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Introduction

Communism, Society, and History

Most of the chapters in this book were originally written as essays in what was to be a monograph on the relevance of historiography to sociological theory and of sociological theory to the humanities. It presupposed a definition of sociology as the study of the social, or collective, aspect of human affairs, where that aspect was seen as necessarily connected to the study of political movements and other noninstitutional, or “informal,” critical activity. Many were written in the immediate aftermath of the breakup of the Soviet Union and were concerned with how the events associated with the breakup were being discussed in the United States, especially by those committed to progressive values and those intellectuals who had become disappointed in what they thought of as the Left according to one of two hypotheses. The first says that Communist ideology and practice are distortions of progressive ideals and need to be purged if those ideals are to have a fair hearing. The second says that they are endemic to the Left, thereby providing a sufficient reason to repudiate or at least marginalize it at virtually any cost.¹ What Theodore Draper has referred to approvingly as “professional anticommunism” had its roots in either the history of the internal politics of “official communism,” in which Draper had once been intensely involved, or the official politics of the Cold War.²

The first approach denied the legitimacy of “protest” in favor of “dissent” and insisted on an orientation to “social problems” within the limits of institutional politics rather than on a more generalized

politics responsive to the contradictory structural features of society such as the relationship between socialized production and the privately controlled disposition of wealth. Resistance to institutional politics was thought of as irrational, an expression of youthful idealism, hypocritical or otherwise dishonest, or bordering on the fanatical.³ The emphasis on institutional politics invoked such values as rationality and civility, thought to have a universal core of meaning regardless of how the words are momentarily defined. These were said to be uncontaminated by the Left ideologies that had promoted misleading and, given the progress of society under liberal democracy, potentially dangerous ideas such as exploitation, classes, and class struggle. The appeal of those ideologies was presumably based on a belief that was essentially utopian, namely that socialism is the rational completion of the capitalist revolution insofar as it is aimed at reinforcing the conditions of abundant production brought about by capital's historic socialization of labor.

What was thought to be utopian about this was the implication that it is necessary to transform the relations of production from an emphasis on the private exercise of power based on wealth to an emphasis on societal authority over those means of production that have to do with the reproduction of society. From this point of view, the Left was seen as unrealistic; at best, it expresses values that, while admirable, are distorted by attempts to short-circuit the natural historical process by which, alone, they are capable of realization under the conditions of democracy. Leftists were advised, in the name of reason, to work within the context of a two-party system in which ideologies had become increasingly irrelevant and that provides the basis of a stable, self-perpetuating, and intrinsically progressive, polity. To do this required eliminating any connection to their radical past. It seemed evident to the critics of the Left that progress in America depends on affirming its institutions, and that, by the end of the 1950s, the constitutional protection of dissent provided a reliable foundation from which to work rationally and effectively for social change.

While this position may have been defensible on its own grounds, it effectively proposed an abandonment of further inquiry, other than self-confirming accounts, into the possibility that a rational basis exists for the persistence of radicalism. Consequently, research turned toward psychological explanations that focused on attitudes, beliefs, and the family backgrounds of activists. An elaborate defense of this position by prominent scholars, including Seymour Martin Lipset, Daniel Bell, and Talcott Parsons, doubtless contributed to a drift to the Right among many radical intellectuals who lived through that period, over and above the revulsion with Stalinism. The latter might have accounted for a growing antipathy toward the Communist Party USA, and toward the Soviet Union as a model. But only a general analysis, coupled with fears not obviously connected with official communism, could have supported the rejection of radical politics as such.

I will discuss the analysis and its context in later sections of this chapter. For now, the drift toward the Right by some progressives can be seen in part as a reaction, first, to the militancy of the Civil Rights Movement, the apparent excesses of the Student Movement, radical elements of the feminist movement, and the generalization of anticolonial struggles; second, to the fact that these movements were far more ambitious than could be tolerated by gradualists; and third, to the continued existence of prominent, though relatively small Left parties. One result is what appeared to be a generational division but, I believe, is best understood as the re-emergence of an authentic political difference between those who resolve doubt in favor of institutional politics and those who resolve it in favor of what C. Wright Mills spoke of as “structural criticism.” Thought of this way, the difference is familiar and virtually constant in the history of modern societies. What is more relevant to the concerns of this book, however, is the way in which the politics of this difference worked itself out at the end of the twentieth century and, in particular, its effects on the Left today and on current discussions of programs for a Left future.

The abandonment of inquiry in favor of self-confirming accounts of the Left also had bearing on deciding how the history of American society ought to be understood—e. g., as the history of democracy rather than the history of capitalism—and whether the emphasis should be on politics and the state or on exploitation (including slavery), conquest, the role of social movements in social reform, and the social ramifications of what Karl Polanyi referred to as the “price-making money market.” It is obvious that neither emphasis excluded the other, and this was no less true in studies of labor published by International Publishers than those in the standard bibliography of American history; but it is the relative emphasis that counted in contributing to the general understanding of society during the Cold War.⁴

In either case, whether the relationship to communism was thought to be internal to the Left or a surface feature easily shed on behalf of reason and civility, the possibility of a Left future was said to depend on severing the connection and divorcing every socially progressive project from even traces of it.⁵ I believe that two things were, above all, crucial to the disappointment with the Left, apart from the uncompromising one-dimensional reaction of the “professional anticommunists” and apart from objections to style. One is a misleading conception of communism, including its manifestations as a political party, a type of society, an ideology, and a type of state. The other is a misunderstanding of the Left—insofar as it is more accurate to see it as a heterogeneous manifestation of an irrepressible and irreducibly critical aspect of “societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails.” The first is understandable in the light of the well-known debasement of the post-war literature on communism, in particular, the complicity of its academic mainstream in the agencies of American foreign policy. The second is understandable in terms of the historiography of

American studies insofar as it emphasizes features of American society that would make the existence of a Left virtually unimaginable.⁶

The third and fourth chapters of this book focus on certain prominent manifestations of the debate, from the 1960s to the 1990s, between established anticommunist scholars, most notably Theodore Draper, and a fairly representative sample of the new historians of the Left. By “new” I mean those post–Cold War professional historians committed to finding a theoretically sustainable basis for their study consistent with a holistic conception of society in contrast with the narrative histories written by most of their forebears and driven by a rather different agenda, one for which such a conception was irrelevant, unnecessary, or ideologically unacceptable. In this regard, their work represents a number of substantive reorientations. For one, they generally take the existence of a Left for granted as a feature of American history, which, for them, means not only that there is no simple and comprehensive answer to the question “why is there no socialism in the United States?” but that the premise of the question is ambiguous and possibly false (cf. Foner 2002, chapter 6). For another, their view of American society makes it difficult to deny a persistent Left tendency and, therefore, to ignore the historical dimension of its manifestations. Third, they draw on a view of social movements as more than instances of the “collective deviance” by which those movements were classified by most sociologists writing in the first three quarters of the twentieth century, and as no less rational than many of the institutional or official forms of action to which “collective behavior” (the inclusive category that included crowds, riots, revolutions, social movements, fads, etc.) was invidiously compared (see Brown and Goldin, 1973, for a review). Fourth, their work attempts to rectify errors implicit in accounts of Left political organizations such as the Communist and Socialist parties, which emphasize leadership to the virtual exclusion of base participation and popular support. Finally, and perhaps most important to understanding the social aspect of the movements to which organizations of that sort typically respond, is the detail with which many of the new historians delineate the diverse and overlapping contexts of participation and activism.

Taken together, these reorientations represent a departure from the mainstream interpretations of the history of communism, and they represent an approach to historical study in general, deliberate or not, that differs significantly from the approach of the orthodox historians. That is, in order to specify both their objects of study and their contexts, they incorporate principles of research, concepts as well as methods, from other disciplines and traditions, especially contemporary sociology and the new “social history” (cf. Lloyd 1986; also Revel and Hunt 1995). Among the most important ideas adopted from sociology are the post-functionalist concept of a social movement, a more expansive notion of context, and a greater respect for the complexity of participation in political action and its relation to everyday life.

However, even without the influence of other disciplines, it was likely that a turn would be taken if only because of the ideological limitations

of the mainstream of the literature at a time, the 1960s and its immediate aftermath, when it was considered necessary in all the human sciences—i.e., the disciplines for which a historiographical interest is essential to the intelligibility of their subject matter—to examine the impact of official policies and propaganda on what is financed, published, and generally brought into public awareness.⁷ But there is also little question that the very idea of history was beginning to change as the field moved closer to the social sciences and to those disciplines within the humanities, including literary studies, that were particularly concerned with problems of meaning, interpretation, representation, textualization, context, and the idea of coherence, as well as with the constitutive role of nonprofessional discourses in all of the human sciences and the implication of that on the discussion of historical truth.⁸

Parenthetically, to the extent to which it was demanded of the Left that it disavow its past, a principle was introduced that would not have been accepted as reasonable for understanding and assessing other instances of human affairs, just as the view of Communist or Socialist societies presented during the Cold War was, with few exceptions, incompatible with the idea of a society.⁹ For example, if they are to be about societal formations, theories of democracy cannot avoid coming to terms with the French Revolution, including the Terror, as well as with the vexing idea of a “state of exception,”¹⁰ not to mention the constitution and limitations of democracy under the shadows of capitalism, slavery, and imperialism.

I believe that my analysis of the debates at the time these chapters were written, including the two chapters I co-authored with Randy Martin on the “collapse of communism,” is basically correct, or at least reasonable, in identifying the frame of reference within which they took place. What makes them relevant today is that the same frame of reference and much of the substance of those debates continue to influence present discussions about the Left and about how a progressive politics, Left or not, might be re-imagined. In those chapters, the analysis bears specifically on the problem posed by anticommunism for how we think of Left ideas, values, and politics, with negative consequences that have proven difficult to overcome. This is why I believe that it is worth re-engaging those discourses. They accompanied what appeared to be not only the end of an era but an end to something that had once been thought of as a model for exploring possible solutions in other contexts to the political, economic, and human problems associated with capitalist modernity. Recent events in the Americas suggest that the judgment that the prospect of socialism had been foreclosed by the breakup of the Soviet Union may have been premature in its general conclusion; but it had the positive effect of opening the question of the Left’s future once again. In particular, it reaffirmed the need of the contemporary Left to come to terms with the complexities of its past, including what had been excluded by those versions of the Left in their struggles for hegemony and what was regressive as well as progressive about them (cf. Butler, Laclau, and Žižek 2000, especially pp. 90–181).

As it turned out, however, the discussion of the Left past and its relationship to the possibility of conceiving of a future was dropped too soon, at least among many of those writing about possible Left futures.¹¹ This was partly in reaction to the 1980 U.S. election and the growing realization that a strong Right was gaining popular support and effective power within national institutions and the media. But it was also due to the fact the controversy had proven impossible to manage even among progressives suspicious of institutional politics, or convinced that working within those limitations would be futile, and due to a growing recognition that it was necessary to rethink the relations of class, race, and gender, which had become crucial to the self-identification of progressive politics in the aftermath of the 1960s. Finally, it also had to do with the crystallization of an altogether negative public image of the Left and its putative past by the end of the Cold War, something I discuss later as one of the more enduring of the many baleful legacies of that period. On the other hand, a growing number of historians began to re-examine the history of communism to the extent to which that project is no longer confined to radical journals or conducted according to methods any longer identifiable as parochial.¹²

In summary, it is understandable that post-Cold War discussions among progressives about the future of the Left began to separate it from its past. However, this had the effect of making the present Left seem altogether indeterminate, as if waiting in a kind of hopeful innocence for an integrative idea with less controversial pedigrees than “socialism” and “Marxism,” possibly a new party or a program aimed at promoting “radical democracy.” At the same time, there remains a growing literature aimed at confirming anti-communism and, by inferences often explicitly made, denigrating the Left in general. The desire to separate the Left from its past poses a dilemma for those who are currently advocating a yet newer Left than the new Lefts of before. The Left can have a future only if it has a present that is somehow related to a memorable past. If it has such a past, it must repudiate or ignore it for the sake of its own progress. Otherwise, something different from a Left needs to be constructed and the idea of social progress redefined accordingly. But, then, there is no imagining a future for what we might have thought was under discussion, and what was under discussion was not just a particular Left but the indispensable critical notion of social progress. To undo the Left is, in that sense, to empty the expression “social progress” of all political meaning, which, I take it, was the aim of official anticommunism from the outset.¹³

The discussion needs to be joined again in regard to two interests, which are shared by professional history and the other human sciences, including politics. One involves deciding what a Left might be if it is to be something that can be thought of as having a possible future. My argument will be that this requires understanding the Left as a constant manifestation of something immanent to society. The other interest involves inquiring into the difference that rethinking the historiography of communism might make to our under-

standing of the history of American society, especially to our understanding of how to think of America as a society.

The present incarnation of this book is addressed to the human sciences as a whole rather than to any particular discipline, and to those interested in re-examining the idea of a Left from the standpoint of the relationship between representations of its past and possible futures. In this introduction, I mention and briefly discuss some of the most important suppositions, ideas, and analytical principles on which I have relied, and summarize some of the main themes connecting the different chapters.

On the one hand, the book as a whole is intended to be consistent with a holistic view of the disciplines of the human sciences according to two related ideas. The first is on the order of a *heuristic*, by which I mean an established practical rule for some activity (i.e., “normal” practice) for which there is no accepted theoretical justification. It says that an understanding of history, historicity, as an immanent feature of sociality is logically prior to deciding how to describe and account for certain apparently crucial features of historical explanation. These are exemplified by the following partial list of problematics, given that we are, for the moment, working with a conventional view of history as an account of events and successions of events in time: (1) how to make plausible an account of the temporal succession or structural determination of states of affairs; (2) how to express an evolutionary movement of societal articulation or any other version of social change over time, if “time” is defined in a nonabsolute and nonlinear way according to the internal temporality of the ostensible social entity and the temporal multiplicity of its environment; (3) how to determine what constitutes an event and what field of difference is thereby reorganized; (4) how to choose a perspective compatible with a philosophically consistent account of historiographical principles and then to test its adequacy to its subject matter; (5) how to distinguish between, on the one hand, “sources” and “facts” and, on the other, what appear to be one or the other but are neither; and (6) how to reconcile the professional obligation to exhaust sources without yielding to the conventional pragmatics of selection and organization and the interpretive biases that accumulate as any field takes on the aspect of a “normal science.”

The second idea is on the order of a theoretical claim, or a philosophical claim with theoretical entailments. It says that the human sciences share a common object, which is *the distinctively human aspect of human affairs*, and therefore a commitment to bring accounts into line with the idea that there is a distinctively human aspect. That aspect is conceived of simultaneously as social and critical, and therefore as a course of activity rather than a state of affairs, though for certain rhetorical purposes it can be expressed as such. Apart from that qualification, the idea of a course of activity implies self-transformation and an essential reflexivity (roughly, the irrepressible display of momentarily unexplicatable socially pragmatic grounds).¹⁴

This establishes a principle of objectivity radically different from the objectivity studied by the non-human sciences. It thereby provides a basis for a general test of the validity of assertions, given the unavoidable tension between reference and representation that makes virtually all claims about human affairs reasonably subject to review. It also entails a general understanding of what would otherwise appear to be distinct products (e.g., meanings, values, things, relations, states of affairs) as what Harold Garfinkel refers to as “ongoing accomplishments” (1967). In regard to the first idea, several of the following chapters discuss some consequences either of ignoring the immanence of history to human affairs or of writing in a way that treats history as movement along a temporal dimension on which societies can be identified as particulars, allowing for the possibility of describing social progress as linear (or as a variant of the same, “multilinear”) and for establishing typologies, analogies, and proximities among different societies, thereby taking historical textualization to involve, fundamentally, writing narratives of events (and describing them in a way that lends itself to narration).¹⁵

On the other hand, I do not purport to offer an analysis of the political Left, a vision of its possible futures, or an account of its past, though various chapters say something about each of these topics. Rather, the book is intended to raise questions about the ways in which these topics have been and are being discussed. These are concerned with what I will occasionally refer to as “latent constraints” on sociopolitical thought and discourse. Michel Foucault has shown that certain of these can, with some difficulty, be made explicit. To that extent, they become manifest in ways that I believe are essential to a self-conscious Left capable of projecting itself as such into a possible future.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the distinction between latency and explicitness is not intended to be theoretical, since, as I will suggest, “latency” refers to an unself-conscious way of making something apparent (doing it in the course of an activity), and “explicitness” is identified with that activity’s ostensible product. It is the distinction between a course of activity and its ostensible product that is theoretical, as is the term “ostensible.” The force of these questions, what makes them particularly disturbing, is clarified by my critique of the distinction between the idea of a nation (an “imagined community” that operates as a totality under the principles of subjectivation and power) and the idea of a society (an imaginable community of strangers that operates inclusively, as an aspiring totality, under the principles of interdependence and “law,” or “authority”). Unless otherwise indicated, I use the expression “the Left” to refer to manifestations of the intrinsically critical aspect of society, and the expression “the political Left” to refer to a specific manifestation of that aspect.

The literature of anticommunism has tended to typify virtually all Left formations either as expressions of immaturity or as subordinate to “communism” as that was imagined under the simplifying logic of the Cold War. That logic is most obvious in Theodore Draper’s writing (1960, 1981), less so in the work of John Patrick Diggins (1991). But the difference between

them is as much one of manner than substance, since both provide a great deal of information that any account needs to take into consideration: Diggs tends to patronize while Draper is always on the attack. The alternative to this literature is not procommunism, as Draper seems to believe. It is primarily, with some notable exceptions, interested in asking different questions: For example, in what way does the history of American society require the systematic inclusion of the conditions of possibility for a Left? How should social movements be represented in historical accounts? In regard to the first, attention is given to how those conditions are established. In regard to the second, the focus is on how those conditions are made manifest. The internality of the relationship between movement and society is one reason why the alternative to anticommunist historiography is so often self-consciously theoretical or sociological. The debate between the two positions, one specific in its focus, the other inclusive, is discussed throughout this book, especially in Chapters Three and Four and, from a different point of view, in Chapters Seven and Eight (with Randy Martin). But the debate itself is not my main topic. Rather, I am interested in what habits of thought are revealed by it so far as concerns our understanding of the relationship between communism and American society.

From another point of view, this book is about the persistence of anticommunism when the time of communism seems to have ended. I am not as much interested in how this might be explained, though I venture something of an explanation in this chapter, as I am in its effects on other areas of thought, in particular theory, the philosophy of the human sciences, prevailing discourses on and various ideas of a Left, and the subsidiary idea of Left politics. I am especially concerned with how the generalization of anticommunism—the encompassing abstraction it has become—has reinforced a historiography formulated against or indifferent to what I believe is a governing principle of the human sciences: That an account of human affairs is valid only if it refers to those affairs, or provides an opportunity to refer to them, according to their necessarily reflexive features of criticism and sociality. By referring to these features as necessary, I mean that they constitute what can be said about the distinctively human aspect of life, given the questions about human affairs that we cannot presently avoid and that currently organize the curriculum in the humanities, philosophy, the arts, and the social sciences. In this sense, “necessity” means “essential to the very possibility of conceiving of human affairs as distinctively human.” To deny this is, effectively, to affirm that our knowledge of human affairs is sufficient to justify beliefs about them when it derives from one or another variant of causal analysis or is plausible solely as a matter of the structure of the specific narrative in which they are featured.

The distinction between the two types of sciences, human and nonhuman (with their very different domains of objectivity), is a familiar one, though it is honored in the social sciences more in principle than in practice. What is

more important for present purposes is to note that a failure to honor it in practice leaves one unable to appreciate how problematic it is to impose an analysis of facts about “nation” on an account of “society,” if only because the first projects a sense of determination and the second a sense of interdependence, in which case “units” are conceived of as what Bruno Latour refers to as active “mediators” in contrast with “intermediaries” (2005). This tendency must be rejected no matter how convenient it may be, not only because the conflation is illogical, but because it precludes a historiography responsive as a whole to what is distinctively human about human affairs. Nor can the emphasis on nation be taken heuristically, as is almost always done in comparative studies, because no argument has been made, and I suspect none can be made, which explains how that can provide a justifiable approximation of society. The substitution of nation for society avoids the very object that invites, and demands, historical study in the first place; to avoid this object is to forego the overarching purpose of writing history.¹⁷

But that criticism, though just, may be too general to clarify what is at stake. The pressing problem is that emphasizing “nation” introduces a bias that infects the selection of materials in every particular case and directs attention elsewhere than to what can be called “society,” to a distinctly articulated polity and the sorts of events and series that might reasonably be expected to accompany the spectacular coherence of a nation and its celebratory performances of agency. Jean-Jacques Rousseau reminds us that when nations are at issue, the object of study is the play of states, indifferent to their societal aspect according to criteria of expediency that dictate the special type of rationality that governs celebratory agencies of power. In that case, the best that can be expected, so far as collective action is concerned, is that people are transformed from members (interdependent with all other members) to functionaries (dependent on hierarchy to the minimization, if not exclusion, of sociality).

I am not saying that histories written from that point of view provide nothing of value to the study of society; quite the reverse. Facts about nation are, more often than not, parametric to understanding society, in the sense that they are most often fixed by force. How those parameters appear in that ongoing life is certainly part of an adequate account of its history. This is so if history comes to terms with the mix of accommodation and resistance that, by the nature of our most incorrigible concepts, testifies to a distinctive dynamics of societal change based on a different kind of “externality” from that often attributed to “conditions” of power, climate, and geography. But references to such parameters can only be worked out on the axiomatic priority of society.

Before they are thought of as parametric, and therefore capable of being understood as such, national data constitute a record of something distinctly nonsocietal. They only appear formally parametric when understood as part of the course of power’s reckoning with society. The relation between the two must be taken into account in determining the limits of the expression and re-

alization of society as an ongoing accomplishment, but the language for describing (or approximating) society cannot be preserved in the language used to register national facts.¹⁸ Historical accounts regularly refer to specific data, chronologies, and hypotheses that cannot be ignored and that must be understood and appreciated in their own terms for the sake of the continued enlargement of the human archive. But, to the extent to which these cannot be separated from standard inferential and interpretive procedures, it is reasonable to propose that the procedures should be examined critically for what they exclude (e.g., about society) before drawing the sorts of general conclusion that we are accustomed to drawing from historical studies.

In arguing against what I see as an elision of the critical aspect of society by marginalizing or ignoring its most important manifestations, I have in mind its possible effects on our understanding of the meaning and significance of “recorded” events (including whether or not they are properly referred to as “events”), the collective constitution of agency and not merely conditions of mobilization (and by derivation, intentionality), and the character of a historically conscious explanation conceived of as an account of society. In summary, I understand both criticism and sociality to be necessary features of the ongoing courses of activity from which we come to form the idea of a society in contrast with the very different idea of a nation, rather than as types of possible action or properties that distinguish some things people do from others. When stated this way, it is clear that the consequences of the elision of the critical aspect are profound, or so I argue in the next section on the logic of anticommunism.

My working hypothesis is that recognition of the critical aspect of society is presently compromised by a context of signification, the governing principles of which I describe as an abstraction and generalization of anticommunism.¹⁹ The first takes the form of a specialized logic, and the second of a field of increasingly inclusive, fixed, and polarizing designators. Dependence on this context makes it difficult to incorporate internally critical manifestations of society in historical accounts. As a result, the latter are often tendentious to a weak notion of society in which criticism appears, first, as an event that might or might not occur and, second, as an exception to normalcy. It also makes it difficult to clarify the grounds of two important historiographical interests. The first is an interest in writing to the possibility of changes in the scope, concentration, and ramifications of critical activity. The second has to do with how a limited set of possible critical turns is conceivable at a given moment within the ongoing activities that constitute society.

The first can be illustrated by a passage in *The Communist Manifesto* that describes the contradiction between the “forces of production” and the “relations of production.” The “forces of production” refers to the social organization of abundant production, and the “relations of production” refers to a relationship of “ownership” to “labor” described as exploitation. This is

according to capital's account of itself as deriving the decisive part of its wealth, the basis of profit, from labor (in the form of surplus value) as the most variable factor in and most expensive cost of production. This is a contradiction because there are no means consistent with the realization of capitalist wealth that allow for the progress of both without each disrupting the other, and there are no capital-friendly policies that can overcome this dilemma other than a self-defeating emphasis on one at the expense of the other. It manifests itself as an ongoing crisis, and therefore a constant tension, in which only two highly general but determinative consequences can be imagined under the conditions of the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production stipulated by the defense of capital. Both are manifest in each and every instance of human affairs subject to capitalist production. That is, they are inclusive and definite. Either the political economy of industrial/postindustrial capitalism moves toward reinforcing the social dimension of production (the infrastructure of "cooperation" and its general form, sociality), in which case it undermines the conditions of exploitation and competition, or it moves toward reinforcing the domination of "the society of the producers" by nonsocietal agencies in control of the means of production (which are always the only fully realizable form of wealth).

It might be said that the move in one direction or another is a function of politics. But that would be a leap not justified by the analysis drawn from capital's point of view. If it is not so justified, then the question is open as to what might constitute politics from that point of view, and what sort of analysis might provide for its identification. This has to be answered before one can justify a political sociology or a history of politics. Even if one were to succeed in identifying what is distinctively political in or about society, one would have to identify the source of its efficacy, and that requires theory. But from the point of view of the immanent critique of capital, the precise direction of change cannot be the object of a prediction, nor can the means by which a concrete change of any sort is likely to take place be such an object of prediction—though more or less reasonable expectations are possible, depending on circumstances that fall outside of the purview of theory and normal practice and depending on what is meant by "reasonable."²⁰

What is powerful about this part of the Marxian critique is its demonstration that, according to the logic of capital's defense of its mode of production, what we now call "economics," only two general possibilities (for policy and programmatic politics) can be conceived of, and that they constitute in this respect a disjunctive relation internal to the mode of production. The first is the maintenance of society. From capital's own account of its capacity to reproduce itself by realizing its distinctive form of wealth, the account that Marx explicates in *Capital*, this requires continued social progress. That is, it requires a continual socialization of labor on an ever-increasing scale. The immediate reason is that monetarily indexed assets expand under conditions of socialized labor (cooperation under the condition of interdependence) only if the latter progressively expands, and output rel-

ative to labor cost thereby increases in an accelerating curve. In other words, socialization intensifies production on a continually expanding scale. Since the overall cost of socialization itself cannot be borne by capital, and the only available form of wealth is under capitalist control, the connection between productivity (based on cooperation) and profit (based largely on the cost of labor) cannot reproduce the conditions under which the surplus value produced is realized in the form of re-investable profit. This is what Marx and Engels refer to as the contradiction between the forces and relations of production. By the logic of capitalist production, and not by virtue of a separate theory, it constitutes an absolute limit of capitalist reproduction that is always manifest. But it does not constitute a limit on abundant production *per se*. The more general and ultimately decisive point is that the progressive socialization of labor is not only a condition of the production of capitalist wealth, acknowledging it is a condition of recognizing that the substance of societal wealth cannot be measured in monetary terms but consists of means of production now understood as “forces of production,” which are fully socialized as what Marx refers to as “the society of the producers.”²¹

To reproduce the socialized labor that creates capitalist wealth turns out to be incompatible with the money-based principle of the private control of that wealth. It is, therefore, inconsistent with the very concept of capitalist wealth. This is because that concept envisions a separation of wealth, which becomes “fictitious capital” in the course of capital’s constant speculative flight from the costs of socialization, from productive capacity itself. But this capacity constitutes the real wealth of society when the analysis of the mode of production is extended beyond its initial simplification as the production of directly useful goods (see the first chapter of Marx’s *Capital*, Vol. I). It is what is constituted under the auspices of capital as the source of abundant production—in the face of the under-production presumably characteristic of precapitalist, presocialized modes of production, but, in fact, internal to capitalist production itself.²² The separation of “wealth” from production guarantees that policies based on that separation can only be irrational both in regard to the progress of society and in regard to the maintenance of the capacity for abundant production. What is revolutionary about socialized labor is the very fact of its being collective. The practice of continuing to work cooperatively, as instructed, where no alternative for the “bearers of labor power” exists, is what Marx meant when he spoke of capital creating its own gravediggers. He did not mean that the “immiseration” engendered by capitalist exploitation is, in its personal effects on a sufficiently large aggregate of individuals, an effective cause of revolution. Even if it were to turn out to be true that the misery of the many is a sufficient condition of revolutionary thought and action, lacking such a distribution would in no sense undermine Marx’s conclusion, which is based on his immanent critique of political economy, that capitalism ultimately revolutionizes itself. It does not follow that Marx himself would reject an appeal to “the condition of the people”

in trying to understand the politics of popular protest and rebellion. In fact, he discusses that condition in detail throughout the first volume of *Capital*, most often in footnotes. It is just that the revolution of which he writes systematically is the totalizing transformation compelled by capitalist conditions of production—toward an autonomous society of the producers or toward the socially destructive domination of increasingly unproductive, or “fictitious,” capital. To understand popular resistance, rebellion, and “revolution” in that sense of the term requires a different sort of theory from the immanent critique of the defense of the capitalist mode of production.²³

On the other hand, as the second possibility indicates, the standard notion of revolution through the exercise of coercive power belongs to capital as its only reliable option, even though it too amounts to a radical change in the course of reproduction (from production to speculation). This involves imposing an increasingly generalized market on human affairs (the unlimited universalization of exchange, in which the demand for liquidity effectively replaces productive investment and in which the wage progressively declines in its capacity to assess and to satisfy needs). This is revolutionary so far as society is concerned. That is, it is incompatible with the cost of the social progress required if the real wealth of society, which is society itself as a productive force, is to be expanded.²⁴ This is the sense in which labor presents itself metaphorically as capital’s “gravedigger.” The point is that the private control of the means of production is not rational to the maintenance of the human forces in their hitherto most productive form—social production organized according to the pragmatic values of efficiency, effectiveness, and mutuality—as a society of producers that, in turn, must continue to advance its sociality in the fullest sense of the term if it is to realize itself as a historical society.

This is clearly not a prediction in the determinist sense of the term. It is a conclusion drawn on the basis of what a certain mode of production, understood in its own terms and therefore from the point of view of its proponents, constitutes as its own perpetual and historically incurable crisis. To the extent to which capitalist production is parametric to the society it constitutes as its collective labor force,²⁵ and it is insofar as what stands for wealth circulates in the form of “fictitious capital” (and therefore in opposition to production), there is no other choice but to imagine the two options without any rational middle—subject to other considerations that are bound to emerge in the course of expanding upon this imagination. What are “predictable” are the options. Nothing can be said about a specific direction, inevitable or likely. One can specify what would be rational, but only within the parameters set by capital, to the extent to which it is fair to say that its imperatives are hegemonic over those of society.

For society, for the society of cooperative production, the only rational direction is toward more of itself. The situated interests of capital’s operatives are constrained by competition, from which it follows that no long-term interest for which there is a rational practice can be attributed to capital. Therefore,

for capital, the only rational direction that is also practical is toward decreasing relative cost. The former presents no further logical contradiction for abundant production except for its incompatibility with the continued freedom of the capitalist market and the private accumulation and disposition of socially produced wealth. The latter represents the competitive, or “anarchic,” aspect of capitalist investment that is the source of capital’s inability to engineer and tolerate the sort of planning essential to the maintenance of society. Therefore, capital’s solution can only be imposed by force or guile, and it only becomes legitimate by successfully eliminating alternatives. The solution paradoxically reproduces the contradiction between the regressive privatization of socially necessary resources and the constitution of capitalist wealth by socialized labor. There are no other rational options under the conditions set by the explication and defense of capital since there are no other conditions of capitalist self-realization imaginable within the logic of capitalist production but the exploitation of human labor and reliance on the “price-making money market,” any more than the reproduction of society can be imagined through capitalist means alone.

This account of the Marxian critique is intended to illustrate how one might analyze “the possibility of changes in the scope, concentration, and ramifications of critical activity,” where the idea of a society is distinguished from that of a nation. This was the first historiographical interest mentioned above, and the example shows how criticism can be conceived of as an immanent feature of society, an aspect, from within an immanent critique of a “theory” (e.g., the defense of capitalist production and its operational principles), which seems to deny that very possibility but which nevertheless discloses it as internal to whatever (in that theory) makes society conceivable. The second historiographical interest can be summarized as a concern for how so significant a contradiction might become visible at a given time and then be brought to the notice of those available for mobilization and possible action.

It might be claimed in this regard that the disciplinary field of politics has partly to do with clarifying contradictions by identifying the acute crises they engender and drawing principled and communicable conclusions from the result. In that case, the political appears as a vehicle for conveying the results of theorizing the mode of production to the concrete sites at which the crises are most immediately experienced. It is tempting, then, to say that this transfer of ideas by means of political action is how politics makes manifest the critical aspect of society, though it is difficult in that case to show why the latter is an “aspect.”

However, this poses an immediate problem. The metaphor of a “vehicle” does not easily support the crucial idea that a critical subpolity is internally related to society and therefore already in motion before becoming articulated, say, as a specific instance of intentionality with its own direction, range, tenor, and scope. The metaphor leaves one with a sense of something (e.g., politics) that carries the result of something radically different from it (e.g., theorizing) to some receptacle different from both (e.g., a public prior

to or independent of politics). Apart from the problem of definition posed by conceiving of these three as externally related, it must also be admitted that a political project designed only to influence or mobilize people is, for the moment of the attempt to exercise that power, not internal to society (and society is not described such that it might be imagined as open to those effects). The attempt to act on others no longer (at the moment of the attempt) expresses the irrepressibility of the sort of criticism that gives noninstitutional politics its “organic” connection to society. A practical interpretation of this essentially theoretical point suggests that this may be one cause of the difficulty self-explicating political groups have in recruiting large numbers of participants when they define themselves or come to be defined as a way of exercising influence on people or mobilizing others to act in one way or another. This, of course, does not mean that such efforts are doomed or worthless, or even to be regarded with suspicion, only that they pose problems for the historian that cannot easily be resolved if one starts with the premise that the topic of politics can be isolated and given substance before being identified within society itself.²⁶ On the other hand, the more familiar tendency is to interpret contradictions as *generating* conditions of acute crises. To be acute is to be noticeable, to be a matter of experience. To that extent, such crises are available as topics of public discourse, subject to its vicissitudes and special vulnerabilities to hegemonic projects.

In either case, historiography often lights on the history of politics, but identifies “politics,” *post facto*, as a causal element in changes, the direction and character of which are construed *initially* as subject to mediations that, by the nature of the case, cannot be anticipated theoretically, from which it follows that they are essentially unpredictable. That is, politics can be presented as having been predictable only after the fact, and it is necessary to attribute properties to political activities that would have been theoretically unlikely before the fact (e.g., specific and unqualified dispositions, and rationality in the sense of being based on justified beliefs and clear and ordered desires, decisiveness, and originality).²⁷ To construe them as having been predictable at the time, therefore subject to better or worse decisions or governed by what might appear to have been determinative predicaments or emotions, it is necessary to rely on concepts of politics, agency, mobilization, and the like formed independently of what is required by considering them under the aspect of their being internal to society. This is evident in the common assumption that authentic contradictions reside in the depths of society while acute crises are occasional and contingent and, therefore, possibly causal in a way that deep and, therefore, generalized contradictions cannot be. It is difficult to imagine how one might think of society as an ongoing affair in which criticism is an immanent feature and, at the same time, attribute to it a distinction between depth and surface.²⁸ Even if one were to rely on that distinction, it would be no easier to imagine how the independent causal efficacy attributable to surface events could yield actions that are conceivable as rational, decisive, effective, communicable, and

originary—qualities associated with an idealization of politics abstracted from society.

Another problem with this sort of retrospection is that the idea of “depth” effectively displaces the critical aspect of society. Politics appears as an eruption, a sudden, possibly coherent, and momentarily original reaction to a relatively independent event (the *acute* crisis, acuteness). By contrast, Marx attempts to show, in *Capital*, that there is no point at which capitalist production can be described without either glossing over its contradictory counter-reproductive aspects or admitting them and, therefore, the consequences mentioned above. If there is a political meaning to this, it is that “politics” names the critical condition of being in a society in which the capitalist mode of production prevails before it indicates a specific state of affairs or a social formation, or constitutes a particular line of action. This is not to say that a politics that can be designated is historically or sociologically irrelevant, only that it should be understood at the outset, most generally and as a matter of practice, as expressing a critical aspect of society that always displays itself in one way or another, and does so in everything that can be taken as an instance of human affairs. In that case, the singularity stipulated by a name is significant only in regard to a momentarily localized context in which courses of activity intersect (or are mixed) in particularizing ways that are both mutually exclusive and, at the same time, constitute relations of necessity.

This does not naturally extend beyond that context, which is why it is indispensable, though difficult, to distinguish between two sorts of politics. One involves what Bruno Latour refers to as “reassembling the social,” i.e., asserting a norm, from the myriad ongoing activities to which such reassembling (which is always assertive) is almost always an exceptional act, an activity in its own right and in regard to its own projected circumstances (2005). As I read Latour, this means asserting a momentarily totalizing interpretation of what has been going on and submitting it for further action to the putative parties to those activities, as a possible constituency. For obvious reasons, this sort of politics typically transpires locally and is rarely intelligible beyond that context (its ongoing courses of activity). Because it is so confined, any generalization of a “reassembled social” requires a rather different sort of politics, one that is directly oriented toward mobilizing people in a way that is either indifferent to specific, local, situations or points to a more generally shared interest, condition, or desire.²⁹ Consequently, it tends to idealize its themes or to abstract itself by appropriate representations from normally ascertainable conditions of action. It does this by way of asserting the relevance or necessity of the locally intelligible assembled social to the virtual extra-local constituency it aims to make actual. This is often associated with the idea of a party or a social movement; but for Latour, the idea of politics need go no further than the moment at which the reassembled social is presented to the others whose observed activities are presumed by the reassemblers to have been taken into account. For this concept to be relevant to our understanding of politics, it is not enough to stop at

the point of the accomplished reassembly. The process of reassembling as well as its aftermath prior to its acceptance or rejection by the others need also to be considered; and that brings organization into the picture in a somewhat different way.

One might define a political party sociologically as a collectivity composed of volunteers that operates in a context in which the difficulty of distinguishing between power and authority makes it unreasonable to discount power in favor of system imperatives. In that respect, parties are oriented primarily by the facts of power, and to that extent they are ambiguously situated within their society. It may not be too misleading to say that such politics are to the state as the underground economy is to the economy—if we understand so-called “parties in power,” with few exceptions, not to be parties in this sense. A party defined in this way presumably operates through processes of deliberation and discipline, centralized or not, often but not always according to explicit values and corresponding forms of expression. Its effectiveness depends on combining analysis and program with a recognizable organizational resource. The latter, if well-formed in the sense of standing for agency, provides reliable practical support for collectively valid decisions about the possible utility and feasibility of one line of action over others and about whether or not competition among different options should be discouraged (cf. Butler et al. 2000). The social aspect of the party can be thought of as reflexive to the special relationship it constitutes, in the course of its activities, between participation (informal) and organization (formal); to that extent, loyalty is a prime virtue for *members*—and deference a virtue for *associates*. Loyalty is likely to be accompanied by the shared pleasure that individuals experience in regard to their participation in the collective exercise of practical reason—an exercise that conjoins committed discourse, the working through of differences, and shared reflection on the ongoing accomplishments of the collective. Left self-criticism typically focuses on what appears to be a failure of one or more of these characteristics; and, because it is always difficult to coordinate the internal exigencies of organization with the external (contextual) conditions of effectiveness, especially where power is an issue, such criticism inevitably accompanies party formation and development.

Social movements are not typically described as formations, in organizational terms, but as unauthorized processes always awaiting formation, perhaps in the sense of being available for “reassembling.” In this regard, they are thought of not as instances of agency but as conditions under which collective agency is a prospect that is always virtual and never realized. Therefore, participation is likely to be limited and, in any case, never realized as membership in the formal sense of the term. The “identity” often associated with participation in social movements, as in Amy Gutmann’s references to “identity politics” (2003), typically registers itself momentarily as an appropriated ideal type rather than a *praxis*, though there is undoubtedly a politics associated with the appropriation so that the identity of the participant

changes in the course of the movement's activity such that *praxis* cannot be excluded from the concept.

The concept of a social movement found in late twentieth-century sociology is essentially reactive and difficult to separate from the functionalist idea of a social system to which it is the logical other—as in the familiar distinction between institutional and noninstitutional politics. By the same logic, it can be argued that the very concept of a social system, as a “structure of action,” includes the prospect of extra-rational forms of collective deviance to the extent to which the conditions of action that comprise the basic units of the system vary in their degree of integration—as the theory says they always do. A relatively conservative distinction is often made between social movements that are “norm-oriented,” in regard to an apparent failure of system-based norms, and those that are “value-oriented,” in regard to a sudden and general decline of functionality or to an apparent crisis of legitimacy (Smelser 1963). The first is oriented toward changing an already existing practice and the second toward asserting an established system value within which the rationality of specific practices might be determined and in regard to which the application of any such practices might be judged. Both are said to concentrate a popular disposition to overgeneralize in reaction to the anxiety associated with “system strain.”

I refer to this distinction as conservative because it defines different types of “collective behavior” (including social movements) in a way that precludes their being thought of as political, that term being reserved for institutional procedures that establish and allocate the offices in which the “rational-legal” authority to act for the whole is vested. In passing, recent theories conceive of social movements either as more rational and focused or as expressions of “civil society” though still fundamentally reactive. This undoubtedly addresses some of the problems posed by the earlier functionalist model, but at the cost of reconciling the political idea of a social movement with an idea of society, and, more importantly, at the cost of excluding from the designation what would otherwise appear to be instances of politics and of invalidating the idea of a generalized politics along the lines discussed above.

The more generalized politics of mobilization and effectuality share at least one characteristic with the local politics of “reassembling the social,” which yields the following more inclusive definition. Manifest politics can be thought of, most generally, as an oriented practice that projects (or in some other way realizes) a context in which power apparently cannot be ignored, and orientation varies in regard to that fact. It takes form, whether as a movement or a party, as a self-intensifying activity reflexive to a play of power immediately perceived as incompatible with the imperatives of society. Absent such a definition, the political appears only as particular phenomena. Each instance takes form as a momentary aggregation of individual states of mind (the possibility of actionable consensus) and as uneasily connected focused performances that anticipate or react to particular problems or predicaments,

rationally or not, having to do with momentary dispositions or distributions of power. These take place within the causal, intentional, or structural limits of their most immediate situations.

For local politics, power is subordinate to issues, and action is more tactical than strategic, judged by immediate effects rather than by success in shifting relative position. For politics understood as beyond specific locale, issues are subordinate to power and, therefore, to the problems posed by power for the very possibility of society. From the local point of view, politics is nothing more than reactions to power that originate within individuals according to their particular interests, which may or may not coincide or overlap. This may be consistent with the idea that the availability of commitments based on such a situationally induced and thereby limited need for reaction can be understood as related to something about society. But that is not what the critical aspect of society requires. Rather, it requires an interpretation of a given manifestation of criticism that does not reduce it to an assembly of individuated cognitive or motivational dispositions. In this sense, criticism is, first of all, a social fact. The relationship between politics as local organization (assembly), individual commitment, and potentially specific influence, that is, typically designated politics, and politics as an expression of the social/critical aspect of society is beyond the purview of the sort of theorizing exemplified by Marx's *Capital*. But, then, it is also beyond the grasp of orthodox historiography to the extent to which the first sort of politics, which is identified in its strictly local form, is taken as generally definitive.

Parenthetically, it might be argued that any designated politics can be seen as merely a *residual* expression of the critical aspect of society and, in that sense, as relatively autonomous and contingent. In that case, its history can be written as an account of an emergent phenomenon. But even then, one must be careful not to extract it (as if an instance of human affairs can be extracted intelligibly from its essential conditions) or its conditions (as if they are separable from the ongoing character of society) from the logic of *society*, or to assume an explanation after the fact that could not have been imagined before it. The history of politics is often confused with the history of national institutions. When this happens, its forms are said to range from the normal to the deviant. Deviance is thought, in turn, to accompany any system of rules divorced from informal practice (therefore "institutional"), where socialization is, as Talcott Parsons put it in his general theory of deviance, "imperfect" and where practical conditions are said to vary across the possible sites of politics (1951, p. 39). The problem of order, which is conceived of as a national problem, is exacerbated, if not caused, by society itself. To the extent to which this sort of history relies on defining "institution" as value-justified rule-governed behavior—where the rules are said to form a coherent subsystem centered by the notion of a distinctive *telos* (e.g., "value for the inclusive system")—it easily slips, conceptually, to the side of nation in the flawed distinction between nation and society.³⁰

Both historiographical interests, in change and in its aspect of agency, are undermined when the perspective of *nation* overwhelms that of *society*. That is, a description of politics apart from the deliberate exercise of power is valid only if it is consistent with the idea of a society. I have argued that a minimal conception of society has it always in a motion that is essentially reflexive, and that this is most generally described according to contradictions between the form (e.g., a course of activity) and its parameters (forces that tend to fix activity), and within each. These contradictions are not only conditions of reflexivity, but they also represent limitations of what can be conceived of as the durability of the form and the continuation, or reliability, of its corresponding context. The limitations are implicit in the discourse in which such relationships are described as (possibly) reproducible (or as supporting a continuous identity).

I have also argued, in effect, that political sociology is sociological to the extent to which it identifies political affairs as manifestations of the critical aspect of society, which means that certain things often referred to as “political” lie outside of that frame of reference insofar as they pertain to the idea of a nation in contrast with and opposition to the idea of a society. In this respect, political agency can be imputed only on the basis of the aspect of criticism. Each such imputation is reflexive to its relationship with the referent it purports to identify, specifically with the activity in which the particularization of the referent appears momentarily irresistible. The fact that both imputation and referent are *of* society implies that any such identification is ostensible and momentary, passing even as it is enunciated. It follows from these conceptions of “society” and “politics” that it is possible to decide what should or should not be considered political only on the logically prior condition of an account of society in which, first, political activity is already located within courses of activity underway, and therefore cannot be said to have been initiated as such or to have initiated itself, and, second, such activity is shown to manifest the immanence of criticism and sociality.

Today, there is, a great deal of historical research consistent with these criteria. Prominent examples that are particularly relevant to the theses of this book are Edward P. Thompson’s study of the English working class (1963); the work of the “people’s historians,” e.g., Peter Burke (1978, 1981) and Raphael Samuel (1981); histories of unauthorized collective behavior, e.g., George Rude (1964) and Eric Hobsbawm (1984); and historical studies of popular culture, e.g., Michael Denning’s account of the “popular front (1996).”³¹ The field of cultural studies has developed its own historiographical principles to some extent along these lines, as is indicated by the influence of the “new historicists,” notably Stephen Greenblatt (1991; cf. Veeseer 1989). Again, the problem arises when the topic supersedes its content in a way that belies the essential reflexivity of the content conceived of as a course of activity—e.g., when a sociologist or historian sets out to study something like “the Left” before coming to terms with the idea of

society necessary if a Left is to be conceivable as a possibility within society as well as a possibility for it. In the next few pages, I will briefly comment on the relevance of these considerations to several prominent studies of this history of the Left, following which I will discuss the generalization of anti-communism and its effects on historiography and political discourse.

John Patrick Diggins's *The Rise and Fall of the American Left* (1991) provides a not always unsympathetic history of the Left that seems at first to be consistent with a notion of society. However, it appears to exclude the possibility of *immanent* criticism, though not the contingent possibility of critical action, and, on my reading, it is unmanageably ambiguous as to the relationship between society and nation. In that respect, his conception of society is too weak to support any view of the Left but one that elevates its ostensibly reactive aspect above what he takes to be its positive, value-oriented aspect. He sees the latter as a foundational interest in freedom, and, correspondingly, characterizes the post-1960s Left "episode" as having betrayed that interest (see chapter 9 of his book in contrast with his first chapter, "The Left as a Theoretical Problem"). The reactive aspect is given its priority by Diggins's characterizations of abstractly demarcated episodes in terms of generational differences and their expected corresponding tensions. Like the idea of a "historical episode," neither the differences nor the tensions is conceptualized and substantiated accordingly.³² It is in the light of what these expressions mystify that he is able to characterize his own study as an account of "episodes," such that "the interim period between the death of one Left and the birth of another has been discussed to highlight generational tensions" (1991, p. 15). It goes almost without saying that the ideas of an "interim period" and "the death" and "birth" of Lefts are problematic, at the least because they are derived from a prior commitment to the ideas of "episode" and "generation" that predetermine his narrative and the lessons he draws from it.

The specter of society nevertheless makes itself known in Diggins's working assumption, with which I agree, that specific organized and designated politics may reflect social movements already underway:

The American Left was born in the United States. Contrary to popular belief, it was not the product of foreign powers and alien ideologies. Although each Left generation would have its rendezvous with European Marxism, Marxist ideas were usually embraced to support a radical movement that had already come into being. (p. 17)

However, Diggins's account of the indigenous aspect of this movement is consistent with his emphasis on ideas³³ and generations and a corresponding de-emphasis on conditions of criticism of the sort discussed above. Thus, he writes that the Left, "sprouting from native soil," "often erupted in a fury of radical innocence and wounded idealism so peculiar to American intellectual history" (p. 17). This image, with its insinuation in all respects of irrational-

ity, suddenness, and extremism is part of the rhetorical paradigm constituted by organizing a historical interpretation of what is supposed to be an instance of human affairs on the basis of precisely what cannot yield a sense of what it is to be such an instance—namely the unqualified ideas of particularity, episode, generation, and generational tension.

Over and above what this paradigm dictates, it is possible to see how Diggins might, nevertheless, justify his interpretation of successive Lefts as if it had not been implicit in its most general presuppositions. Like many other such histories, including some by authors to the Left of Diggins, his has its own intellectual agenda based on a view of American society as emerging under the impact of romanticism. Corresponding to that is what appears to be an expressivist view of unauthorized politics, coupled with a view of society as determined largely by indigenous cultural forces, incompatible with much of the newer theoretical work in the human sciences. He is not friendly to that work, which he often categorizes in ways that both minimize and distort what is complex and important about it (cf. pp. 21–22 and chapter 9). He therefore fails to see one normative implication of it that might have contributed to his own account, especially to his stated desire to understand the Left as something “born to seek and to struggle” (p. 23). That is a willingness at least to rethink the conflation of nation (and its disembodied ideational system and implication of power) and society (and the courses of activity in which participatory membership is constituted), an error to which he falls victim, and to rethink the corresponding tendency to particularize politics by characterizations that allow for just such a premature objectification—e.g., in terms of putative ideals. His account of the history of the American Left, that it “was born from the idea of freedom, an idea that implies the power of ideals to be actualized” (p. 383), concludes with the claim that the “fall” of its most recent incarnation is a consequence of its having traded its founding interest in freedom for an overly ambitious and self-defeating critique of Enlightenment reason (chapter 9).

A further point needs to be made about the perspective of generational differences. An emphasis on generations is nearly always “dramatically ironical,” and, to some extent, self-serving insofar as it situates itself beyond the foibles of those bound to predicaments not of their society but of their kind.³⁴ And whatever that trope is reflexive to, it is unaccountably beyond the logic of generations itself. A generational account can only justify itself as an exception to a more inclusive but unstated historiographical principle, or if the writing of history is somehow exceptional to the generational determination—or, in the case of Diggins, if the Left is an exception to the rationality of which historical consciousness is presumably a feature.

The idea of Left exceptionalism is not unrelated to the idea of American exceptionalism on which Diggins’s account depends and that can be seen as its subtext. In that respect, given what is necessarily assumed, I would place him among the “orthodox historians” of communism, from Draper to Klehr (cf. Brown 1993). Parenthetically, it must be admitted that this typification

of orthodoxy also has the obvious weakness of all such simplifying categories, including those by generation. The reason I use it here is not because I believe that it is relevant to writing a history of the “history of communism,” but because it is a distinction imposed on the literature by the rhetoric of the debates discussed in Chapters Three and Four, particularly evident in Theodore Draper’s insistent hostility to the work of other historians whose attempts to replace the anticommunist agenda by a more theoretically conscious methodology he consistently rejects on the apparent grounds that the complexity and qualifications of the interpretive result of their research violate the truth of anticommunism.

Nevertheless, it is possible, roughly, to distinguish between works that emphasize nation over society and those that do not; and my reference to “orthodoxy” is intended to bring that to mind, rather than to focus on the specific point of view those historians have about the meaning of the Communist experience. On the other hand, I will try to show that the emphasis on nation and a corresponding *concept* of power (no less than an emphasis on ideas divorced from practices) is particularly susceptible to the abstraction of anticommunism as a logic that burdens political discourse to this very day. In this respect, I will refer to it as disposed toward intellectually and morally conservative interpretations based on choices of principles of organization within several sets of options.

The first option is, as indicated, a preference for an emphasis on nation rather than society, except in the weakest sense of the term. The second is a reductive emphasis on particularized intentionality over collectivity, with the consequent loss of a concept of the collective and a separation of the idea of culture from the more fundamental idea of society. The third is an understanding of rationality based on the quantificational logic of exchange in contrast with what Alfred Schutz referred to as “social rationality” (the rationality of sociality as such) and the logic of difference (and value) that corresponds to that idea (1967). The fourth is a reductive view of agency as essentially individual and sufficiently explained by reference to individuals beyond the practices within which they are individuated. There are also several metaconceptual decisions that are crucial to evaluating the difference between the two types of approach to the history of communism. One rejects the possibility of basic contradictions at the heart of the relationship between society and its national parameters (including especially its mode of production/reproduction), and the other rejects class as a basic socio-economic category. There are, of course, accommodations to the demands of each unorthodox alternative, but, together, the choices comprise significant features of a conservative frame of reference.

There are two effects of this that are germane to my later discussion of the debates. One is a refusal to give any significant benefit of the doubt to what C. Wright Mills thought of as “structural criticism.” The fact that Diggins not only values criticism aimed at overcoming restraints on freedom but also uses this as a test of the contemporary Left is not an exception. His concept of

freedom (as a simple and sovereign ideal) is far too abstract and unqualified to distinguish among political tendencies and too general to use in understanding the difference between Right and Left (presumably the priority given authority or freedom, as if the two can be defined independently). In any case, it is a value that is not easily historicized in relation to those features of society that might be contradictory in the sense discussed above. This, I take it, is what tempts the ironist to condescend and patronize, and to identify Left movements as essentially generational rather than rational, and therefore deviant so far as the privileged order of the nation is concerned.

The other effects are a tendency to give greater weight to the testimony of those who separated themselves from the Left than to the testimony of those who remained committed to it, and a shift from an emphasis on the social movement to an emphasis on possible results, such as on policies, on popular attitudes, or on the outcome of elections, and a corresponding emphasis on formal organization at the expense of participation. This is as visible in Diggins's writing as in Draper's. In regard to the testimony of those who reject their pasts, Draper's irrationalist account of the attraction of communism, from a point of view determined by his own rejection of it, makes it impossible to imagine how anyone as intelligent as Draper could have become involved in the first place. This inability to imagine oneself biographically, to lose empathy with what one had been, is part of what leaving the Communist Party meant at a certain time. Such a conversion experience is not likely to provide the testimonial reliability necessary to contribute to understanding the Communist movement and its appeal to so many during and beyond the 1950s, even in the face of internal and external criticism. The possibility of a rational decision to remain involved should be part of any account that attempts to prove that the movement was a failure no less than one that attempts to situate it in American life or oppose it by an appeal to progressive possibilities within institutional politics. This is largely lacking in the orthodox histories, and it is in this regard that they contribute to the more general tendency to marginalize the Left, Communist and non-Communist, in nationalistic accounts of American society and, in doing so, beg the question of what it is about that society which is immanently critical such that the social movements presumably reflected in political organizations might be made intelligible as such.

An elision of the Left, either by marginalization or omission, or by an account that refers to causes conceived of as logically independent of the dynamics of society, tends to confirm a view of society as an institutional order or functionally integrated system, as not immanently critical though liable to occasional bouts of deviance, including collective protests, fads, rebellions, internal strife, social unrest, and the like. I have discussed why I believe that such a view is self-defeating. It places the Left outside of society even as it purports to recognize the influence of the social on its various manifestations. What it places the Left outside of is not society as such but

a particular conception of it derived from the idea of a nation, in the light of which “society” remains fatally untheorized. The view I am defending requires situating the Left, and politics in general, within the critical disposition of society conceived of as already in motion and subject to the irreducible and irrepressible tensions of its contradictory aspects.

This affords an understanding quite different from the ironical accounts of the orthodox historians.³⁵ Above all, it attempts to identify the Left as a manifestation of society. It attempts to show what it is about society that is immanently critical, and what it is about certain societies, those “in which the capitalist mode of production prevails,” which manifests that critical aspect, suggesting a more comprehensive notion of the Left than is found in the standard topical accounts. I will be arguing that the orthodox frame of reference effectively elides the Left, as do most popular accounts of American history (taken as histories of a society), where both the political Left and the critical disposition of the body politic that it manifests simply do not figure in a comprehensible way.

At this point, I want to consider the context of the elision, in whatever form it appears, as one that depends on a highly generalized continuation of the logic of the Cold War “by other means.” As such, it takes shape in a way that is relatively rare to the latent aspects of discourse, namely as a self-consciously imperative coherence of meaning and feeling. Its constitutive categories are binaries, representing polar opposites, and they accumulate in the associative form of a paradigm³⁶ predicated on yet more general dimensions. By way of treating what appear to be *exemplary* as *emblematic*, the accumulation is correspondingly moralized. Each specific instance picked out at the points at which the categories intersect appears to be identical with its universal principle. That is to say, it appears to represent in all respects what it is taken to be an instance of. This makes the dimensions, which describe variations within the paradigm, relevant to virtually all subject matters having to do with the social aspect of human affairs, and relevant in a way that insistently promotes an image of actions as particulars and, at the same time, idealizes interpretation by eliding its own obligation to self-criticism.

The logic of the Cold War is with us today, as much as it was two decades ago, even though the content to which that logic most directly applies is no longer exclusively substantiated by reference to Communist parties or governments. To some extent this is a result of a generalization of anticommunism, no less than the familiar background of chauvinism for which grounds do not have to be given, in the light of which communism comes to exemplify the more inclusive category of “totalitarianism.” The latter is ultimately identified, in turn, as a subcategory of the suprahistorical discursive category of “statism” (domination beyond hegemony) that signifies total control without any prospect of democratic constraint. The corresponding idea of democracy is the myth of pure communication among equals, free of anything but popular impulse, a movement of dialogue that, in the

name of civility, must never go beyond itself. This generalization is, of course, only one way in which the elision occurs. I focus on it because it is currently incorporated in the post-Soviet American literature on “civil society,” and, by virtue of that, has had considerable influence in the social sciences and humanities (cf. Cohen and Arato 1992).

Whoever cannot participate in that overarching evaluation of this dialogical indefiniteness, whoever cannot abide dialogue that feeds on itself, is excluded from the very concept. In this way, the idea of resistance is removed from the context of its referents. Resistance thereby becomes essentially unintelligible—the one exception being, as Stuart Hampshire reminds us, reactionary “resistance” to organized politics altogether (cf. Hampshire 2000).³⁷ There is, however, another exception typically granted by some Left intellectuals to “new social movements,” familiarly identified as “identity politics” but more generally described as anticipations of democracy. While these fall within the definition of Left politics, their theoretical status is ambiguous. For one thing, this form of resistance is often defined negatively and to that extent is vulnerable to reactionary appropriation. The risk is greater when the various movements are identified with a particular form regardless of differences in content or apparent purpose. The form most often taken to identify their newness is the negation of politics as previously understood. On the one hand, they are thought of as informal expressions of desire relatively free of the burdens of power. On the other hand, this transfers most of what remains of identifiable political content to the involitional expressivity of “civil society” (see, for a version of the first part of this, Mouffe and Laclau, 1985; for the second part, see Cohen and Arato 1992). That portion of the original content that had been developed organizationally and, as it were, historically now appears to be nothing more than an ideological expression of unyielding organizational imperatives (e.g., of party or state).

This vision of a society without politics (except for what is reluctantly adopted or somehow deemed occasionally necessary) equates “democracy” with the idea of “hegemony without internal qualification,” which is to say without relevance to any imaginable movement of history. Civil society is effectively *released* rather than constituted. It does not and need not realize itself substantively, except in reaction to what it is not. This presumably occurs in several steps, first by the generalization of the “Law Merchant” in regard to specific rights connected to property and exchange, and then by the constitutional process of institutionalizing democracy. That is its only history; and it is historical only if “history” invokes nothing that can be thought of in terms of contradiction, difference, opposition, and struggle. Civil society exists for itself and is relevant only to itself: It stands, then, as the only model of society worthy of respect—and the capitalist mode of production need be mentioned only for the distortions its own possible excesses may or may not introduce in the republic of dialogue without end.

This brings into theoretical play another altogether idealized opposition, that of civil society and the state. The former is defined precisely as the

antithesis of the latter, which is then taken to represent the general disposition of *statism*—with the corresponding equation of (1) the bureaucratically rational *aspect* of organizational self-realization and (2) a totalistic realization of the Weberian “iron cage” independent of any other aspect of reproduction. Weber’s expression, which was not intended as a concept, is only intelligible as a critical notion designed to sustain, as in memory, what is already known: The success of “formal organization” (specialization, impersonality, hierarchy, jurisdiction, rules, and accountability) depends on its capacity to sustain “informal organization.” This means that productive order not only stems from hierarchy but from courses of activity at the base. The presumably static aspect of organization is inconceivable without the social activity usually described as interpersonal interaction. The “iron cage” metaphor shows the irrationality of conceiving of social order as such only in terms of a relationship between a single value (and a corresponding emphasis on efficiency in its pursuit) and an organizational form (e.g., bureaucracy). Parenthetically, this is why Parsons’s claim that Weber asserted a historical “law” of increasing rationality is mistaken.

It follows that interaction, informal sociality, can be thought of as the ongoing activity of recovering the sense of intentionality (which maintains, for its parties, not only the prospect of mutual surprise but the prospect of mutual response) as a feature of even those “total institutions” that appear to have eliminated all instances and traces of it. From this point of view, “formal organization” does refer to a *lack*, but it is one within the formal itself and not *for* “members” or “functionaries.” One reason is that the very concept of an organization necessarily includes realization and, therefore, activity. What is called “informality” (and appears as interaction) is a necessary accompaniment to realization, and it presumably expresses this lack, as is indicated in research on the incessant display of sociality under even the most rigidly controlling of circumstances, and in research that reveals the generativity of what is otherwise referred to as “deviance.” What is called “deviance” can be said to appear, as Emile Durkheim (1982) reminds us, at the very moment at which rules are instantiated (e.g., in studies of “red tape,” of exaggerated adherence to rules, and of pressures toward individuation in stressed contexts such as “panic”). Thus, it is inconceivable that rational organization, in Weber’s sense, could lead to the iron cage without an imposition of the nonrational element of force, unless one conceives of organization minus the logically necessary aspect of realization. Consequently, the idealization of civil society as a counter to that possibility does little more than create a myth against a myth, curiously, a negation against (but not of) a negation—an external relation of mutual denial that has no dialectical significance for either. The question is, how does a myth of that sort come to play so prominent a role in current political discourse and in the disciplines of the human sciences themselves? In what sense is it indicative of a generalization of anticommunism or, at least, of whatever anticommunism is an instance of?

The use of the expression “iron cage” gives weight to a particular extratheoretical desire, one that is more than understandable in the light of the past three quarters of a century: to be able to criticize any line of activity that, extended in the direction of its putative “ideal type,” appears to foreshadow an unacceptable probability of total and unremitting control. The classical example would be a society in which goal-oriented social actions of scale are coordinated impersonally through the exercise of jurisdiction by the incumbents of “offices,” so that the coherence of formal cooperation replaces the uncertainty of informal interaction and, to that extent, appears as a rational solution to the instrumental problem of maximizing, at one and the same time, efficiency and effectiveness.

Decision-making is far more complex in actual practice. Diverse interests are unavoidable, if only because populations change, the socialization of members cannot be uniform, and every historical society constitutes divisions among people, which then appear as differences of interest. Organizational facts invariably take these more general facts into account. It is, of course, possible for interests to overlap, though it is difficult to imagine how the degree (or reality) of overlap could be assessed for its sufficiency to a reasonable expectation of a just social order; and who would be neutral enough to assess it? In many cases, it is not clear that even overlapping interests can be reconciled in such a way that the different parties can respond to the areas of overlap; indeed, it is not even clear that it would be rational for them to do so, especially under conditions of limited and suspect information about the other parties and the beliefs of those parties about the conditions under which they are enjoined to act. Such facts may require modifications of goals initially thought of as strictly organizational such that efficiency itself is put into question.

Even if it were possible in a given case to reconcile different interests with an overall value or set of goals, situations are bound to arise that require modifications of previous procedures or other sorts of innovation, and such operational innovations are almost certain to be controversial. Moreover, to the extent to which the diversity of interests and the need for innovation effectively lead to a reinstatement of “informal organization,” as most organization theorists believe is necessary if the collective is to retain its identity and endure, then the tendency toward formalism remains just that, a tendency. It is a disposition that can never effectively realize itself. Thus, what I called “the classical example” is not an example of a society (or organization) so much as a pre-ideal “ideal type,” a postoperational abstraction that precedes the formation of the methodologically adequate pure idea. The pure, methodologically adequate, ideal type is summarized as bureaucratic rationalization organized according to a particular classificatory and calculating version of reason. Given the desire to avoid the “iron cage,” the type might be projected onto what appears, in retrospect and metonymically, to exemplify it.

This line of theorizing moves from an apparent reality to theoretically projected normative implications of the real as an ideal in itself and then, by a

metonymic concentration of meaning, to a purified ideal type that replaces the instance. It is easy to see how it can provide a basis for drawing essentially moralistic conclusions. In regard to the above example, it might support a judgment against planned economies, restrictions on the free market, modernization (i.e., diversity, complexity, and scale), and politics organized in part according to the subvalues of efficiency, effectiveness, and durability. Indeed, all of these have been subjected to just that sort of critique—in the extreme case, as potentially fascistic.³⁸ In that light, any or all might appear to be totalistic in principle, not merely totalizing in the Sartrean sense of being progressively inclusive.

It is tempting to see this chain of reasoning as an instance of what Neil Smelser once referred to, in regard to crowd formation, as a “hysterical belief” (1963). It is too encompassing in the capacity it attributes to its object, too generalized for the reality it is intended to make comprehensible, insufficiently historical and overly categorical in its failure to consider the prospects of change immanent to even the imaginably most formal of arrangements, and presumptuous in its one-sided attribution of an unacceptable state of affairs (the iron cage) to the putative efficacy of a “type” of organization that can only be conceived of in the first place as functioning within a context of mediations it cannot control. It is also committed, metonymically, to a reductive view of the fate of organizations (and ideologies) in terms of the worst of “worst case scenarios”; and it fails to reckon with the unanticipated cognitive, political, and moral costs of relying on the opposition of one myth to another regardless of what is conceivable about their possible realizations.

Finally, apart from these criticisms, it is impossible to think of an activity or project for which there is no conceivable possibility of an unacceptable end state (temporary though its existence would be) even if one cannot establish an implication or rational probability of so unlikely an aftermath.³⁹ The principle of this line of reasoning would potentially discredit any and every line of action, which is why its deployment is almost always selective according to agendas and their social supports unaccountably considered immune to the analysis itself. To reject all political involvement but that which bears no risk of a logically possible “normatively negative” extreme is to reject all involvement whatsoever, since nothing can guarantee that a worst case possibility—or, for that matter, any imaginable possibility—will not become increasingly probable, though it is difficult to imagine how and from what point of view such an increase might be assessed.

In this regard, it is crucial to remember an elementary principle of socio-historical analysis, that the path from a stated political program (or an existing “state of affairs” idealized by a cross-sectional analysis) to a final consequence cannot be conceptualized as linear since, from the moment it is put into motion, there are countless and accumulating mediations, events, and conditions of reflection impossible to anticipate.⁴⁰ It does not follow that projections of linearity are not relevant to certain purposes and justifiable

under certain conditions; e.g., the assessment of possible physical dangers, the immediate threat of invasion, etc. Even then, however, judgment must be tempered by the realization that linearity is inconsistent with what must be acknowledged in general about possible courses of social change. When change is represented otherwise, as linear, the representation typically expresses a point of view from which a worst case scenario is all that counts, which is to say that once such a scenario is imagined, the putative future is virtually at hand. In that case, it is unlikely that the analysis and the policy it is designed to support could be rationally communicated. This is why a politics of anticipation (e.g., the politics associated with the defense of the theory of “civil society”) that explicates itself along a dimension of successive approximations of a final state of affairs can only present itself as conclusions for which reasons (and their inevitable complexity) become less important than dramatizations of the mere possibility that “where there is smoke there is bound to be fire, and where one imagines fire, what might not have appeared to be smoke is.”

When proponents of a politics of “civil society” speak of “statism” as an ultimate normative implication of socialism or communism, not to mention fascism (like the “iron cage” as an ultimate implication of organizational rationality), they are not only simplifying what those terms can mean, they are arguing from the idealist’s premise that if the thought exists reality will follow, from the arch-positivist’s premise that if you’ve seen some you’ve seen them all, and from the antirationalist’s premise that certain formations and ideologies are bound to develop in a linear fashion consistent with the *telos* of their ideal type. But this is not simply the province of the Right or of conservatism; Many on the Left are vulnerable to this way of thinking as well.

It was evident among some Left intellectuals during the late 1980s and 1990s, in an overly optimistic attitude toward the solidarity movement in Poland (as a popular workers’ movement against totalitarianism) and in a failure to criticize the radical desocialization of economies in the former Soviet bloc and beyond. I am not arguing that no humanitarian reasons could be given for supporting Solidarity and endorsing an end to the version of social economy that existed under the Communists. I am suggesting that there was an uncharacteristic leap of faith by many whose experience should have made them more wary of such enthusiasms, especially to the extent to which they were predicated on a stereotypical characterization of the relationship between state and society in the Communist nations and on a failure to appreciate the significance of the radical differences within the movement and the various reasons given by those in Poland who disapproved of both the existing government and Solidarity. Rather, socially progressive attitudes toward Solidarity, no less than toward the re-organization of those political economies, would have been better served by subjecting both to the same principles of critical analysis ordinarily required of any account of societal change, actual or projected. The widespread disappointment

with what occurred after the “break-up of socialism” should be taken as a cautionary reminder that the evaluation of such change requires remembering what is conceptually indispensable to understanding it.⁴¹

Even if one wishes to keep open the option of evaluating certain forms by a criterion that says that the end of their development is implicit at the outset, thereby supporting action based on the judgment, it is not at all clear how that can be made theoretically defensible. So far, despite many attempts to do so, no analysis of social formations demonstrates anything close to such a line of development, though Draper’s interpretation of the history of American communism certainly exemplifies the aspiration. At any rate, with few exceptions, historians now agree in principle, though not necessarily in practice, that historical change rarely, if ever, occurs along a linear path.⁴² Even if a given case were to have followed a linear path of development, it is difficult to imagine how one writing its history could know that as a fact. To the extent to which a narrative imposes linearity on its material regardless of what it otherwise introduces by way of, say, overdetermination and structural breaks, it suggests that the beginning is already an intimation of an end that can only be known after the fact. In other words, the determination of an intimated end is subject to judgments that cannot be reconciled with a nonarbitrary version of history.

When the beginning is written in a political history as if its end is implicit and the facts do not themselves lead the historian to an unequivocal identification of that end, the temptations exist to preserve the initial sense of direction by identifying conditions that either mitigate against its fulfillment, which is to say the self-realization of the subject matter, or to contribute to the equivocal character of the end as finally written. I have argued that Diggins’s overall characterization of Left history as the betrayal of a dream is an instance of this way of writing history, and have listed, mostly in footnotes, texts that exemplify rather different approaches. There are, of course, other temptations some of which are discussed in the following chapters. And there are many variants of linear and narrative accounts that do not suffer from the same problems as those that arise in some of the literature on “civil society” and in regard to the historiography of the Left, which is the literature that is mainly at issue in this book.

Similarly, it would be false to conclude that the path of social change is multilinear, though that brings historical interpretation closer to Novick’s notion of “overdetermination” (1988). Regardless of what one thinks about narrativity and historical objectivity, and the problem of preserving the sense of temporality, there seems no reason to dispute the claim that one of the most important tasks of the professional historian is the development of a factual base for historical interpretation such that (1) every interpretation is always subject to the sort of criticism that demands that the historian have exhausted existing sources and anticipated possible sources, and (2) the factual base itself is always subject to review for the constitution of the categories of difference, the assignment of properties, and the analogies by

which the elements selected for interpretation are declared factual and then related to one another, and by which those construed elements are made more or less coherent as a referential field (White 1973; Novick 1988).

This elaborate and ultimately self-defeating logic inherited in part from the Cold War, though in evidence in the business press and in official reports on labor and immigration since the end of the nineteenth century as well, becomes, through the movement of its own thought, a positive ontology of form and an idealist theory of normative entailment. It is ontological insofar as its categories are treated as real and the possibility of mediated change is effectively denied. It is normatively idealist insofar as it draws upon an ahistorical conception of communism as totalitarian and ultimately statist. The inclusive category *statist* now appears as a purified abstraction, the idea of a directly projected final state entailed by both the party form and the governmental form. This is easily generalized to apply to the critique of capital (and the corresponding critique of the ahistorical, property-based, regulatory aspects of civil society). This recourse to a theory in which a given historically relevant formation or event is held bound to realize a totalistic, or absolutistic, disposition without qualification and without the possibility of mediation can be accepted only if most of what is otherwise believable about society is false; and the theory not only does not address that possibility but relies in almost all respects on the very sociology its own applications belie. Yet, it is still necessary to come to terms with the historiographical principles that follow from such a position, which I see as one version of the logical end game of the Cold War.

From the point of view of that extension of anticommunism to a theory of a self-generalizing trend toward total control, and the self-serving distinction between totalitarianism and authoritarianism, it is not only possible but necessary to classify social movements as either tending in one absolute direction or the other, toward statism or toward democracy, regardless of the absence of a theory that can account for such a binary. Thus, the “old social movements,” organized in some but not all respects by unions and parties, appear to embody one expected normative outcome, namely absolutism. In contrast, the idea of horizontal sociality (as a putative variant of or basis for “radical democracy”) attributed to the “new social movements” is too fluid to use to identify the coherence presumably indicated by preserving the expression “social movements.” Moreover, quantifying “social movement” by relying on a severely truncated temporal dimension makes “oldness” and “newness” either virtually unintelligible or significant only in regard to their rhetorical or ideological force. Since the rhetorical aspect is, by this account, the positive feature of this discourse, it is worth considering what it accomplishes. It is momentarily able to avoid the worst case scenario—statism—from the outset, and therefore the danger of an interminable “state of exception,” which qualifies and challenges all notions of democracy. Again, it is able to do this only

by sacrificing the intelligibility of the expression “social movement.” Alternatively, the “new” movements are conceptualized according to an ideal type in radical opposition to the Weberian model of the “corporate group” in their manner of integration, which is to say to anything that suggests leadership, ideology, or stability. In this respect, questions are begged that ultimately cannot be begged, having to do with mobilization and efficacy. The reason that they cannot be begged is that they are imposed by a context in which power of the sort substantiated by the formal operations of the nation admittedly cannot be ignored (cf. Aronowitz 1996; but see his later, 2006, book for an apparently less negative view of vertical organization; cf. also Zizek 2001).

This is not to say that thinking of civil society in the context of a theory intended to validate one sort of politics over another does not allow for any organizational stability whatsoever, or that the notion of the new social movement does not express an intuition that may be valid. But it seems worth looking at the claims and not, for the moment, the purposes that might be served by making them. If we take the theory that connects civil society to new social movements seriously as it is most prominently presented (cf. Mouffe and Laclau, 1985, and Cohen and Arato, 1992, for somewhat different versions), the line between what would be politically and socially acceptable and what would not can only be discerned after the fact and, therefore, without a clear enough sense of what might have given rise to the unacceptable form (or give rise to it in the future)—a sense that the proponents of the position are most eager to convey. In other words, asserting such a line is already an instance of the politics the theory is supposed to disavow. However, the important question is not merely epistemological. It is how a requisite degree of integration is to be explained without reintroducing the rejected form and without accepting the risk of misjudging possible outcomes, as is required by the strategy of confronting “the worst case scenario.”

I suppose that the hidden positive basis of horizontal integration (social versus formal) might be something like a “natural hierarchy of merit,” or legitimately dominant ideas that, having survived the “marketplace of free dialogue,” have demonstrated their relative superiority. The main trouble with this is that once established, the crucial principle of dialogue is no longer sufficient to account for civility in the maintenance of the dominant ideas, and this introduces precisely the possibility of the power to exclude, which the theory of civil society was supposed to warn us against. It is hard to imagine any other basis for going from the idea of a “new social movement” to the possibility of its being a “movement,” though further thought might yield alternatives. The recent history of Eastern and Central Europe has not yet provided enough evidence for continued optimism along these lines, so the alternatives will, again, have to be produced, as it were, theoretically.

In any case, it seems impossible to imagine a role for history in such a conception, if by “history” is meant the working out of difference and if dif-

ference refers to momentarily incompatible courses of activity (cf. Brown and Goldin 1973; Butler et al. 2000) founded on constitutive oppositions that accompany a transformation of the relation between form and content from one set of generalizing conditions to another—i.e., from a subsistence economy that is underproductive relative to increases in demand and the generalization of trade, to a socially organized market economy that is overproductive relative to the possibility of realizing value and, thereby, unable to guarantee its own reproduction (the continuation of abundant production). A disclosure of this requires the sort of immanent critique represented by Marx's *Capital*, which the countervailing position is bound to ignore or actively to marginalize or reject out of hand. It is worth noting in this regard that there are no other comprehensive critiques of the mode of production as such that deal with the problem of reproducing the relations of production under capitalist conditions. However, there are some quasi-theories that are designed to show how markets can work for the good of all, how inequalities are either good for the progress of society or unavoidable, or are capable of a satisfactory degree of amelioration by minor changes in rules of distribution or methods of determining need; or how reforms aimed at mitigating the relationship between wealth and power might be devised within the contexts of the market and what that requires, namely the private exploitation of social labor. Occasionally included is the hypothesis that the irrepressibility of “civil society” makes it more than likely that reforms will progressively develop in a democratic direction (and, presumably, that this progress can be maintained by the self-same agency and no others incompatible with it). Absent an alternative, then, it is not so much sink or swim with Marx as it is necessary to try and understand what it is he was doing in that text. Without going into detail, I believe that he was not developing a positive theory, of the sort David Laibman (2007), G. A. Cohen (1978), and others have attributed to him, but was engaged in the sort of immanent critique in which everything flows, as Raymond Williams pointed out (1977), from capital itself.

The contradictions that emerge in the course of Marx's analysis are not so much “laws of capital” as they are a succession of exigently and partially solved problems that appear in the course of the attempt to defend capital and justify policies made in its name—to which Marx presumably gives adequate voice. The unsolved parts accumulate until the paradox they represent becomes impossible, in good faith, to ignore. The result is not a positive theory of how capital works or how societies in which capitalist production prevails operate, though there is a great deal of commentary on both. It is a demonstration that, on the grounds given, no policy made in the name of capital can show itself to be rational relative to the two overriding legitimizing values, *the common good* and *the continuation of capitalist production as such*. It also substantiates the principle that a critique ends, and then only momentarily, when what was left out of its object reappears with a sense of unavoidable urgency (e.g., production, otherness, etc.). It is

in this light that the generalization of anticommunism can be seen as evading three obligations: the obligation of theory to begin with an immanent reading; the historiographical obligation to demonstrate, in regard to constitutive contradictions, the historical limitations of a given, identified, form; and the political/conceptual obligation to identify what has been left out that might have to do with a continuation of the mode of production (cf. Spivak 1987, 1988, and 1999).

Parenthetically, there is also a default hypothesis available when those arguments either fail or seem uncertain. It says that, whatever the difficulties imposed on society by markets, or whatever problems are introduced by unregulated markets and accelerating antisocietal accumulations of wealth, the alternatives are problematic in enough respects to reject them altogether. But to evaluate the so-called alternatives, given the state of the evidence and the prospect of adequate evidence when mechanisms of planning cannot easily be separated from even the most established capitalism is unproductively tautological to the extent to which the judgment is implicit in the theory. In any case, the good alternatives to or qualifications of unregulated markets are said to arise within civil society as the most general aim of the new social movements, in contrast with old forms, parties, unions, etc., which are thought to be unable to resist their characteristic disposition to absolutism. Without going further into this, it seems that the conceivable distance between what are called new social movements and the possibility they presumably stand for is greater than that between the old Left political formations and their more limited aim, which is to establish policies conducive to the reproduction of the society of the producers. It is only when one envisions emancipation as such that the first distance is irrelevant, since its idealization of radical democracy becomes the standard against which the adequacy of any instance of politics is evaluated. When an ideal is historically justified as immanent rather than a goal to be achieved, as in the emphasis on the completion of the capitalist revolution by the progress of the society of the producers, the standard always points to the relationship between the forces and relations of production, and no further.

What makes the distinction between the two types of social movement compelling is not its clarity, since it has proven difficult if not impossible to specify a “new” social movement that does not display at least some of the “old” ordering principles and vice versa. As discussed above, this failure of plausible interpretation makes the line between the two impossible to discern, and therefore makes it likely that any attempted application of the distinction will be either mystifying or, contrary to the principle of dialogue, reactionary. What is important to the present discussion is the way in which the logic of the Cold War becomes available for more general applications and remains implicated in a way of writing history that elides the critical aspect of society by marginalizing its most obvious manifestations, and how this bears on evaluating developments in the historiographical practices of

other disciplines of the human sciences. But the influence of that logic goes far beyond the disciplines, not only to those centers of public discourse still committed to the idea of American exceptionalism but to the Left itself, at least since the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980.⁴³

One effect on socially progressive politics is discussed in Chapters Three and Four, and, in regard to yet another set of problems, in Chapters Seven and Eight, which were written with Randy Martin. It is that the political life of the Left has remained contentious and its debates interminable in regard to how its past should be understood and what political expressions should be excluded. There is less disagreement about the proper diagnosis, despite uncertainty about what it means: The Left is said to be fragmented, its cure a new principle of unity (excluding what presumably needs to be excluded and assuming that Left mobilization is primarily responsive to well-formed ideological appeals). In regard to diagnosis, Stanley Aronowitz is among those who use the term “fragmented” in a way that is useful in reminding us of the lack of integration on the Left but, I believe, is misleading, if only because such a lack is endemic to criticism or any attempt to cure it (e.g., in terms of one universal or another) can, as Žižek and Butler have pointed out, only appear to be yet another instance of fragmentation (cf. Aronowitz 1996, 2006; and Butler et al. 2000). At the same time, it has become virtually impossible to imagine a political vision or program that could be inclusive, retain Left values, develop a continuing public presence, and, at the same time, be effective, without becoming an instance of the type of politics the theory of civil society concludes is either obsolete or normatively unsuitable. It is the exclusion implicit in the diagnosis, and its failure to incorporate difference in the conception of a possible unity, that I believe weakens Left discourse today and threatens to leave it burdened by the residual logic of the Cold War. This is not because such a judgment in favor of a new “new Left” oriented to “civil society” cannot be justified by any conceivable version of the idea. It is, in addition to the criticisms of the most notable versions discussed above, because it is based on a decision about a complex experience whose history has been addressed largely from the point of view of an exclusionary agenda of challengeable origin, and compromised by an attempt either to ignore the effects of the Cold War on the Left itself, or to act in a way intended to minimize them by endorsing an anti-organizational ideal of dialogue the possibility and the grounds of which are not intelligible as things stand.

Even the most dedicated and reasoned case against communism in general, whether or not it includes the political Left or moderates debates within the Left, relies on tendentious examples, arguments from the perspectives of different ways of anticipating possible futures, experiences that cannot easily be generalized, facts that pertain to part of what is then judged as a whole, or undecidable arguments about “actually existing communism” that compare it to an ideal. Of course, most arguments in politics

rely on such shortcuts, are tendentious to conclusions already determined, and seem, often unself-critically, either to make too much of too little or to make too little of too much—without reflecting on the internal relation of the “too little” and the “too much” and the problem it poses for how to think about the history of politics.

This by itself does not disqualify a discourse on civil society. But it does allow us to reconsider the judgments on which that discourse depends, to the extent to which conditions allow us momentarily to imagine that those judgments are rational and have no interested politics of their own. One reason to reconsider that discourse is that a judgment (exclusionary) aimed at the past of a present yet to be defined, and with the hope of an otherwise unprecedented future, posits a break in continuity that should not be taken for granted even if it could be made comprehensible. That is, there is nothing about the ostensible present form—i.e., the Left presumably divorced from its past—on which to base the connection between it and a possible future; and that connection is necessary if we are to be persuaded that there is something to be conserved, a Left to be reproduced and not merely reiterated. My purpose is not to refute such judgments so much as to dispute the generalizations on which certain of them depend when they are said to speak to the possibility of a new Left, and to do this in order to begin a discussion of the logical conditions of considering a future for the political Left that is compatible with what is immanent to society. Once a judgment—e.g., about what politics must be excluded in advance, either historiographically or politically—is used in a way that totalizes the past as a condition of thinking about the future, it becomes impossible to speak of a Left future that is not simply a matter of being absorbed by the “institutional politics” of a society in which capitalist production (private accumulation and exploitation) prevails.

I believe that part of what we are seeing in at least some debates on the political Left is an exclusionary effect of the logic of interpretation that developed in the context of the Cold War as part of sanctioned public discourse on politics, culture, economy, and society. Entering that discourse submits one to that logic to a degree difficult at best to resist. It may not be too speculative to suggest that this is evidenced by the progressive weakening of the critical features of Left discourse and the apparently interminable aspect of the debates, no doubt as well under the limitations regressively imposed on society by a relentless, powerful, and reactionary Right. The accumulation of formal constraints on progressive reform by themselves make it difficult to imagine how even approximations of progressive goals might be achieved much less recognized as achievements.

To clarify the logic of political exclusion, the attempt to purify the Left by denying its possibility, it is necessary to move from a description of its increasing generalization to an account of how it might operate in discourse and in literatures that are either beholden to political discourse or are intended to influence it. My aim is to defend an understanding of theory as

critical activity limited only by relations constituted by its object and therefore without independent limits. This is exemplified, as above, by Marx's critique of political economy, and an attitude of self-acceptance on the part of Leftists based on recognizing the dependence of the very idea of a Left on a past that is complex, divided, unsavory in many respects and genuinely progressive in others, and that has been interpreted by forces committed to a sense of national order incompatible with the idea of a society.

As the concrete referents of anticommunism disappear, the generalization of its logic operates as a kind of latency, always anticipating an object but indifferent to specific content: It is available for any particular crisis, any criticism of policy, and any negative response to that policy. It is all the more powerful when combined with pre-existing exclusionary ideologies, with nationalism, and with the longstanding discourse of the obligations of empire, and it is available to justify whatever invasions are undertaken in the name of the nation. As a logic of crisis, it easily becomes a collective rule of historical and sociological interpretation, what Emile Durkheim would have called a "social fact," difficult to resist. This "political unconscious" acquires modes of substantiation in the course of its practical realization that constrain discourse beneath a surface of voluntary participation. I have discussed some of them above. They include the use of abstract categories immune to criticism; reliance on a method of fixing belief that organizes selected material offensively, as in a "brief" for one side or another of a legal case; a tendency to derive normative consequences from conclusive and nonhypothetical assignments of rigid typenames and to take the results as sufficient for judgments of what are thereby named; and a way of dealing with the risks of possible errors according to the format of a worst-case scenario.

These modes are defined by their ways of determining similarity and difference—e.g., us and them—insofar as the context, now endlessly referred to as one of permanent danger and imminent threat, demands a Manichean view of the world in which evil is identified according to national imperatives, increasing militarization, and uncompromising reaction. This demand is necessarily positive and antireflective. Despite the fact that its proponents use the language of sports to give force to the rules by which they substantiate their decisions, they distinguish them radically from the morally indifferent rules and moves of a game. When empowered, reaction has little choice but to see itself as engaged in an arena of struggle with a great evil, and to give itself the biblical status of the heroism of the few who know the evil, yet desire to save civilization even at great cost of life—with barely a glance at what I have been calling "society." This way of thinking does not necessarily extend to other aspects of life where conflicts and crises are managed according to the exigencies of very different contexts. But the possibility of such an extension cannot be excluded. We have certainly seen intimations of it in the sectarianism that appears so threatening in American society at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Yet, in regard to the specialized context of the national state,

where the grand and moralized politics of elections only seems to satisfy the interest of society, the generalized logic of the Cold War serves the interests of power over and above and against the interest in social progress, increasingly limiting our sense of the possibility not only of a Left future but of a future for society itself.

A final point needs to be made in regard to the question of judgment, one that is especially important when the issues are as controversial as some of those discussed in this book. It has to do with an implication of the idea that thought and practice can only be understood as socialized courses of activity. This is logically prior to their being considered for the degree to which they approximate a normative ideal (of analysis, rationality, consistency, coherence, usefulness, etc.), which, itself, may or may not have an additional justification.⁴⁴ The criteria for adjudicating arguments in the human sciences, for coming to judgment, are necessarily constituted within the ongoing activity—e.g., of arguing—and cannot be taken as settled prior to it. Indeed, there is no obvious subject position from which it could be so taken and no known method for guaranteeing (in knowledge and in practice) the existence of a prior settlement. Even the *semblance* of settlement in advance, which could only occur under different conditions from those developing in the further course of activity, would be inconsistent with the notion of a judgment as a conclusion of an activity, any ostensible end of which can only be momentary (and nothing but an *ostensible* end can be imagined).

This is an uncomfortable, logical truth for those who prefer the convenience, and privilege of self-affirmation, of never having to look back. Many of the most serious and self-critical discussions about the character of the Left, imaginable futures, the historiography of communism, the significance of the Cold War, and the like, are interminable precisely because the criteria for settling them are constantly shifting with the course of their becoming “settled.” This is not a defect in need of a cure. Nor is it a result of the failure of participants to reflect adequately on what they are saying and to clarify it. It is the very character of judgment, and the course of its development as such, that makes a prior settled criterion logically impossible—unless one conceives of the “end” of an argument as essentially dictated by its ostensible beginning, with nothing more needed beyond that but to fill in the blanks and persuade one’s opponent. The very idea of discussion as a course of activity implies that the criteria for settling issues are themselves unsettled in advance. Judgment is, then, an “ongoing accomplishment” before its statement becomes a topic within another such activity (cf. Garfinkel 1967).

Judgments are to be treated, then, as commitments no less than as attempts to reckon with difference, at least to the extent to which one takes their statements as seriously intended. To that extent, they can be thought of as indicating a far greater choice, no less reified for being moral, by the momentary judge: namely, to be the very sort of self-constituting moral be-

ing who might conclude just what he or she concluded, and to conclude it in connection with yet other possible conclusions. It follows that the existential criterion for a judgment, what it unavoidably says for or about the “judge,” which by now is itself a precarious notion, is no doubt part of a yet different discourse, whether explicit or not; and the discourse presumably giving rise to the judgment is never complete but is incorporated in this further encompassing one.

Judgment always presupposes a process, an activity, in which what is settled is not merely the given inscribed “result”; nor could it be. It presupposes that the conditions of deciding which “result” momentarily to accept are themselves ongoing accomplishments rather than fixed from the outset. This is, I take it, a logical fact. It is only problematic if one refuses to consider the existential, moral problem, in which case the options seem to be absolute assertiveness or skepticism, neither of which is tenable. It is presupposed by what I have written so far, to the extent to which it is addressed to the human sciences, in particular to the historiographical considerations that pertain to those disciplines, and to politics. In critiquing an argument, in offering alternatives, and so forth, the aim is always to unsettle finality and to try and come to terms with what might be, for the moment, at stake in attempting to come to a final judgment. But, of course, “what is at stake” is not merely determinate in advance, though “that something *is* at stake” might be taken by the parties to a discourse as an organizing principle of their own. The “what” that might be at stake generally must be said to be constituted in the course of coming to terms with one or another question. How that question comes to arise as incorrigible and urgent is another question, though I believe it lends itself to the same considerations. Normally the questions with which one seems to be beginning are not taken up without precedent; rather, they arise in the course of an activity in which questions of one sort or another, including whichever come to appear most important to continued activity, are instantiated. Debates within and about the historiography of communism seem to be instances of how discourse comes to be constrained in antidiscursive ways such that questions about the criteria of judgments and the moral/theoretical significance of any explicit criteria are elided, just as, or so I have claimed, the elision of the political Left in accounts of American society (*qua* society) amounts to an elision of the critical aspect of a society that cannot be understood apart from that aspect.