of the department by emphasizing their "cross-cutting" nature, operationalized by having faculty from the three original wings of the department teaching and grading exams in the new specialty (see Table 1).

Table 1:
Areas of Specialization in the Graduate Program,
Department of Sociology, University of Michigan

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Population and Human Ecology 2. Social Psychology 3. Social Organization 		--> the traditional "perspective" wings of the department
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Social Change b. Status and Power c. Cultural Belief Systems d. Formal Organization e. Deviance f. Gender g. Race and Ethnicity 		--> social organization's substantive specialities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Health and Aging 5. Family and Kinship 		--> the new "cross-cutting specialities"

This diversification of sociology into a variety of substantive specialities has led some to consider that sociology's malaise is derived from its "overspecialization". They argue that this is a new phenomenon accounting for sociology's vulnerability.

FROM DISSONANCE TO FRAGMENTATION AND OVERSPECIALIZATION

The ASA Task Group on Graduate Education⁸ was formed in the late 1980's over a concern for the unevenness and inconsistencies in graduate education across the USA. It later became concerned for sociology's "vulnerability" in university streamlining. As such, it identified eight points of sociology departments' vulnerabilities. I won't deal with all eight points today, given that some don't fit with my overall focus on sociology's intellectual self-definition and politics.⁹ What I do want to highlight, however, are the internal weaknesses noted by the Task Force on a more "cognitive" level.

In general, all of the weaknesses imply that sociology has lost something, thereby giving the problem an appearance of novelty. The first vulnerability the Task Group identified was the discipline's excessive "laissez-faire individualism and fragmentation". This general theme was reinforced by the seventh vulnerability, "overspecialization" (p. 3). Although these two themes are analytically distinct, they are linked in the discourse of disciplinary self-examination. In a state of the discipline article on the subject, Randall Collins,¹⁰ offers a rather nice explanation for this combination.

The first explanation rests in the peculiarity of intellectual politics generally. As Collins describes it,

The strategic problem of any intellectual is to be maximally original while yet maximally relevant to what the community is prepared to hear. (intellectuals)

8 The group responsible for the report consisted of Michael Aiken, James Coleman, Lois DeFleur, Barbara Heyns, Joan Huber (chair), Kenneth Land, Stanley Lieberman, Franklin Wilson, William Julius Wilson and Mayer Zald.

9 In this paper, I don't emphasize the following of their points: 2) our image as pushers of unpopular radical causes, something hopefully that will be less problematic as Reaganism fades, and something to which I referred in the first section; 4) an extreme ideology of democracy permitting excessive graduate input, something I don't see as intrinsically problematic, but rather a difficulty dependent on certain conjunctures; 5) a disproportionate number of near retired faculty, clearly not a matter of intellectual strategy; and part of 8), an ideology of limited terms for department chairs leads to a lack of stable leadership, which for some reason is linked to the weakness of a "core", a linkage I don't see as intrinsic. I shall refer to this matter of a "core" toward the end of the paper.

10 "Is 1980's Sociology in the Doldrums?" American Journal of Sociology 91:6(1986):1336-55.

cannot be successful without at least a subliminal sense for the realities of the intellectual field and its alliances. Intellectuals, including social scientists, are engaged in constructing visions of reality ... while they are constructing their own careers and their own positions in the intellectual field (Collins, 1986:1337).

This alliance building goes on a meso-structure of organizations, which does not directly determine the ideas themselves but influences what traditions intellectuals engage. Material bases, as in career opportunities, shape intellectual content considerably.

Among the important changes in material base is the sheer increase in numbers of sociologists. The growth of numbers of sociologists is suggested by the increasing number of members of the American Sociological Association from about 7,000 in 1960 to a peak of 15,000 in 1972 (Turner and Turner, p. 141). Although the association registered a decline in membership between 1975 and 1985, reflecting the worsening job market (p. 154), the growing numbers and increasing market pressures produced some interesting solutions to the problem of achieving intellectual recognition in such a huge field.

The problem of recognition was resolved by what Durkheim and Spencer would expect: differentiation into a number of "specialities". According to Turner and Turner (1990:157), "there are more than 50 fields of specialization in which graduate education is offered", and about 40 specialized associations (p. 158), and, as of 1983, "more than 200 journals (excluding foreign journals) which are primarily sociological in their content" (p.159).

One of the more interesting ways to see the basis for this diversification is to examine some of the recent discipline-wide "codifications" of this diversity. The American Sociological Association journal of book reviews, Contemporary Sociology, divides the field into 10 basic areas (see Table 2). The most recent and widely heralded attempt to codify US sociology itself was in Neil Smelser's Handbook of Sociology, published in 1988.¹¹ It includes five chapters on theoretical and methodological issues, four on bases of inequality, nine on major institutional and organizational settings and four on social processes and change (see Table 3). The American Sociological Association itself has 33 sections (see Table 4).

11 Also reviewed in Wrong, 1993.

Table 2:

Areas of Specialization in Contemporary Sociology: An International Journal of Reviews
(under the editorial direction of Ida Harper Simpson, Duke University)

1. Differentiation and Stratification: Age Groups, Class, Gender, Race and Ethnic Groups
2. Macrosociology: Social Change, Social Movements, World Systems, Comparative and Historical Sociology
3. Organizations, Occupations and Markets
4. Political Institutions and the State
5. Population, Ecology and Urban and Community Studies
6. Social Control, Deviance and the Law
7. Sociology of Art, Knowledge, Science, Religion and Sports
8. Sociology of Health and Illness
9. Sociology of Socialization and the Life Course: Aging, Family, Education and Sexuality
10. Theory and Methods

Areas of Specialization in Contemporary Sociology: An International Journal of Reviews
(under the editorial direction of Walter Powell, University of Arizona)

1. Social Hierarchies
2. Political Processes and Institutions
3. Macrosociologies
4. Urban Sociology and Community Studies
5. Life Course: Stages and Institutions
6. Criminology, Deviance and the Law
7. Organizations, Occupations and Markets
8. Microsociologies
9. Sociology of Culture
10. Medical Sociology
11. Theory and Methods

By comparing Tables 2 and 3 with 1, one can see one of the major criticisms of the Smelser text: he left out major areas. Demography and historical sociology are absent. Even social psychology is absent as a distinct field from both Contemporary Sociology and the Smelser collection, with that "perspective" having been subsumed into other categories. These absent categories reflect some of the major strengths of our own department, and thus hardly make these codifications of sociology's diversity attractive to our department. But their absence only makes the greater case: sociology is far more "differentiated", or even "fragmented", than it has ever been. Given the magnitude of this fragmentation, nobody can even agree on the basic "divisions".

Table 3:
Chapters in Neil Smelser's Handbook of Sociology (Sage, 1988)

Theoretical and methodological issues:

1. Walter L. Wallace, "Toward a Disciplinary Matrix in Sociology"
2. Jeffery C. Alexander, "The New Theoretical Movement"
3. Neil Smelser, "Social Structure"
4. Peter Rossi, "On Sociological Data"
5. Richard A. Berk, "Causal Inference for Sociological Data"

Bases of inequality:

6. Mark Granovetter and Charles Tilly, "Inequality and Labor Processes"
7. Katherine O'Sullivan See and William J. Wilson, "Race and Ethnicity"
8. Matilda White Rile, Anne Foner and Joan Waring, "Sociology of Age"
9. Janet Z. Giele, "Gender and Sex Roles"

Major institutional and organizational settings:

10. Joanne Miller, "Jobs and Work"
11. Howard Aldrich and Peter Marsden, "Environments and Organizations"
12. Anthony Orum, "Political Sociology"
13. Joan Huber and Glenna Spitze, "Trends in Family Sociology"
14. Charles Bidwell and Noah E. Friedkin, "The Sociology of Education"
15. Robert E. Wuthnow, "Sociology of Religion"
16. Harriet Zuckerman, "The Sociology of Science"
17. William C. Cockerham, "Medical Sociology"
18. Gaye Tuchman, "Mass Media Institutions"

Social processes and change:

19. W. Parker Frisbie and John D. Kasarda, "Spatial Processes"
20. Andrew T. Scull, "Deviance and Social Control"
21. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, "Social Movements"
22. Peter B. Evans and John D. Stephens, "Development and the World Economy"

This sense of fragmentation has led many, including Collins (1986) and Turner and Turner (1990) to lament our lack of "integration". As Collins writes,

There are no longer rival theories and alliances within a single intellectual field; instead, we have become congeries of outsiders to each other, unable to see what the rivalries actually are in other fields, and hence prone to view the statements of those whose names do "accidentally" stick up above the watermark as arbitrary and meaningless (Collins, 1986:1340).

It is important to recognize, then, that the discourse on sociology's internal diversity has changed in the 1980's, away from sociology as a "divided" discipline, toward sociology as a "fragmented" discipline. Jonathan Turner is particularly distressed by this condition in which sociologists don't seem themselves as members of a single community, and thereby disagree over

the basic goals of their work, use languages that are mutually incomprehensible and cannot thereby agree on standards of evaluation.¹² This fragmentation without integration would likely only be the concern of social theorists like Turner, however, were it not for the social conditions that have turned this discourse of fragmentation into one of crisis.

Table 4:
Sections of the American Sociological Association

1. Undergraduate Education
2. Methodology
3. Medical Sociology
4. Crime, Law and Deviance
5. Sociology of Education
6. Family
7. Organizations and Occupations
8. Theoretical Sociology
9. Sex and Gender
10. Community and Urban Sociology
11. Social Psychology
12. Peace and War
13. Environment and Technology
14. Marxist Sociology
15. Sociological Practice
16. Sociology of Population
17. Political Economy of the World System
18. Sociology of Aging
19. Mental Health
20. Collective Behavior and Social Movements
21. Racial and Ethnic Minorities
22. Comparative Historical
23. Political Sociology
24. Asia and Asian Americans
25. Sociology of Emotions
26. Sociology of Culture
27. Science, Knowledge and Technology
28. Micro-computing
29. Latino/a Sociology
30. Alcohol and Drugs
31. Sociology of Children
32. Sociology of Law
33. Rational Choice

12 Jonathan Turner, "The Disintegration of American Sociology" Sociological Perspectives 32(1989): 419-33, cited in Jonathan Turner, "Further Reflections on Sociology as The Impossible Science", forthcoming in Social Epistemology.

The discourse of fragmentation gives sociology's self-examiners a new angle on an old problem. And while it is certainly true that the disciplinary discourse is more fragmented than it has ever been, ironically the same "solution" remains waiting in the wings to resolve the problem: the resurrection of the science of society. In this, there is a smooth extension from the past into the present.

THE OBSESSION WITH SCIENCE

The most obvious way in which sociology, despite its different specializations, might be integrated is if it shared a basic epistemology, a common commitment to the scientific investigation of social life.¹³ Indeed, the Task Group on Graduate Education identified their third point as the "denial of sociology's status as science" as one of their 8 points of vulnerability (p. 3).

The elevation of science goes in two basic directions, however: toward methodology and toward theory, but with each specifically limited to certain kinds of methods and kinds of theory appropriate to science.

Sociology's principal scientific obsession has been with the problem of measurement (Zald, 1988; Turner and Turner, p. 106). The Task Group even identified the methods and research strategies associated with this measurement as the "underpinning of the discipline, needed for its legitimation". Research methods are the most frequently required course of study, in 78% of the graduate departments the Task Group surveyed (p. 4). But in many programs on graduate

13 When sociology can be a "science" depends very much on how one wants to define science. Both N.J. Demereth, "Nineteenth Century Visions and Twentieth Century Realities" (forthcoming, Social Epistemology) and Schuman (forthcoming) argue that a less dogmatic and more realistic and relaxed understanding of science has certainly been achieved in some subfields of sociological investigation. Schuman cites Morris B. Cohen and Ernest Nagel, An Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method (NY: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1934, p. 195-96) for this as a reasonable expectation for science in sociology:

using logic to help in 'devising ways of formulating our propositions explicitly and accurately, so that their possible alternatives become clear.... When thus faced with alternative hypotheses, logic develops their consequences, so that when these consequences are compared with observable phenomena, we have a means of testing which hypothesis is to be eliminated and which is most in harmony with the facts of observation.'

education, as my own alma mater at the University of North Carolina, "methodology" was narrowed to a series of courses on statistical techniques for measurement (Turner and Turner, p. 106), despite the fact that our discipline's increasing accomplishments in this regard have not yielded commensurate gains in theoretical or substantive findings (at least according to Collins 1986). Most sociologists recognize this, and there has been a trend toward reducing the hold of statistical techniques on the definition of methodological competence. In our own department, an advanced statistics course might be replaced with a course in advanced language study, and the practicum which was in the past mainly defined by survey research is now more and more fulfilled through qualitative research and historical and comparative methods.¹⁴

The turn away from sociology's obsession with science as statistical techniques and measurement, and the increasing acceptance of alternative methodological competencies, has undermined one aspect giving sociology a secure self definition in the light of its substantive fragmentation. Despite this increasing pluralism in methods, a legacy from this past is retained in our department at least.

The only "good" sociology is an "empirical" sociology. Those whose books are defined as "theory for theory's sake" are defined, in our department, as not really appropriate to our department's sociological culture. Indeed, our dissertations are specifically enjoined to be "empirical", without ever specifying exactly what the "empirical" is, implying only what it is not: a history of social thought. I shall return to this issue later, for I believe that one of the most important problems sociology has to face is its very unselfconscious deployment of words like empirical, which are increasingly inadequate in light of the developments sociology has experienced in the last couple years.

14 Nevertheless, this turn seems to move away from one of the recommendations of the Task Group concerned for sociology's reputation. These presumably are not the "the major research methods" the Task Group recommended that departments require mastery of for obtaining a degree, given that they define it in terms of those methods "needed to work as a sociologist in governmental or applied settings" (p. 6).

When I say, however, that sociology is too unselfconscious, I don't mean that it tends toward atheoretical empiricism. Indeed, one of sociology's other main obsessions is with "theory". Theory is so important that it is everywhere!

Most sociologists don't identify sociology's scientific aspirations with its methods alone. Rather, they pin their scientific hopes on a kind of cumulative, parsimonious and falsifiable theory, which is after all essential for distinguishing their enterprise from other statistically oriented disciplines, on the one hand, and the professional appropriations of their techniques, as in market research, on the other. But this is not the theory found in the American Sociological Association's leading theoretical journal.¹⁵

Many "scientific" scholars scoff at the leading "theory" journals like Theory and Society or Sociological Theory. Such "theory for theory's sake" seems to many such sociologists quite removed from the principal concerns of the discipline to test hypotheses with empirical research. Although theorists committed to hypothesis making, like Collins or Turner, are regular contributors to journals like Sociological Theory, they also think that there is far too much social philosophy and not enough sociological theory in them. Turner and Turner (1990) even describe the gap between "researchers' theory" and "theorists' theory", and suggest that the split exaggerates disciplinary fragmentation (p. 171).¹⁶ Turner and Turner imply that an empirically

15 According to Collins (1986:1345-46), the essence of science is theory, by which he means the "generalized and coherent body of ideas, which explain the range of variations in the empirical world in terms of general principles ... it is explicitly cumulative and integrating... general principles must be true across their widest range of application... it is multicausal ... using a tool kit of different causal and structural principles in tandem to explain the specifics of particular cases in the historical world."

16 Jonathan Turner ("Further Reflections ...") is even more depressed when he writes by himself. He writes,

Sociology is becoming a very boring discipline, bordering on trivial, because it has lost its vision of being a natural science, because it has let the methodological and increasingly ideological tail wag the theoretical horse (I hope I got this metaphor right), because it has fostered a gap between theory and research, because it has let theorists become philosophers and researchers dust bowl empiricists, because it has tolerated any set of ideas whose adherents are willing to pay dues, and it has become obsessed with political over explanatory correctness.

oriented theory is the only vehicle that could integrate the fragmented discipline, even if in the end they are skeptical that it could ever work given the institutional foundations of contemporary sociology, and the growing interest in "social problems".¹⁷

A focus on "problems" does not give sociology any special claim to disciplinary boundaries; indeed, the problem focus weakens our "boundary maintenance" capacities. In light of the collapse of the "science of society" as our common distinction, and the drift toward problems and substantive areas in our research, the search for sociology's distinction adopts another strategy: the search for our core, which becomes my "normalized discontinuity".

THE SEARCH FOR THE CORE

If science is no longer our common ground, what might we share? Unlike history, economics or political science, which have rather "self-evident" turfs,¹⁸ sociology doesn't have such an easy category to claim, having been built as a "residual" discipline (as Lynd claimed). Precisely because there is no self evident field, sociology has been obsessed with defining its distinction, but rarely in a satisfactory way.¹⁹

The Task Group presented rather unproblematically the "core" of our substantive concerns, the notion that "demography, social organization and social stratification" were the discipline's core. While I am not enough of a demographer or organizations theorist to understand the nuances of their development, it seems to me that both fields have undergone significant

17 A common refrain of criticisms of this book is that they ignore the ideas themselves as they focus on the institutional. Zald is certainly right to argue that the disunity operates on intellectual grounds too. Theories differ not with regard to substantive focus, but theoretical assumptions and concerns too; "the texture of knowledge, the form of generalization, and the linkage of empirical statement to concept and theory will vary depending upon the problem set, the methodological commitments, the style of data collection and the form of conceptualization in each particular arena" (p.20).

18 Although this should be obvious, this idea did come from Schuman (forthcoming).

19 This is one reason that anthropology and sociology have theory courses based on the history of social thought. If sociologists and anthropologists can't define their current disciplinary coherence, at least they we can point to common origins. Given that our epistemological assurance is fading, one of the options is to find our disciplinary "core" in our origins.

changes in the last couple decades. Indeed, this department alone has had a dramatic demographic transition, away from the human ecological spirit of Amos Hawley and O.D. Duncan toward the methodological individualism and rational choice of fertility models inspired by Caldwell. Too, organization studies have undergone considerable evolution, away from the formal analysis of bureaucracies toward new kinds of network analyses, population ecology and other studies that examine the interaction between internal and external factors of the organization.

Neither of these changes, of course, are so dramatic as to call into question the Task Group's claim on the traditional centrality of these specialities to sociology. At the same time, however, I do think that stratification, the core field with which I am most familiar, has undergone such a dramatic transformation as to suggest that a discontinuity has been normalized by identifying its study as constitutive of sociology's core.

When the field was labeled, "stratification" was as the name implied: the study of inequality in terms of different strata arranged in hierarchical order. The dominant approach to its study was in terms of status attainment or social mobility. Today, while these orientations toward inequality remain important, they are but a small part of the work on inequality, which is now much more oriented toward relational inequality, based on gender, class or race.

Racial studies has always been an important part of US sociology, and a field apart from stratification. The new interest in class and gender, however, reflect the incorporation and normalization of Marxist and feminist studies, or at least a part of them. The part that has been incorporated are those feminists and Marxists who focus on structure.

Our own departmental retreats I think have come up with a better way of describing our "core" than the Task Group's effort to describe sociology's resting in stratification, demography and organizational studies. The greatest consensus on sociology's core seemed to reside in a common agreement on the centrality of "structure" to sociological studies. Feminists,

modernization theorists, neofunctionalists, Marxists, Goffmanites, network theorists, demographers and others could agree that sociology focuses on structure.²⁰

This identification of structure with our core makes sense. It reinforces sociology's penchant for locating the "hidden", the "underlying", the "recurrent", or the "essence" of social phenomena. Sociology appears to identify with the enduring rather than the fleeting, conjunctural or accidental. It is striking, however, how differently we use the idea of "structure" in our discourse: from age structure, to the different structures found in different modes of production, to the structure of interaction to the structure of personality. So what is this structure that unites us? Durkheimian "social facts" certainly don't suffice to unify our vision. Most sociologists agree that structure does not only "constrain" activity, and that it does not exist apart from the social action which reproduces and transforms it. But by appealing to the "structures" of social life, we can normalize our discontinuities and construct a vision of sociology that appears to have all of us in it. But it only appears to have us all in it, for the unity is metaphorical at best.²¹

I suspect that at our next retreat, were we to pursue this matter further, our practical deconstruction of different notions of our core concept might benefit a great deal from a common reading of Sewell's (1992) paper on structure. For by rethinking all the different elements this metaphor conveys, our core evaporates into a variety of alternative visions that hardly share a

20 Geoff Eley likes to argue that the social is core to sociology. I have been arguing with him for a long time on this, for just the reasons I mention above with regard to structure. It is hard to argue that the social is really core to all of sociology in the way culture may be to anthropology. Consider this, for instance: culture can be core to anthropology because it is seen as constitutive of human existence, and not easily separated from other phenomena. Sociology, given its multivariate passion, seeks to distinguish the cultural from the economic from the political, or to distinguish the macro from the micro, resources from strategies, or the base from the superstructure, but in each of these cases, the social only forms a backdrop. Even if the social is constitutive, it is an undertheorized, even implicit construct. Because it is implicit, it is subject to little systematic research or thought, and thus, can hardly be considered a core idea except in the sense of the imagination discussed above. Consider, for instance, how "civil society" is a core ingredient of most social movement theories, although the "social" is rarely theorized as such. See Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, Civil Society and Political Theory, MIT Press 1992.

21 To call attention to the metaphorical power of this concept is one of the appeals of the seminal article on structure by William H. Sewell, Jr.: "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency and Transformation". American Journal of Sociology 98:1(1992):1-29.

common epistemology, or even imagination, unless we pit that imagination against those without higher education in either humanities or social sciences.

I believe, however, that as we continue to search for our "core" concept to define the distinction of the discipline, we are practicing the very kind of theory which "scientific" sociology has rejected: the kind of theory which is above all reflexive, trying to consider how we have come, as intellectuals and as persons, to the place we have, on the one hand, and asking what brings us together and moves us apart, on the other. Indeed, I see this as an extraordinarily healthy practice, even a sign of strength. But before I show how this is a sign of strength, I wish to reconsider why we are having the core discussion. For I don't think we are having it because we are so "fragmented", and in need of scientific recasting. Rather, we are having the discussion because of our cultural turn, a turn forced by the elevation of historical sociology and gender studies.

THE ELEVATION OF PLURALISM

Reeling from the acute conflicts and stresses of the 1960's and 1970's, a new culture emerged in many sociology departments in the late 1970's. Instead of keeping the Marxists and the feminists out of secure scientific departments, many departments went out to find some "nice" Marxists and feminists, who might also be scientific. While they may have been "scientific", many of these nice Marxists and feminists also began helping to reshape disciplinary practices, taking them into forbidden zones. By the middle 1980's, the disciplinary terrain had changed fundamentally, not only in terms of the number of specializations, but more importantly, in terms of what was "hot".

In 1986, Collins identified these as the "hot" areas:

1. The nature of historical change;
2. Microsociology associated with the non-cognitive;
3. The micro-macro connection;
4. Innovations in the meso level of markets, networks and organizations;

5. Sex and gender.

These "hot" areas had very different implications for sociology's reproduction. Innovations in organizational studies and microsociology did not drastically transform either the internal constitution or the external relationship of sociology to other disciplines. The macro-micro linkage was promised by many to be the new "core" issue,²² but in fact this central theoretical problem has broken on the reefs of other changes to be discussed below. What is perhaps most important, and relevant, to our discussions here historical studies, on the one hand, and gender on the other. When either or especially both of these fields are strengthened within departments, the "certainty" of sociology's distinction is more likely to be undermined because both perspectives tend to force sociology to take a cultural turn, to take an interest in examining the cultural foundations of disciplinary practice. Our department has been strengthened significantly in both areas, and while departmental "certainty" has not been threatened, the limits of the new ideology of pluralism have been stretched.

The ideology that came with increasing pluralism was an ideology of live and let live. If one could achieve prominence within a speciality of sociology, then that was enough. The discipline-wide recognition, once so important for leading sociology departments, was limited by trying to find people eminent in a particular field. This gave each sphere more or less its own right to self rule, even if other sectors retained some measure of veto power over appointments and curricular innovation. But as gender and historical studies became more important within the discipline and department, the old standards for common evaluation also had to change. No longer could publication in the discipline's flagship journals be called essential for promotion or senior hires, even if it remains helpful. Books were no longer treated as long journal articles but rather the case for or against tenure. And perhaps most important, place of publication was no longer considered to exist in self-evident hierarchies. Publishing in Signs, for instance, couldn't be treated

²² Several publications by George Ritzer in the end of the 1980's and the beginning of the 1990's are the best place to find evidence of this. See for instance his concluding chapter in Sociological Theory 1988.

as another "third tier" journal if a pluralism that incorporated gender studies was to be taken seriously.

Also interesting, I think, is that the incorporation of these two "specialities" in sociology has led to severe strain in the definition of sociology's internal differentiation, although existing categories have been able to more or less accommodate the fields. I believe, however, that this will not last.

At present, historical sociology as a specialization is "within" social change, but of course, it is well practiced in demography, and addresses every "substantive" speciality we have. If taken seriously, it is difficult to construct any field without a historical dimension, which could in fact lead to the historicizing of the entire department. This will likely not happen, however, given the theoretical differences that are to be found not so much among historical sociologists as among sociologists in general about "history" in social science. Much like theory, everyone can claim history so long as they have studies of different periods within their reading list.

Gender studies too has been "contained", but in a much more difficult and ambivalent way. On the one hand, it occupies an odd relationship to the new specialization in family and kinship; gender studies have struggled to escape the confines of family studies in order to claim relevance to all social fields. On the other hand, however, most of the experts in gender are too junior in rank in our department to be able to effect the kind of internal reconstitution the logic of their practice recommends.

These two transformations, however, have pushed ahead the debate in our department at least. They make the disciplinary distinction harder to draw, and the assumptions about evaluation harder to defend. But at the same time, they have raised questions that are rarely raised in other "specialities", like, "is this really sociology"?

To summarize to this point, I have argued that disciplinary pluralism has yielded, especially in those places where historical and gender studies have become important, an increasing plasticity of internal structures, on the one hand, and an increasing fuzziness of disciplinary boundaries, on the other. This had been resolved by a live and let live ideology, but

under threat, disciplinary disintegration might be identified as the source of our weakness. While this has not happened in our department, some sociologists could be drawn to a new strategy of identifying what is sociology and what is not. Even worse, a new strategy might be adduced for identifying a "good" sociology based on standards extrinsic to the speciality.

While I could possibly see this negative strategy succeeding in other departments, I don't see its positive face doing very well in the discipline at large. The path toward identifying sociology with science as it was once understood is unlikely to succeed, given that statistical methods no longer can command the prestige and authority in sociology's definition as they once did, and cumulative general theory, on the other, can't satisfy the increasingly problem-centered nature of our inquiry, on the other. I believe that the "solution" to sociology's anxiety over its distinction can be found, however, by making explicit and developing theoretically what we have begun to do in practice.

RHETORIC, REFLEXIVITY AND THE CULTURAL CORE OF SOCIOLOGICAL PRACTICE

While sociologists most frequently cite "structure" as the central concept, as Sewell (1992) has argued it is rarely understood but in a metaphorical sense. Sewell's paper opens up the issue for further discussion, especially by moving the rhetoric of sociology to an explicitly problematic level.

When rhetoric is made problematic, however, our "construction" of the object we are claiming to describe is also made central. Implicitly, by focusing on the "core" of what we claim to study, and by showing how it is itself "constituted", we are subtly shifting the self-definition of sociology away from the anachronistic label, "science of society", which in practice most reject, toward a more "humanistic" self conception. We are beginning to treat our own social world, as part of the project we must understand. Thus, we are beginning to ask not only why structure is so important in social explanation, but also why do we identify structure as so important?

As we begin to consider this question, many of our other rhetorical practices become problematic. For instance, while some sociologists still unselfconsciously say, "is this really

sociology?" when a sociologist presents a paper on some historical period and place remote from their interlocutor's experience, most sociologists, within our department at least, seem to dismiss such simple boundary maintenance practices. Most of the department seems rather open to making the boundaries more or less fuzzy. But at the same time, they are far less comfortable with rethinking the core, for several reasons.

Most sociologists are not interested in the discipline at large. In this regard, the doomsayers are right. Specialization really has refocused most reference groups and prestige hierarchies away from the general discipline. This either leaves sociologists with a rather stagnant view of the discipline, comfortable with old disciplinary slogans like "science of society" or "an explanation of social structure", or it leads them to extrapolate from their speciality the "essence" of sociology in general. Thus sociologists are out of discipline-wide practice, in a dual sense. First, they don't work with a disciplinary reference group in mind, and second, they don't think of their work as a cultural practice.

Anthropology, history, and literary studies have all been engaged in a major project of rethinking their "distinction" and "tradition" in the last decade or so under the impact of feminist thinking, cultural studies, and in anthropology especially, the centering of "third world" intellectuals in the metropolitan core. Sociology, however, has not "suffered" this disciplinary self-examination, as Stacey and Thorne²³ pointed out several years ago in regard to the "missing feminist revolution" in sociology. This is because "culture" is relegated to a "speciality" in our discipline. There is reason to think that is changing, however.

Inspired by the spectacular growth of the "culture section" of the ASA in the late 1980's, in 1990, Contemporary Sociology had a special symposium on "The Many Facets of Culture". In the lead review essay on some works by Bourdieu and Raymond Williams, Craig Calhoun (1990:500) wrote,

23 Judith Stacey and Barrie Thorne, "The Missing Feminist Revolution in Sociology" Social Problems 1986.

The recent revitalization of a sociology of culture has too often perpetuated sociology's narrow conceptualization of culture as just one among many topical areas. Too many researchers are content to see the field as analogous to the sociology of education, law or medicine. ... in taking this approach, they perpetuate an unfortunate separation between this hypostatized cultural realm and the rest of society. We need not simply a broader, richer notion of culture for the sociology of culture, but an adequate role for culture in a general sociology.

Indeed, one might make the case that not only would bringing culture to the general sociological enterprise be a "healthy" move, it might also help to reconstitute the "scientific project" associated with sociology itself. At least Bourdieu suggests such a possibility.

Bourdieu, in Homo Academicus but also in other places, shows how "reflexivity" can be simultaneously an extension of the scientific project and an extension of cultural analysis. First, Bourdieu gives us a new language with which we can begin to scrutinize our practices. For him, the intellectual is a producer in the field of cultural production, and this field is a social world like any other, even if it is characterized by its own sets of power relations, struggles and mechanisms of reproduction. Consider the various intellectual strategies deployed in struggles: the use of the demeaning adjectives like "mere", exclusion from publications, putatively "objective" rankings of quality or quantity of publication, establishing degrees of innovation by using adjectives like "avant-garde" or "old school", and so on. Of course each field is composed of smaller fields and is nested within other fields; our department is simultaneously nested in our discipline and our university, and within the department there are various fields which each have their own sets of power relations. Programs like CSST have their own sets of power relations different from those of the departments out of which they come, for one reason being that such a program is much more "voluntary".

Although Bourdieu focuses on the power relations structuring knowledge, he is far from a relativist. He argues that fields can be structured so that they encourage the transcendence of personal interest in the ordinary sense, and approximate the autonomy and search for knowledge that science is supposed to represent (p. 146). But in order to do this, a discipline must be reflexive. Sociology must begin with its own sociology. Only by understanding the rules, interests and stakes of the intellectual field can the sociologist begin to acquire the autonomy science

requires. Too easily can sociologists offer the most brutally sociological analysis of their enemies while becoming the ideologue of their own position. The only chance for the advance of science is then the cultivation of a field in which struggles and victories are based on scientific capital. And that depends on theorizing the bases for alliances and conflicts in a maximally autonomous and reflexive field.

In sum, without reflexivity, there can be no approximation of autonomy; and without autonomy, there can be no science, for other forms of capital then decide the outcomes of conflicts and struggles. It is only by "expressing the determinants of different forms of practice, especially intellectual practice, (that) the sociologist gives us the chance of acquiring a certain freedom from these determinants" (p.15).

There are several aspects to Bourdieu's cultural examination of the sociological project that I find misleading, but I believe his elevation and celebration of reflexivity as a common sociological project can invite sociologists to rethink their disciplinary practices, and not consider it to be some deviation from the scientific goal of explaining society. This is why I think the growing interest in the French sociologist, illustrated by the review symposium dedicated to him in March 1992 of Contemporary Sociology, is a good sign for US sociology, for I think our "malaise" must be seen not as something derived from what we have lost, but rather something we feel as a consequence of knowing, at least intuitively, what we need to do.

If one looks at the Task Group report, Collins' essay, Turner and Turner's history, or even our department's discussions, the same "theme" recurs: we face some danger because we have lost something, usually our integration. We have lost it to fragmentation. The way in which we can recover ourselves is to restore that integration either through some hegemonic project in theory or methods, or through the celebration of our core substantive wisdom. This, however, seems to me to be a project of integration through reverence for a mythical past, reminding me sometimes of nationalists claiming certain political rights based on an imagined community's past glory. Why shouldn't we consider that our "crisis" is healthy, and may in fact lead us to consider

incorporating something we have never seriously addressed: namely our own community of inquiry.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I should like to make what is hopefully a provocative claim: US sociology can begin to approximate the integration it has putatively lost only by becoming something it has never been: a reflexive discipline. In order to acquire this reflexivity, we cannot only go to our own, like Alvin Gouldner or Pierre Bourdieu, but also to those disciplines whose familiarity with reflexivity might help us develop our own. For thinking about our own community's development, without a mythical past or telos built in, might help us provide the common ground within which we can establish better dialogues across our problem oriented specialities. The discipline is, however, resistant.

It is resistant because to acknowledge such a deep limitation in a period of crisis might suggest weakness to the powers that be. It also is resisted because to suggest a common cultural turn would imply a definite reconfiguration of authority within the discipline. Those whose claim to own the "foundation" of sociology in statistical methods would be partially displaced; those who advance theory as testing hypotheses about "empirical" patterns outside our intellectual community would lose some of their "scientific" mantle; and even those who study culture in the same way that any other field is studied in sociology (see Thomas Gieryn's review of Judith Blau's The Shape of Culture) would also lose some status. Or at least that is what I thought before our department's retreats.

If sociology's reflexive turn can be cultivated first at a practical level, and at a personal level, where dialogue among peers rather than debates among specialists characterize the exchange, then the reflexive turn has a good chance. Our department has already, it seems, begun this reflexive examination, which I take as a sign of its internal strength. The next challenge, it seems, is to consider its translation into institutional structures. This too has already begun, as standards suitable to different intellectual traditions are introduced for evaluation of

promotions and hirings. Where the greatest gains might be made, however, are to be made in graduate education.

When we think of our sociological imagination, we think of the way in which we think about social phenomena beyond us. Rarely, unfortunately, does our imagination include us. The faculty might begin this reflexive turn, but it will probably be developed more among graduate students if they take culture seriously. I think this is the key question on the agenda for graduate education. It is not only a matter of strengthening our core, improving our methods competence, or increasing our link to professional schools: it is rather in making our graduate students more reflexive about the conditions of their intellectual production than our discipline has historically been inclined to be. It is about making our students better informed about the conditions of cultural production, not just so they can study film or literature, but so that they can understand themselves better, and maybe even ask eminently sociological questions that have eluded us, given our relatively innocent cultural moorings. And this is no utopia. This kind of reflexive and cultural sociology is already practiced in our department.

I have in mind here demographers who have rethought the racist and patriarchal culture behind the data upon which demographic analysis depends. I have in mind survey research which not only takes into account the effects of interviewer bias, but also the very plausibility of rendering through individual interviews attitudes which are more typically formed dialogically within primary groups. I have in mind more qualitative researchers who identify themselves and their biography as central to the explanation of an event far removed, apparently, from the connection of their biography to its history. I have in mind strengthening our capacity to learn not only about the organizational, demographic or class bases of group action, but also to learn about the very constitution of an identity like being gay or lesbian which so defies past sociological methods of codification much less enumeration. I have in mind historical studies which not only seek to establish causal patterns through comparison, but also those which have as their aim the reformulation of the categories with which we ask our questions.

The ease with which I recall reflexive research already being done within our department shows, I think, just how powerfully the discipline is being transformed.²⁴ It hasn't shown up, however, at the level of disciplinary discourse. Maybe it is time that it has, for I don't think this transformation we are witnessing is at all a sign of weakness or a cause for concern. Rather it is a sign for celebration.

Although this reflexive turn is already taken by other disciplines, our own turn does not have to imply the loss of our distinction, or somehow that we are behind the more culturally centered disciplines. In fact, our distinction might be elevated by making our community more of a conscious creation, rather than the byproduct of our search to explain other substantive matters. To have the strength to retool, and not to reclaim a mythical past, is likely a sign of disciplinary strength, not weakness. I am confident about US sociology's capacity to do this, at least here at Michigan.

²⁴ This transformation has not, nor should it, come at the expense of our continuing link with "science". In response to this presentation, Mayer Zald admonished me not to forget the "political economy of organizations". It is the "scientific sociologists" in our department who work with eminent and powerful institutions like the national Census Bureau and the National Science Foundation, or internally, in the Institute for Social Research or the Center for Population Studies. These ties should not be lost, but at the same time, they should not be a barrier to our developing better ties with the "humanistic" resources of the university and the nation.

