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Randall Collins: Interaction Ritual Chains

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Chapter 1

THE PROGRAM OF INTERACTION RITUAL THEORY

A THEORY OF INTERACTION ritual is the key to microsociology, and microsociology is the key to much that is larger. The smallscale, the here-and-now of face-to-face interaction, is the scene of action and the site of social actors. If we are going to find the agency of social life, it will be here. Here reside the energy of movement and change, the glue of solidarity, and the conservatism of stasis. Here is where intentionality and consciousness find their places; here, too, is the site of the emotional and unconscious aspects of human interaction. In whatever idiom, here is the empirical / experiential location for our social psychology, our symbolic or strategic interaction, our existential phenomenology or ethnomethodology, our arena of bargaining, games, exchange, or rational choice. Such theoretical positions may already seem to be extremely micro, intimate, and small scale. Yet we shall see they are for the most part not micro enough; some are mere glosses over what happens on the micro-interactional level. If we develop a sufficiently powerful theory on the micro-level, it will unlock some secrets of large-scale macrosociological changes as well.

Let us begin with two orienting points. First, the center of micro-sociological explanation is not the individual but the situation. Second, the term "ritual" is used in a confusing variety of ways; I must show what I will mean by it and why this approach yields the desired explanatory results.

Situation rather than Individual as Starting Point

Selecting an analytical starting point is a matter of strategic choice on the part of the theorist. But it is not merely an unreasoning *de gustibus non disputandum est*. I will attempt to show why we get more by starting with the situation and developing the individual, than by starting with individuals; and we get emphatically more than by the usual route of skipping from the individual to the action or cognition that ostensibly belongs to him or her and bypassing the situation entirely.

A theory of interaction ritual (IR) and interaction ritual chains is above all a theory of situations. It is a theory of momentary encounters among human bodies charged up with emotions and consciousness because they have gone through chains of previous encounters. What

we mean by the social actor, the human individual, is a quasi-enduring, quasi-transient flux in time and space. Although we valorize and heroize this individual, we ought to recognize that this way of looking at things, this keyhole through which we peer at the universe, is the product of particular religious, political, and cultural trends of recent centuries. It is an ideology of how we regard it proper to think about ourselves and others, part of the folk idiom, not the most useful analytical starting point for microsociology.

This is not to say that the individual does not exist. But an individual is not simply a body, even though a body is an ingredient that individuals get constructed out of. My analytical strategy (and that of the founder of interaction ritual analysis, Erving Goffman), is to start with the dynamics of situations; from this we can derive almost everything that we want to know about individuals, as a moving precipitate across situations.

Here we might pause for a counterargument. Do we not know that the individual is unique, precisely because we can follow him or her across situations, and precisely because he or she acts in a familiar, distinctively recognizable pattern even as circumstances change? Let us disentangle what is valid from what is misleading in this statement. The argument assumes a hypothetical fact, that individuals are constant even as situations change; to what extent this is true remains to be shown. We are prone to accept it, without further examination, as “something everybody knows,” because it is drummed into us as a moral principle: everyone is unique, be yourself, don’t give in to social pressure, to your own self be true—these are slogans trumpeted by every mouthpiece from preachers’ homilies to advertising campaigns, echoing everywhere from popular culture to the avant-garde marching-orders of modernist and hypermodernist artists and intellectuals. As sociologists, our task is not to go with the flow of taken-for-granted belief—(although doing just this is what makes a successful popular writer)—but to view it in a sociological light, to see what social circumstances created this moral belief and this hegemony of social categories at this particular historical juncture. The problem, in Goffman’s terms, is to discover the social sources of the cult of the individual.

Having said this, I am going to agree that under contemporary social conditions, very likely most individuals are unique. But this is not the result of enduring individual essences. The uniqueness of the individual is something that we can derive from the theory of IR chains. Individuals are unique to just the extent that their pathways through interactional chains, their mix of situations across time, differ from other persons’ pathways. If we reify the individual, we have an ideology, a secular version of the Christian doctrine of the eternal soul, but we

cut off the possibility of explaining how individual uniquenesses are molded in a chain of encounters across time.

In a strong sense, the individual is the interaction ritual chain. The individual is the precipitate of past interactional situations and an ingredient of each new situation. An ingredient, not the determinant, because a situation is an emergent property. A situation is not merely the result of the individual who comes into it, nor even of a combination of individuals (although it is that, too). Situations have laws or processes of their own; and that is what IR theory is about.

Goffman concluded: "not men and their moments, but moments and their men." In gender-neutral language: not individuals and their interactions, but interactions and their individuals; not persons and their passions, but passions and their persons. "Every dog will have its day" is more accurately "every day will have its dog." Incidents shape their incumbents, however momentary they may be; encounters make their encountees. It is games that make sports heroes, politics that makes politicians into charismatic leaders, although the entire weight of record-keeping, news-story-writing, award-giving, speech-making, and advertising hype goes against understanding how this comes about. To see the common realities of everyday life sociologically requires a gestalt shift, a reversal of perspectives. Breaking such deeply ingrained conventional frames is not easy to do; but the more we can discipline ourselves to think everything through the sociology of the situation, the more we will understand why we do what we do.

Let us advance to a more subtle source of confusion. Am I proclaiming, on the micro-level, the primacy of structure over agency? Is the structure of the interaction all-determining, bringing to naught the possibility of active agency? Not at all. The agency / structure rhetoric is a conceptual morass, entangling several distinctions and modes of rhetorical force. Agency / structure confuses the distinction of micro / macro, which is the local here-and-now vis-à-vis the interconnections among local situations into a larger swath of time and space, with the distinction between what is active and what is not. The latter distinction leads us to questions about energy and action; but energy and action are always local, always processes of real human beings doing something in a situation. It is also true that the action of one locality can spill over into another, that one situation can be carried over into other situations elsewhere. The extent of that spillover is part of what we mean by macro-patterns. It is acceptable, as a way of speaking, to refer to the action of a mass of investors in creating a run on the stock market, or of the breakdown of an army's logistics in setting off a revolutionary crisis, but this is a shorthand for the observable realities (i.e., what would be witnessed by a micro-sociologist on the spot). This way

of speaking makes it seem as if there is agency on the macro-level, but that is inaccurate, because we are taken in by a figure of speech. Agency, if we are going to use that term, is always micro; structure concatenates it into macro.

But although the terms “micro” and “agency” can be lined up at one pole, they are not identical. There is structure at every level. Micro-situations are structures, that is to say, relationships among parts. Local encounters, micro-situations, have both agency and structure. The error to avoid is identifying agency with the individual, even on the micro-level. I have just argued that we will get much further if we avoid reifying the individual, that we should see individuals as transient fluxes charged up by situations. Agency, which I would prefer to describe as the energy appearing in human bodies and emotions and as the intensity and focus of human consciousness, arises in interactions in local, face-to-face situations, or as precipitates of chains of situations. Yes, human individuals also sometimes act when they are alone, although they generally do so because their minds and bodies are charged with results of past situational encounters, and their solitary action is social insofar as it aims at and comes from communicating with other persons and thus is situated by where it falls in an IR chain.

On the balance, I am not much in favor of the terminology of “agency” and “structure.” “Micro” and “macro” are sufficient for us to chart the continuum from local to inter-local connections. The energizing and the relational aspects of interactions, however, are tightly connected. Perhaps the best we might say is that the local structure of interaction is what generates and shapes the energy of the situation. That energy can leave traces, carrying over to further situations because individuals bodily resonate with emotions, which trail off in time but may linger long enough to charge up a subsequent encounter, bringing yet further chains of consequences. Another drawback of the term “agency” is that it carries the rhetorical burden of connoting moral responsibility; it brings us back to the glorification (and condemnation) of the individual, just the moralizing gestalt that we need to break out from if we are to advance an explanatory microsociology. We need to see this from a different angle. Instead of agency, I will devote theoretical attention to emotions and emotional energy, as changing intensities heated up or cooled down by the pressure-cooker of interaction rituals. Instead of emphasizing structure, or taking the other tack of backgrounding it as merely a foil for agency, I will get on with the business of showing how IRs work.

Conflicting Terminologies

My second orienting point is the following. It might seem that encapsulating a comprehensive theory of micro-sociology is heavy duty to pin on the term "ritual." The term has been used in roughly the fashion that I will emphasize by some sociologists, notably Emile Durkheim and his most creative follower in micro-sociology, Erving Goffman: that is, ritual is a mechanism of mutually focused emotion and attention producing a momentarily shared reality, which thereby generates solidarity and symbols of group membership. But this theoretical heritage is not exact, and since Goffman, for example, wrote in a different intellectual era and had different theoretical alliances, I will have to defend my own particular usage by showing its fruitfulness for our problems. More troubling is the fact that "ritual" is a term in common parlance, where it is used in a much more restricted sense (as equivalent to formality or ceremony)¹ than in this neo-Durkheimian family of sociological theories. Further confusions arise because there is a specialized body of anthropological work on ritual, and yet another body of "ritual studies" within the field of religious studies; and these usages tend to overlap in confusing ways, sometimes with the Durkheimian tradition, sometimes with the restricted sense of everyday usage. One of my preliminaries must be to display the overlaps and differences in theoretical connotation.

For orientation, let us note the principal divergence between anthropological and microsociological usage, while bearing in mind that neither is uniform. Anthropologists have tended to see ritual as part of the structure of society, its formal apparatus for maintaining order, or for manifesting its culture and its values. This is the reverse of the microsociological approach: instead of ritual as the chief form of micro-situational action, ritual merely reflects macro-structure; ritual is a doorway to something larger, higher, and fundamentally static in contrast to the fluidity of IR chains. A long-standing anthropological theme is that ritual taking place in time reveals the timeless, the local manifests the total. In the varying terminologies of intellectual movements of the later twentieth century, this is the approach of structuralism, of symbolic anthropology, of semiotics and cultural codes. In general, the terminological usage of ritual in religious studies is closer to the doorway-to-the-transcendental approach of cultural anthropology than to the local source of action in radical microsociology. Where the microsociological approach takes the situation as the analytical starting point of explanation, the structuralist / culturological approach starts at the other end, with an overarching macro-structure of rules and

meanings. The challenge for microsociology is to show how its starting point can explain that what often appears to be a fixed global culture is in fact a situationally generated flux of imputed rules and meanings.²

The problem is more than terminological. Durkheim provided sociologists with a mechanism for situational interaction that is still the most useful we have. He set this model up in the case of religious ritual in a way that enables us to see what social ingredients come together in a situation and make a ritual succeed or fail. Goffman broadened the application of ritual by showing how it is found in one degree or another throughout everyday life; in the secular realm as in the sacred and official worlds, ritual plays a key role in shaping both individual character and stratified group boundaries. The model holds potentially even more wide-ranging applications. The problem is that the intellectual history of the twentieth century weaves through and around Durkheimian themes but in a fashion that has often twisted them into quite different positions. Instead of a clearly formulated causal mechanism of situational ingredients producing variations in solidarity, emotion and belief, several intellectual movements have turned away the study of ritual toward an emphasis on reconstructing evolutionary history, on the functionality of social institutions, or the preeminence of culture.

I will begin, then, with a historical overview of the way in which ritual has been theorized, with an eye to bringing out the micro-causal shape of the Durkheimian model so that we can see it clearly amidst these other formulations. It is a matter of getting a theoretical program in focus and not confusing it with quite different programs that unfortunately use the same terminology.

My aim is not simply “back to Durkheim and Goffman.” Like all intellectual figures, both lived in complex intellectual environments that are not our own. Their positions could be construed in a number of ways, because they were composed of several preexisting threads and got recombined with ongoing intellectual movements in the following generations. Such is the nature of intellectual life—building conflicting interpretations of canonized individuals for the sake of later intellectual maneuvers. Such a history is illuminating because it tells us where we are coming from and what intellectual ingredients we are working with—a map of the Sargasso Sea of ideas that makes up the turn-of-twenty-first century intellectual scene. To be sure, I am making my own intellectual construction out of Durkheim and Goffman, trying to forward my own intellectual project and its larger intellectual alliance. This is not a claim that there is only one objective way to construe Durkheim and Goffman, as if past intellectual politics were nothing but impurities upon a once-clear vision. But I will urge a strong pragmatic criterion: this way of building a Durkheim / Goffman

model of situational causality takes us far in showing the conditions under which one kind of thing happens in social situations rather than another. Situations often repeat, but they also vary and change. Interaction ritual theory shows us how and why.

TRADITIONS OF RITUAL ANALYSIS

I will not try to review the entire history of writings on ritual; an excellent sketch is available in Bell (1992). Instead I will highlight the points that are most useful for situating theoretical problems.

Roughly speaking, theorizing has focused on subcognitive ritualism, functionalist ritualism, and the code-seeking program along with its critics; the latter strands are often lumped together in what is ambiguously called the "cultural turn." From the late nineteenth century to the late twentieth century, these have been partly successive, partly recurrent, and sometimes overlapping programs.

Subcognitive Ritualism

Analysis of ritual was very much in the air at the end of the nineteenth century. Anthropology and sociology were created to a considerable extent around discussions of the topic. These new disciplines emerged out of a variety of older ones. Historians like Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges in the 1860s had searched out the sources of ancient Greek and Roman property, law, and politics, and found them in a succession of religious cults, participation in which marked the boundaries of household, clan, and political coalition. In the 1880s, religious scholars like William Robertson Smith had probed the ancient religion of the Semites, finding it in ongoing practices like the communal meals and sacrifices of Bedouin tribes. In the 1890s and following decades, classicists like Frazer sought to make sense of the host of minor deities and spirits who crowded the background of the Olympian gods elevated by Greek literary tradition, finding their meaning in practices at the shrines and sacred places of ancient everyday life. Working on convergent paths into this same material, Nietzsche already in the early 1870s seized upon the differences among the alabaster-statue Apollonian cults and the bawdy Dionysians, and pointed to the connection between the contrasting religious figures and the clash of social moralities. In the early years of the twentieth century, these lines of work crystalized in the Cambridge school of classicists around Jane Ellen Harrison, F. M. Cornford, and Gilbert Murray, who programatically interpreted all myths in terms of cult practices of their original adherents.

Another scholar of this tradition, R. R. Marrett (1914, 100) summed up epigrammatically: "primitive religion was not so much thought out, but danced out."

The research program of these classicists and historical anthropologists was not very abstract or systematically theorized compared to what came later. Its guiding idea was to translate particular myths into conjectures about cult practices, and to correlate them with archeological remains of ancient cult sites. One popular intellectual movement (which has lasted down to current times, especially as revived by the popularistic wing of feminist thinkers) was to document a cult of the "Great Mother," a goddess-centered fertility rite that was regarded as preceding all other religions, until displaced by male-centered cults, perhaps deriving from migrations of conquering warriors. Another branch of analysis attempted to formulate the principles of "primitive mentality" and to show how these contrasted with later rational thought (a movement that has been roundly repudiated in the post-colonial period); related works traced the roots of early Greek philosophy to the development of religious concepts and mythology. All of these approaches used the evidence of ritual and myth for historical reconstruction; thus their theorizing tended to be rather concrete, looking for earlier historical stages, which were sometimes construed as universal evolutionary patterns. Freud's *Totem and Taboo* used anthropological descriptions on tribal rites as evidence of a remote period in which the sons really did rise up to kill their fathers, then instituted commemorative rites out of their feelings of guilt. Freud was operating with the theory derived from embryological development that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, that is, the growth of the individual psyche parallels its collective history. Field anthropologists, who were often amateurs such as missionaries, medical doctors, or other travelers, concentrated on collecting curious ritual practices that could then be interpreted as survivals of a remoter period of human history.

Intellectual movements generally take place along an entire front of researchers who happen upon a body of new materials to study. The ideas with which they analyze their new-found data resemble each other because they formulate their intellectual tools by recombining the ideas of their predecessors. In the same way, as I have shown elsewhere, philosophers of each new generation operate within a lineup of existing intellectual factions, which gives a limited number of moves that can be made by recombining, negating, and abstracting existing ideas (Collins 1998). It is our own practice as members of the cult of intellectuals to elevate a few names as canonical writers and treat them as sole discoverers; and there is little harm in this as long as we take it merely as a convenient simplification and summary. As anthropol-

ogy and sociology took shape as recognized disciplines, their treatment of ritual became more concerned with a theory of how society operates. Anthropological field-researchers shared in the movement to make sense of belief, especially belief that seems nonrational by modern standards, by grounding it in ritual practice. Van Gennep in 1909 brought much material together under the scheme of rites of passage from one social status to another.

I will take the Durkheimian formulation as emblematic of the intellectual achievements of the early classicists, ancient and religious historians, and field anthropologists. Durkheim, himself a pupil of Fustel de Coulanges, was the leader of a school of comparativists and synthesizers (Lukes 1973; Fournier 1994; Alexander 1982). His protégés Henri Hubert, Marcel Mauss, and others launched the “Durkheimian” program of interpreting rituals in relation to the social structures that they sustain, as in comparative analyses of the sacrifice (Hubert and Mauss 1899/1968) and of prayer (Mauss 1909/1968). The general statement was Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912), which remains the best source for summing up what this entire movement of researchers had achieved.

Why is it appropriate to call this movement subcognitive ritualism? Rationality, and more generally all belief, is the surface of human consciousness; it is what first meets us, usually in idealized form, like the beautiful myths of the Olympian gods or sermons from the pulpit drawing upon the Hebrew Old Testament. The program of ritual analysis goes beneath this surface. In an evolutionist generation, this procedure was often seen as stripping away modern rationality to find its irrational foundation or historical roots; if the image is reminiscent of Freud depicting ego emerging out of the passions of the id, it is appropriate to remember that Freud was working in the same generation as van Gennep and Durkheim, and was drawing upon some of the same sources of material.³ The evolutionary postulate became outdated in later research programs, and remains a favorite whipping boy for intellectuals at the turn of the twenty-first century, and so it is important to emphasize that what I am calling the program of subcognitive ritualism does not stand or fall with social evolutionism.

Analytically, the point is that ideas and beliefs are not sufficiently explained in their own terms, whether one views them as Platonic essences or as products of individual minds; the subcognitive program is to understand how ideas arise from social practices. Durkheim formulated this sharply in 1912, first in a special case, then more generally. The special case is religious ideas, which Durkheim proposed can always be analyzed into the emblems of membership in the group that assembles to carry out rituals. The more general case comprises all the

basic categories of the human understanding, the cosmological concepts and logical operations through which we think. These too, Durkheim argued, arise from the ritualism sustaining group membership. His evidence—and this marks the procedure of his research program—is comparative patterns that show how the structure of ideas varies with the structure of the group.

One other aspect of Durkheim's formulation generalized and expanded points adumbrated by Fustel, Nietzsche, and other forerunners. The subcognitive interpretation of rituals, as I have outlined it, explains cognitions by social practices, especially ritual practice. Durkheim's 1912 work explicitly adds that moral beliefs are also constituted by ritual practice. Again the thrust of the argument, and the logic of the evidence, is comparative: moralities vary with the organization of the group; change in group structure changes moralities. Nietzsche expressed this in a highly polemical way, in contrasting what he called the slave-morality of Christianity with the aristocratic hero-morality of the dominant Greeks. In fact, a whole range of moralities has emerged as different kinds of ritual practices have been discerned for different groups and historical periods. From his teacher Fustel, Durkheim learned that ritual participation sets the boundaries of groups, and hence the boundaries of moral obligation. His pupil Mauss was later to show how rituals could be used to set up temporary exchange across group boundaries, through such practices as ceremonial gift-exchange, thereby setting up still wider structures. Appropriately, this ceremonial gift-economy has subsequently been applied to the Homeric society of the Greeks (Finley, 1977). Both Fustel and Mauss showed that the ritual mechanism is not static but also creative, and also conflictual. New social connections can be established by extending rituals to new participants; and those excluded by rituals from group structures can fight their way into membership, as Fustel showed in sketching the history of ritual participation in the political coalitions of the ancient city states. The key point is that Durkheimian analysis provides not only a sociology of knowledge but a sociology of morals. This will lead us into the sociology of emotions capable of explaining the passions of righteousness, retribution, and rebellion, a sociology encompassing both anger and love.

The Durkheimian tradition has been continued and extended by a number of researchers up to the present: Lloyd Warner (1959), Kai Erikson (1966), Mary Douglas (1966, 1973), Basil Bernstein (1971–75), Albert Bergesen (1984), Thomas Scheff (1990), and others. The principles crystallized by the early generations of students of ritual are permanent additions to our stock of sociological knowledge, building blocks out of which more complex theories have been constructed.

Functionalist Ritualism

The generation of anthropologists and sociologists who studied rituals in the middle decades of the twentieth century may largely be called functionalist ritualists, to indicate a divergence in the Durkheimian school. The subcognitivist model was submerged in the functionalist program, but it is also detachable from it.

The aim of the functionalist movement was to show that all of the institutional practices of a society fit together and contribute to the maintainance of its structures as a whole. This approach has subsequently been dismissed as static. Indeed it has become so fashionable to dismiss functionalism that it is worth reconstructing the intellectual motives that once generated enthusiasm for this method of analysis (the best source for this is Goody 1995). As amateur anthropologists and text-oriented classicists gave way to a profession of field researchers, a group of Malinowski's followers began to emphasize that field work should study one whole society at a time, and analyze all of its practices as working institutions in relation to each other. This was carried out especially by Evans-Pritchard and Meyer Fortes, who examined each of several of African tribes with an eye to how its economy, political structure, kinship system, religion, and other institutions all functioned as part of a mutually supporting system. No institution could be understood in isolation: all were adapted to each other, and piecemeal changes in one component were not possible without either unraveling the whole or setting in motion countervailing changes that would bring the system back into equilibrium. This functionalist program opened up a promising set of tasks for field researchers, and also served as a polemical contrast to the methods of the older generation of amateur or library-based anthropologists. What the functionalists rejected were historicist interpretations that took a particular item out of context in its society as currently functioning, and interpreted it instead as a "survival" giving evidence of some earlier period of history. Functionalists turned their backs on history in order to reject speculative historical explanations (since isolated cultural items must have a contemporary function) and to get on with the business of showing structure in operation. The functionalists were consciously systematic, aiming at a general theory of how societies operate; a systematic theory of interconnected structures took priority over a theory of how structures changed, since the latter could be constructed scientifically only on the basis of the former.⁴

The functionalist program was easiest to apply in isolated tribal societies, or at least what appeared to be isolated and self-contained societies. Its guiding image was a set of structures functioning together as

a unit, and thus distinct from other such functioning units outside its boundaries. Later critics would attack this point as well, arguing that the functionalists were too taken with the metaphor of society as a self-reproducing organism, or alternately that they modeled tribal societies on the ideology of the Western nation-state as a self-standing identity. Later it would be argued that tribes, too, have histories, and that they not only change over time but are to a considerable degree constituted by their "foreign relations" of trade, cultural prestige, military geopolitics, and kinship alliances (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997). Such difficulties came especially to the fore after the functionalist program was generalized into a program for all sociological science, and applied to complex modern societies. The lead here was taken by Talcott Parsons and Robert Merton.⁵ Functionalist theory became a systematic listing of the basic functions that any society needs to carry out; a model of change as the differentiation of structures specializing in those functions; and a study of the strains that occur when functions are not properly met, and of the responses that the system makes to restore equilibrium. Parsons added an emphasis upon a shared value system that orients each specific social system, together with sets of norms that provide blueprints implementing these values in actors' behavior. The functionalist program as grand theory became bogged down in debates from the 1940s through the 1960s over what is functional or dysfunctional, what determines which functional alternatives are implemented, as well as whether the functionalist outlook is conservative in that it casts stratification and inequality in a favorable light, while ignoring conflicting interests inside a society. Eventually the whole research program lost adherents. Some rejected it because of presumed ideological bias; others because it seemed impossible to make progress toward empirically demonstrable explanations of what actually happens under what conditions.

Functionalism is now generally so unfashionable that any theories once attached to it are likely to be dismissed out of hand. There is some tendency to dismiss Durkheim as a conservative evolutionist, and to see his concept of collective conscience as a reification on a par with (and indeed the source of) Parsons' overarching value system. I would argue, however, that the strength of the Durkheimian tradition has been its contribution to micro-sociology rather than as a theory of macro-level societal integration or social evolution. Especially in *The Elementary Forms*, Durkheim provides a model of how solidarity and shared symbolism are produced by interaction in small groups; thus it is an easy extension (although admittedly Durkheim did not make it, and might well have been hostile to it) to see these groups as local, ephemeral, or mutually conflicting, rather than integrated into one

large society. "Collective conscience" can exist in little pockets rather than as one huge sky covering everybody in the society, and I have argued elsewhere (Collins 1975) that the Durkheimian mechanism provides a crucial component of a conflict theory that is quite the opposite of functionalism on the macro-level.

One frequent criticism of ritual analysis is that it is overgeneralized. Rituals are held to be omnipresent; but if everything is a ritual, what isn't? In that case, the concept is useless to discriminate among the different kinds of things that happen. The criticism holds up best against a notion of ritual as serving functionally to equilibrate society, operating as a pressure-valve to let off hostilities, or as a celebration of shared values, in either case acting to sustain and restore social order. When things go wrong there are rituals; when things go right there are rituals. Ritual analysis just seems to illustrate, on a micro-level, the conservative bias of functionalism: everything is interpreted as part of the tendency of society automatically to produce social integration. But the problem here is functionalism, not ritual analysis. If we take rituals out of the functionalist context, we still have a clear model of what social ingredients go into making a ritual, and what outcomes occur; and the strength of those ingredients are variables, which determines just how much solidarity occurs. Rituals can fail, or they can succeed at different degrees of intensity. We can predict and test just what should result from these variable conditions. Such ritual analysis is not a tautology.

In my own use of ritual theory, I am one of the worst of sinners, proposing to see rituals almost everywhere. But this does not reduce everything to one bland level, explaining nothing of interest. On the contrary, it provides us with a very generally applicable theory by which to show how much solidarity, how much commitment to shared symbolism and to other features of human action, will occur in a wide variety of situations. If it is any help in mitigating the prejudice against ritual theory, the theory can just as well be couched in terms (which I will explain later) of the causes and consequences of variations in mutual focus and emotional entrainment. I will claim that this theory can be universally applied; but that no more makes it vacuous than, for instance, Boyle's law relating volume, temperature, and pressure, which usefully applies to a wide range of circumstances.

Functionalist theory of ritualism had a more limited application than the functionalist program in general, and it made a number of important contributions to showing the mechanisms by which rituals operate. The functionalist ritualists are exemplified by Radcliffe-Brown (1992), who shows that a funeral operates to reintegrate a group after it has lost a member: beyond ostensible appearances, the

ritual is for the living, not for the dead, and the greater the concern that the rite be carried out to bring the soul to rest, the greater the threat to the group and its need to reintegrate itself.⁶ This is the sub-cognitive interpretation, but carried further in the direction of a program for understanding group structure and function. Radcliffe-Brown is still a micro-functionalist, but he gives us empirical materials to work upon that we can recast as ritual ingredients bringing about variable outcomes.

Goffman's Interaction Ritual

The most important of the contributions emerging from functionalist ritualism were made by Erving Goffman. Goffman was uninterested in questions of the institutional integration of society as a whole. He reserved the right to pick his own level of analysis, and his functionalism operated at a level that was distinctively his own: the functional requirements of the situation.

Goffman writes like a functionalist when he depicts ritual as following rules of conduct that affirm the moral order of society.⁷ But Goffman's consistent emphasis is on the micro level of immediate interaction; and the "society" that is affirmed and that makes its demands felt is not some mysterious remote entity but embodies the demands of sociality in the here-and-now.⁸ The situation itself has its requirements: it will not come off unless the actors do the work of properly enacting it. Social reality itself is being defined. What social institution people believe they are taking part in, the setting, the roles that are being presented—none of these exists in itself, but only as it is made real by being acted out. Goffman is a social constructionist, except that he sees individuals as having little or no leeway in what they must construct; the situation itself makes its demands that they feel impelled to follow.

Most famously, each individual's self is being enacted or constructed in the situation; here again, this is the construction of self under social constraint. The constraint is most palpable because it comes from one's stance vis-à-vis others; once the actor has taken a line as to what one's self is (and what the situation is), he or she is constrained to keep their line consistent. The recipient or audience of these constructions is constrained as well, under a palpable pressure to go along with the line the actor presents, to fall in with the spirit of the performance, and to overlook and excuse breaches that would threaten the definition of who people are and what they are jointly enacting. This is a functionalist analysis insofar as it starts with functional needs and goes on to show how they are met. But since Goffman operates on a level of micro-detail that was unprecedented at his time, he helps point the

way toward seeing just how the pressure for ritual conformity is felt, and thus allows us to turn his micro-functionalism into a mechanism of the micro-production of solidarities and realities.

Goffman defines ritual as follows: "I use the term "ritual" because this activity, however informal and secular, represents a way in which the individual must guard and design the symbolic implications of his acts while in the immediate presence of an object that has a special value for him" (Goffman 1956/1967, 57). This parallels the definition that Durkheim set out in analyzing religious ritual; after arguing that the distinguishing feature of religion is a division of the world into the two realms, the profane and the sacred, he states, "[R]ites are the rules of conduct which prescribe how a man should comport himself in the presence of these sacred objects" (Durkheim 1912/1965, 56). This has a functionalist tone: society and its sacred objects exist, and these constrain the individual to act in a rule-following, symbolically laden fashion toward these objects. But these definitions are just the entry points for the analyses that Durkheim and Goffman carry out in detail; and these allow us to see not merely that rituals have to be produced, but also under what conditions they are produced and are effective, and under what conditions they are not produced or fail. Both Durkheim's and Goffman's definitions assume that the sacred objects are already constituted. Micro-empirically, this means that they have been carried out before, so that this instance is a repetition of what went before. This is not an isolated ritual but an interaction ritual chain. Putting Durkheim together with Goffman reminds us that rituals not only show respect for sacred objects, but also constitute objects as sacred; and if the ritual is not carried out for a time, the sacredness fades away.

Let us look more closely at the main types of rituals that Goffman finds in everyday life. There are the salutations, compliments, and stereotyped verbal interchanges that make up the polite or friendly routine of verbal interaction. These are on the surface meaningless. "How are you?" is not a request for information, and it is a violation of its spirit to reply as if the interlocuter wanted to know details about one's health. "Good night," "hello," and "goodbye" do not seem to convey any explicit content at all. But it is easy to see what these expressions do by comparing where they are used and not used, and what happens if they are not used when expected. They may be omitted without social consequence if the situation is highly impersonal, such as a brief commercial transaction at a ticket window. But if they are omitted when there is a personal relationship of friendly acquaintanceship, the feeling is a social snub; failure to greet someone one knows, or not to ceremonially mark their departure, conveys the sense that the personal

relationship is being ignored or downgraded. (I shall have more to say on this subject in chapter 6, in discussing various kinds of kisses.)

Thus various kinds of minor conversational routines mark and enact various kinds of personal relationships. They are reminders of how persons stand toward each other, with what degree of friendship (i.e., solidarity), intimacy, or respect. They convey in fine detail, known tacitly to everyone, the differences between total strangers, persons in fleeting utilitarian contact, persons enacting certain organizational roles, persons who know each other's names and thus recognize each other as individuals rather than as roles, persons who have a friendly concern for each other's affairs, buddies, confidantes, family members, lovers, and so on. "Hello, Bob" has a different meaning than "Hello," and than "Hello, dear," or "Hello, Mr. Knight" or "Hello, Your Honor."⁹ Introductions, whether by a third party or by oneself, are significant moves because they shift the entire level of interaction from one institutional sphere to another. Changing from one kind of greeting, small talk, or departure ceremony to another is the most palpable means of changing the character of a social relationship.

There is a fine-grained temporal aspect to the use of these verbal rituals. If we think of social life as taking place in a string of situations, that is, encounters when persons are physically copresent (or otherwise linked into an immediate focus of attention), then in order to get the situation focused, it is usually necessary to start it off with an act that explicitly notes the existence of such a situation and that defines what kind of situation it is. "Hello" and "goodbye" and their equivalents are used to open and close situations; they are transition rituals marking when a certain kind of encounter is starting and ending. This transition-marking aspect of verbal rituals is coordinated with the relationship-marking aspect. The friendly "Hello, Bob" (or whatever marker is chosen) says that we have had a friendly relationship of personal recognition beyond institutional roles before, and that we remember and resume that relationship, linking past situations with the present into a chain. (This is one specialized meaning of "interaction ritual chain.") The "goodbye" and its variants at the end says: we have shared a certain kind of situational reality for the time; it is now coming to an end; we leave on friendly (or respectful, or intimate, or distant, etc.) terms. Thus the ending ritual sets things up for the future, marking that the relationship is still there and will be resumed (Goffman 1971, 79). Parents kissing children goodnight, a ritual especially emphasized with small children, is a version affirming that, though one person is going off now into the altered reality of sleep, the other one is still there and will be there when the child awakes. The old bedtime prayer for children "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord

my soul to keep. . ." does the same thing in a religious context, invoking larger communal realities, as the goodnight kiss does for a purely personal relationship.

I have elaborated Goffman's analysis in order to bring out the vast extensions possible of his rather condensed theoretical remarks on the topic. In his key early papers "The Nature of Deference and Demeanor" (1956/1967) and "On Face Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction" (1955/1967), Goffman gives a taxonomy of ritual elements. Politeness to others, including the salutations just discussed, is a form of deference. This subdivides into what Goffman calls "presentational rituals" (looking ahead to his book then in progress, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* [1959]), by which an individual expresses regard for the value of others, and "avoidance rituals," which are taboos that the actor observes in order not to infringe upon the other person. Among the latter is respect for privacy, of which an important aspect is the ecology of everyday life, allowing other persons a backstage where they can do the things that do not make an optimal impression—ranging from bathrooms and bedrooms to private offices and kitchens where a situational performance is being prepared, and the alley behind the house where the garbage is collected. Here, too, Goffman is working up material that will become the frontstage / backstage model in his first book. Goffman explicitly connects these two kinds of everyday ritualism with Durkheim's classification of ritual into positive and negative rites (Goffman 1956/1967, 73).

Deference is what individuals do toward others; demeanor is the other side of the interaction, the construction of a social self. Here Goffman is invoking the symbolic interactionist concept of the "me" or self-concept; but he declares it simplistic to see this merely as viewing oneself from the role of the other. Demeanor is a form of action, the work that he calls "face work." It is not merely one-sided action, but reciprocal. The actor acquires a face or social self in each particular situation, to just the extent that the participants cooperate to carry off the ritual sustaining the definition of the situational reality and who its participants are. There is reciprocity between deference and demeanor.¹⁰ This situational self is typically idealized, or at least staged to give a particular impression; it certainly does not convey a full picture of what the individual's self might be if one took all the moments of his / her life together. This idealization is inevitable. For Goffman, there is no privileged reality standing outside of situations, but only a chain of situations and preparation for (and aftermath of) situations.

Goffman's early fame came in large part from delving into the seamy side of everyday life. This gave an impression among many sociolo-

gists as well as the general public that he was a practitioner of *exposé*; the Durkheimian basis of his analysis was mostly ignored. But Goffman chose his materials analytically, designing his research to show how the normal rituals of everyday life are carried out, above all by contrasting them with situations in which they are strained or violated. Thus Goffman drew upon his fieldwork that was carried out incognito in the schizophrenic wards of a mental hospital (Goffman 1961; this research was also cited as the empirical basis for his description of ritual and face work in Goffman 1955 and 1956) to make the point that one becomes labeled as mentally ill because one persistently violates minor standards of ritual propriety. He went on to draw the irony that mental patients are deprived of backstage privacy, props for situational self-presentation, and most of the other resources by which people under ordinary conditions are allowed to show their well-demeaned selves and their ability to take part in the reciprocity of giving ritual deference to others. Goffman's research strategy is like Durkheim's investigation of suicide, not so much to show why people kill themselves but to reveal the normal conditions that keep up social solidarity and give meaning to life.

In the same vein, Goffman gave much attention throughout his research career to the troubles of carrying out rituals effectively. Bloops and blunders, moments of embarrassment, rendings of the presentational façade, frame breaks, all these were studied as ways of demonstrating that the ordinary reality of everyday life is not automatic, but is constructed by finely honed interactional work. Goffman was concerned with sophisticated deviants for the same reason. He studied confidence artists because these are professionals attuned to the vulnerabilities of situations, and their techniques point up the details of the structures of normalcy that they take advantage of in order to cheat their victims. He analyzed spies and counterespionage agents because these are specialists in contriving, and in seeing through, an impression of normalcy; the fine grain of normal appearances becomes plainer when one sees a secret agent tripped up by minor details (Goffman 1969). Goffman's topic here seems exotically adventurous, but his conclusion is about the crushing pressures of keeping up normal appearances, and the difficulty in contriving them; spies and counterespies often fail because of the difficulty in managing high levels of reflexive awareness or layers of self-consciousness in presenting their false cover, while being on guard against give-aways, all the while giving off an appearance of normalcy. Here again, the extreme instance highlights the mechanism that produces the normal. Life follows routine rituals for the most part because it is easiest to do so, and full of difficulties if one tries to do something else.

Goffman has a reputation for a Machiavellian view of life: individuals put on false fronts, which they manipulate to their advantage. Life is a theater, and actors use their backstages in order to plot how they will deceive and control others on the frontstage. True enough, especially in *The Presentation of Self*, Goffman gives considerable material from industrial and occupational sociology to just this effect: teams of salesmen who suck in a customer and trick him or her in order to extract a higher price; workers who put on a show of compliance in the presence of their managers but go back to working at their own pace in the absence of supervision; managers who pretend to be completely knowledgeable about what the workers are doing, and who hide behind the locked doors of executive bathrooms and lunchrooms in order not to be seen in a casual or vulnerable situation. This material makes Goffman compatible with a conflict theory of social life, and I have exploited the connection to show how Goffman provides micro-foundations for Dahrendorf's class conflict of order-givers and order-takers (Collins 1975).

How can we reconcile the apparent two sides of Goffman—the Machiavellian and the functionalist Durkheimian? For Goffman, the requirements of rituals are fundamental: any conflict, any individual maneuvering for advantage must build upon it. Self-interested action is successful only as it respects ritual constraints. Manipulation is possible precisely because ordinary life is an endless succession of situations that have to be acted out to be defined as social realities, and that constrain both actor and audience to take part in the work of keeping up the impression of reality. The everyday reality of class conflict on the factory floor—the supervisor trying to get the workers to work harder, the workers putting on a show of compliance during the moments when they are ceremonially confronted by the manager—is a kind of theatrical performance; both sides generally know what is real or unreal about the situation; both put up with it, as long as the show of respect is maintained.¹¹ The show of cooperation is the situational performance through which conflicting interests are tacitly managed.

Goffman makes this explicit in discussing the aggressive use of face work. It is possible for individuals to set out to dominate situations, insult others, have jokes at their expense, even drive them out of the situation and the group. But situational prestige goes to the person who does this by keeping to the normal forms of ritual interaction. A successful insult is one that is done within the expectable flow of conversational moves, inserting double meanings so that on one level it remains appropriate.¹² Put-downs and one-upmanship are successful when the onus for breaking the smooth playing out of the interaction goes to the recipient, who incurs dishonor either by being unable to

shoot back a smooth and appropriate reply, or by breaking the frame entirely with an angry outburst. This is Goffman's model of conflict: individual advantage comes from manipulating the normal rituals of solidarity, deference, and situational propriety. And the individual, although self-interested, is nevertheless interested in what can be found only in social situations; individuality and egotism are oriented toward socially constructed goals.

The *Presentation of Self* model might be taken as an egocentric contriving of one's social demeanor: one puts on one's face, like putting on one's clothes, in order to make a certain impression; it is a model of impression management. A whole field of research has grown up around this interpretation. But Goffman's point is that demeanor is part of a reciprocity among participants who are all contributing to a situational reality. One pays attention to the style of one's clothes and grooming (which might in some circumstance be a fashionable *déshabillé*) not merely to make an exalted impression in the eyes of others; it is also a sign of respect to the person to whom one presents oneself, showing that one regards him or her as worthy of seeing one's best self; and it is a sign of respect to the situation. This logic remains in effect even when there are transformations in popular culture, so that rejecting traditional demeanor becomes a mark of belonging to a social movement, or an emblem for youth, or a vogue of casualness emulated by everyone; the degree of respect shown for situations of public gathering is conveyed by demeanor rituals, whatever the particular style demanded by the group. Thus in the compulsory casualness at the turn of the twenty-first century it is just as much a violation for a man to show up at a party wearing a necktie as it was for him to show up not wearing one in the 1930s.

Goffman's overall theoretical model is often hard to discern. Each of his publications was organized around a theoretical discussion, into which he wove his own, usually quite innovative, collection of micro-empirical materials. Often the substance of these materials was so striking that his theoretical concerns were lost from sight. Additionally, Goffman changed his terminology from one writing to the next, obscuring whatever cumulative refinement was taking place. His explicit references to Durkheimian ritual theory are in his earliest papers, and they drop out thereafter. Goffman appeared successively as analyst of ritual, of life as theater, of total institutions, of the ecology of everyday life, of games and strategies, of human ethology, of frames of reality construction, among other topics. Nevertheless, Goffman's Durkheimianism is one constant point of anchorage; everything he does remains consistent with this position, and indeed elaborates it, and throughout his career he rejected interpretations that stressed his supposed simi-

larities to symbolic interaction, ethnomethodology, and Machiavellian conflict theory.¹³ Let me summarize what Goffman gives us as materials for a refined model of interaction rituals, grouped into rubrics which I will shortly use in presenting that model:

1. Ritual takes place in a condition of *situational copresence*. Goffman is a pioneer in spelling out the various ways in which human bodies assembled in the same place can affect one another. Even when people are in what he calls unfocused interaction (Goffman 1963), there is tacit monitoring, to make sure nothing abnormal or threatening is in the offing; when this happens, it quickly attracts attention. Conversely, even when a person is alone in public, he or she feels obligated to disarm the reaction of others whenever he or she makes a sudden or unexpected move. Thus talking to oneself out loud when one forgets something and has to retrace one's steps is a tacit signal that bizarre-appearing behavior has a normal meaning (see "Response Cries," in Goffman 1981). Being oblivious to other persons takes tacit interactional work: there are minute adjustments of gaze, eye contact, and trajectory of pedestrian traffic that are finely attuned, ranging from "civil disattention," to friendly acknowledgement, to accosting attention, to aggressive control of public space. More complicated tacit relationships take place between little groups in each other's interactional range: a couple in public, for example, gives off tie-signs ranging from holding hands to bodily alignment that convey their unapproachability insofar as their relationship attention is already taken up (Goffman 1971).

2. Physical copresence becomes converted into a full-scale encounter by becoming a *focused interaction*. It now becomes a mutual focus of attention, again varying in intensity and obligation. A fairly high level of engrossment is illustrated by the mutual attention that participants in a conversation feel obligated to maintain: "Talk creates for the participant a world and a reality that has other participants in it. Joint spontaneous involvement is a *unio mystico*, a socialized trance. We must see that a conversation has a life of its own and makes demands on its own behalf. It is a little social system with its own boundary-maintaining tendencies" (Goffman 1967, 113). Participants become constrained to keep a topic afloat, and to move from it to another topic by smooth transitions. They are under pressure to take it seriously, that is, to accord it the status of a reality that is at least temporarily believed in. This is true even if the topic is explicitly framed as in some sense unreal—jokes are to be taken in a humorous frame; stories of one's own tribulations and other's atrocities are to be taken in an appropriately sympathetic and partisan vein; accomplishments in an admiring vein. There is situational pressure for agreement, and for allowing the

other to present a line, however patently fabricated, as long as it remains situationally consistent.

To be sure, the theatrical model is only a metaphor, as Goffman himself notes in his concluding statement of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. He goes on: "This report . . . is concerned with the structure of social encounters—the structure of those entities in social life that come into being whenever persons enter one another's immediate physical presence. The key factor in this structure is the maintenance of a single definition of the situation" (1959, 254). Goffman is echoing the symbolic interactionist watchword, the "definition of the situation"—that which makes a shared reality effectively real for its participants, as W. I. Thomas famously argued. What Goffman adds by his translation into the terms of micro-interactional ritual are the mechanisms by which this comes about, and the telling emphasis: a *single* definition of the situation, one reality at a time. And this definition needs to be upheld by active efforts, and defended against breakdowns and rival definitions. It is above all the single focus of attention that is the eye of the needle through which the power and the glory of interaction ritual must pass.

In Goffman's later work, especially *Frame Analysis* (1974) and *Forms of Talk* (1981), he describes quite complicated situational realities: frames around frames, rehearsals, recountings, debriefings, make-believes, lectures, broadcasting troubles, performer's self-revelations. These indicate the subtleties that make up the differences among formality and informality, relationships that take place on the frontstage and on various kinds of backstages. Although the terminology is different, Goffman is in effect adding complexities to the basic model: situations are rituals calling for cooperation in keeping up the momentary focus of attention and thus giving respect both to the persons who properly take part and to the situational reality as something worth a moment of being treated seriously. In keeping with his earlier work on the troubles and vulnerabilities of constructing situations, Goffman now shows even more complicated situations that have even more complicated requirements and vulnerabilities.

Ultimately, all these frames are ways in which attention is focused. This allows us to connect with the theatrical model. In its early, simpler version, there are frontstages and backstages. In effect the frontstage is the situation where attention is focused, incorporating some public who joins in the focusing; the backstage is where work is done to prepare so that the focusing can be effectively carried out. The frontstage is the performance of a ritual; the backstage, Goffman reminds us, is usually there because rituals—at least complicated ones—don't just come off by themselves but have to be worked up to. In his later writ-

ings, such as *Frame Analysis*, Goffman shows that there can be stages within stages.¹⁴ Whenever there is a play within a play, there is opportunity to shift stances, so that actor and audience may quite rapidly move into a backstage for some frontstage, or vice versa.

3. There is pressure to keep up *social solidarity*. Rituals are entraining; they exert pressures toward conformity and thus show one is a member of society. Goffman discerns a variety of kinds of solidarity, for example, in that he suggests the various kinds of social relationships that are enacted by the different shades of deference rituals. These range in time and continuity from brief face engagements, to acquaintanceship anchored in past relations, to the obligations incurred by varying degrees of intimacy. There are boundaries among different kinds of social bonds, as well, and persons perform ritual work both to keep up an expected tie and to fend off intrusions that would shift it to a closer level (Goffman 1963, 151–90).

4. Rituals do honor to what is socially valued, what Durkheim called *sacred objects*. Goffman shows that these are transient and situational. In modern societies, the foremost of these is the individual self, treated as if it were a little god in the minor presentational and avoidance rituals of everyday life (Goffman 1956/1967, 232).

5. When ritual proprieties are broken, the persons who are present feel *moral uneasiness*, ranging from mild humorous scorn, to disgust, to, in extreme cases, labeling the violator mentally ill. Ritual equilibrium can be restored by apologies, which are part of the flow of deference rituals in conversation (Scott and Lyman 1968; Goffman 1971). This is an everyday version of Durkheim's analysis of the punishment of crime, which is carried out not for its effect in deterring or reforming the criminal (effects that may well be illusory), but as a ritual to restore the sense of social order (Durkheim 1895/1982). Whatever operates on the large scale, Goffman indicates, can also be found in the small.

The Code-Seeking Program

It remains to deal briefly with the branch of ritual analysis influenced by the French theoretical movement of structuralism and its offshoots, which has been prominent in interdisciplinary circles in the latter half of the twentieth century. This is not the place for a full-scale history of the larger topic of cultural theory during this period; I will treat only the way in that ritual theory turned into a version of cultural theory that left ritual behind. Toward the end of this period—which is the intellectual time that we are still living in—there are moves toward

bringing the situation back in; and this is where the current program of IR theory fits into contemporary movements, but putting a radical emphasis on microsociology.

Durkheim had proposed that the structure of ideas varies with the structure of the group. In his early formulation in *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893/1964), Durkheim argued from broad historical comparisons of religion and law that a small society with uniform conditions produces a concrete, particularistic collective consciousness, whereas a society with a complex division of labor develops a more abstract consciousness to encompass variations in experience (275–91). In *Primitive Classification* (1903/1963), Durkheim and Mauss adduced ethnographic evidence for the classification systems and social structures of tribal societies. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912/1965), Durkheim argued that the categories of the understanding in the Kantian sense, the conceptual means by which persons think, are constructed socially: space is the geographical extension of the group; time is its patterns of periodic reassembly; causal force takes its prototype from *mana* or religious power, which is in effect the moral pressure of group emotion; category schemes that divide up the universe do so originally on the model of totemic emblems that mark membership in social groups and boundaries among them. (For detailed analysis of the implications of Durkheim's epistemology, see Ann Rawls 2003).

But this correspondence between ideas and social structure might be taken to run in either direction. This ambiguity in Durkheim's formulation led to divergence of opposite research programs: a sociology of knowledge that stayed close to the original program of explaining variations in ideas by variations in group practices; and a structuralist program that viewed ideas as the codes or transcendental patterns according to which groups became structured.

In the light of Durkheim's model of rituals, we can take ritual as the missing link between group structure and group ideas. Rituals are the nodes of social structure, and it is in rituals that a group creates its symbols. But it is methodologically easier simply to correlate ideas with types of society, or, even further from the context of social action, to correlate ideas with each other; one no longer needs to do the micro-ethnography of ritual action. Ritual drops out, leaving the system of symbols as the object for analysis. This was the pathway trod by Lévi-Strauss.

At the height of his structuralist ambition, Lévi-Strauss proposed in *Structural Anthropology* (1958/1963) that the same structure underlies each social and cultural institution of any particular society: its kinship system, the layout of its campsite (for instance, clan moities divide the campsite into halves), its art style, language, mythology, and every-

thing else. What was necessary to demonstrate this was the translation of each component into a formal code. Lévi-Strauss had made a start with a massive comparative analysis of kinship systems (*The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, 1949/1969), showing that various marriage rules, such as different forms of cross-cousin marriage, had distinctive structural consequences: kinship forms could be analyzed as the working out of choices for symmetrical or asymmetrical exchanges, which in turn implied short cycle and long cycle, restricted and generalized exchange. In a later terminology we could say that marriage rules generate network structures. Lévi-Strauss's analysis did not exhaust all types of kinship systems, but it gave confidence that it could be done, and it led to efforts to formulate these systems in mathematical terms.

Kinship codes were to be the entry point into codes that generate all aspects of culture and social organization. Troubles popped up, however, in this grand program from the beginning. It quickly became apparent that the variety of languages did not correspond to the variety of kinship systems, and that many other aspects of social institutions did not easily correspond with one another.¹⁵ Lévi-Strauss at this point in his career had proposed an extremely ambitious version of the functionalist program to show not only how the various institutions of a particular society hang together and mutually support one another, but to demonstrate that they all were workings out of the same underlying code. As it became apparent that this project was unlikely to come off, Lévi-Strauss retreated to a narrower (although still very large) field in which code-seeking analysis could be carried out: the structural interpretation of myths.

Around this time, Lévi-Strauss came to hold that the grand unifying system is a set of elaborations from binary oppositions. The notion was taken from the structural linguistics of Saussure. His central argument was that the unit of meaning, the distinguishable sound-elements or phonemes, are structured by contrasts with other sound-elements. Each language builds upon an arbitrary set of sound-distinctions or differences. Together these make up a system, and it is only within the context of such a system that specific lexical items are meaningful.¹⁶ Lévi-Strauss had already made a move toward seeing structure as a language in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, where he argued that the exchange of marriage partners is not only a rule-generated structure but a system of communications: women sent as wives from one family to another are messages, and their children, who circulate further through the system, are both replies and reminders of connections.

Lévi-Strauss (1962/1969) now proceeded with an attempt to decode myths across entire culture regions. His focus was no longer on distinct tribal units, abandoning the claim to show that each tribe had its own

code. Instead Lévi-Strauss embarked on a search for the code of all codes. Formal parallels among the elements of myths, and their combinations and oppositions in particular narratives, can be interpreted as a code organized on binary dichotomies. Myths structure the world into categories of what goes together and what is opposed. A system of myths thereby lays down the frames for thinking, as well as marking boundaries of what is permissible and what is monstrous, and therefore implicitly who is a proper social member and who is not. These are still Durkheimian resonances, but the emphasis has shifted from social structure to symbolic structure. As Lévi-Strauss sought the fundamental code of the human mind, the message that he deciphered was about the transformations of earliest human history. The mythologies of South America tell us of the break between the raw and the cooked, emblematic of the separation of humans from animals, and of culture from nature; more particularly it is a history of the totemic emblems that constituted human social groups. Ironically, Lévi-Strauss's structural method had now returned to the historicist anthropology that the functionalists had critiqued; but here was Lévi-Strauss again taking cultural items out of the context of their functioning present-day society, and interpreting them as historical survivals. Instead of respecting the integrity of the living social system, Lévi-Strauss was assembling bits and pieces of symbolism from disparate cultures into a comparative system showing the workings of the primitive mind; his was a more formalized version of Frazer or Lévy-Bruhl, only repudiating their evolutionism and the notion that the primitive mind is less rational than the modern. Lévi-Strauss vacillated between presenting a model of the timeless human mind, a sort of eternal Durkheimian collective consciousness, and a historical reading of what that mind was thinking at the birth of human societies. Lévi-Strauss has been an admirably bold and adventurous thinker, but we need to penetrate the façade of the way he worked. This was to bring together one large body after another of empirical literature from the field records of anthropologists, while shifting from one structural interpretation to another as difficulties popped up, without ever explicitly admitting that a hypothesis had failed or that he had changed his mind (see Schneider [1993] for an analysis of Lévi-Strauss's inconsistencies).

Lévi-Strauss, of course, was not alone in the structuralist movement that became so prominent in the 1950s and early 1960s in France. A widened scope of application as well as refined analytical tools came from the Russian and Prague formalists in literary criticism and comparative folklore (Jameson 1972). Shklovsky, Bakhtin, Jakobson, and others singled out recurring or archetypal plot structures, especially the plot tensions and oppositions that create drama and narrative di-

rection; following Saussure, it is the oppositions that create meaning. The formalist method acquired a dynamic or generative element, examining literary technique with an eye to how new systems of cultural meaning are created by metaphoric and metonymic transformations of prior texts and representational systems. Using these tools, the French structuralist movement ranged widely across all items of culture, seeking the code by which they are generated. Barthes (1967), for example, analyzed haute couture fashion as a system of oppositions and combinations, conveying structural relationships and implicitly placing persons in social hierarchies. Baudrillard (1968/1996) applied the method to modern, commercially distributed culture with its cycles of new products released seasonally or annually that target an array of market niches. The world of material consumption can be viewed as text-like; the tools for analyzing the structure of languages, myths, and literary works can be extended to the sets of oppositions and combinations that structure human interpretation of the entire material world. Derrida and others elaborated on the epistemological implications of structuralist analysis; the term “deconstruction” implies the activity of taking apart commonly accepted cultural items to show the structural ingredients from which their meanings were made.

At this point the structuralist or code-seeking program exploded, as its later followers, most famously Derrida and Foucault, turned against its central premise. The deconstructionist or postmodernist movement critiqued the notion that a single structural code exists. Lévi-Strauss proposed that cultures are built upon a binary code, but was never able to demonstrate it convincingly. Instead there may be multiple axes of differentiation; symbols can convey a number of contrasts; sign systems are polysemic, conveying multiple meanings. The importance of ambiguity and multiple penumbra of meaning-resonances had been stressed since mid-century by literary critics examining the effectiveness of literary style, especially in poetry (e.g., Empson 1930). The deconstructionists broadened the point, thundering out the argument (not unmixed with ideological animus) that cultural systems can be read quite differently by persons in different historical epochs, in different social locations, and indeed by the same person taking a succession of viewpoints.

The broader structuralist movement thus came up against much the same problems as did Lévi-Strauss: scholars are committed to a method for seeking codes, but we never securely arrive at a code that we can agree is fundamental to all the others. In effect, the later deconstructionists, without being aware of it, have come back to a more situated viewpoint: like microsociologists, they have had to return primacy to the particular location in which the construction of meaning

takes place. But microsociology is barely known in the French intellectual scene and in the literary disciplines that take their direction from it; and the Durkheimian origins of the structuralist movement are generally forgotten.¹⁷ In effect, the code-seeking program abolished ritual, or looked high over its head. Its emphasis on cognitive structures led to a search for codes, mentalities, or structures of the mind that transcend all situations; its location is somewhere outside any particular space-time location. Lacking a microsociology, postmodernists see the locatedness of meaning-construction as broadly historical, in the framework of overarching history of ideas (as in Foucault's writings on sexuality), or in the historical phase of capitalism or global economy or electronic communications networks (for those who retain a structural mechanism). These moves have the ironic consequence of returning to a single, overarching framework for the imposition of meaning, leaving no means of seeing how meanings are indeed situationally constructed.

The Cultural Turn

This entire set of developments has sometimes been labeled "the cultural turn." This omnibus term can be misleading because it lumps together what I have called the "code-seeking" program with its modifiers and critics. In its original structuralist version, the program takes all items of culture—indeed, all human institutions in the broadest sense—and treats them as a text to be decoded, seeking the underlying semiotic structures of which they are manifestations. By the late 1960s and 1970s, this program had given rise to its heretics, critics from within, who argued for the polysemic, ambiguous nature of codes. In the Anglophone intellectual world of the late twentieth century, many have been followers or importers of these French intellectual movements. In contrast to the rather uncritical enthusiasm for structuralism and poststructuralism in anthropology and literary theory, the cultural turn in sociology has been more ambivalent. Anglophone sociologists generally regarded the French structuralist movement with skepticism and from a distance, but they pursued their own version of a "cultural turn" in a movement that self-consciously emphasized to culture. This movement was split between those doing research on how the production of culture (typically, specialized high culture) operates, and those who argued for the autonomy of culture from reductive explanations.

A prominent version of the "cultural turn" occurred within the thriving intellectual field of social movements. By the 1970s, this field had made important explanatory advances by formulating resource mobilization theory, demonstrating how material conditions for mobi-

lizing and sustaining a movement—including its organization, financing, and networks—affect its growth and fate, quite apart from the extent of its grievances. Any successful paradigm tends to spin off rivals looking for new research territories to open, and thus the next phase of social movement theory took a cultural turn toward examining movement frames, or group traditions and identities, and the flow of these cultural resources from one social movement to another. Mobilizing material and organization resources, and using cultural resources are not incompatible in social movements, and indeed the two aspects tend to go together; but the contentious character of intellectual life often made it seem as if there were a war between rival positions, operating either without culture or by putting culture first.

By the 1980s and 1990s, cultural sociologists were attempting to loosen the restrictions inherent in the paradigm of culture as an autonomous, and therefore an ultimate explanatory, device. Sociologists have given greater emphasis to the flexibility of culture in the flow of situational interaction. In Ann Swidler's (1986) well-known formulation, culture is a toolbox from which different pieces can be extracted for use according to the differing purposes and strategies of social action (see also Emirbayer and Mische 1998; Lamont 2000). Sociologists have thus attempted to overcome the implicitly static bias of cultural analysis and to show how new cultures can be created out of older ones.

In one respect, these developments have been remote from ritual theory. The code-seeking program, exemplified by Lévi-Strauss and Barthes, dropped Durkheim's ritual action entirely; and even anthropologists who specifically studied religious rituals saw them as performances determined by the code, if allowing some local flexibility in how the rituals are carried out. Recent developments within the "cultural turn," especially by social movement theorists, have given more emphasis to micro-situational action; and sometimes this is even referred to as ritual. Yet these conceptions of ritual carry the heritage of terminological confusion that I have been reviewing. Ritual is seen as action, but action heavily constrained by past culture—something between a manifestation of what the underlying culture prescribes, and a device for generating new culture.

IR theory pushes this development to a clear conceptual break. In Durkheim's formulation, rituals create culture, and sometimes reproduce existing culture. In either case, culture is socially alive only when rituals are successful, that is, when the situational ingredients exist to make rituals emotionally intense and cognitively focused. IR theory gives a precise mechanism for showing when new cultural symbols are generated, and when old symbols retain social commitments or fade away as no longer meaningful. The emphasis in IR theory, obvi-

ously enough, is to put ritual interaction in the center of analysis, and to derive the ups and downs of cultural belief from it. We may, if we like, regard IR theory as a further twist within and beyond the cultural turn; IR theory radicalizes the trajectory of criticism of the code-seeking program. But it is also a return to an older Durkheimian formulation in which social morphology shapes social symbols. Current IR theory differs from the classic version mainly in giving a radically micro-situational slant, stressing that the social morphology that counts is the patterns of micro-sociological interaction in local situations.

What does IR theory add? First, it is a theory of situations themselves, showing how they have their own local structures and dynamics. Second, it puts emphasis on the situation, not as a cognitive construction but as a process by which shared emotions and intersubjective focus sweep individuals along by flooding their consciousness. It not so much a matter of knowledgeable agents choosing from repertoires, as it is a situational propensity toward certain cultural symbols. Third, ritual creates cultural symbols. This is in contrast to the thinking of many who have taken the cultural turn, for whom culture remains the trump card in the social deck, an ultimate category of explanation behind which it is impossible to go. IR theory provides an empirical mechanism for how and when symbols are created, as well when they dissipate, why they are sometimes full of magnetism for the persons who invoke them, and why sometimes they fade into disrespect or indifference. Interaction ritual theory provides a processual model for the construction of symbols; it has the further advantage of showing just when and to what extent those meanings are shared, reified, and imposed, when they are ephemeral—and all the gradations in between.

CLASSIC ORIGINS OF IR THEORY IN DURKHEIM'S SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

In the particular fields that study religion and related forms of ceremony, even during the heyday of the code-seeking program, some scholars have continued to study ritual. This analysis has generally been slanted by using the tools of the code-seeking program, notably among structuralist anthropologists and many scholars in the field of religious studies, including the now specialized field of ritual studies. Their predominant orientation is that the ritual is determined by the code.¹⁸ But since the code is unknown and must be discovered, the researcher describes the pattern of the ritual, and uses it as evidence for

how the code is structured; then the direction is reversed, and the code is now taken as an explanation of why the ritual is carried out in this manner. There is an underlying circularity in the method: positing a code that is then taken as explanation of the ritual behavior that is seen as evidence for the code.

Religious ritual is thus interpreted as a revelation of the divine, a doorway into the transcendental (e.g., Drewal 1992; Martos 1991). This is rather close to participants' own view of ritual, a form of going native. And insofar as scholars sympathetic to religious beliefs are already in some sense natives in religious commitment, this may be one reason why the structuralist approach to ritual appeals to many religious scholars. A modified version of this position is that religious ritual reveals the underlying religious code; it is a reading of a transcendent text, which becomes imminent in the ritual. In contrast, the analysis of interaction ritual as a set of processes that produce belief is an inherently secular viewpoint; it takes seriously what religious persons are doing, but interprets their action, as Durkheim did, in a secular manner.¹⁹ At this point it is worth our while to return to Durkheim himself, and start out again from his model of social ritual.

Durkheim set forth most of the components of social rituals in his discussion of how religion is socially produced, using as his example the tribal gathering of Australian aborigines. He intended this analysis to have wide application, and he interspersed his account with examples drawn from modern political life, commenting frequently on the generality of these processes. These texts are perhaps the most worthy of close attention of all of classic sociology, and so I will quote from them extensively in building up a general model of interaction ritual.²⁰ With a little theoretical self-consciousness, of course, we can see that this very activity of respectful attention is a way of treating Durkheim's texts as sacred objects of a cult of sociologists. Fair enough; this activity not only affirms our identities as members of the sociological profession stretching back to Durkheim's generation, but it will make us better and more acute sociologists, sharpening our consciousness of the tools by which we can see into the inner workings of social life in all its varieties.

Let us take this material in three stages: the ingredients that go into making rituals happen; the process by which a condition of collective effervescence or collective consciousness is built up; and the results or products of a ritual.

First, the ingredients. Here Durkheim places emphasis on the *physical assembly of the group*. The starting point is when human bodies come together in the same place:

The life of the Australian societies passes alternately through two distinct phases. Sometimes the population is broken up into little groups who wander about independently of one another. . . . Sometimes, on the contrary, the population concentrates and gathers at determined points for a length of time varying from several days to several months. This concentration takes place when a clan or a part of the tribe is summoned to the gathering, and on this occasion they celebrate a religious ceremony, or else hold what is called a corroboree. . . . These two phases are contrasted with each other in the sharpest way. In the first, economic activity is the preponderating one, and it is generally of very mediocre intensity. . . . The very fact of concentration acts as an exceptionally powerful stimulant. (Durkheim 1912/1965, 245–47)

The sociology of ritual is thus a sociology of gatherings—of crowds, assemblies, congregations, audiences. Through Goffman's eyes, we can see that these gatherings can also be quite small scale: a couple of acquaintances stopping to talk, or merely nodding in passing, or even strangers avoiding each other's glance on the street; or, at the intermediate level, a small group eating and drinking around a table. The point is not merely the banal one that people interact best when they are together; there is the much stronger implication that society is above all an embodied activity.²¹ When human bodies are together in the same place, there is a physical attunement: currents of feeling, a sense of wariness or interest, a palpable change in the atmosphere. The bodies are paying attention to each other, whether at first there is any great conscious awareness of it or not. This bodily inter-orientation is the starting point for what happens next.

Durkheim goes on to indicate that this bodily assembly varies in its frequency and intensity. When this happens, there are striking differences in behavior of both group and individual:

There are periods in history when, under the influence of some great collective shock, social interactions have become much more frequent and active. Men look for each other and assemble together more than ever. That general effervescence results which is characteristic of revolutionary or creative epochs. . . . Men see more now and differently than in normal times. Changes are not merely of shades and degrees; men become different. . . . This is what explains the Crusades, for example, or many of the scenes, either sublime or savage, of the French Revolution. Under the influence of the general exaltation, we see the most mediocre and inoffensive bourgeois becoming either a hero or a butcher. (Durkheim 1912/1965, 241–42)

Once the bodies are together, there may take place a process of intensification of shared experience, which Durkheim called collective effervescence, and the formation of collective conscience or collective consciousness. We might refer to it as a condition of heightened intersubjectivity. How does this come about? Durkheim indicates two interrelated and mutually reinforcing mechanisms:

1. *Shared action and awareness*: “[I]f left to themselves, individual consciousnesses are closed to each other; they can communicate only by means of signs which express their internal states. If the communication is established between them is to become a real communion, that is to say, a fusion of all particular sentiments into one common sentiment, the signs expressing them must themselves be fused in one single and unique resultant. It is the appearance of this that informs individuals that they are in harmony and makes them conscious of their moral unity. It is by uttering the same cry, pronouncing the same word, or performing the same gesture in regard to some object that they become and feel themselves to be in unison. . . . Individual minds cannot come in contact and communicate with each other except by coming out of themselves; they cannot do this except by movements. So it is the homogeneity of these movements that gives the group consciousness of itself. . . . When this homogeneity is once established and these movements have taken a stereotyped form, they serve to symbolize the corresponding representations. But they symbolize them only because they have aided in forming them” (Durkheim 1912/1965, 262–63).

2. *Shared emotion*: “When [the aborigines] are once come together, a sort of electricity is formed by their collecting which quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation. Every sentiment expressed finds a place without resistance in all the minds, which are very open to outside impressions; each re-echoes the others, and is re-echoed by the others. The initial impulse thus proceeds, growing as it goes, as an avalanche grows in its advance. And as such active passions so free from all control could not fail to burst out, on every side one sees nothing but violent gestures, cries, veritable howls, and deafening noises of every sort, which aid in intensifying still more the state of mind which they manifest” (Durkheim 1912/1965, 247).

Movements carried out in common operate to focus attention, to make participants aware of each other as doing the same thing and thus thinking the same thing. Collective movements are signals by which intersubjectivity is created. Collective attention enhances the expression of shared emotion; and in turn the shared emotion acts further to intensify collective movements and the sense of intersubjectivity.

Now we come to the results of ritual. Collective effervescence is a momentary state, but it carries over into more prolonged effects when it becomes embodied in sentiments of group solidarity, symbols or sacred objects, and individual emotional energy.

The experience of heightened mutual awareness and emotional arousal gives rise to *group emblems, markers of group identity*:

So it is in the midst of these effervescent social environments and out this effervescence itself that the religious ideas seems to be born. . . . We have shown how the clan, by the manner in which it acts upon its members, awakens within them the idea of external forces which dominate them and exalt them; but we must still demand how it happens that these forces are thought of under the form of totems, that is to say, in the shape of an animal or plant.

It is because this animal or plant has given its name to the clan and serves as its emblem. . . . [T]he sentiments aroused in us by something spontaneously attach themselves to a symbol which represents them. . . . For we are unable to consider an abstract entity, which we can represent only laboriously and confusedly, the source of the strong sentiments which we feel. We cannot explain them to ourselves except by connecting them to some concrete object of whose reality we are vividly aware. . . . The soldier who dies for his flag, dies for his country; but as a matter of fact, in his own consciousness, it is the flag that has the first place. . . . Whether one isolated standard remains in the hands of the enemy or not does not determine the fate of the country, yet the soldier allows himself to be killed to regain it. He loses sight of the fact that the flag is only a sign, and that it has no value in itself, but only brings to mind the reality that it represents; it is treated as if it were the reality itself.

Now the totem is the flag of the clan. It is therefore natural that the impressions aroused by the clan in individual minds—impressions of dependence and of increased vitality—should fix themselves to the idea of the totem rather than that of the clan: for the clan is too complex a reality to be represented clearly in all its complex unity. . . . [The tribesman] does not know that the coming together of a number of men associated in the same life results in disengaging new energies, which transform each of them. All that he knows is that he is raised above himself and that he sees a different life from the one he ordinarily leads. However, he must connect these sensations to some external object as their cause. Now what does he see about him? On every side those things which appeal to his senses and strike his imagination are the numerous

images of the totem. . . . Placed thus in the center of the scene, it becomes representative. The sentiments expressed everywhere fix themselves upon it, for it is the only concrete object upon which they can fix themselves. . . . During the ceremony, it is the center of all regards." (Durkheim 1912/1965, 250–52)

What is mutually focused upon becomes a symbol of the group. In actuality, the group is focusing on its own feeling of intersubjectivity, its own shared emotion; but it has no way of representing this fleeting feeling, except by representing it as embodied in an object. It reifies its experience, makes it thing-like, and thus an emblem, treated as having noun-like permanence. In fact, as Durkheim underlines, *sentiments can only be prolonged by symbols*:

Moreover, without symbols, social sentiments could have only a precarious existence. Though very strong as long as men are together and influence each other reciprocally, they exist only in the form of recollections after the assembly has ended, and when left to themselves, these become feebler and feebler; for since the group is no longer present and active, individual temperaments easily regain the upper hand. . . . But if the movements by which these sentiments are expressed are connected with something that endures, the sentiments themselves become more durable. These other things are constantly bringing them to mind and arousing them; it is as though the cause which excited them in the first place continued to act. Thus these systems of emblems, which are necessary if society is to become conscious of itself, are no less indispensable for assuring the continuation of this consciousness. (Durkheim 1912/1965, 265)

Since Durkheim is often regarded as a static theorist of social organization, of structures fixed into a functionalist system by a value system, it is worth stressing how dynamic his conception is. Society becomes patterned by symbols, or more precisely by respect for symbols; but the symbols are respected only to the extent that they are charged up with sentiments by participation in rituals. Sentiments run down and fade away unless they are periodically renewed. Religion, the specific case under consideration here, is not simply a body of beliefs, but beliefs sustained by ritual practices. When the practices stop, the beliefs lose their emotional import, becoming mere memories, forms without substance, eventually dead and meaningless. By the same token, new symbols can be created; whenever the group assembles and focuses its attention around an object that comes to embody their emotion, a *new sacred object* is born:

Also, in the present day just as much as in the past, we see society constantly creating sacred things out of ordinary ones. If it happens to fall in love with a man and if it thinks it has found in him the principal aspirations that move it, as well as the means of satisfying them, this man will be raised above the others and, as it were, deified. Opinion will invest him with a majesty exactly analogous to that protecting the gods. . . . And the fact that it is society alone which is the author of these varieties of apotheosis, is evident since it frequently chances to consecrate men thus who have no right to it from their own merit. The simple deference inspired by men invested with high social functions is not different in nature from religious respect. It is expressed by the same movements: a man keeps at a distance from a high personage; he approaches him only with precautions; in conversing with him, he uses other gestures and language than those used with ordinary mortals. . . .

In addition to men, society also consecrates things, especially ideas. If a belief is unanimously shared by a people, then, for the reason which we previously pointed out, it is forbidden to touch it, to deny it or to contest it. Now the prohibition of criticism is an interdiction like the others and proves the presence of something sacred. Even today, however great may be the liberty which we accord to others, a man who should totally deny progress or ridicule the human ideal to which modern societies are attached, would produce the effect of sacrilege. (Durkheim 1912/1965, 243–44)

One chief result of rituals is to charge up symbolic objects with significance, or to recharge such objects with renewed sentiments of respect. Along with this, individual participants get their own reservoir of charge. The “sort of electricity” that Durkheim metaphorically ascribes to the group in its state of heightened excitement is stored in batteries: one component of which is the symbol, and the other pole of which is the individual. Participation in a ritual gives the individual a special kind of energy, which I will call *emotional energy*:

The man who has obeyed his god and who for this reason, believes the god is with him, approaches the world with confidence and with the feeling of increased energy . . . since society cannot exist except in and through individual consciousness, this force must also penetrate us and organize itself within us; it thus becomes an integral part of our being and by that very fact this [our being] is elevated and magnified. (Durkheim 1912/1965, 242)

Elsewhere in the same work, Durkheim says,

But it is not only in exceptional circumstances that this stimulating action of society makes itself felt; there is not, so to speak, a moment in our lives when some current of energy does not come to us from without. . . . Because he is in moral harmony with his comrades, he has more confidence, courage and boldness in action. . . ." (178)

There are occasions when this strengthening and vivifying action of society is especially apparent. In the midst of an assembly animated by common passion, we become susceptible of acts and sentiments of which we are incapable when reduced to our own forces; and when the assembly is dissolved and when, finding ourselves alone again, we fall back to our ordinary level, we are then able to measure the height to which we have been raised above ourselves. History abounds in examples of this sort. It is enough to think of the night of the Fourth of August, 1789, when an assembly was suddenly led to an act of sacrifice and abnegation which each of its members had refused the day before, and at which they were all surprised the day after [i.e., the abolition of feudalism by the assembly of nobles and commoners in the French Revolution]. That is why all parties, political, economic and confessional, are careful to have periodic reunions where their members may revivify their common faith by manifesting it in common (241)

This socially derived emotional energy, as Durkheim says, is a feeling of confidence, courage to take action, boldness in taking initiative. It is a morally suffused energy; it makes the individual feel not only good, but exalted, with the sense of doing what is most important and most valuable. Durkheim goes on to note that groups hold periodic assemblies to revivify this feeling, drawing again on his point that sentiments fade out over a period of time if they are not resuscitated by another experience of collective effervescence. I would add that this feeling of emotional energy has a powerful motivating effect upon the individual; whoever has experienced this kind of moment wants to repeat it.

A final item in the list of ritual effects is *morality*. The individual feels moral when he or she is acting with the energy derived from the heightened experience of the group. And indeed, since Durkheim is building a theory of human institutions from the ground up, without assuming any preexisting beliefs or moral standards, he is also indicating that rituals are the source of the group's standards of morality. It is the heightened experience of intersubjectivity and emotional strength in group rituals that generates the conception of what is good;

what is opposed to this is what is evil. Transferred to symbols and sacred objects, the concept of moral good is attached to beliefs in religious beings, and to their secular equivalents:

[W]e cannot fail to feel that this [feeling of strength and social approval in having done one's duty] depends upon an external cause, but we do not perceive where this cause is nor what it is. So we ordinarily think of it under the form of a moral power, which though immanent in us, represents within us something not ourselves: this is the moral conscience. . . . (1912/1965, 242)

We say that an object, whether individual or collective, inspires respect when the representation expressing it in the mind is gifted with such force that it automatically causes or inhibits actions, *without regard for any consideration relative to their useful or injurious effects*. When we obey somebody because of the moral authority which we recognize in him, we follow out his opinions, not because they seem wise, but because a certain sort of physical energy is immanent in the idea that we form of this person, which conquers our will and inclines it in the indicated direction. Respect is the emotion we experience when we feel this interior and wholly spiritual pressure operating upon us. . . .

The very violence with which society reacts, by way of blame or material suppression, against every attempted dissidence, contributes to strengthening its empire by manifesting the common conviction through this burst of ardour." (237–38; emphasis in the original)

For Durkheim, the touchstone of morality, and of the sacred, is that which is a value in itself, apart from its utilitarian value. Respect for sacred objects, and for the group sentiments behind them, is a higher value than the merely mundane, individual consideration of "useful or injurious effects." All merely mundane goods are sacrificed to the moral sentiments. Here Durkheim echoes his argument about precontractual solidarity in *The Division of Labor*: what holds society together is not self-interest, and it is only where utilitarian exchanges are embedded in ritual solidarity that any sustained cooperation on practical matters can take place.²²

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INTERACTION RITUAL FOR GENERAL SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

The Durkheimian model addresses the central questions of social theory; and it has implications that extend to all corners of contemporary microsociology. It asks the basic question: What holds society together?

And it answers the question with a mechanism of social rituals. Furthermore, it answers it with a mechanism that varies in intensity: society is held together to just the extent that rituals are effectively carried out, and during those periods of time when the effects of those rituals are still fresh in people's minds and reverberating in their emotions. Society is held together more intensely at some moments than at others. And the "society" that is held together is no abstract unity of a social system, but is just those groups of people assembled in particular places who feel solidarity with each other through the effects of ritual participation and ritually charged symbolism. The total population of France, or the United States, or anywhere else one might consider, consists of pockets of solidarity of different degrees of intensity. A population can be washed by waves of national solidarity on occasion, but these are particular and rather special ritually based events, subject to the same processes of ritual mobilization as more local pockets of solidarity.

This means that the Durkheimian model is entirely compatible with a view of stratification and group conflict. Indeed, it provides key mechanisms for just how stratification and conflict operate. Rephrase the question as, What holds society together as a pattern of stratified and conflicting groups? The answer is social rituals, operating to create and sustain solidarity within those groups. We can elaborate a more complicated answer, and later chapters will do so. Among those complications are these: that some groups have more resources for carrying out their rituals than others, so that some groups have more solidarity and thus can lord it over those who have less; and that these ritually privileged groups have more impressive symbols and fill their members with more emotional energy. We may examine more fine-grained processes of stratification: looking inside the very group that is brought together by participating in a ritual, we can see that some individuals are more privileged than others, by being nearer to the center of the ritual than others. Rituals thus have a double stratifying effect: between ritual insiders and outsiders; and, inside the ritual, between ritual leaders and ritual followers. Rituals are thus key mechanisms, and we might say key weapons, in processes of conflict and domination.

Durkheim famously argued that the utilitarian, economic dimension of life is not basic, but depends upon precontractual solidarity; that rituals provide the basis for a situation of social trust and shared symbolic meanings through which economic exchanges can be carried out. Here I am making a similar argument with regard to social conflict: conflict is not the primordial condition of social life, a Hobbesian war of all against all, but is analytically derivative of social solidarity. That is to say, effective conflict is not really possible without the mecha-

nisms of social ritual, which generate the alliances and the energies of the partisans, as well as their most effective weapons in dominating others. And the goals of conflict, the things that people fight over, are formed by these pattern of social rituals. The flashpoints of conflict, the incidents that set off overt struggle, almost always come from the precedence of symbols and the social sentiments they embody. All this is to say that social conflict, which I and many other theorists have argued is the major process structuring social life, especially on the macro-level of large-scale structures (Collins 1975; Mann 1986–93), requires for its explanation a Durkheimian microsociology of interaction rituals.

The central mechanism of interaction ritual theory is that occasions that combine a high degree of mutual focus of attention, that is, a high degree of intersubjectivity, together with a high degree of emotional entrainment—through bodily synchronization, mutual stimulation / arousal of participants' nervous systems—result in feelings of membership that are attached to cognitive symbols; and result also in the emotional energy of individual participants, giving them feelings of confidence, enthusiasm, and desire for action in what they consider a morally proper path. These moments of high degree of ritual intensity are high points of experience. They are high points of collective experience, the key moments of history, the times when significant things happen. These are moments that tear up old social structures or leave them behind, and shape new social structures. As Durkheim notes, these are moments like the French Revolution in the summer of 1789. We could add, they are moments like the key events of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s; like the collapse of communist regimes in 1989 and 1991; and to a degree of significance that can be ascertained only in the future, as in the national mobilization in the United States following September 11, 2001. These examples are drawn from large-scale ritual mobilizations, and examples of a smaller scale could be drawn as we narrow our attention to smaller arenas of social action.

Interaction ritual theory is a theory of social dynamics, not merely of statics. Among social theorists there is a tendency to regard ritual analysis as conservative, a worship of traditions laid down in the past, a mechanism for reproducing social structure as it always existed. True enough, ritual analysis has often been used in this vein; and even theories like Bourdieu's, which combine Durkheim with Marx, see a mutually supporting interplay between the cultural or symbolic order and the order of economic power. For Bourdieu, ritual reproduces the cultural and therefore the economic fields.²³ But this is to miss the transformative power of ritual mobilization. Intense ritual experience creates new symbolic objects and generates energies that fuel the major

social changes. Interactional ritual is a mechanism of change. As long as there are potential occasions for ritual mobilization, there is the possibility for sudden and abrupt periods of change. Ritual can be repetitive and conservatizing, but it also provides the occasions on which changes break through.

In this respect IR theory mediates between postmodernist and similar theories that posit ubiquitous situational flux of meanings and identities, and a culturalist view that fixed scripts or repertoires are repeatedly called upon. The contrast is articulated by Lamont (2000, 243–44, 271), who provides evidence that there are “cultural and structural conditions that lead individuals to use some criteria of evaluation rather than others.” The argument is parallel to my use of IR theory, which pushes the argument at a more micro-situational level: that the operative structural conditions are those that make up the ingredients of interaction ritual; and that cultural repertoires are created in particular kind of IRs, and fade out in others. To show the conditions under which ritual operates in one direction or the other is a principal topic of this book.

Intense moments of interaction ritual are high points not only for groups but also for individual lives. These are the events that we remember, that give meaning to our personal biographies, and sometimes to obsessive attempts to repeat them: whether participating in some great collective event such as a big political demonstration; or as spectator at some storied moment of popular entertainment or sports; or a personal encounter ranging from a sexual experience, to a strongly bonding friendly exchange, to a humiliating insult; the social atmosphere of an alcohol binge, a drug high, or a gambling victory; a bitter argument or an occasion of violence. Where these moments have a high degree of focused awareness and a peak of shared emotion, these personal experiences, too, can be crystalized in personal symbols, and kept alive in symbolic replays for greater or lesser expanses of one’s life. These are the significant formative experiences that shape individuals; if the patterns endure, we are apt to call them personalities; if we disapprove of them we call them addictions. But this usage too easily reifies what is an ongoing flow of situations. The movement of individuals from one situation to another in what I call interaction ritual chains is an up-and-down of variation in the intensity of interaction rituals; shifts in behavior, in feeling and thought occur just as the situations shift. To be a constant personality is to be on an even keel where the kinds of interaction rituals flow constantly from one situation to the next. Here again, IR theory points up the dynamics of human lives, their possibility for dramatic shifts in direction.

IR theory provides a theory of individual motivation from one situation to the next. Emotional energy is what individuals seek; situations are attractive or unattractive to them to the extent that the interaction ritual is successful in providing emotional energy. This gives us a dynamic microsociology, in which we trace situations and their pull or push for individuals who come into them. Note the emphasis: the analytical starting point is the situation, and how it shapes individuals; situations generate and regenerate the emotions and the symbolism that charge up individuals and send them from one situation to another.

Interaction ritual is a full-scale social psychology, not only of emotions and situational behavior, but of cognition. Rituals generate symbols; experience in rituals inculcates those symbols in individual minds and memories. IR provides an explanation of variations in beliefs. Beliefs are not necessarily constant, but situationally fluctuate, as a number of theorists have argued and as researchers have demonstrated (Swider 1986; Lamont 2000). What IR theory adds to contemporary cultural theory in this regard is that what people think they believe at a given moment is dependent upon the kind of interaction ritual taking place in that situation: people may genuinely and sincerely feel the beliefs they express at the moment they express them, especially when the conversational situation calls out a higher degree of emotional emphasis; but this does not mean that they act on these beliefs, or that they have a sincere feeling about them in other everyday interactions where the ritual focus is different. IR theory gives the conditions under which beliefs become salient, by rising and falling in emotional loading. Everyday life is the experience of moving through a chain of interaction rituals, charging up some symbols with emotional significance and leaving others to fade. IR theory leads us into a theory of the momentary flow of internal mental life, an explanation of subjectivity as well as intersubjectivity.

Durkheim held that the individual consciousness is a portion of the collective consciousness. This is tantamount to saying that the individual is socialized from the outside, by social experience carried within. This is surely true, as most social scientists would agree, as far as early childhood socialization is concerned. The argument of IR theory carries this further: we are constantly being socialized by our interactional experiences throughout our lives. But not in a unidirectional and homogeneous way; it is intense interaction rituals that generate the most powerful emotional energy and the most vivid symbols, and it is these that are internalized. Contrary to an implication of Freudian theory and others that stress early childhood experience, socialization once laid down does not endure forever; emotional energies and symbolic meanings fade if they are not renewed. IR theory is not a model of a

wind-up doll, programmed early in life, which ever after walks through the pattern once laid down. It is a theory of moment-to-moment motivation, situation by situation. Thus it has high theoretical ambitions: to explain what any individual will do, at any moment in time; what he or she will feel, think, and say.

Viewed in the abstract, this may seem like an impossibly high ambition. But consider: there are considerable theoretical resources available for this task. We have Durkheimian theory, which yields an explicit model of what produces sentiments of group membership; of symbols that formulate social values, and through which humans think; and of emotional energies that animate individuals. This theory is cast in terms of conditions of varying strength, so that we can tell which situations will generate higher or lower levels of solidarity, respect for symbols, and emotional energy. And this model is of wide applicability: it fits not only the great collective events of religion and politics, as Durkheim himself pointed out, but it can be brought to bear on the level of everyday life situation by Goffman's line of application. More and more details of how to apply the Durkheimian ritual theory to everyday life situations are becoming available, as I will attempt to show in later chapters, by drawing on such resources as Meadian symbolic interactionist theory of thinking as internalized conversation, along with contemporary research on conversation and on emotions, and on the ethnography of everyday life. The totality of social life is the totality of situations that people go through in their everyday lives; we have a powerful and wide-ranging model that explains what will happen in those situations. An offshoot of this situational microsociology is the internalization of social life in individuals' subjective experience: the sociology of thinking and feeling.

Why not follow this theoretical research program as far as it will go? Some intellectuals have philosophical commitments that hold them back from taking this path; we do not want a theory that explains everything, and we construct arguments to rule out the possibility of any such a theory succeeding. There are lines of metatheory, going back to Max Weber and to his Neo-Kantian predecessors, which hold that the territory of social science is the realm of human meanings and human freedom, *Geisteswissenschaft* as opposed to *Naturwissenschaft*, a realm in which deterministic explanations do not apply. But such arguments are hardly conclusive: they try to lay out in advance and by conceptual definition what we can and cannot find along particular lines of investigation. Social theory and research moves along pragmatically, in the real flow of intellectual history; philosophers and metatheorists cannot legislate what we will not be able to explain in the future.

The program of interaction ritual theory is to take the intellectual tools that we have, and to apply them: to all situations, all emotions, all symbols, all thinking, all subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Intellectual life is an exciting adventure when we try to push it as far as we can. There is surely more emotional energy in exploration than in conservatively standing pat and trying to avoid extending our understanding beyond the boundaries set up by intellectual taboos. IR theory, as an intellectual enterprise, is a set of symbolic representations riding on its surge of emotional energy; it is the intellectual version of effervescence that gave *élan* to Durkheim and his research group, to Goffman and his followers, and to today's sociologists of emotion and process in everyday life. What I attempt to show in this book is some vistas that open up as we ride this intellectual movement into the future.