CHAPTER THREE

HARRISON WHITE AND SOCIAL THEORY

"By what staggeringly unlikely concatenation of
constituents did some such marvelously singular
system of integration come into being?"

— Harrison White (1992a: 243)

In this dissertation I am examining how Harrison White's structural-
network could be explored from the perspective of critical theory. These insights
and arguments stem from many readings of White's general theory of social
structure. To gain any headway in grasping the critical theory of Harrison White,
the larger project itself must be apprehended. Consequently, this chapter explains
the major claims, arguments and concepts advanced in White's general social
theory, insofar as they might influence and resonate with the concerns of critical
social theory, and inasmuch as it required to give a coherent understanding of
Harrison White's theoretical work as such. More specifically, I present and try to
use White's conceptual apparatus as sort of a guidebook for thinking about and
negotiating constellations of control in network society — as a crib sheet for how
action might happen within the social spaces of Weberian "formal rationality,"

Foucauldian power-grids, or in the line between Habermas's "system" and "life-world."

My treatment of White begins with the big concepts and then wends its way to increasingly particular and concrete assessments of his enterprise. I start by offering a short statement on the key afflictions that constitute what I call the "madness" of Harrison White, one which examines how and in what way White's approach is at odds with dominant or customary forms of sociological theorizing.

In the second part of this chapter, I offer a critical distillation of the relevant sociological literature that has remarked on White's goal of shaking up social science, and addresses in particular essays by Brint (1992) and Prendergast (1997). Section three tries to get at the root meanings behind the concepts of identity, control, and social ties, which sets the scene for examining his notions of disciplines and institutions.

The Madness of Harrison White

Comprehension of Identity and Control is problematized by the fact that this is a mad book — one "by definition insane" (Tilly 1993a: 307).[1] Craig Calhoun (1999) recently suggested that White's approach resembles the search for the "lost city of Atlantis"[2] — he doubted that White would ever find it, but noted that this did not obviate the fascinating treasures he might unearth in the process.

White's theoretical writing does indeed attempt to further the best sort of social theory, those efforts which "delve beneath the surface of observed cultural forms to find the 'deep' principles and logic according to which empirical reality functions" (MacLeod 1995: 13). Yet White's effort is even more thoroughgoing than most theoretical

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[1] "In social science the only sanity is to eschew sanity, common sanity. To be sane is by definition not to penetrate the common-sense that conceals the inner mechanics of social reality" (White 1992a: 21).
[2] White's (1999d) response to this remark was, "Well, I think I am getting close . . . Why not?"

sociology in this regard and he is arguably among the best living sociologists to strip theory and "society" down to its barest essentials to reveal the salient qualities of social process and structure.

In order to shake us free from of our commonsensical sociologies, White uses a theoretical vocabulary that is explicitly designed to seem foreign and idiosyncratic to most social scientists. In the introduction to Identity and Control, White comments that he

> must work hard to establish a word for each principal construct, the relations among which are to serve as my axioms. Yet these terms must be introduced in bunches . . . which can be maddening to the reader. An additional problem is that all these terms, without exception, are also words in the English language, many with the numerous and subtle connotations captured by an unabridged dictionary (White 1992a: 15).

White argues that, in his theory, the following constructs differ from those of "ordinary usage": *social organization; identities; control; dispersion; disciplines; tie; networks; stories; structural equivalence; network-population; institutions; styles; persons; self-similarity; decoupling; embedding*; *ambage*; *ambiguity*; and *getting action* (White 1992a: 16-18), and he nominates a whole host of others that are used in a "sense special to this book."[3]

What are we to make of these admissions? In short, that virtually all the constructs that White uses to build his theory are used in some way specific to his project. White's making of a new vocabulary for social theory, his new description and

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[3] These are: contingencies, comparability, interfaces, arenas, councils, valuation ordering, quality, purity, prestige, catnets, story-sets, corporatism, clientelism, values, corporate actors, positions, role frames, profiles, professionalism, embedding ratios, differentiation, dependence, and involution.   When White refers to these terms as "special to this book" (White 1992a: 16), I take it to mean that these terms are the crucial ones for understanding the argument that White is trying to make in Identity and Control.

imagination of the social, is vital for understanding his contributions to social theory and represents a big part of his "madness." White is not as explicit as say, an Erving Goffman, who in his writings used a certain mode of argumentation and vocabulary "to disrupt [the] unselfconsciousness" of the reader (Goffman in Hazelrigg 1992: 249). Yet it is clear that White is battling with what he considers is a false consciousness of normal sociology, one which is oppressive to social science. In Harrison White's words,

> [M]y parsings resemble the parsings of fictional worlds, as I pointed out earlier, and they may also resemble the parsings of some children, madmen, and tribal peoples…Nor does my parsing resemble present adult common sense. Such combination of similarities and differences is quite reassuring, given two stipulations. One stipulation is that a main effect of social structure and process is to completely conceal its own nature from its minions, us. The second stipulation is that the more sophisticated and long-lived be the structure/process, the more complete is its hegemony over at least those actors deemed competent within its worlds. (White 1993d: 34)

What are we to do with these statements? What is the nature of these "stipulations"? Can we write this paragraph off, with some of his others, as "simply the hallmark of self-absorbed genius" Abbott (1994: 895)? Perhaps.

The question of White's "bad writing" recalls debates that flurried over the sort of representational style that was announced in Frame Analysis. Like Goffman's work, it seems that White, too, has "encountered the limits of the possibility of a vocabulary, a vocabulary that may be called, without preference, either one of 'everyday, ordinary language' or one of 'special, scientific language'" (Hazelrigg 1992: 251). Though White does not explicitly call for a new "language" for social analysis, one is implied throughout his work.

I argued in the introduction that White's approach could be seen as a move in and an exemplar of the dialectical approach.   It takes real work, concrete labor, to read a dialectical author, whether it is White, Goffman or Derrida on the table. And, as Hazelrigg reminds us, this battle to come to terms with idiosyncratic language use of difficult theorists — this labor — is "an accomplishment not merely of words and their fit to world but an accomplishment of world, of an up-bringing (erziehen)"(Hazelrigg 1992: 258).[4] Yet such accomplishments does not come easy, and as Hazelrigg (1992: 257) reminds us further, "the possibilities of a new vocabulary of uses are met with various resistances."[5] As far as White's Identity and Control is concerned, Abbott provides a piece of important evidence. As he says: "The Miami meeting of the American Sociological Association (ASA) was quietly abuzz with the verdict that Harrison White's Identity and Control is incomprehensible: a book of poetry, a theory manqué. Some said that even as poetry it isn't very good, others that it doesn't really make an argument" (Abbott 1994: 895).

Such resistance to a new theoretical vocabulary such as White's come not only out fear of the theoretical system under consideration, but also perhaps from an over-estimation of what a single book can do. To put this slightly another way, maybe White's book was initially dismissed as poorly written theory because it necessarily failed to accomplish what it set out to do, namely, to "reconstruct" the social and behavioral

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[4] For a more radical and lengthier version of this argument, see Hazelrigg (1989b).
[5] For a comparison with Foucault, see Hazelrigg's (1989b: 454) statement about the "perception of threat" generated by books such as The Order of Things.

sciences. That a single writer could accomplish such a task is "patently 'unsociological'" as Hazelrigg (1992: 257) rightfully points out.[6]

Harrison White's theory program is obviously a far cry from that of, say, Derrida, but his work does seem to hold an equivalent sort of potential — one of recalibrating regimes of academic discourse, of adding to the sociologist's toolkit. In the context of these projects, some sort of new social discourse or at least rhetoric must be called for. For Harrison White, this means that sociology must be something a lot more interesting than simply what "lay people" think it is.

This argument should not, however, be taken as some search for Archimeadian privilege on White's part; on the contrary. It has everything to do with the practice of control. White argues:

> Social scientists today may see challenges to their authority from ordinary persons, but only with respect to the phenomenology of everyday life, which most social scientists would concede to them anyway…. Since the laity are no status threat, surely they cannot be besting scientists! However, the 'laity' includes the jurists, bankers, all sorts of groups and persons preeminent over social scientists within existing stratification. And sometimes, perhaps, the preeminence is because of their professions' and professional insights are superior, especially for the aspects in which they specialize, whether or not a parallel specialty science, a sociology, or an economics, is split off. …. Whatever the outcome of any such particular argument, the very discussion concedes the basic point, since the discussion is, literally, in lay terms. (White 1992a: 290)

One lesson that seems to emerge from this paragraph is White's advocacy of discussion that is not in "lay terms." He suggests that a new style or rhetoric is needed which would insulate social scientists from hegemonic meanings found in existing "societies" and

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[6] Hazelrigg argues, for example, that Edward Said's excoriation of Derrida for being "unable to discover a new way of thinking that liberates us from old ideas" (Said, in Hazelrigg 1989b: 219), is a misplaced

social science. Harrison White would have us differentiate or reclassify social

phenomena on a slightly different level of abstraction. His attempt is to try to keep the

"tribe" (Cf. Swedborg 1991) of social theory together by giving us new ways to articulate

social structure — a basic step that any respectable "science" should take.

The question of White's theory of "science" is equivocal, and it is one that I do

not want to address in any great detail here. It should be noted, however, that in his

published output, we find both a vociferous critic of a naïve sort of "qualitative" or

humanistic sort of sociology, as well as what he calls "statistics as the new rhetoric of

confidence" (White 1980: 204).   For example, in his 1980 article, "Fear and the Rhetoric

of Confidence in Science" White called "too dramatic, too extreme" and rhetorical, the

views of those such as Robert E. Kohler who suggest that the scientific enterprise is "a

social institution, not different in any fundamental way from other economic, cultural, or

political institutions" (in White 1980: 200; cf. Hazelrigg 1989b: 170).   White also

expresses in that article a concern with what he called the "increasing humanization of

the sciences."[7] White argues that the social sciences "come to resemble humanities more

in a number of aspects: The creators of the field are required to be dead so as not to

interfere with the labor of their inheritors, the humanistic scientist-scholars, in their task

of polishing a rhetoric. The unpleasant ebullience of genuine discovery is replaced by the

charm of a scholarly ping-pong adopted from traditional Chinese literati" (White 1980:

205).

In recent years, however, it is interesting that White himself has borrowed from

and built upon the humanities so as to improve sociological theory. In Identity and

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criticism. As Hazelrigg (1989b: 219) puts it, "What an enormous task to ask of one person!"

Control, for example, he suggests that, "Literary criticism has much to say about stories and their grammars and voices. Ironically, humanists seem better aware than scientists of the paradoxical status of the person construct" (White 1992a: 21). In this later work. White also acknowledges the similarities between science and other social institutions (like magic and religion) and he also stresses the importance of rhetoric ("stories") in making science work.

While the specific network mechanisms responsible for White's shift in theoretical trajectory are unclear, the shifting historical terrain appears to account for at least part of this change in position. By this I mean to suggest is that science today, at least in the United States, is viewed as a less fearful institution than it was in the 1970s — transfixed on microtechnologies and pharmaceuticals, we forget, for example, about the threat of nuclear meltdowns. It is arguable that in his later work White in part relaxed the split between science and rhetoric because he now thinks that the institution of social science is well enough established so as to look outside itself for ways to enlargen its previous identity. A more accurate view might be that the very future of social science depends on sociology doing just that.[8]

On the other hand, White has not become an intellectual softy. While he has expanded his interests well beyond the realm of "mathematical sociology," he has by no means abandoned these concerns. His approach to science then, has also remained somewhat consistent. As White puts it, "I myself wish for a move toward less fear and more trust of science only on two conditions. One is that the sciences remain a relatively

[7] White does not, incidentally, bother to restate this critique in Identity and Control.
[8] It could also be argued that White considers statistics as the "new rhetorics of confidence" — more so that that the humanization of the discipline — as more pernicious to the discipline.

free and independent institution . . . The other condition is that science continues to produce miracles" (1980a: 205).   White is adamant that scientists should be free to pursue their own work, which he suggests should produce scientific discoveries. In Identity and Control, White decouples from any particular form of science, and uses a whole cabinet of theories, histories, and research methods to deconstruct the social milieus of virtually all of human kind.

Reading Identity and Control

These above statements concerning use of vocabulary and discoveries in a rejuvenated social science notwithstanding, the seemingly incomprehensibility of White's prose can also be explained in more mundane ways.   As Craig Calhoun (1993: 314) notes: "If this book had nothing important to say it would not matter that it is so badly written." Meyer (1993: 311), points to "an extensive (sixty-three page) list of works cited, not all of which are clearly cited, an index that is incomplete, and an appendix of 100 topics, conjectures, speculations, and questions that should have been built into the text."[9]

I wonder, however, if these concerns are simply matters of editorial oversight. What if, in fact, Identity and Control manifests the same social-structural-scrappiness that White is so interesting in theorizing?   More than detracting from his arguments, can this messiness be better read as an announcement of Harrison White's theoretical style?

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[9] Indeed, some of the errors and omissions are truly remarkable, and one wonders whether there was a move here by White to intentionally dissuade anyone from trying to conduct hermeneutically responsible assessment of his production. For example, Samuel F. Sampson's 1969 Phd. Dissertation, A Novitiate in a Period of Change: An Experimental and Case Study of Social Relationships (a work that is central to a number of studies in network analysis) somehow gets twisted in White's hands and in his bibliography reads simply as Sampson, Frank. 1969. "A Crisis in a Cloister."

It seems to me that much of the book's apparent messiness may be intentional.[10] Well more than half way through Identity and Control, White (1992a: 254) offers the following reflection. He says, "The reality frame implied by the way I am presenting this analysis is troubling. A certain tidiness, a sense of order and regularity in social process is being generated which is, for better or for worse, just not true." It is almost as if White, having taken much of the last twenty years building a new architectonic grid for social analysis, is now, just eighty pages from the end of the book, almost ready to blow the thing up and start afresh. Just what is going on here?

The key issue that concerns White in the above excerpt, it seems to me, concerns a too heavy an emphasis on social structure (of networks), one which belies the chaos of social relations on the ground. I suggest that White's obviously unsystematic and inconsistent style of theorizing, the strangeness of his syntax and grammar, and his inattention to bibliographic detail, all work to emphasize this basic point. It also illustrates White's conviction in the dynamics and trade-offs of what he calls ambiguity (i.e. cultural vagueness), ambage – "expanded mobility and flexibility among social connections" (Mische and White 1998: 710) – and contingency.[11]

More generally, it could be the case that White does not play into the "professional" game of social theory, because he knows that "professionalism is a style that inhibits innovation" (White 1992a: 223). In sketching out his argument in this way, is he trying to create for himself more power and control? White knows the basic

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[10] Yet there are crucial omissions, which severely limit any reader unassociated with White's group to gain access to his text. At the top of my list are the omitted guides to figures 2-3 – 2-6 in chapter two. These figures are at the heart of this chapter on disciplines. White claims that "footnotes in the figures supply background references which are the basis of these codings" (White 1992a: 49). The alleged footnotes, however, are simply not there. Since White makes so much of his index space for disciplines, such an oversight is surely a pity.

principle: from the unscrupulous street fighter who hits below the belt, to the supposed "irrationality" in US foreign policy, unpredictability is key to getting action (Cf. White 1992a: 236).

To be sure, not all social scientists will be interested in courting White's new episteme and it seems quite likely that many would-be readers will run from White's book as quickly as people turned down the brown acid at Woodstock. Abbot (1994: 895) captures the confusion of reading Identity and Control when he says that White often makes you feel like "a character in an Escher print, who after climbing four staircases has wound up on the bottom of the one he or she started on." Randall Collins suggests, and rightly so, that readers must learn an entirely new vocabulary divorced from the concerns of established social science. In a friendly and frank letter to White, Collins writes that that Identity and Control "is above all an exercise in network switching . . . it creates a new 'grammar' peculiar to that work." Yet Collins adds the following caution: "As yet there are no other speakers of the language" (1994: 2). Furthermore, the fact that White is himself, one would assume, a "person" (see chapter four, below) adds to this difficulty in vocabulary —White seems to be happy only when he is speaking to many different disciplines, institutions and conversations, all at once.

White's theory program does indeed seem daunting to the existing consciousness of normalizing sociology, and his work is indeed, "hard to read." Yet one can take his statement about research methods and apply them equally well to the task of coming to terms with his general theoretical project. As he puts it, "Alienation is the core requirement . . . You are already, and have long been, steeped in common sense, that is,

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[11] I discuss these trade-offs in greater length below.

in hegemonic understandings of the social around you. That greatly detracts from the possibility of fresh observation guided by a new and presumably more independent and scientific frame of constructs" (White 1993c: 117). Think of the basic terms and phrases that sociologists rely upon, e.g. "socialization," "how you are raised," "race, class, and gender," etc. All these constructs, upon close inspection, disintegrate as explanatory or even descriptive variables. White has put aside "the gemeinschaft and gesellschaft of introductory texts" (White 1992a: 296), and insists that we must recast these reifications in terms of social networks.

This point explains the little faith that White's holds in constructs like "individual" or "society."[12] Early on in Identity and Control, White (1992a: 3) offers the following declaration: "Effective theory of social relations is hindered by assuming that social action comes only from individual biological creatures – humans – as a consequence of their nature and consciousness as persons. This mirage of the person as atom breeds an obverse mirage of a society as an entity." Let us pause a minute to consider the meaning expressed in this statement.

Action not dependent on human nature? Action not dependent upon "consciousness"? Such remarks seem to question much social scientific theory and practice. Constructions such as human nature and consciousness have figured strongly in the history of sociology, from methodological individualism to Frankfurt school sociology. If "social" action comes not only from humans (and surely White is not saying that action stems from any godly design), then from where does or can action

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[12] Cf. Marx: "It is above all necessary to avoid restoring society once more as a fixed abstraction opposed to the individual" (Cited in Jay 1984: 61).

come? White suggests that the answer can only be in found in the struggles for control formed from the mismatches and contingencies of organizational networks.

White's final statement is perhaps no less radical than the first: "This mirage of the person as atom breeds an obverse mirage of a society as an entity." While it seems that a disparaging reference to "person as atom" would likely be conceded by most practicing social scientists today, White's claim regarding the "mirage of a society as an entity" might strike of atonality. For if we should not speak about society as an "entity" (as we normally do when we speak about the differences between, say, French society and American society, or feudal society and capitalist society) then what are we, as sociologists, i.e., people who study "societies," to say?

To White, the construct of "society" is a "mirage," [13](White 1992a: 3), one which pollutes and hamstrings social analysis.[14] This has been a persistent argument. In a technical paper on network flows in the early 1970s, White stated: "Surely it is commonplace that the formal Table of Organization with its inane tree structure is a mystification, an ideological fixation of managerial types" (White 1973: 48). Like, organizational charts, political parties, and markets (see White and Eccles 1986) White claims that "societies" are also reifications — they simply don't have the solidity and the

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[13] Compare Mannheim (1957: 103): "The great mistake of every kind of lay sociology is that it considers such units as a political party, a family, a business corporation, a church or state as a sort of a mythical entity, that is to say, as a substantial unit, and fails to realize that these units are nothing but the integrations of diverse forces and tendencies."

[14] In a sense, White's critique can be seen to extend Boissevain's network argument against structural-functionalism. As Boissevain puts it, "the structural-functional model of society does not work at the level at which real people interact. . . . It is not enough for students of social behaviour to ask: 'What is the pattern of social relations?' and 'How is this pattern maintained?' the two fundamental questions which structuralists concern themselves. They must also try to explain the system in terms of something besides the system. That is, they must also ask: "How do such patterns emerge? and 'How are they changing?'" (Boissevain 1974: 5). With Boissevain, White is also ultimately interested in how social patterns emerge and how they are changing. White does not think that they are being adequately addressed by most sociology.

contours that we usually attribute to them. Moreover, he suggests that, too much attention to this macro terrain of "society" also obscures what White calls the "middle range." As he put its, "The real crux for analysis . . . .in social science are the messy intermediate regions where it is hard to project crisp levels in rhetoric" (White 1992a: 289).

An early statement, written as a draft syllabus for one of his courses at Harvard, makes clear White's basic conceptual approach:

> [L]ike all social engineering, organizations come swathed in a heavy cocoon of rhetoric – not just particular ideology or mystification of some class or faction but a more general fog of folk wisdom that buries much of the most important aspects in the taken-for-granted and thus invisible. The term organization itself is misleading: it is meaningless to think about or try to make sense of "the" formal organization – like a state, an organization is meaningless except as a member of an interacting population of such, whose interaction does much to shape and define the broad institutional context which in turn evokes, makes possible and shapes the population of interacting organizations. (White 1980b: 1)

Yet in saying the "formal organizations" and "societies" do not exist and that these terms are often quite meaningless, White is definitely <u>not</u> taking the conservative high road á la Margaret Thatcher's notorious 1987 statement that there is "no such thing as society: there are individual men and women, and there are families," because White doesn't believe in "individuals" either. Individuals, according to White, are also myths, holdovers from Enlightenment exegeses on the soul.[15]

Moreover, White has for a long time projected distaste for modern scientific iconography, and he makes it clear in <u>Identity and Control</u> that he will not directly engage established sociological traditions. As he writes: "I need to mine the resources and

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[15] As Warsh (1993: 77) comments, Harrison White has "fundamental significance for those who want to see social life as more than a collection of purely individual decisions."

current social science in a newly selective way. The great masters took everything as their scene and thus do not provide me with densely specific insights on which to build" (White 1992a: xi). Needless to say, White's theory construction creates a dilemma for any reader trying to get a grasp on White's project, since his references and citations are not of the usual "sociological" variety.

As White lectured at Harvard: "It is silly to begin study of a science with critical accounts and comparisons of the work of masters; that is the road of the dilettante" (White 1968: 1-3). One implication of White's project, then, is essentially an abandonment of the sociological canon.[16] Rather than repeat the "frightened repetition of the already said" (Foucault [1977b] 1980: 110), White endorses the construction of innovative network models of social process.[17]   Above all, White's efforts build upon the bracketing of "boundary constructs, beginning with culture and society." As a contrast to what he sees as these unnecessarily totalizing notions, White suggests that the social processes to be observed are "local, stochastic, and historical," and operate within the heterogeneous spaces of social networks (White 1995a: 1060).

Social networks[18] are White's alternative to what he sees as the chimerical notions of societies, organizations or individuals, which as he sees as rather misty foundations for social science.   However, what emerges to readers patient enough to work through Identity and Control — a book Collins (1992) calls "the theoretical statement that

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[16] In this, of course, White can be counterposed to Habermas, who suggests that "productive theorists of society" must conduct a "dialogue with the classics." Habermas writes, "the ability to appropriate and work up the best traditions is indeed a sign of a social theory's powers of comprehension and assimilation" (Habermas 1989 [1981]: 199-200).
[17] Of contemporary sociological theorists, White states that: "Niklas Luhmann comes closest of any recent theorist to teasing out an explanation of transitions to modernity from a comparative statics, in terms of his constructs differentiation and autopoiesis" (White 1993d: 3). It is beyond the scope of this work to explicate the linkages between Luhmann and White.

network theory has been awaiting" — is White's frustration, if not wholesale

dissatisfaction, with the theoretical trajectory of present day network analysis. As he

puts it in his article, "Constructing Social Organization from Multiple Networks," (White

1998a: 3), "the essential nature of <u>social</u> networks is that they are self-shaping . . . a

social tie presupposes network and generates further ties in that or other networks. <u>This</u>

is the axiomatic essential."[19] It is also not an argument to which network analysts have

devoted much attention.

In spite of his prominence and centrality in advocating the merits of the network[20]

perspective, it seems that White's sense now is that network constructs themselves run

the risk of becoming reified. Abbot (1994: 897) captures some of this with his statement

that "sociograms are just water wings that White wants to throw away." The key brief is

that a monomaniacal faith in network analysis can "confound and obfuscate research." As

White puts it: "Ambitious MBAs, upwardly mobile yuppies, executives, social workers,

journalists, all agree on the importance of networks. Since sources this diverse all agree

on the advantages of 'networking' as social process, the term must confound many

interpretations, and thus it confounds much social science fieldwork attempting to use

network terms and concepts" (White 1992a: 290). By using the word <u>confound</u>, I take it

that White means that analysis must move beyond the scope of social networks, <u>per se</u>.

One must be careful, in other words, not to lose sight of other, equally important

relational dynamics. It is important not to mistake, for example, casual acquaintance for

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[18] See chapter two.
[19] This is one of the key reasons why he thinks that "social" dynamics are special, and why analogies to, for example, "water or gas or rail distribution networks," (White 1998a: 3) are only partially correct.
[20] White refers to network analysis as the "most important advance in sociology in the half-century since Parson's first book" (White 1993b: 85 n27).

network tie proper; or to misperceive the broader context within which network dynamics play out (e.g. in institutions, styles, and persons).

White argues the point directly: "Until now, network constructs have lain undigested, increasingly indispensable for phenomenological insight, but inert theoretically." Moreover, he claims that social networks "have misleading overtones of nodes being monads and of ties as lines in physical space with Cartesian dimensionality" (White 1992a: 64, 64n). In short, White has become increasingly wary of the voguish nature of social networks in academic discourse. The risk is that networks may become no better at informing sociological insight than do current reifications, say "the Holy Trinity" of "race, class and gender."[21] Nor is it enough, White says, to simply "add a social network" (White 1992: 217) to one's analysis.

What is innovative and significant about White's theory of social networks, then, is that his analysis does not stop at the mere point of connection among or between social entities, but rather goes deeper into anthropological issues of substantive social organization. Gone are the days when network theory simply revolved around the graphical structure of dyads and triads on an X-Y grid. White is emphatic that a "social network is a network of meanings" (White 1992a: 67). To capture these scrappy and messy network processes, White suggests that social theorists must change some very basic ideas about social organization. He argues, "Social organization is a shambles

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[21] This is not to say that these constructs are themselves incompatible with the network approach, quite the contrary. Rather it is meant to signal a move away from a categorical conception of these variables into a more relational direction. On the question of race, White comments: "The most significant task of embedding in the United States is of African Americans, and there will be found the greatest scope for narrative creativity and witnessing identity" (White 1993: 107). In that same work, Creativity and Careers, White (1993c: 197) also states: "Gender identities are perhaps the most urgently expressed concerns among us at the present time."

rather than a tidy crystal.[22] . . . Theorists of social process commonly assume that their

space resembles the planetary heavens as a vast playing field in being regular,

continuous, neatly measurable, and controlled by precise rules or even by clockwork . . .

[but] liquids, polymer gels, minerals, or coral reefs provide more appropriate metaphors"

(White 1992a: 23, 308).

     In the next section, I offer a brief and critical distillation of relevant literature

produced in response to White's work, and I also examine a couple of longer critiques

that have tried to penetrate the murk of Harrison White.

Critiquing Harrison White

Compared to the urgency of its signaling, the published response to Identity and Control

has been minimal. The secondary and critical literature on White's approach — which

can only crudely be labeled a network brand of structuralism — is virtually non-existent,

just as it was in the 1970s Mullins (1973).[23] Only a few authors (e.g. Brint 1992;

Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994; Prendergast 1997; Wächter 1998) have really tried to

grapple with White's project, or at least different stages of it, as a totality. While there

are many references to White throughout literatures in social science, his contributions to

these fields very often remain more acknowledged than articulated.[24]

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[22] Cf. Marx: "The present society is no solid crystal, but an organism capable of change, and is constantly changing" (Cited in Jay 1984: 27 n.4).

[23] One reason for this may be an assessment on the part of the column of White's students (some of whom themselves are reaching retirement age), that writing about White would be tantamount to a sort of attack on the primordial father (Brain 1998). Another reason could be that White's network and the domains in which he moves are typically hostile to the mere "exegetes" who are thought to be too busy polishing metaphors to be much use scientifically.

[24] These citation practices are quite at odds with White's own citing of other texts, viz. not to distill any deep meaning that may reside in them, but to read mainly in order to note or take over the arguments, speculations, and evidence of other researchers, knowledge which is then put to work in one's own project.

Although there has yet to be much detailed, conceptual and critical work on Identity and Control, the book did manage to garnish a fair number of (mostly positive) intensive and analytical reviews. Of these, Andrew Abbott's commentary is perhaps the most enchanting. Referring to the book as "one of the truly important works of the last 40 years," (Abbott 1994: 901), he writes,

> It is not a clear, propositional vision that will be teachable in two sessions of a graduate theory course or become a neat chapter in a theory text. But at heart is a compelling and brilliant vision. For while this book may seem confusing and difficult, it is showing us the most important directions sociological theory must take. Thirty years from now, it will be known as a centrally fruitful and classic text . . . Thirty years from now, this book will be alive. (Abbott 1994: 896)

Craig Calhoun, on the other hand, sees White's contribution to social theory as less grandiose and suggests that it can help us in more specific ways. Rather than swallowing the entirety of White's argument, Calhoun suggests that White will be remembered mainly for his "middle-range" contributions. These contributions "lie not in the architecture but in [White's] specific insights and conceptualizations," which, he says, should rank "alongside 'manifest and latent functions' and 'reference group' in sociologists' everyday vocabulary" (Calhoun 1993: 315).

Raymond Boudon takes a further step, one of dismissing White's project at its very roots. Taking issue with White's contention that the "identity of modern sociology has become barely perceptible," Boudon suggests that the organizational solution to this problem will be found by utilizing a minimalist style, rather than a strong reconstructive program. Boudon gives the example of history as an academic discipline. He writes that nobody "dreams of grounding it, of organizing its activities around a small set of axioms. Still, it enjoys an 'identity'" (Boudon 1993: 312). Boudon doubts that White's book

"will cure the social sciences," and closes his assessment by claiming that White's fundamental constructs, identity and control, "do not define a program, much less an alternative to the ruling sociological apparatus" (Boudon 1993: 314).

Boudon's argument, however, seems to imply that the main purpose behind White's reconstruction of the social sciences is in fact a strong program of the kind Boudon is discussing. Such a view might take White's interest in, say, formalizable theory as "the" goal of White's enterprise, rather than one goal among many. In fact, the elements of a strong program in White's theory are quite marginal to the enterprise as a whole. As he puts it, "the scopes possible through [formal] models are so limited and so oddly scattered that I restrict discussion of them to footnotes, references, and an appendix" (White 1992a: 15). If — and this is to extrapolate from Boudon's remarks — some of the apprehension of would-be readers to Harrison White is sort of an unconscious fear of yet another oppressive, totalizing theoretical system, they will have to wait a long time for one to develop.

At the moment, there only seem to be about three other critiques (Brint 1992, Prendergast 1997, and Wächter 1999) which have systematically dealt with the core of White's theory of social structure. I would like to briefly discuss two of them. The first main critique of Harrison White, written by Steven Brint (1992), alleges (and this ties in with the sort of fear that I invoked above) that White is too much of a structuralist and that he ignores issues of culture. Brint argues that, in White's work, "concern with cultural elements is consistently marginalized in favor of a focused concern with structural elements — which is to say, relations among sets of positions" (Brint 1992: 195). Brint's view is unfortunate, to my mind, because it too easily

dismisses the challenge of White's project and generally has the effect of dissuading would be readers from looking to White for help with their social-anthropological research. White does not neglect culture. Indeed, in explicating the phenomenology of, for example, gay bars, Bob Dylan, romantic love, and the art world, White is engaging with the core of contemporary culture.

It is not then, culture per se which is neglected in White's work, but rather a theory of culture that starts unapologetically from a conception of the individual as a self-standing entity. Brint, though suggesting (1992: 195 n.3) that he has at least glanced at Identity and Control, obviously has not absorbed much of it. If he had, he would realize that, for White culture certainly does not emerge "out of a cultural and organizational vacuum." Quite the contrary. White's conceptions of valuations, styles, stories and disciplines, provide just the sort of cultural context that Brint claims is missing in White's project.

Furthermore, contrary to the Brint's assessment, White does take into account "what people say about themselves and others" (Brint 1992: 204), and the relativism of White's own project (e.g. White 1992a: 305) speaks against Brint's claim that White's band of network analysts regard themselves as "white coated scientists" (Brint 1992: 204). As White argues, "Any packaging as style that we discern as observers must also show up in the actors own terms. These are not accounts of bare values, but are embedded in stories" (White 1993d: 76).[25] Furthermore, the heavy emphasis that White places on struggles for "identity" and "control" — terms that are ubiquitous in "cultural

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[25] Early on White had recognized the irreducibly relativist nature of science, when he wrote that: "The operational meaning of a scientific law, and hence the correct way to solve a technological problem, is what the network or communities of scientists say it is at a given time" (White 1966: 5).

studies" — also argues against Brint's belief that White is creating "skeletons without souls, relatively empty formalisms spinning outside the orbit of human history" (Brint 1992: 206). Brint alleges that White's nomothetic theory program is emblematic of formalist hegemony within the discipline of sociological theory, one that detracts from what he sees as the more important, and neglected concerns of idiographic, which is to say, Weberian, social science. As he argues: "[T]he absence of a vital idiographic tradition allows the culture of nomothetic theory, of which White's work is a particularly pure example, to stand as the unchallenged version of theory" (Brint 1992: 206).

In his reply to Brint, Harrison White (1992c)[26] claims that, contrary to Brint's assertions, the "grammar of structural equivalence is available to idiographers to help them make sense of culture through examining its social channeling" (White 1992c: 210). He takes Brint to task for questioning the analytic separation of cultural from social dynamics and then goes on to foreshadow later arguments, for example, that: "Culture structures stories and itself builds from stories. Stories are used in sets within social process" (White 1992c: 211).

It should also be remarked that, unlike the implications of critics such as Brint (1992) and Prendergast (1997), White does not subscribe to some sort of crude positivism where it is believed that human networks operate in a manner identical to control systems found in, say, mechanical engineering. He simply suggests that we can come up with clearer models of human networks if we think analogously about the dynamics from other systems. Almost three decades ago, White (1973: 48) commented, "The properties

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[26] This short statement also represents one of White's more sustained attempts at published theoretical reflexivity, and is one which can also serve as a good introduction to what he calls his three "obsessions":

of persons as nodes are so different from those of machines that the network ideas we have borrowed from engineering must be recast." More recently, he has argued that social dynamics are unique and cannot be reduced to vague rhetorics of system (White 1992a). As White puts it, "the social generates its own distinctive spaces of possibilities even though they are ones somehow intertwined with physical-biological spaces" (White 1992a: 308). As I mentioned above, social networks are different than other networks in that they shape their own boundaries: "Observable limits for a network depends on where one stands within it, and these limits also vary over time" (White 1992a: 79).

Christopher Prendergast's article on <u>Identity and Control</u> (1997) attempts "to introduce White's vocabulary and vision . . . to an audience of mainstream sociologists" (Prendergast 1997: 4). He is clear in his evaluation of White's book as "one of the great works of contemporary social theory," and argues that it "represents the most sustained attempt to reconcile 'structure and agency' and forge the 'micro-macro link'" (Prendergast 1997: 16, 4). Yet Prendergast also argues that White is ultimately unsuccessful in constructing a general theory of social action. He suggests that White's theory represents a new version of what he calls "objectivism," a theoretical foundation that neglects "human intentionality, rationality and personhood" (Prendergast 1997: 5).

<u>Identity and Control,</u> argues Prendergast, "denies the distinctive features of human agency and their contributions to the theory of action""(Prendergast 1997: 15). In response to White's statement that identities are the causes and consequences of social action, Prendergast stubbornly disagrees, and offers the individualistic retort: "Persons act" (Prendergast 1997: 15).   Surely this is a misapprehension of White's theory.

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dispersions, social space, and combinatorics (White 1992c: 210-212), which together mark the boundaries

Certainly "persons" act to the extent that they are "identities," or have relatively active identities. But the reason White focuses so much attention on identities rather than "persons," is because he wants his analytic scheme to work at a number of levels at once, across the "largest possible range" (White 1992a: 15).

While I think that Prendergast is partially successful in introducing readers to the general problematics to which White attends in <u>Identity and Control,</u> it is difficult to see what, in fact, he finds so redeeming in it — i.e. what statements it might contain that would warrant Prendergast's endorsement of the book as having a monumental impact on sociology. In other words, if the book is as flawed as Prendergast claims, why does he suggest that it "deserves the careful attention of social theorists and mainstream sociologists alike" (Prendergast 1997: 16)?

The main problem that I see with Prendergast's review is that while he may have correctly identified one method or research strategy employed by Harrison White, he ignores other equally important dimensions to White's project. Prendergast seems to be arguing that White's work is indicative of objectivist social science that does not take action seriously, but then he virtually ignores White's other modes of analysis. Prendergast only addresses one facet of his identity.[27] Despite his suggestion that White's book "fail[s] to give agency its due" (Prendergast 1997: 8), Prendergast does nothing to introduce the reader to White's theory of action, per se. He seems so set on trying to prove the dangers of White's "persistent objectivism" (1997: 8) that he doesn't allow for an understanding of White's theory in its own terms, and he virtually ignores all

of his work.

[27] See White's article, "Cases are for Identity, Explanation, and Control," where he lays out three basic modes of sociological methodology, all of which he mixes together in his own work.

of White's constructions such as "ties," "styles," "values," and "liminality," which argue against some sort of strong objectivism to be found in White. Prendergast has allowed the appearances of formal argument to distract him from what Abbott (1994): 896) calls White's "lyrical imagination underneath."

Moreover, Prendergast's failure to address other recent key theoretical statements by White (e.g. White 1992c; White 1992d; White 1992e; White 1993; White1995), works which address precisely the sort of social-psychological dimensions of social reality that Prendergast says is lacking in White's work, is also duplicitous as it suggests that Identity and Control stands alone as the culmination of White's theoretical development. Prendergast, like Brint (1992), gives readers an easy out — an explanation of why they should not read Identity and Control even before they have cracked the front cover.

As I mentioned above, the main contribution of Identity and Control to network theory is that it challenges network theorists to take the "deep shit" of society more seriously. It aims to articulate the gooey and fragmentary context within and around which social networks operate. White does not believe that static images of "networks" are sufficient for theorizing, but rather argues that theory should begin by theorizing identities in the context of "social molecules [and] dynamics of control, while recognizing influences from larger contexts" (White 1992a: 65). What then, are these identities? What does he mean by social molecules? What are these "larger contexts"?

Identities, Control Thrusts, and Social Ties

Theoretical discourse on "identity" is ubiquitous these days (see Gitlin 1995; Calhoun 1996; Castells 1996) as questions of identity creation and maintenance plague

deconstructionists and artists alike. In Harrison White's project the concept of "identity" takes on similar level of importance. As he puts it — and this could serve as a good statement for his general theory as a whole — "Identity becomes the starting point. The question is what identity may look like, how to recognize it on the ground, especially in early times" (White 1992a: 23). In this section I hope to clarify the meanings, definitions, and the uses of the notion of identity in Harrison White's general theory. If it is true, as White suggest, that "identity and control…drive the whole enterprise" (White 1992a: 19) then mastery of each of these concepts is crucial for any critical reading, let alone, expropriation of Harrison White's work.

Just what is exactly is the notion of identity in Harrison White and how can this conception help rejuvenate critical theory? That is the present focus. However, before I elaborate the main differences between Harrison White's concept of identity with those found within contemporary critical theory, I would first like to examine some of the ways in which White's concept in fact highlights some important themes of the latter. One may begin such a task with Boudon's (1993: 312) remark that, for Harrison White, "Identity — personal as well as social — is never a given … but always provisional, revocable, and uncertain." From this assessment, it seems that White's approach shares much with a sort of "poststructuralist " theorization of the fragmented self, though in White's case what is central is how the self is stretched out upon (or within) various social networks.[28] For White identity is never very far from concerns about "who and what I am" (White 1994a: 1), that is to say, with issues of self-hood, though one must sometimes extrapolate

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[28] These conceptions, of course, are by no means unique to our own age. See Hazelrigg (1995: 28).

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White's arguments about the latter from an illustration or application of identity at quite different level or scope.[29]

More specifically, one can see echoes of some themes in White's theory of identity in Trinh T. Minh-ha's definition of identity as "the whole pattern of sameness within a human life" ([1989] 1999: 544). This is identity as a style that permeates all the changes undergone, and it catches on some of the same phenomenological concerns as White's identity construct. Like Trinh T. Minh-ha, White eschews a "unified subject, a fixed identity," and thinks of social actors as being enormously complicated, perhaps even made up of "infinite layers" (Minh-ha [1989] 1999: 544). White shares the latter's view of identity formation as complex and turbulent, yet also stresses the importance of concepts that capture the sameness of identity over time. As I mentioned earlier, much of this sameness is conveyed by White's heavy reliance on what he calls the dynamics of self-similarity or scale-invariance: the method of transposing self-similar processes across large domains and scope.[30]

According to White, self-similarity means that phenomena perceived in one domain or instance of history simply must have its analogue in another domain. White insists on using the "same constructs for many scopes and levels of social spaces, times

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[29] While White does not address the "macro-micro" link directly, it is clear that his framework (hostile as it is to both stucturalist and rational choice perspectives) is meant to both circumvent and add to such research. On the "macro-micro link" see Hazelrigg (1991).

[30] White's notions of transposibility and self-similarity are closely related. On the former, he writes: "If there be a valid construct of 'empire,' for example, it must be recognizable in say, present-day New Jersey." He says that self-similarity is an "allied criterion . . . which applies as much to processes with feedback loops as to forms." Transposability thus seems a higher order level construct. He writes that: "Good social theory should be transposable to a considerable degree – transposable not only between different periods and sites but also across the distinct institutions among which we discriminate, such as polity, economy, society" (White 1998a: 1). Transposability is substitutability; self-similarity is resemblance in process.

and reference" (White 1993d: 2).[31] In this manner, he draws parallels between the

workings of academic science and Hindu castes (White 1992a: 118), and he is able to

find identity in both a wolf pack and a fishing party (White 1992a: 313). White claims

that the notion of self-similarity is important for social science in that it leads to

parsimony in social explanation, and it is important to those on the ground because of

social organization's "complex mixes and intertwinings across scale and level and

realms" (White 1995b: 59).[32] Self-similarity, he suggests, "removes the temptation to use

biophysical constructs as crutches in analysis, as substitutes for operational socio-cultural

constructs" (White 1993a: 3). Throughout his career, White has been crafting many such

analytic keys, "which turn across very different scopes of action" (White 1995b: 59).[33]

One important payoff from White's principle of self-similarity is that it urges

simultaneous analysis at seemingly disparate levels of social reality, a fact that displaces

individual human beings as the principle drivers of history and action. This is an aspect

of White's thought that sets it off from that of, say, Minh-ha, or other critical theorists

who focus so much of their analysis on individual experience. White sees such a focus as

misguided for sociology, and prefers instead to look at identities in the middle range,

namely employers, communities, crowds, superiors, or clusters of children on a

playground. Harrison White is interested in how identities emerge as and bring forth

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[31] This is another example of White's dialectical approach, not that far removed from another great thinker. As Ollman ([1971] 1973: 68) observes in his interpretation of Capital: "In both presenting the same thing from different angles and apparently disparate ones as 'identical,' Marx is trying to mirror a reality where entities are connected as essential elements in each other's Relations."

[32] See the White's "Preface" to Identity and Control where he discusses his "mother's second-cousins-once-removed, and how much that resembled the Navy bureaucracy which embedded [his] father" (White 1992a: xiv).

[33] Yet one must bear in mind that social organization is self-similar only in part. As he writes: "[H]istory as a whole has to presuppose genetics, geography, famine, pestilence, mineralogy, weather, whatever, and that is enough to disrupt self-similarity in a theoretical scheme, so that one is left with ad-hoccery" (White 1993d: 10).

social organization. In the very beginning of his book, White brings up the example of the Dutch pension, the Pauwhof, at which he stayed while he was finishing Identity and Control. White argues that the Pauwhof "is a perfectly real social actor," and then goes on to make one of the book's central arguments. He writes, "I claim that [the Pauwhof's] continuing construction out of network mechanisms, which crosscut several distinct social worlds, is very much the same as your construction as you, and mine as me" (White 1992a: xi). As this quote demonstrates, for White what is crucial to identity is its emergence and formation in the context of larger social organization, more specifically, in terms of networks of control.

As I mentioned above, identity is one of Harrison White's terms that should not be confused with "ordinary usage" (White 1992a: 15). White it seems would agree with, say, Marshall's (1998: 296) assessment that that "there is … no clear concept of identity in modern sociology," and in his work attempts to bring more clarity and precision to discourse on identity. Rather than being simply another word for social actors, or buying into the received view of identity as self-understanding, White defines identity as "any source of action not explicable from biophysical regularities,[34] and to which observers can attribute meaning" (White 1992a: 6). This definition necessitates further inspection. What White does not mean to say, of course, is that identity is any source of action which is somehow not explicable by biophysical process (which would be impossible), but only said "regularities." Identities, then are social entities that cause action that deviates from these regularities, and identity is the outcome of such deviation. Workers, for example, are not identities in so far as they stick to the routines and regularities of daily life; they

become identities (though, of course, sometimes only for an instant) when their labor practices are at odds with the normal and the customary, and which may lead to embeddings in alternate disciplinary formations. White stresses that identity needn't be particularly long-lived, but it "will not be taken seriously … until after some nonlinear eddy of affairs, some crisis" (White 1992a: 208).

Another problem with White's definition of identity concerns the question of whether there may exist things that qualify as "identities" without being "source[s] of action." In other words, does White equate identity as "any source of action not explicable from biophysical regularities" without remainder? Can social entities that do not fit into this definition also be considered identities? The answer seems to be both yes and no. On the one hand, White makes it clear that identities are the crucial determinants of social organization; indeed, one of his major tasks in the book is to make us "see social organization as arising from identity formation out of control efforts" (White 1992a: xi). To the extent that social formations count as social organization, they would appear to be part of the "biophysical regularities" that White claims is the antithesis of identity. Yet White's interest is in theorizing social organizations, i.e., social entities that persist with regularity over time. From White's theory, it would seem that identities (through control struggles) create social organization, but then once created, cease to be identities. Those intentional actors may still be called identities, but now only in a historical, rather than a contemporary sense, e.g. an intellectual or scientist who created a new field or published a significant article, but who then either rests on her laurels and rides out tenure or falls into the routinized tasks of administration. In any event, White is adamant that the

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[34] White's "biophysical regularities" are, of course, also <u>social</u> processes, given that "natural" processes are

operating principles of normal socialization are never simply out there for all to see; rather the "normality" of social organization acts as a "veneer on [the] interacting efforts of identity and control" (White 1992a: 4).

More generally, at other points White loosens his definition of identity to include more quotidian uses of the term. White summarizes four levels of identity (see below), at least one of which hinges on a conception of identity "which is close to what is meant by identity in ordinary talk" (White 1992a: 314). Certainly, then, we can call social entities "identities" which aren't necessarily sources of action, and White would not put up too much of a fuss.

On the other hand, it seems that White does treat identity as a special term, and may want to specify a definition of identity which as much as possible leaves no remainder. Contrasting the term "identity" with the phrase, "control efforts by actors," for example, White states, "I keep to the term 'identity' when what is at issue is original and unpredictable action by intention – and in particular and especially gaming" (White 1992a: 67). Towards the end of the book, White reiterates this basic theme (which, in my view, is his signal contribution to rethinking debates on identity). He writes: "Identities are the <u>only</u> source of intentional efforts, which is to say of potentially unroutine action" (White 1992a: 236, emphasis added). He reiterates this definition in his article, "Cases are for Identity, Explanation and Control," when he states that "'Identity' carries its social-psychological connotations of a self-aware entity capable of generating social action, which is to say, action not programmed as fixed repertoire of instinctual or learned response" (White 1992e: 85).

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always human productions (See Hazelrigg 1995).

In order to get a better sense of how White's concept of identity fits into his general theory, one can turn to his diagram of "nested triangles" (White 1992a: 19) and see how his identity construct is couched between "environment" and "control." By environment, White means not only ecological considerations and other biophysical states, but also and perhaps more so, social environments (which is to say, social networks). What White calls "contingencies" — "which bridge physical with social" (White 1992a: 16) — are born in these environments, and he argues they "trigger" identities. As White puts it in the introductory chapter, "A central claim of the theory is that identities are triggered by contingencies" (White 1992a: 5), and this is a theme he stresses throughout Identity and Control. As he puts it, "Identity is produced by contingency to which it responds as intervention in possible processes to come. … Identities emerge initially from rubbings together of mismatchings engendered in aid of distinct control and/or production efforts in given settings" (White 1992a: 9, 62).

On the other side of the equation, we have the relation between identity and control (on control, see below). Control comes about in dealing with the environmental contingencies: "Identities come from mismatches in contingencies and so perceive and try to control turbulence" (White 1992a: 215). Control is achieved through the embedding of disciplines (more on which, below), and it is the latter that provides the social cushioning and network support that suppress further contingencies. As White argues, "Any identity embeds to a new level of social action through its discipline" (White 1992a: 34). Identity is thus always a relation between contingency on the one hand, and intervention in terms of disciplines, on the other. Moreover, identities and control struggles do not come solo: "As the density of ties among a subset … reaches

some threshold value, the subset will come to regard itself as having an identity" (White 1992a: 63).

Identities and control thrusts emerge from micro-situational contingencies. A form of discipline is imposed upon otherwise unfocused interactions, as when a musician, for example, takes control of a stage or a musical performance and thereby changes the outcome and identity of the event. Another example might be the organizing of say, a "Cop Watch," program formed out of the networks and ties of otherwise disinterested college students. White's point is that social disciplines and control struggles give birth to new levels of identity and social action — a result of unending interactions and historical accumulations of contentious social structures in disciplines and network domains. As he puts it: "Identities add through contentions to the contingencies faced by other identities. Social organization comes as a by-product of the cumulation of these processes. When contending counteractions result in a dynamic equilibrium, we perceive social structure" (White 1992a: 6).[35]

I noted above how White is interested in shifting theorization of identity away from that of individual human beings. As he says in the introduction, "Identity here does not mean the common-sense notion of self, nor does it mean presupposing consciousness and integration or presupposing personality" (White 1992a: 6). We have already seen how for White the focus is on social entities of the middle range, namely corporations, "superiors," communities, and so on. Throughout Identity and Control, White further invokes his principle of self-similarity in the context of his discussion of events. White

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[35] White uses the term "dynamic" in this equation, because social organization is always a matter of the balancing of contending forces. He sees social organization as always in process; in perpetual movement.

claims that identities can also be events (and memories of events, e.g. "the French Revolution) and these events also trigger searches for control (action).

Yet this brings up an interesting question. If one of the defining criteria of identities is that they "seek" control, how can "events" be placed in this category? Since events do not exhibit intentionality or agency, how can they be considered identities? White does not directly address how "events" might "seek" control. In the introduction to Identity and Control, he comments that "identities are various, and include events" (White 1992a: 16). Just what is the nature of this inclusion?

Reading more closely into his work, it seems that identities and events are in fact not identical, but rather the latter give weight to the former. White states: "Identities and events are similar. Identities emerge out of turbulences in social process that do not appear accountable within any particular story. Events may be precursors to or consequences from identity formation, but they may substitute as a parallel to identities" (White 1992a: 76). Events[36] are comparable to identities because events are important sites of action and struggles for control, for example, in the latest protest against "globalization" or at the most recent Middle East summit.   As White puts it in chapter three of Identity and Control, in the context of his discussion of "Leifer ties," "Events become important as medium in which already established actor-identities interact, fill out stories, and possibly lead to still further embeddings into identity" (White 1992a: 86). Yet White also stresses how important it is for said identities to often avoid events which may impact negatively on their social standings, on their place within the pecking order. This insight explains why chess players and others pick their tournaments carefully, and

why, say, established politicians (e.g. Florida Governor Jeb Bush) so rarely make public appearances — better to remain behind the scenes to avoid any embarrassing guffaws.

So rather than being just like identities, events (like persons) are important in that they provide a common social environment where identities can appear. Not only do events exhibit the rough and ready intermeshing of networks and disciplines that give rise to identity, but because of this they generate story lines and accountings that evince a style and which may be used for further and fresh action. Events in other words can provide kind of precedents or standards for better things to come. So when, in the context of elucidating the dynamics of social mobilization, White says that, "events have to be generated and polished as identities so that issues can be forged" (White 1992a: 267), he means that events must become important and renowned sites of action. Events are to be remembered as the social space-times where history went down a new and unexpected path. It seems to me that this is White means when he states that "events themselves may become actors" (White 1992a: 135).

In the final section of the book, White attempts a concise restatement of his theorization of identity and its importance for his argument, in terms of what he calls the different "layers" or senses of identity. He suggests that a first level of identity as analogous to the need for "secure [social] footing" (White 1992a: 322). Identity in this sense can be seen in the examples of a child jockeying for position on a kickball team (White 1992a), or scientists competing for a prize.

A second level of identity involves social actors having some role within a concrete social locale, which is to say, a commitment to a social discipline (a social

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[36] In work subsequent to <u>Identity and Control</u>, White recasts his arguments about events in terms of what he

formation that regularly persists over time). The crucial dynamics here are "of an identity expressed and achieved through a social discipline." As White (1993c: 7) argues, this "second and more elaborate and quite distinct sense of identity is akin to 'face.'"[37]

White's third layer of identity is what he calls identity at its most social, and it is this usage which occupies the bulk of White's attention in his book. He claims that the third layer of identity "builds upon the first two" (White 1992a: 313). Identity on this third level stems "from frictions and errors across different social settings and disciplines" (White 1992a: 313). Whereas identity in the first sense is about responding to contingencies within a given social domain, and in the second, to occupying some social role, the third sense of identity opens into White's theory of agency and personal development. As White argues,

> Each human is in more than one social molecule. That is, each of us continues in several different roles that cross distinct realms, such as family and village and job and secret society, so that our actions and thence our selves crosscut these realms. Even as children, we mix with different groups while intermixing our living in different realms... There need be nothing unusual or esoteric in this sense of identity . . . [C]ontradictions in life – all the screwups, mistakes, errors, and social noise – are just what bring about establishment of identity in this sense. (White 1993: 49)

White (1992a: 314) suggests that identity in this third sense is "where social action centers" because getting action — maneuvering the future (White 1992a: 230) — is

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calls "situations." See Mische and White (1998).
[37] In his attempt to develop a social theory which is not at odds with socio-biology and evolution White (1992: 313) suggests that identity in these first two senses, "might already be found in wolf-packs, or hen-flocks, or monkey bands, and other such non-human social settings. No one is sufficiently expert to be sure." White (1992: 313) continues, "One test would be whether some examples of what we call artworks can be discerned in such settings."

determined in part by these network and discipline configurations. As he says: "Control attempts are endemic, and they interact and accumulate in erratic fashion. The [third] facet of identity is this constant exposure to the possibility of change in a discipline and in the realms within which it figures" (White 1993d: 11).

Finally, White argues that there is fourth layer of identity that is "close to what is meant by identity in ordinary talk" (White 1992a: 314). It is the social actor's own self-understanding as an identity, in so far as it is presented to others and itself by way of narration or stories. White argues: "The fourth sense of identity is all about rationalizations and failures of action. . . . This is identity after the fact as presented in accounts which may become woven into some unique narrative story" (White 1992a: 14). The "stuff of daily socializing, they are used in daily reconstructions by interpretation of selves and of social organization" (White 1992a: 314).[38]

White's stratigraphy is fascinating. Yet since it comes in the last three and one-half pages of his book, one wonders the extent to which it appears at the behest of some editor's need for "closure" to White's behemoth, rather than any need on White's part to write a neat and tidy conclusion (something which his argument says is impossible). Indeed, White almost dismisses his crude summary with the statement that it would be "silly to reify the four senses of identity, to set them up as separate personae," since they always "come wound together in the same constructed reality" (White 1992a: 315).[39]

Yet it would also be silly to simply take White at his word and to not examine more closely these various meanings and uses of identity, especially since, in my view,

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[38] This very dissertation is also an example of identity in this sense, as I am striving to weave accounts of and by Harrison White into a persuasive narrative story which will build larger identity, for myself, for critical theory, and network analysis.

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they leave out what is so crucial to White's definition of identity in the first place. In his stratigraphy, White in fact seems to play down a stronger sense of identity formation; the idea that what is crucial to identity is becoming new and "distinct social actor" (White 1992a: 25) — one that breaks the "stranglehold of pecking orders" (White 1992a: 70).[40] White's summary is unsatisfying if not misleading because there is little emphasis on what is "special" about identity in White's third "layer" of identity. Even though he says that this is the where the action centers, he also nominates as "the central fact of human social organization" that, "whenever, and wherever social organization has been observed, each human is in more than one continuing discipline, in more than one social molecule" (White 1992a: 313). Yet this "fact" seems to belie White's claim that it is blocking action, more so than getting action, that is omnipresent in social organization. In other words, White's summary almost makes it appear that identity (and thereby getting action) is simply a matter of network contingencies and one's reflections upon them. Moreover, White's continual use in his stratigraphy of the microsituational examples of, say, the social dynamics of children's play, as well as the structure of family networks, seem not only quite tame, but also to work against White's primary focus on identity dynamics at the organizational, rather than the individual level.

Towards the end of his book, White claims that, "Identity concerns fury and fear as well as sweetness and light because identity seeks control. Identity is urgent, and its expression is urgent. The former aspect implodes and the latter explodes the greatest of energies" (White 1992a: 312). Couched as it is at the end of a section concerning "the

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[39] In his book, Creativity and Careers, (White 1993c: 49-50) White switches the third with the fourth sense of identity, which may indicate the somewhat arbitrary nature of his summary.
[40] White (1993c): also says that this sense of identity "is at the core of any struggle to assert creativity."

rhetoric of identity and control," one wonders whether White here is just being ironic in describing the issues of identity and control in such an obviously rhetorical way.

Yet there is nonetheless much richness in this passage. If identities form at the juncture of environmental contingencies and social ties, then we can expect them to be either fearful or sweet depending on the sorts of styles, disciplines, and magnitude of contingencies in which identities find themselves and what struggles they are attempting to control. The emphasis on urgency, namely that which compels or requires immediate action, stresses how identity is always more about moves in a game rather than unceasing reflection upon present position. The last sentence in this excerpt means that action is a seriously charged event, one that is always accompanied by an existential sort of uncertainty that just kicked in a social institution to challenge an accustomed social pattern.

By way of conclusion to this section on identity, is instructive to compare White's theorization with one recently stated by his colleague, Charles Tilly. Funnily enough, in a recent article on social movements, Tilly in fact uses White's notion of identity as his definition of social actor. Tilly defines an actor as "any set of living bodies (including a single individual) to which human observers attribute coherent consciousness and intention," while he reserves "identity," for "an actor's experience of a category, tie, role, network, group or organization, coupled with a public representation of that experience; the public representation often takes the form of a shared story, a narrative" (Tilly 1998: 456). Given how much effort Tilly spent in coming to terms with White's book, and how much he admires in it, these definitions of actor and identity are quite intriguing. Unlike

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White, Tilly seems to reserve more intentionality for "actors," while he uses "identity" to connote more the experience and the representation of identity.

By contrast, in Identity and Control, White stresses that identity are the things of intention, while "actors" are the social forces of scripted everyday reality. While Tilly's definition does manage to nicely address the contextual dimensions to identity, his interpretative twist here seems to neglect the radical sense of identity elaborated in White's book, namely identity that exists by changing social organization. In fact, it seems that Tilly's usage of identity, when compared to White's stratigraphy, hits mainly what White calls the fourth level of identity (see above). This is identity in the sense of "accounts [that] are built from and stored in sets of stories and story lines…These sets of stories are the stuff of daily socializing, they are used in daily reconstructions by interpretation of selves and of social organization" (White 1992a: 314). In so doing, Tilly captures well the embedding of identity, but fails to address in any detail, the necessity of decoupling from and for identity.

When I posed this difference to Tilly (1999), he acknowledged the distinction between his and White's approach, but was not particularly interested in elaborating any more upon it. Indeed, in almost an exasperated fashion, Tilly said that although he believed in the importance of being clear about one's theoretical vocabulary, there reaches a point when it becomes an obstacle to social research. As Tilly continues his impressive career as one of sociology's top historians, it is clear that his interest lies more in theorizing social realities, than in the realities of social theorizing. Harrison White seems to share this view. On more than one occasion during my visits with White, he would respond to a query of his theory in rather disinterested fashion. He was rather

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happy enough to just to have the book finished, and White suggested that any further elaboration of his constructs and theoretical architecture was to be left up to social analysts and their investigations on the ground.

Certainly White's book offers no finality to the "question" of identity, and such an interest is also noticeably absent in <u>Identity and Control</u>'s two appendices. Is identity for Harrison White in the end just another sort of bracketing term?   While action and identity are always the focus for Harrison White, he also seems careful not to hypostatize these terms. Remember that for White, the key is "to develop social space from process, rather than the reverse" (White 1992a: xv). Applying this insight to thinking about identity, the lesson seems to be that one can get overly fixated on a question such as "What is identity?" to the detriment of other concerns. As White's theory makes clear, equally, if not more important, are the sorts of social processes and events that give rise to identity, such as contingencies, networks, stories, styles, decouplings, disciplines, and the like. Any analysis or observation of identity, therefore, must always bring the latter constructs into the picture. As White argues, "identities and their contentions come all wrapped in larger structures and processes that predate them" (White 1992a: 6).

I mentioned above how Tilly's notion of identity falls into the fourth layer of identity suggested by White. This sense of identity "what is usually meant by identity in ordinary talk…as biography," "the stuff of daily socializing," and "used in daily reconstructions" (White 1992a: 314). This is also the layer where most of critical theory's discourse on identity ends up. The term identity is too often thrown about quite loosely in social theory and sociology, and enjoys a familiarity not too different from commonsensical notions of the term. Whether we are talking about issues of

"recognition" or "distribution," gay struggles for liberation or the plight of Dutch prostitutes, this is the sense of identity that occupies the self-consciousness of postmodern critical theory. As White argues, "The fourth sense of identity is all about rationalizations and about failures for action. In this fourth layer of identity, action and its agency are suppressed. The third layer is where social action centers" (White 1992a: 314). If critical theorists are interested in action, as they at least purport to be,[41] then perhaps one way to proceed would be to rethinking identity in terms of Harrison White's scheme, a scheme that highlights the multiplicity and contradictory set of relations that are constitutive of social organization and the perilous social situations in which they are embedded.

In the next section I turn to address in further detail White's theorization of control. I then address his mappings of social ties and networks, which will bring us to his conception of disciplines.

On Control

In the previous section I attempted to bring some clarity to the meaning of identity in Harrison White's general theory, and in particular how it might relate to critical theory. Here, in a briefer intervention, I address some of the issues relating to White's concept of control, a concept that will accompany us through the rest of this dissertation. As Peter Abell (1993: 1084) notes, in White's scheme, the concept of "control…appears to do a considerable amount of conceptual work." Let's examine its productivity.

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[41] See Martin Jay's ([1989] 1996) analysis of the political inclinations of the Frankfurt School theorists, and also see Colletti ([1969] 1972: 111-142) for his critique of the politics of Marcuse, Horkheimer and Adorno.

Excepting efforts from authors such as Sites (1973) and Gibbs (1989), there has not been a great deal of explicit attention paid as of late to issues of control in social theory. More recent output in social theory has, rather, been more keenly aware of issues of "power."[42] Typically, when issues of control are breached in social science, they are prefaced by the word "social" — a usage that implies a rather brutal, oppressive and "top-down" style of control. Indeed, the hegemony of this usage makes it difficult to actually see what White means in titling his work, Identity and Control, and critical theorists who come across his book for the first time may not know what to make of the connection between the two terms.

Harrison White argues that control (as well as his notion of "action") is a two-faced concept. On the one hand, it seems that White would have us think that social organization simply is control. This is looking at social organization and the question of control from the perspective of disciplines, regimes, and institutions. Most of the time, argues Harrison White, social organization fosters rigid blockings-of-action that inhibit identities. In one of his lab notebooks from the early 1980s, White builds upon the work of dramaturgical theorist Kenneth Burke to suggest that control is "sustaining one's act" (1983: 37), which implies the smooth running of social actors in broader organizational culture.

Early in Identity and Control, White claims that: "Who 'we' are is all bound up with what 'control' is in social surroundings (White 1992a: 4), in disciplines. At one extreme of control, White provides as example the military drill where "persons are

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[42] See, for example, Foucault [1977] 1980); Foucault (1978 [1990]); Rouse (1989); Kelly (1995); Habermas ([1985] 1995.

induced to move in parallel within a little group which is both literally and metaphorically cut off from other social relations for a time" (White 1992a: 10). White argues that all social organization, i.e. the disciplines and networks that ensconce us, are always on the verge of hardening and blocking movement. They are reptating, as if in a "mineral before it hardens" (White 1992a: 4), and White warns of the danger of being too affixed to place. Yet even seemingly permanent networks of control are subject to social-ecological contingencies that can serve as openings <u>for</u> control.[43]

An alternative way of looking at the issue would be analyzing control in terms of these openings and to interpret "control" as the starting point of action. This is to situate control as the active taming of social organization and context. In describing these processes, White stresses control "attempts," with an emphasis on the plural. His approach further implies that no one in any organization or network is ever completely down and out; one can always exercise some control. In this, White's argument highlights arguments like that of Giddens (1984) and Hazelrigg (1989b) concerning the "nature" of transformative action. As White puts it, "Control is what identities seek in taking action" (White 1993d: 11).[44] Control is a matter of "social fixing," (White 1992e: 86) which implies solving problems, setting things right, and arranging the outcome of events.   Because they are inextricably linked, changes in control impacts shifts in

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[43] White is not, of course, arguing that the point is to be free of social organization and discipline. See Breiger (1990), who draws upon Simmelian sociology to propose a relational and network approach to freedom based on the notion of "control." Breiger urges us to conceptualize control not as "coercive control" but rather, as "the capacity of social collectivities to regulate themselves" (Breiger, 1990: 453).

[44] Compare Hazelrigg: "It is not that an entity exists <u>and</u> changes, as if in alternation between two distinct states of being, existence and change. Existence <u>is</u> change, the ongoingness of process. The abiding struggle is for control — 'control of the process,' shaping the ongoing to suit specific interests" (Hazelrigg 1997: 119).

identity that can be dissected as changes in network involvement and embeddings in other disciplines.

Harrison White is also adamant that control involves and is a response to others control attempts. He writes that, "identity plays off in control efforts against the spreads among other identities to enable some degree of balance and continuity to develop" (White 1992a: 5). Unlike more "compassionate" strands of critical theory, for Harrison White, control is indeed measured through gains and losses. For Harrison "the material of control is social relations"(White 1992a p. 254). The emphasis is always on gaining more, not less control, and he advocates the necessity and potency of criss-crossed and far-reaching control projects. As he claims, "one can seek control exactly from weaving a maze of uncoordinated and changing contexts around others" (White 1992a: 10).[45]

In an article with Eccles (1986), White invokes Mayer Zald's definition of control as "the ability of a person or group, for whatever reason, to affect another person's or group's ability to achieve its goals (personal or collective)" (White and Eccles 1986: 132 n.1). This does make control sound a lot like Weberian "power." Yet White and Eccles argue against an originary source for control (Cf. Calhoun, 1993). Rather,

> [C]ontrol can be mounted only on the backs of ongoing social processes, that is, it must work out of the energy exerted by people keeping their own footings in their immediate social milieus. Control exists when the efforts of actors to achieve their own goals yield a self-reproducing social structure. No one stands outside of this to supply some constitution or order and to flag who are the seekers of control. (White and Eccles 1986: 132)

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[45] This latter form of control might mark through traces of absence as much presence, and in so doing, may increase control (Cf. Derrida 1981). Invisibility can enlarge identity, as much as erase it. Absence can also increase control in more concrete ways, for example, in the case of a strike, or when not enough delegates bother to show up to make quorum.

These authors couch this point in a memorable aphorism: "Control is and must be opportunism riding the shoulders of structure" (White and Eccles 1986: 150).[46] The "self-reproducing social structure[s]" to which they allude in the larger quote, are what White would later call disciplines. I mentioned above the example of a musician who takes "control" of a stage or a musical performance. Most of the control that happens thereby is through the making of disciplines. A musician's skill or control utilizes cultural awareness as well as social capital, which means "both anticipation of and response to eruptions in environing process" (White (1992a: 9).

White stresses the importance of disciplines in his chapter on "Getting Action," when he concludes a descriptive paragraph of control with his statement that, the "search for further control, which is unending, keeps digging within complex social formation back into disciplines" (White 1992a: 232). Disciplines (more on which below) are the "distinctive units of mutually constraining efforts at control, which survive contentions among identities that were triggered by happenstance" (White 1992a: 23). Like identities, disciplines come out of struggles for control, and can spin these struggles off in new directions.

Yet, for all his insight into control — and perhaps mirroring the gaps in White's theorization of identity — White's concept of control is also not particularly well specified, and one wonders why some links simply are not articulated. For example, if identity and control are made tangible in terms of disciplines, are not the three main control "processes" (White 1992a: 32) that concern social actors (identities) to be

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[46] A few pages earlier, he had penned: "Control, in its subtlety and sophistication is always what the point is. That is just as true in industrial or economic context and modern times. Control is always a leverage

commitment, selection, or mobilization? It does seem that this is the case. Getting some

sort of control, which may precede action, must involve some combination of these

processes. Yet Harrison White does not systematically address these processes and how

they relate to control, and instead leaves them up to the discretion of social analysts.

In his review of White's book, Stinchcombe observes that the important point to

remember about identity and control is that they are "connected to the breaking and

reorganization of the ties and rankings." "Identities are formed by actions that are noticed

because they establish or break ties or rank orders. The capacity to reorganize such

orders is 'control'" (Stinchcombe 1993: 335). The social space in which these

reorganizations take place is largely determined by network ties, which I now address.

Ties From and Out of Networks

Harrison White argues that struggles for identity and control occur in networks of social

ties, which he defines as "a metastable equilibrium of contending control attempts"

(White 1992a: 67).[47] A tie "encapsulates struggles for control" (White 1992a: 67).

White claims that social ties — which are not simply about connections to individual

people[48] — imply and induce chronic reports or narratives that take account of the

situation at hand.   As mentioned above, White labels these accounting schemes "stories."

He claims: "All ties are defined by, and induce and respond to, stories" (White 1992a:

68).   Stories are thus a cultural counterpoints to ties; stories emerge from ties, and ties

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operation, a percentage operation on the backs of an ongoing social construction, is always 'behind the
backs of,' though not necessarily concealed from the population concerned" (White 1983: 5).
[47] A couple of pages later, White again defines social tie, this time as "a dynamic structure of interaction in
control attempts" (White 1992a: 69).
[48] "Anything about which you tell a story is a tie" (White 1992a: 68).

are born and die on the basis of different stories or "talk." White further argues that stories come in sets, the structure of which may captured by block-modeling (see chapter two).

White designates "talk as the chief medium and product of switchings in situation flows" (White 1995: 1036), and also as a means to 'get' action. Stories work both to constrain and further social action. Coming out of disciplines, "narrative exerts constraints of what we think of as choice, and quite aside from any emotional penumbra" (White 1993d: 26). Stories and ties, through identity and control, build up social organization. The architectural connotations of these words, with stories implying height and structure and ties (e.g. railroad or otherwise) indicating breath and foundation does not seem to be lost on White — they are quite literally the foundations of the social. As White states, "identities come to perceive the likelihood of impacts from other identities in some string of ties and stories" (White 1992a: 65). In other words, how identities get their bearings in and on social organization are crucially intertwined with and determined by their ties and stories.

White also calls ties "aborted disciplines"[49] (White 1992: 65), to highlight the extent to which networks emerge from and are built into concrete social settings. Ties are wrapped up with the stories told and perceived within a given social formation. When the social action in a given setting stops functioning (if only temporarily), just the ties remain. There are many possible examples: from ending a career, when one is left only with a web of friendships and contacts that are only rarely invoked; to the falling out with former lovers; and also the memories and tales you have of your last vacation.

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[49] See discussion on disciplines, below.

Social ties are heterogeneous and come in many different types. In chapter two, in discussing White's effort to theorize ideology in terms of block-models, I remarked upon his differentiation of ties into three categories or hues: those which serve to block or hinder social attainment; those which advance this endeavor, and those social ties that are neutral.[50] In <u>Identity and Control</u>, White ventures even further into the constituents of social space by drawing out the texture and variation of social network membership. White begins by placing social ties on a continuum from weak to strong. He argues:

> A tie can be distinguished by intensity level. At one extreme is the multiplex tie of sociometry and casual gossip, the ties of everyday networks spun out in bar and acquaintance dance, and on playing field or in Rapoport's junior high. These are overall ties as commonly perceived, weak ties in Granovetter's terminology. The other extreme is the tie of maximum intensity. Such a tie embodies skilled sustaining of interchange and perception between identities, skill which perhaps helped to induce the identities. (White 1992a: 87)

On the one hand, then, we have what White calls multiplex or "Granovetter"[51] ties. He sees the multiplex tie as a wonderful invention, and argues that it allows us "moderns" to break free of hegemonic, locked in, social roles. White says that the multiplex ties is a "decoupler," since it facilitates smooth and ready switching between different networks and social domains. As I show in the next chapter, White argues that social relationships imply domination to that extent that they are "lockstepped" or "locked in" (Mische and White 1998: 702, 707). Multiplex or Granovetter ties can avoid some of this. With

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[50] The valuation of any one of these "types of tie," can, of course, shift in ways both unexpected and unobserved by ego, and these shifts depend as much on the eruption of natural and social contingencies as on the stories told to smooth them over. Contingencies affect networks and networks contingencies (White 1992a: 102).

[51] Mark Granovetter, possibly one of White's most successful students wrote his 1973 dissertation at Harvard on how employment opportunities (and therefore the prospect of social mobility) are determined by an actor's range of weak contacts and connections. People who had, relatively speaking, more weak ties

Mische, White argues: "In earlier historical periods, switches between idioms or dialects were ceremonial and lockstep, occurring jointly across populations and/ or role-sets according to fixed cycles and calendars. Such lockstep transitions contributed to the reproduction of social and linguistic patterns of domination" (Mische and White 1998: 701-702). Such periods lacked the rampant decoupling made possible through the multiplex tie, which White also argues emerges with publics.

At the other extreme, White argues, are types of tie of "maximum intensity." White refers to these maximum intensity ties "Leifer"[52] ties. Whereas Granovetter ties are about "undifferentiated connectivity" and decoupling (White 1992a: 84). Leifer ties arise in more coupled and strategic contexts, such as chess tournaments and in the maneuvering triggered by romantic love (White 1992a: 86). The crucial point to remember about Leifer ties is that they are based on "unending gaming and speculation" (White 1992a: 85).

In between the two extremes of Granovetter and Leifer ties, all sorts of other types of tie may persist, however, and which can be identified, in part, on the basis of the different sorts of stories actors speak to each other. We don't tell the same stories to our parents, bosses and lovers; the stories we speak vary depending on our differential embeddings in types of relationships.[53] What White calls "types of tie" (TOFT) are generalized, historical tallies of control struggles, and "are typed according to which clusters of signals [e.g. identities--DH] realize those ties" (White 1993a: 4). Like

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were demonstrated to have an advantage in getting a job since their contacts gave them more job related information than those who had stronger and more involuted ties. See Granovetter (1979; 1995).

[52] Named for another of White's insightful students, Eric Leifer. See Leifer (1991; 1995)

[53] In his study of subordinate oppositional groups, Scott (1990) highlights "kinship, labor exchange, neighborhood, ritual practices, [and] daily occupational links," as crucial in sustaining struggles of opposition.

effective struggles for control White claims that the "colorings, the animuses of distinctive stories, that give content to types of tie are borrowed from discipline valuation" (White 1992a: 87).

The flotsam of social relations around ego somehow boil down and collapse into "very few distinct types" (White 1992a: 90). While claims that ties are established in three main ways, each one of which maps to a discipline. Key to all three processes is the "profound asymmetry between sending and receiving" (White 1995a: 1043). White argues that ties made through overlapping relations (e.g. age and occupation) are common to councils; through asymmetrical ties (e.g. boss and worker) in interfaces; and through the institutionalization (whether through corporatist or clientelist variation) of indirect ties, which are common to arenas, (e.g. friend, colleague, golfing partner). None of this is neat and tidy. How types of tie in fact arise on the ground depend on the sort of organizational control struggles which "explode a multiplex network into distinct networks for separate types of tie" (White 1992a: 89). Types of tie are bound up with the dynamics of disciplines and institutions, to which we shall shortly turn. It is important first, however, to examine an additional set of concepts that provide the motor and configuration for types of tie.

Coupling and Decoupling

The concepts of coupling and decoupling date back to some of White's earliest work. He provides clear definitions to these terms in his unpublished, though widely circulated paper, "Notes on Coupling and Decoupling" (1966: 1). White argues: "By coupling I mean inclusion. By decoupling I mean severance. But they are complementary: in order

to be included you have also to be cut off in some sense and in order to be severed

meaningfully, you have to be included somewhere else."

The dynamics of coupling and decoupling are at the heart of White's molecular

and his molar view of society. They are also the sign and the rachet for social action,

whether blocked or fresh. By coupling and decoupling, identities move among changing

spaces (White 1992a: 128) as they strive for style and control. All social formations

represent different variations and embodiments of these basic processes. As White puts it

in <u>Identity and Control</u>:

> Embedding and decoupling assert a duality between interpretive and assertive moments, between
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> ambiguity and ambage. On the one side, decoupling is the basis of size distributions and other
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> profiles which can describe style, and without decoupling tangible social formation would be too
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> rigid to reproduce as institution. On the other hand, without embedding there would not be the
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> successive appearances of new actors and new sorts of actors. (White 1992a: 304)

White argues that coupling is embedding into new social formations, whereas decoupling

is, at least in part, "freeing one actor from another's ties" (White 1992a: 78). White

suggests that this freeing up of social relations, "presupposes indeterminacies, with some

breaking of connection between identities" (White 1992a: 12)

The coupling and decoupling dialectic "is the context for manipulation and

movement" (White 1981: 1). [54] Decoupling can involve switching or eliding social

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[54] White seems to highlight decoupling more than coupling in this dialectic. Yet he seems to fail to
distinguish intentional decoupling from what one might call the unintended "snapping" of social relations.
Actors may have control over decoupling, but not over snapping mechanisms. When one decouples, one is
doing so actively, with intention; snapping, on the other hand, is being at the mercy of contingencies.
Being blacklisted is an example of this snapping process in action; as is getting fired; and unrequited break-
ups. Yet at one point in <u>Identity and Control</u>, White does draw the distinction between what he calls
"instinctive" and "strategic" decouplings, where the former ties with control, and the latter with action. In
subsequent work White further extends his thinking on decoupling through his notion of zapping. White
defines zapping as "the mechanism for weaving the narrative thread of time within a style [of identity]. . .
One zaps by invoking a story from among the set first for this and then for that distinct realm [domain]"

levels and formations and it can involve conflict. As Tilly (1993b: 7) notes, "decoupling is nothing like disintegration or decay (as many sociological theories suppose) but an essential condition for many kinds of social action; in a completely-integrated social structure, indeed, no social action would occur." White's concept of coupling, on the other hand, connotes "digging in" processes — of social actors having a fixed role, at least for the time being, in some social discipline.

Harrison White uses these concepts as a means to get inside the "black box" of social structure. Commenting on the phenomenology of the acquaintance dance, for example, White notes that, after scenes of more generalized switching, "Actors seek more restrictive corporates within the initial mass. More specialized mixers follow. There is a nesting of levels crossing simple partitions into groups. These embeddings go on in time as well as in organization. They go on among elites and in esoteric settings as well as everyday" (White 1992a: 83). Triggering movements such as the "more specialized mixers" are stories, which are instrumental to decoupling and coupling. White argues: "Routine can be disrupted by contending projects of control, as these efforts generate stories. Decoupling induces a spread of alternative stories as menu." Stories "help create sufficient decoupling for fresh action" (White 1992a: 13, 14).

White's excursus on the phenomenology of social ties and coupling/ decoupling already represents an enormous step beyond most social network theory. Yet his scheme goes even further in mapping out a new language for the analysis of social organization through his conception of disciplines, which is the focus of the next section.

(White 1993d: 19, 32). "Zaps by actors accompany greater freedom for them, and thus, higher variability in socio-cultural outcomes across networks and realms" (White 1993a: 12). For more on zapping dynamics, see chapter four, below.

Social Disciplines

As should now be clear, identities emerge from and survive in a network sea of control attempts, of which social ties and stories are the primary constituents. Social structure arises out of this chaos, yet according to White only settles down as organizational realities in a limited array of social spaces, which he names types of discipline.[55] He refers to these types of discipline as interfaces, arenas, and councils. Social disciplines play a big role in White's attempt to chart a new "state of nature" (White 1992a: 26). White's argument, in a nutshell, is that social organization emerges from socio-biological pecking orders such as those one might find among chickens or within "a baboonlike troop of humans" (White 1992a: 24). For human beings, disciplines are a more sophisticated form of pecking order, and span the coercions of a group of physically powerful and imposing individuals, to the hierarchies of academic science "enforced by deference behaviors in committee meetings and luncheon interchanges" (White 1993b: 72). Disciplines are "self-reproducing formations which sustain identities" (White 1992a: 22), and they represent the inescapable core of what, up to now, we have thought of as "society."

White's chapter on social disciplines is arguably the most important chapter in Identity and Control, yet it is also one of the more schematic. One gets the sense that

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[55] Disciplines are counterposed against CATNETS (categories + network) — residues of social structure where "no sustainable variety of any species" of discipline (White 1992a: 62) can be generated. White says that catnets may be thought of as equivalent to a " 'black hole,' inasmuch as any and all efforts at stable disciplines disappear without a trace in such potential configurations." (White 1992a: 62). In other words, catnets are precisely the "aspects of social organization not captured in discipline representation" (White 1992a: 63). Yet White claims that catnets are the most "febrile" situations, and are generative both of identities and persons. CATNETS can also be seen as an elementary basis of one's draw on network power, more concretely in one's "friends of friends" (Boissevain 1974; Cf. White 1992a: 63-64). Catnets are a resource. "Each person in the catnet system thereby secures a less fragile place in a social formation less definite but more ineluctable than any given discipline" (White 1992a: 64). Given all the interconnections, catnets are the breeding grounds of agency. See also Tilly (1984: 28-29).

social disciplines and their concatenations are somehow <u>the</u> driving force behind White's

argument in <u>Identity and Control</u>, but White is sparse on details. He provides a grid

(White 1992a: 32) but neglects to draw out the connections between the terms in any

systematic way.

As a first step towards understanding disciplines, let's go with Arthur

Stinchcombe's (1993: 334) suggestion, "that 'disciplines' are status systems that are

made up simultaneously of socially patterned judgments (in the extreme ordered rankings

of people or other social actors) and networks of ties created by a combination of those

judgements and flows of action." In other words, what Stinchcombe means by this is that

disciplines provide the organizational structure and valuation ordering for some type of

tie. Disciplines represent how individual human beings (as well as other social actors)

aggregate into more formal social arrangements. These social arrangements, as was

noted above (in the section "On Control"), generally revolve around social processes of

commitment, selection, and mobilization.

Peter Abell captures the shift from identities into commit-interfaces, arena-select

and mobilizer disciplines, when he states that "processes of further identification bring

potential identities into contention, engendering a mutual sense of definition that may

then organize them into 'disciplines'" (Abell 1993: 1084). Disciplines can be seen most

clearly in ceremonies and daily rituals, and they are triggered and sustained by waves of

social actors who keep them going by way of stories, cultural memories, and artifacts, all

embedded in a myriad of networks. The outlines of a discipline can be seen in an instant,

for example, in the immediate division of labor that takes place when a stranger collapses

in a public place. Out of nowhere suddenly springs unbounding social action. Suddenly

people must act and have to deal with control in ways which only seconds before would have seemed incredible. One instantly becomes surrogate doctor, while others run to get pillows and towels, and you reach out to call 911.

But White argues that disciplines persist as the most enduring and weighty organizational forms as they become further entangled with other regimes of discipline and institution, such as those found on the battle field, in committees or in the "world system" (White 1992a: 47). Interfaces, arenas, and councils[56] "seed on now this happenstance and now that, but once started they call forth imitation and counterpart and survive as discipline by repetition" (White 1992a: 32). Control and production "are always the underlying sources of dynamic in any given discipline" (White 1992a: 38), yet these dynamics differ in each discipline due to the different shadings of social valuations (quality, purity and prestige) that are hegemonic in each.[57]

Disciplines are "universals which can be observed anywhere." They are not, "restricted to particular societies or by levels of technology, economy, polity or the like" (White 1992a: 33). Any social situation can be analyzed or re-cognized in terms of these three basic scripts. White (1993b: 68) comments: "The prototype discipline is interlocked as in recurrent team action for material production, from fishing party to assemblyline group." But there is huge variation in forms of discipline, which are cultural as much as social. White argues that a discipline, e.g. the Presidency, is also "a

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[56] White makes no claim of comprehensibility in his mapping: "There is more variation within a species of discipline than there is within pecking orders. Though disciplines of any one species vary greatly, one can attempt to index them all" (White 1992a: 33).

[57] These valuations of quality, purity, and prestige, White claims, are "induced from recent systematic observation of small human groups from three affective dimensions from studies of human communication" (White 1992a: 29), which he calls "instrumentalism," "friendly-hostile, and dominant-submissive."

pronouncement of style whose effect depends upon the extent to which it frames perceptions" (White 1992a: 318).

One heuristic way to think of White's notion of disciplines would be by considering them as the main "scenes" in which human activity takes place. Take, for example, the following passage:

> Begin with some imagery. We humans live as if in a shambles of theaters, both proscenium and in-the-round, with innumerable spotlights darting now here, now there, illuminating situations. These shifting situations bring to focus first one, then another sort of theater context or domain. The spotlights are triggers for social action, and, in turn, for various selves of each of us and for neighbors and for unacknowledged network-mates some number of ties distant in the network of that building domain. (White 1995a: 1035-1036)

In Identity and Control, White analyzes these "theater context[s]" or "domains" in terms of social disciplines. One can see the basic differences between the three disciplines in White's example of "meals as social processes." White suggests,

> A cafeteria meal is an interface, effectively delivering foods into people. A sit-down urban dinner party among professionals is an arena discipline. It is concerned with establishing some sort of identity of the evening. A church supper, by contrast, is a council, ordered by prestige valuation in an unending concern with balancing and disciplining conflicts as such (White 1992a: 30).

Social disciplines are important for critical theory not only because they are at the center of White's theory of social structure, but also because it is in social disciplines that the key dynamics of social domination are played out and occulted. Disciplines are, in other words, the pecking orders to be deconstructed. As White puts it: "Dominance ordering has devolved into three distinct valuation orderings. Pecking order is accordingly turned into three aspects of discipline" (White 1992a: 33). Along with valuation orderings, White pecking orders are enforced through dominant discipline's "invidious use of

dialects," as well as "syntactical framings of verbal expression, including such other aspects of grammar as aspect, mood, and tense, that determine dominance through the veil of switchings" (White 1995a:1040).

Let us now briefly address the basic structure of each species of discipline. White's first species, the interface, is so named because this social formation exhibits "an interface between material production and social array" (White 1992a: 30). Interfaces can be identified by the valuation ordering of quality, and "the flow of action is about production" (Stinchcombe 1993: 334). Interfaces are comprised of interactions and transformations of social and physical "nature." Interfaces are where work happens. In interface disciplines, actors

> commit by joining together to pump downstream versions of a common product, which are subjected by them and downstream to invidious comparison. Children competing in hopscotch or reciting for a teacher, mathematicians in a test for a prize, manufacturers of recreational aircraft for the U.S. market, actors in a play – all can be examples. (White 1992a: 38)

White argues that the other disciplines arenas and councils, are "more purely social," (1992a: 30), since they are further divorced from biophysical contingencies. White argues that formal organization is best described "as a set of interfaces which is in turn disciplined within an embracing interface, and so on, with each constituent discipline having the ethos of a pecking order" (White 1992a: 318).

Another component to these pecking orders is what White calls matching dynamics. Each social discipline matches flows of identities and stories, both inside and outside the discipline, and in slightly different ways. In interface disciplines, White argues that variances are being matched (e.g. inequality of payment within a work group, a teacher matching, through his or her own discourse, variations in student responses to

class discussion). Because of this asymmetry (as well as all the involution), White (1992: 39) stresses that change is difficult among interface disciplines. Social pressures make the dominant valuations hard to shift and sheer peer pressure can keep one coupled too strongly to interface disciplines.

In the arena discipline, the overarching valuation ordering is a matter of purity. White claims that, of the three disciplines, arenas are the most stochastic, that is they experience greatest turbulence in unexpected flows of social actors. Yet, like interfaces, arena disciplines seem to settle into blocking action. Arenas are "robust with respect to eruptions of control projects, whether from within or from without" (White 1992a: 50). This is due both to arena's multicentered organizational structure and also the sanctity of the valuations they exhibit.

What White calls "select and exclude" mechanisms pervade arenas. These are tied up with a matching dynamic of trading on averages, whether on the stock market, on a blind date, or in the "treatment of your current ailment, legal or medical" (White 1992a: 49). Timing is crucial in arenas, and the term should be kept separate from more customary usage of the word, for example, the "political arena." As Stinchcombe (1993: 335) has already noted, "an 'arena' in White's work is not an area of sand to absorb the blood, in which dominance and subordination are established between gladiators or between bulls and matadors; dominance and subordination are fought out in 'councils.'"

While White (1992a: 237) is adamant that action, which is to say, changing local history, takes place in all sorts of social spaces, he does argue that council disciplines are the primary source of mobilization (and thus fresh action on large scale). Prestige is the valuation ordering that maps to council discipline, and examples include a church

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supper, Roman senate, or IRA retreat. Stinchcombe (1993: 335) defines 'prestige' as the "capacity to influence corporate action, and in particular to mobilize resources and loyalty for corporate action." Councils must be extremely focused, so as to suppress the "calling" of the "claims of different ties" (White 1992a: 104). In councils, "judgements involve bets about others' power, and judgements about their 'soundness' in corporate political matters" (Stinchcombe 1993: 335). These judgements try to calibrate, among other things, potentials, which constitute the matching dynamic for councils.

White says that councils are omnipresent, and run the gamut of reality from inside the human brain (White 1992a: 349) to the macro realities of global scene. Despite being the most powerful social form, White says that councils

> exhibit an openness and flexibility of agenda. Each council, miniscule and local as it might be in some broader survey, is sovereign in its own concerns. These concerns are limited in and by concrete fact, but they are not limited by any systematic doctrine or rationale. In particular, there is little interpenetration of one council by another,[58] in dependencies and wrangles (White 1992a: 103).

Stinchcombe discerns the basic differences in network phenomenology between arenas and councils when he comments, "Networks in councils tend to reach out from the council to control resources and people; networks in arenas tend to break off at boundaries to avoid introducing danger and impurity into the group" (Stinchcombe 1993: 335).

Councils are about reallocating turf and settling disputes, White argues (1992: 32). They are mobilizer disciplines. Unlike the social organization generated by sets of

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[58] This seems to suggest that the phenomena of, say, interlocking corporate directorates may have more in common with arena than council disciplines, and which further implies that researchers may need to expand or change their focus to include the workings of council forms.

interfaces and their respective constituents, White says that "any mobilizer species

presupposes its constituents are of a different species."[59] By way of example, White

suggests that "a political campaign organization is to have as constituents, first,

interfaces of rational bureaucratic order focused on specialized tasks, and, second, arenas

wherein persons sort out degrees of purity on various issues, and in addition,

mobilizations of preexisting networks, as of ethnic group and community" (White 1992a:

318). Councils also presuppose "rooted interests and factions" (White 1992a: 54), that

move through chains of mobilization. On the latter process, White comments,

"Mobilization spreads from some beginning link, which at the same time will trigger

other, apparently distant links whose actors perceive mobilization toward their social

locales" (White 1992a: 104). Struggles for control animate the entire process, and

"power, for example over engrossment and disbursement of social and physical material,

is what mobilizing aims toward" (White 1992a: 59).

    If all of this still sounds strange and far too abstruse, turn to Rick Fantasia's study,

Cultures of Solidarity (1988), which implicitly highlights the importance of council

disciplines in social mobilization, in his case, in "wildcat" strikes. In his analysis of the

first strike in his study (which revolved around the arbitrary firing of a maintenance

worker who had fallen asleep on the job), Fantasia reports that the workers in this casting

plant split up into three different groups, each of whom had differing levels of

commitment to the strike. The first group, from the maintenance department of the plant

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[59] As Lincoln points out, participants in the Spanish Civil war achieved mobilization not only through committees (and thus councils), but also through "extraordinary rituals," such as parades and rallies." (Lincoln 1985: 105).

and who instigated the strike, could in White's terms be considered the representatives of the implicit council. Fantasia (1988: 83) writes:

> Five or six workers moved swiftly and directly to the mouth of the exit leading to the loading dock and courtyard area, where they were confronted by the department foreman. Another group of about six to nine workers, not as tightly knit a body of men and not as vocal, formed a semi-circular ring behind the first group. The third group, which consisted of four to five workers, stayed closer to their work stations in separate areas of the department, 'hanging back' and individually observing and listening.

Of the workers in group one, three of them according to Fantasia, were responsible for a second wildcat strike some three months later. Again, council disciplines weighed heavily in the second situation (which aimed to put a heater in the worker's changing room). Fantasia (1988: 110) relates: "After demonstrating their activism during the first strike, the network of activists gravitated to one another and played an important role in mobilizing for the second. This loose grouping of workers provided an informal forum in which the possibilities and problems of the second wildcat strike could be considered."

The important point in all this is that White's theory of disciplines offers us a different way to think about the organization of social relations in networks. White offers a virtual treasure chest of social process variables which we can be used in mapping out relations of domination and control. In this regard, there is a surface similarity between White's conception of disciplines and Foucault's ([1977] 1979) writings on social discipline and power. In a sense, White's use of the term could quite reasonably be said to, if not fill in the gaps, then at least to haunt the same theoretical territories as Foucault. Yet there are at least two important exceptions. First, White's analytical focus is less attuned to the disciplining of corporeal bodies and is more focused on the explicitly

social, "second order" structures within which "bodies" move. Like Foucault, White uses extreme case studies to make his points, but operates at a more organizational level.[60]

Second, White's analysis provokes us to think that even Foucault's approach may "hamstring" social analysis. While I am not as willing to go as far as Rorty in characterizing the "ubiquity of Foucauldian power [as] reminiscent of the ubiquity of Satan," (Rorty 1998a: 95), White's characterization of different social formations being organized by distinct dominance orderings (valuations) seems to add an important corrective to those who always speak of social domination as some monolithic top-down force. Commenting on Foucault's insistence that "each society has a regime of truth," White argues that Foucault's perspective is mistaken insofar as it implies a single dominance ordering, or a truth, that structures society. He argues: "One must instead assert that there are a whole set of such truths simultaneously in operation, each as a rhetoric for a regime[61] more tangible than Foucault's society" (White 1992: 228). In Harrison White's theory, domination becomes perhaps even more contextual and relational than even Foucault could have envisioned.

One should not, however, attach too much rigidity to White's type of disciplines. Social formations never represent one and only one type of discipline, and in some cases match with none at all. Disciplines are merely analytic constructs to help us decipher social structure. The social dynamics of all three disciplines can be perceived in any one social molecule, and further and fresh control attempts (see chapter four) must involve

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[60] Although they do both share an interest in the networks that led to the construction of noteworthy historical figures, without doubt Foucault presents a darker view of institutions.

[61] On regimes, White argues: "The sources of larger views of explicit social order beyond the institution seem clear. Institutions and the rhetorics they come to agree upon both are open-ended and can be extrapolated beyond present local disciplines and networks. Call the product, which is a native statement combining styles around institutions, a regime" (White 1992a: 226).

switching between them. White argues: "Exemplars of social molecules always come mixed with and colored by other such within larger social organization…As social action by given identities continues around a particular site it may, after first being captured in one variety of discipline, then shade into another variety. Or this action may change over into an exemplar of a different species" (White 1992a: 60). Also, one should not lose sight of the fact that, in each discipline, what is most crucial for social analysis is the challenge of observing identity and how it shows up in units (interfaces), clusters (arenas) or factions (councils).

White is also interested in how disciplines embed into larger social formations. He claims that there are two sides to embedding, external and internal — what White calls external face, over internal disposition. External embedding is how a discipline is sited with respect to some other population of disciplines; internal embedding is how well the discipline is, as seen from the inside, an identity. White introduces the concepts of involuteness, dependence, and differentiation here as what he calls the key "trade-offs," with valuation orderings now trailing behind.

The social embeddings of disciplines are important. Only short-lived identities are those that are not embedded into "some larger formation touching on biophysical space" (White 1992a: 34). Like individual human beings or social actors, disciplines also have networks of ties to other disciplines, and to some extent, social ties are the further embeddings. White uses what he terms "embedding ratios" to figure out how a given discipline "reproduces itself despite endless efforts to subvert it via projects of control that are not confined to the molecule" (White 1992a: 34).

For any linkage between disciplines, one can discern three "aspects," which can be captured by through three embedding ratios, one each for involuteness, differentiation and dependence. Through using these ratios, White is once again attempting to weave more phenomenology into the social ties of social network analysis: "These three aspects of linkage will be used to characterize embedding of any discipline, for all variants of each of the three species" (White 1992a: 35).

The embedding aspects are called ratios because White is attempting to mark the tendencies of both "upstream" and "downstream" embedding processes. He stresses that, "Embedding is necessarily a joint or dual process between internal discipline and fitting to external context" (White 1992a: 35). Embedding ratios try to get at these fits. The embeddings or the linkages of disciplines — i.e. how disciplines are tied to "other disciplines as the various identities contend for control" (White 1992a: 34) — can be analyzed through the balancings of the three embedding ratios.

The stickiness of what Harrison White actually means by "involuteness" has already been noted by Stinchcombe (1993). In a sense, one could say that Harrison White's theory, at its core, simply is a treatise on social involution, and he does use this term on more than one occasion in the sense of "an act or instance of involving or entangling, involvement."[62] Yet "involuteness" is the term White usually prefers, and provides a definition with the following,

> Involuteness, which can also be called specialization, characterizes for a discipline the extent to which the given valuation ordering refers to and presupposes other orderings outside the given discipline. Involuteness reflects how the stringing together of identities in chains of ties, that eventually close back on their origins, impacts the valuation. (White 1992a: 35)

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Involuteness thus seems to imply inbred, heavily nested ties, and indeed, White states that, "close-knitness of a network is highly correlated with involuteness" (White 1992a: 75). Unlike involution, the word involuteness seems to be a neologism, though one which generalizes notions of being intricate, complex, as well as a folding in upon something.[63] One implication of White's analysis seems to be that, for interfaces to persist, involuteness (quality) must be balanced by differentiation and dependence. If the latter are skewed too much, then the interface, whether, for example, work or conversation, may fail to reproduce itself.

This sort of folding in, this involuteness, can be contrasted with the embedding ratio of the other extreme, namely differentiation, "the given preoccupation in council" (White 1992a: 55). The valuation ordering prestige is mirrored in the term differentiation, in the sense of being unlike, dissimilar, or "distinguished." In councils, the two embedding ratios of involuteness and dependence are played off against differentiation. White argues, "Differentiation is a matter of visibility, recognizing distinctiveness by position in an ordering" (White 1992a: 35). Councils seek a balance between the involutions of production and the strings of dependence.

Arena disciplines, on the other hand, embed by playing off differentiation and involuteness ratios all the while keeping dependence (purity) fixed. In White's sit-down suburban dinner, for example, one might expect to see a subtle balancing of tales of distinction set against stories of a given family's "dirty laundry," all the while talk of dependence (e.g. money and finances) are kept to a minimum.

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[62] Webster's Unabridged Dictionary. 1996.

Disciplines are central to all forms of social organization. White intends his remarks on disciplines to be descriptions of tendencies in network structure, and how involuteness, dependence, and differentiation actually work themselves out on the ground will obviously vary from case to case. Embedding ratios try to catch on the further context surrounding how disciplines, and identities within them, are linked to others at different level or scope. Without disciplines and further embeddings, identities lack the grounding and the motivation for social action. Disciplines act as conduits "for social action which inducts as it embeds an identity into still further social action" (White 1992: 23). By way of disciplines, identities decouple, embed and spin out into different social networks and realms, forging new ties and connections along the way.

White's Theory of Institutions

White's theory of institutions, like that of disciplines, is one of the most underdeveloped yet most important parts of his theory program.[64] Unlike his notion of social disciplines, White says that institutions can not be confined to some prefabricated classificatory scheme. White claims, "There is no reason … to think that institutions appear, as disciplines do, in only a few species that can be specified in advance" (White 1992a: 116). Presumably, this is due to the simple combinatorial complexity that impacts on the workings of institution. Any analysis of institution — which White says can only come

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[63] Involuteness could also be interpreted through a synonym — "invagination" — which connotes both a swallowing up, an engulfing of identity, and also an encasing, a womb for the reproduction of organizational structures.

[64] Although White does suggest in Identity and Control, that other uses of the term institution are not incommensurate with his meaning of the word. He states: "There are several other connotations for the term 'institution' in social science usage: the broad architecture of functional areas (e.g. education, the arts, health, business as institutions); a special kind of organization infused by values; any social routine of

from "meticulous study of a concrete system" (White 1992a: 118) — must take into account not only all of the constructs that I have mapped out above (e.g. networks, stories, identities and control), but also all the valuation orderings and intersecting embeddings of disciplinary mechanisms. Perhaps the sheer size and variety of institutions imaginable cautioned White against an <u>a priori</u> classification of institutions.[65] However, if White's disciplines are not to be self-similar on an institutional plane, he does suggest that institutions should be transposable. As he puts it, "By definition, each institution is transposable from one of its concrete examples to another" (White 1992a: 116).

As a way of rounding out the general outlines of White's theory of social structure, I would now like to briefly address some of White's arguments concerning institutions. Although the conditions of intellectual production undergirding the current project prevent me from going into very much detail, I do think White's approach could probably add almost as much to debates over institutionalist [66] analysis (whether "new" or "old"), as it can to debates in critical theory. Quite possibly, White offers a theory program to guide the otherwise fragmented labors of researchers in this research tradition.

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behavior, such as a handshake; and so on. These alternatives are not hostile to my usage, as will become apparent" (White 1992a: 116 n1).

[65] But I think this can also be explained in terms of White's contradictory relationship between architectonic theory and the usability of a good guidebook. <u>Identity and Control</u> could fit as well as a "methods" book as within any other topical area in sociology.

[66] On this debate, White comments: "At least two "new institutionalisms" are active. One is from political economy, still concerned with strategic maximizers, but with various constraints and loosenings from institutions. The other, from sociology, focuses on the taken-for-granted setting which becomes perception to the actors. Embeddedness is a phenomenon explainable only as the interpenetration of the two" (White 1998a: 11). While his insights are generalizable to the neo-institutionalist framework, White's analysis aims higher by trying to map how organizational forms appear and fade into larger, institutional contexts.

In reconceptualizing institution, White attacks and dissects the concept from many directions. He also provides numerous definitions of institution. For example, he says, that an "institution" is both a "a correlation of values around social networks," a "balancing of diverse control projects" (White 1992a: 127), as well as the "result either from the literal physical supposition of network-populations or by crossing them in other ways" (White 1992a: 17). Institutions are historical records of the cross-pressures and sculpting forces of identities and disciplines, embodying network valuations and types of tie as spun out across a population. Institutions are of "larger scope" and "longer duration" than social organization at the level of social discipline (White 1992a: 117). In part, they are the organizational globs that keep social disciplines within bounds. Yet institutions are also intertwined and embedded with these disciplines, these "network ties, and their external contexts" (White 1995: 59).[67]   Institutions thrive on the spread of one or more valuation ordering.

The institutions mainly discussed by Harrison White in Identity and Control are caste, academic science, corporatism, feudalism, and clientelism.   From these, White differentiates "corporatism and clientelism" as "major institutions," but also stresses that each comes in "myriad variants" (White 1992a: 17).   It could be argued that the tension in White's theory hinges on the dialectic between these social forms, the one signifying social organization, the other network traces.   Corporatism and clientelism seem to represent for White social structure at its most basic, just as his example of kinship suggests. Corporatism and clientelism precede, accompany, and follow on from

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[67] In spite of their seemingly archi-tectonic nature, institutions also have a role in the getting of action. In an appendix to Identity and Control, White quotes favorably the following observation by Richard

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identities, disciplines, style, and valuations. Each institution catches at different aspects of social organization. A "super-bowl" party, for example, is a corporatist social form, but in fact comes together on the basis of clientelist dynamics, i.e. through the workings of social ties.

In his chapter on "Institutions," White spends most time discussing corporatism, and relies on extended analysis of the parallels and similarities between Indian village caste and American academic science.[68] The key to corporatist institution is that it "blocks action by asserting meaning" (White 1992a: 145), and White argues that both caste and university science are "resistant to innovation" (White 1992a: 122). But he also stresses that corporatism need not be "something grand, esoteric, and different." He goes on:

> Corporatism is a common everyday affair. Corporatism is an institution that exactly organizes around the assertion of specific meanings, rights, immunities, for explicitly operationalized sets and nestings of actors. Corporatism is so at all scopes and in all contexts. The Old Testament is the bible of corporatism. Corporatism is around you all the time, a stalwart of blocking action on every scale from boys' gangs to college departments and to bureaus within businesses. And of course we find it in the endless lattices of law courts and tribunals. (White 1992a: 148)

Institutions are made up of social disciplines, as noted above. White suggests, however, that these disciplines manifest in different ways depending upon institutional structure. White, suggests, for example, that, "corporatist institution builds from a soup of disciplines in which events and issues are generated in plenty, and in which arena disciplines are rare among the three species" (White 1992a: 142). If arenas are rare, this

Lachmann, "action is gotten where corporatism can be constructed to challenge clientelism, or vice versa . . .. Action is in a period of shift" (in White 1992a: 321).

implies that interface and council species are the more prevalent disciplines under corporatist organization.

What White calls "subjective jointness" (1992a: 189) is another name for corporatism, and one which he incorporates into his comments on the human group. He argues: "We need to understand how a corporate group can come to share, and be aware of sharing, social characteristics and evolve to share a subjective sense of identity…The answer must be by endless stories talked by identities to each other, as part of their ongoing struggles with each other for control with respect to one another and concerning all sorts of matters" (White 1992a: 189).

The institution of clientelism runs counter to corporatism. Clientelism is a "stratification system that centers on persons and their ties" (White 1992a: 150). White argues that clientelist institution exists without "disciplines and issues and with few identities," and thus "exhibits larger-scale ordering in ways other than those for corporatism or caste" (White 1992a: 153). From these remarks, it seems that the clientelistic institution is a more "networked" institution than is corporatism, in that it lays down the chains of ties through which corporatist discipline can be realized. Like corporatism, clientelism is an institution that blocks action and presses immobility (White 1992a: 153). But White also suggests that clientelism can also be a route to fresh action on large scale. As he puts it: "clientelism may expand to permeate large social formations in a counterpoint of blockage exactly to periods of extreme and getting of action" (White 1992a: 153).[69]

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[68] Boissevain (1974: 20) also compares academic science to broader institution, though of feudalism rather than caste.
[69] In the next chapter, I provide more specific details of what these forms of clientelistic action may take.

Institutions, then, are "multi-level configurations" (White 1993d: 13). They are

comprised of regular patterns of disciplines, though at larger scope and at longer duration

(White 1992a: 116-117) than the latter. Institutions, like disciplines, must "reproduce

themselves commonly enough to be recognized in many and diverse circumstances"

(White 1993d: 13). One way through which one may recognize and discriminate

institutions is in terms of styles, (which are themselves comprised of values) a construct

that White suggests is "suitable to capturing kinds of contextual orderings in a stochastic

environment" (White 1992a: 165).

White's concept of style, like discipline, mediates social actor from network

population. He notes, "Style generalizes the dominance orderings [e.g. friendly/hostile;

dominant/submissive; instrumentalism] from within molecular disciplines, whereas . . .

institution generalizes the valuations [e.g. quality, purity, prestige] from within molecular

disciplines" (White 1992a: 170). In other words, a style signals attachment to some

regime of power, some discipline. Values are the players within a style.

White's theory of institutions is interesting because it focuses on the dialectical

construction of values and of meaning. White is adamant that values come from social

networks as mediated through disciplines. He stresses that the "meaning of a package of

values is to be inferred as much from the social architecture as vice versa" (White 1993b:

65). Values are "by-products of social pattern" (White 1992a: 121),[70] which are more or

less consistent across discipline and institution. In White's words, "Values, whether

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[70] These insights into "values" could be useful to those researchers who object to the vacuous discourse
concerning, say, "family values" debates. White's theory suggests that changing anyone's values must
involve changing their social networks. Welfare state agencies, for example, which neglect to take into
consideration the social networks of their clients may in fact block, rather than aid, a welfare recipient's
mobility.

symbolized or implicit, reflect more than they direct concrete social action. . . . . Values code from social network" (White 1993b: 84).

Institutions, styles, and values are all intertwined and intermixed with each other. White manages to convey how they all fit together in the following statement, "Individuals[71] watch one another within disciplines and social networks and imbibe patterns into how to maneuver within and using the package of value. Thereby individuals acquire a style as they jointly reproduce an institution through their mutually patterned actions" (White 1993d: 69). Styles are bound up with stories, and come in profiles. White claims that "style, unlike institution, is not determinate" (White 1992a: 166). "An institution can fold up into as well as devolve down from itself or from a style, and conversely" (White 1993d: 14).[72]

The concept of style is White's big stab at theorizing culture, and it is one that tries to give cultural processes their due. For example, White suggests that social stratification should be seen as a "system of styles" (White 1992a: 187), and he also argues (in line with the "deep shit" metaphor, above) that, "Institutions tend to be leached out through the play of styles from stratification system" (White 1992a: 187). The fission and fusion of styles, as they mesh with values, networks, and disciplines is culture for White, with institutions built in as structural channels of support. Style is the experiential, institution the architectonic, label for this process. Styles are the

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[71] Though one could, of course, substitute a social actor at different scope, given the self-similarity of White's theory.
[72] Institutions and styles have similar dynamics. In Identity and Control, White claims that "institutions mate to change (White 1992a: 282). In White (1993b) the focus is on how "styles mate to change."

organizational memories of previous control attempts newly expressed in terms of stories, valuations, and other social signals.[73] Styles both account for and resist institutions.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to articulate the crucial theoretical categories that constitute White's general theory of social structure so that his project may be more adequately apprehended for the purposes of critical theory. I have suggested that White's structural theory makes visible forms and sources of power that are hidden or obscured from other theoretical vantage points, that these his constructs may be used — in quite tangible ways — to deconstruct regimes. In other words, to my mind, many of Harrison White's insights, especially those concerning types-of-tie, disciplines, regimes, styles, and networks can be used as important dimensions or variables that could better explain conditions of social domination. They provide a useful framework for social researchers and participants for coming to terms with social organization, for figuring one's place in pecking orders, and for tracing the movement of culture.

I hope that I have managed to convey in this chapter how White wants to shakeup existing sociological theory and how he in fact leads the way by presenting accounts of social reality that can be used as an alternative starting point for social science. In the following chapter, I continue with my expropriation of Harrison White for critical theory by first constructing a theory of social domination from White's work, and then by extrapolating his theory of "fresh action."

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[73] For more on styles and values, see Chapter Four.