CHAPTER FOUR

FRESH ACTION FOR CRITICAL THEORY

"Can social pressure be beaten by a science guild?"

— Harrison White (1993b: 86)

In this chapter I try to extrapolate the themes of social domination[1] and fresh action in Harrison White's critical social theory. According to White (1992a: 16), social organization is "both means and bar to control." Most of the concepts discussed in the last chapter presented social organization in the latter mode, and they are the ones that also occupy most of White's attention in the first five chapters of Identity and Control. If sufficiently elaborated, I have argued that that these analytic constructs might be put together in a critique of institutional and organizational "pecking orders." This critique would have as its focus dominant identities in disciplines and regimes and how they mesh and intertwine into systems of stratification.

In chapter six of Identity and Control, White turns his attention away from questions of the genealogy of social organization, and towards analysis of what he calls the "getting-of action," which is to say, principles of intervening within and across social organizations and institutions. In his introduction to his concept of fresh action, White

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[1] I am of course writing this chapter with the knowledge that I am for the most part bracketing the crucial role of "nature" in social domination. Yet White's theory purports to "reemphasize the importance of geography, ecology and biology . . . Biophysical ecology shapes empire and tribe alike" (White 1992a: 14, 20). His catchall conceptual set of "contingencies" seems to be a placeholder for "nature" broadly defined.

comments: "Agency resulting from control has been the principle theme, agency as by-product of control. From it derive first identities and simple social organization, and eventually persons as agents between populations in complex social organization. Now the principal theme becomes agency for control" (1992a: 245). As White points out in his preface to <u>Identity and Control</u>, one must always "see getting action in tension with social organization" (White 1992a: xi). Getting action is thus "dual to" stratification (White 1992a: 180). While social organizations and stratification systems represent shells of previous "gettings of action," White argues these same shells can dominate, or "block" the action of social actors embedded in other disciplines.

This chapter examines some possible routes that would avoid or overcome such blockings-of-action action. In other words, its seemingly soulless (Cf. Brint 1992) appearance notwithstanding, White's theory demonstrates a keen awareness of issues of culture and individuation, [2] and suggests important leads for action that dominated identities have at their disposal to get more control within, and in spite of, pecking orders and regimes. From my perspective, White's theory of agency points to a solid (if largely implicit) notion of social domination, one that can compete with critical theory. White's approach implies that a critical theory of social domination must incorporate social network configurations and dynamics. His scheme suggests that social domination

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Hazelrigg's (1995) argument provokes us into recognizing that these contingencies, these "natural forces," are as much human constructions as are the seemingly more "social" network ties and social disciplines.
[2] One may perceive an awareness of the important question of social domination in one of White's notebook entries from the 1970s, where he expresses the "central concern, most lucid in our religion, is overriding and centrality [sic] of each and every life . . . [and the] tension of this with . . . [the] omnipresence in all complex societies known of huge pressures toward, e.g. 'rewards' for, higher location within and thus sheer existence of hierarchic, focused, centered structures which by existence denigrate the rest, usually most" (White 1979a). In theorizing what he calls the getting of fresh action, I suggest that White is trying to come up with a method akin to combating this denigration of the "rest" and usually the "most."

weighs heaviest on identities that exhibit less developed social networks, and who are instead smothered by redundant and involuted social ties and stories. Such dominated actors lack the ability to "switch" or to "zap" into different and more productive social domains,[3] and thus find it difficult to become persons, communities or cities.

After elaborating White's incipient theory of social domination, in the second half of this chapter, I turn to address in further detail elements of White's theory of agency, more specifically, what he calls "fresh" action and "getting" action. There is a connection (though one that is left mostly unstated in White's work) between his concept of "fresh action" and that of personhood or personage. Getting "fresh action" is surely one of the routes to becoming identities such as the above. But whereas they involve overcoming and controlling the strangling embeddings of social organization, fresh action radically shifts the trajectory of social organization itself. Fresh action concerns "repackaging values together with a realignment of networks of work and cooperation" (White 1993b: 70), and could be considered a new way to conceptualize praxis.

I hope to argue that White's theory contains important propositions concerning separating from "a world which is dead, illusory, unmanageable, contradictory or absurd"

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[3] In his article, "Network Switchings and Bayesian Forks" (1995), White continues with his "reconstruction" of the social and behavioral sciences, yet now with a slightly different focus and terminology. Social disciplines, the dynamics of which White tried to elaborate in chapter 2 of Identity and Control, are now analyzed in terms of what White calls network-domains, or NETDOMS. White's switch in emphasis by using the term NETDOM in place of "discipline" is not altogether clear. One argument could be that NETDOMS seem to work better than the discipline construct in capturing the network component of social relations and the plethora of different social domains that exist on the ground. In his words: "Networks catch up especially the cross-sectional patterns of connection and resonance in interaction. Domains catch up especially the meanings and interpretations which are the phenomenology of process as talk" (White 1995a: 1038). In later work, White also invokes what he calls, "realms" which operate on a slightly higher level of generality. Domains bleed into realms. "Private and work and community" are realms; while "kinship, hunting, and ceremony" are domains (White 1994: 4). Like domains, specification of realms is important since it captures "the interpretative aspect of network" (White 1993d: 13).

(Muecke 1969: 235). While such a struggle obviously takes place on many fronts, I argue that White's theory must be at the heart of the battle.

Harrison White and Social Domination

One way of looking at Harrison White's theory might be in comparison with the work of Karl Marx. Rather than following Craig Calhoun's lead in decrying Harrison White for not "following Marx or a variety of other exemplars," (Calhoun 1993: 316) in his social theory, I suggest that there are in fact key similarities and non-obvious parallels between White's structural theory and elements of the Marxian project.[4] Such an argument will lay the groundwork for my reading of Harrison White as critical theory.

While White's book is certainly not a work of "Marxian" scholarship, there are important affinities between White's theory and some elements of Marxian theory. First, White seems to follow Marx's advice with the injunction: "[M]aterial productions must start the scene" (White 1992a: 24). Rather than pushing us in the direction of more "theoretical theory," or "critical criticism," White's theory program seeks a multi-faceted approach to the study of social behavior, of material things.   As he argues, "Unending interactions with the biophysical environment are the distinctive constraints on action for any species, and in particular on the generation of social space-time for the human

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[4] The only substantive comment on Marx or Marxism in <u>Identity and Control</u> is "Only Marxism among classical strands of theory has a central role for problematics and dynamics of time and thence of development in the large" (White 1992 p. 292). Yet in a working notebook while he was poring over <u>Capital</u>, White (1973b) noted the "beautiful gut analogies" that one can find in Marx " . . . like a great physicist." Also, in a slightly later notebook entry, White articulated his desire for constructing a theory of "social structure as joint, motivated construction – [which] even should satisfy Marxists: improve by adding to" [Marx's focus on] "the direct overwhelming pressures of social structure, which he tried to lump into ideology/superstructure, whereas Simmel and his like saw the abstract, general (and indeed timeless) effort of the latter" (White 1979c).

species. The exigencies of material needs in a physical world underlie much of social organization" (White 1992a: 24)[5] Therefore, the elaboration of social organization must begin with an analysis of these interactions, these "subject-object" relations (Cf. Hazelrigg 1989b).

Second, the theories of both Marx and Harrison White seem to advocate a similar methodology. Both figures are concerned with getting beyond (or below) surface phenomena to delineate what they take to be the more fundamental and significant processes at work there. As White (1980c) remarks in one of his notebooks: "Marx also goes for [social] architecture, for space . . . and he fights religion because it is the only competition." Also like Marx, White is interested in "class" issues, with social ecological dominance orderings (Cf. Hazelrigg 1972).[6] According to White, "Social class is where valuations from molecular disciplines come together with networks of stories into larger, compelling formations of stochastic order, with rhetorics as their by products" (White 1992a: 293). Whereas Marx maps out class relations on the basis of their relationship to the "means of production," White opens up the black box of the latter, and redefines it in terms of disciplines and stories, which is to say, of network ties.

Most significantly, perhaps, one finds in both Harrison White and in Karl Marx, a heavy impatience with microsituational (Cf. Collins 2000) domination, and the implicit contention that social organization is too often constructed in a way that dwarfs identity.

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[5] "The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity. These premises can thus be verified in a purely empirical way" (Marx [1845-6] 1978: 149).

Consider, for example, the parallels between Marx's statement from the 18th Brumaire with a passage from Identity and Control. Marx writes: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living" (Marx [1852] 1994: 15). Does this phrase not resonate with White's following declaration: "Each work group, each slash-and-burn settlement, each metalworker circle in the city, in short each production setting inherits, each day and each generation, a strangling embedding in social arrangements computed on other grounds than work; each such inheritance must in some fashion be decoupled" (White 1992a: 298)? In another instance, White argues that, " 'You' and 'I' and others are gotten together by, as much as we construct through social action, our contexts of practical production and control" (White 1992: 298). This statement reminds one of Marx's argument that, "The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that it is essential to educate the educator himself" (Marx [1845] 1978: 144). Like Marx's subject-object relations, or Giddens' ([1984] 1986) structuration, White argues that "actors of all scopes come into existence in the very social processes they helped to shape" (White 1995b: 145).

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[6] As Hazelrigg reminds us, for Marx, "class is first and most fundamentally the evolutionary ecological organization of a societal population of socially existent biological organisms -- i.e. individual human beings" (Hazelrigg 1972: 478).

Both Marx and White see identity as driven by control. White is adamant that "actual human beings take shape as ensembles of identities" (1992c: 210). This critique strikes me as identical to the statement that "the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations" (Marx [1845] 1978: 145). By this, Marx means that man can be seen as the sum total of his social relations. Similarly, for White, each individual is a historical tally of previous control attempts in various disciplinary formations. As he puts, it, "[P]ersons are aptly seen as walking wounded, who evolve out of stochastic processes of continuing bruisings and coalescences among networks and disciplines" (White 1992a: 198). These bruisings and coalescences are not strictly a matter of concrete labor activity. As he puts it: "Much of life is work, and work takes place in concrete ecologies. But much of work also involves coping with other identities and their control efforts" (White 1992a: 38). Social domination, according to White thus comes wrapped up in larger social structures and formations out of the immediate purview and control of individual human beings. More often than not, according to White, these structures and formations conspire to block action, the potential of which one must be continuously aware.

Too much blocked action, according to White, can lead to (among other things), a diminution of personhood. The term "person" is another concept to which White attributes some sort of special meaning. He argues that persons are late to develop, both in the context of historical time and also in the potentialities of an individual human life.[7]

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[7] A Foucauldian reading could trigger an alternate perspective on White's notion of persons. In many ways, White's theory seems to parallel Foucault's thesis of the 'end of man.' Like Foucault, White is unwilling to grant "man" any primacy in epistemological ground, and argues along with Foucault that persons develop "late historically." White (1992a: 3) argues: "The difficulty of the construct 'individual as person' is shown by its being shunted aside from the center of activity in each social science separately . . .

White argues that persons "develop only under special circumstances." He goes on, "persons come into existence and are formed as overlaps among identities from distinct network-populations," and "only as the contexts become more sophisticated. Persons build in terms of styles across distinct populations" (White 1992a:196).[8]

The similarities between this network-based approach to personality development and the Marxian critique of labor in capitalism are striking.[9] As Shapiro suggests, for Marx overcoming alienation involves the "development of an absolute distinction between the personal individual and the individual as subsumed under the division of labor and its empirical conditions. The personal individual does not identify with any specific roles and their conditions" (Shapiro 1976: 66, emphases added).[10] This statement seems to echo White's aphorism that, "a personal identity may touch on many networks but does not encompass all of any network" (1992a: 197).[11]

The active science [of psychology] today is rooted in cognitive aspects and emphasizes the 'wet,' the biological substrate of neural cell physiology, or else emphasizes perception and development and other correlates to the ecological environment." Like Foucault, White seems to know that it is not around the shadowy figure of 'man' that knowledge lurks. Indeed, White (1993d: 15) says that persons "can be seen as small-scale instances of styles." White also shares with Foucault a solid anti-humanist streak, stressing that there is no necessary normative dimension to his theory of fresh action. I posed the question of whether, say, Hitler could be said to have gotten fresh action, and White's response was in the affirmative. When pressed to describe whether this was a "problem" White commented that you can "smell something to see if it's rotten," but this does nothing to advance analysis. "Where do these norms come from?" White asked. "Are they smuggled in by God?" Another similarity between Foucault and White is, as I noted above, the role that power plays in Foucault's work and the concept of control in that of Harrison White. White (White 1992a: 232) explains: "Identities from their formation are struggling for control. But identities form up social structures, in which control struggles participate. Thereby controls become entangled in ways that cannot be visualized as projects of individual actors: In the words of Chanowitz and Langer . . . 'Control is not something that we possess.'"

[8] One might also be able to find analogies to personhood in nonhuman species, for example among Warbler birds who seek mates "based on how extensive the repertoire is of a male's song" (Tiger 1999: 199).

[9] White (1999) himself admits that his thinking on "getting action" came late; in the early 1980s, in the context of a rethinking of Marx.

[10] As Ollman (1973: 110) puts it, in such a situation, "the variety and intensity of the individual's activity has brought him directly, or as a unit of society, into contact with all of nature."

[11] Resemblances of this perspective can also be found in Cooley's Human Nature and the Social Order [1902: 148)]. Cooley writes: "A man may be regarded as the point of intersection of an indefinite number of lines representing social groups, having as many arcs passing through him as there are groups."

One important conclusion to draw from White's approach, therefore, is that network relations constitute human being's prowess, skills, and needs. As Wächter has already noted, White's approach suggests that "understanding a person means understanding his [sic] continuous reconstruction by the networks he [sic] is embedded in" (Wächter 1999: 149).[12] Seen in this way, White's arguments can be seen to buttress arguments in social reproduction theory (Cf. MacLeod 1995) by expanding notions of social or cultural capital. Indeed, the "higher, more differentiated needs — needs which are no longer animal but human (Fischer 1996 [1970]: 47) — can only be triggered and sustained through network morphologies, especially in any so-called "communist" society, a society "where man is said to be rich because he needs 'the totality of human life activities'" (Ollman [1971] 1973: 78).[13]

White says that your personhood diminishes to the extent that you become "helpless outside the confines of your tied roles," when, that is, you have "no basis for and no irritant of capacities for dealing with the unexpected" contingencies of daily living.[14] For White the "point" to social existence is to somehow ride the waves of, if not

(In Breiger 1990: 459).
[12] This is not to say that multiplicity of social relations can always override contingency, even for someone such as Marx. In a 1855 letter to Ferninand Lasalle, lamenting the death of his young son Edgar, Marx wrote: "Bacon says that really important people have so many relations to nature and world, so many objects of interest, that they easily get over any loss. I am not one of those important people. The death of my child has shattered me to the very core" (quoted in Wheen 1999: 217-218).
[13] While White does not spend much, if any, time discussing the differences between human beings, individuals, and persons, such a discrimination may be drawn from his "levels of identity" thesis (see chapter three). From this frame, human beings would match to White's first level of identity; individuals would match to the second level, persons to the third, and "self" to the fourth.
[14] Instead of "persons" being at the center of sociological theory, others suggest the title and activities of "coordinators" as crucial to the network age. Lipnack and Stamps (cited in Arquilla and Ronfeldt 1996: 86) write: "[T]he person who makes particular networks happen is the 'coordinator.' . . . In a richly connected environment where many potential projects are sparking, growing, diminishing and disappearing, a new role arises, that of the coordinator, whose distinguishing characteristic is the ability to see 'connections' among people." Yet in White's frame, coordinators are more agents than persons. The difference between persons and coordinators seems to be that the latter do their bidding for others more

completely overcome, these contingencies — to maintain an enduring and interventionist ensemble of identities in multiple disciplines and realms and thereby try for action. Such multiplicity in social organization is his model of identity development, not only for human beings, but also corporations as well as urban centers.

Although White does notice some convergence between his and Marx's notions of personal identity formation, he takes issue with what he suggests is the "utopian" dimension in "Marx's classless state" — namely that there would be "no cross-pressures at all between roles in distinct realms" (White 1992a: 313). White finds this idea objectionable, so it seems, because it would privilege the second, or "boring" (White 1992a: 315), level of identity (see above). Recall (see chapter three) that this usage of identity meant having a role in some social discipline. White claims that this oppressive role structure is also what is wrong with utopias (as well as dystopias) — the fact that everybody in a utopia has a role, or knows they have role, makes them quite bland social environments. By extension, White suggests that "regular life" is also "bland," in the following:

> Regular life, by its own account, is a utopia. Regular life seems to supply you at any time with an accounting, a story of what is going on and where you fit. If this were the whole story, there would be no triggering by happenstance and you would not be in existence as an entity outside of prediction. You would not have an identity; you would not need it – any more than you would need an identity in a utopia. (White 1992a: 211)

When read against his theory of disciplines, White's critique here is of blandness of social venue — of being tied to a hegemonic network. Similarly, much of the alienation

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than themselves. Persons, on the other hand, are ultimately interesting in creating their own identity out of

and frustration captured by the Marxian critique can be explained in terms of networks and connections. To be more precise, it may very well be the case that much of what people experience as domination by "work" is a matter of being chained to the same demands, the same stories and culture, day in and day out — coupled as they are to the same relations of production.

The more one gets more locked into a disciplinary (e.g. work) role, the easier it is to get locked into to another's goals. Involution in social relationships is rewarding and necessary on a short-term basis, but White stresses that "even the most intimate connection[s are] only enacted occasionally" (White 1992a: 218).[15]

White's theory of social domination comes to the fore quite clearly in his discussion of Paul Willis' Learning to Labor.[16] Couched in his section on "Persons," White argues (1992a: 198): "Many if not most of [Willis'] youth participate for long periods in social scenes in which they never step outside routine role performances; so there personhood is never induced, despite inevitable chronic mismatches among alternative role performances and role complementarities."

It should also be pointed out, however, that although White announces early in Identity and Control his effort to rethink the concept of "person" in social theory, in fact what that White's calls "personage," rather than person, seems to better get to the root of his argument. The key point behind White's notion of personage is that it "goes beyond an identity or person" (White 1992a: 193). Given White's criticism of the premise that

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stories, which is to say, out of network ties.
[15] Such a perspective also seems a good counterweight to a too heavy communitarian or participatory theory of democracy.
[16] A work which Brint (1992: 199) wrongly suggests is incompatible with White's structuralist frame.

"social action comes only from individual biological creatures" (White 1992a: 3),

personages more so than individual persons, must then be key to the moving and shaking

of social organizations.[17] In the example that uses, that of the history of "the great

Dutchman, John DeWitt," one can see the distinction that White is trying to make.

Building upon Herbert Rowen's analysis of DeWitt as having social efficacy mainly

through the activities of "a congeries of cliques" with whom he was involved, White

stresses the basic and important point that "it was not a mere person, no matter how able

and multi-faceted" (White 1992a: 193) that effected these changes on systems of Dutch

governance. Rather, it was the peculiarities of DeWitt's network structure (which

included DeWitt's "double genius" of mathematician as well as statesman) that led to

such historical change and action.[18]

Personages (or entourages) have access to many interlocking coalitions of

disciplines, and participate in increasingly specialized councils and netdomains. As

White puts it, "Style for and insights by, particular identities are . . . important, as Weber

insisted in his account of charismatic leadership" (White 1992a: 231).   Kuhn (1970)

gives us an example of how this process works for science, and even White's career

(Mullins 1993; Scott 1991), itself is also illustrative of the importance of personage. A

historical, perhaps even biographical perspective, is needed to understand their

importance. White argues, however, that trying to understand the social action of

ordinary people is an impossible task. He writes:

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[17] These insights can be compared to the "principal carriers" of Scott's resistant cultures, who are "likely to follow trades or vocations that encourage physical mobility" (Scott 1990: 124) and thus have more plentiful, variegated and specialized types of tie.

> Studies of ordinary persons, even in such apparently detailed form as psychoanalysis, are not and cannot be undertaken with the resources needed to report the larger social context for their action. "Movers and shakers" of earlier times can be reconstructed, however, indeed even better than current elites. It is more likely to be for past ages than for the current scene that "professional investigators," scholars and/ or scientists, have enough clout and perspective to gain full access to elite life and the full context. (White 1992a: 192)

This "emphasis on full access to elite life and the full context" should not be dismissed by a social theory which, perhaps like Fraser's (1997), focuses too closely on the full context of not elite, but oppressed, groups. Endorsing the principle of self-similarity, White's approach would suggest that the social dynamics of the one could be illuminated by those of the other. In other words, it may be possible to learn from the oppressors, if only to learn about the injustices of network privilege.

This, then, is the gist of White's general theory of social domination: He offers a critique of unnecessarily insular and involuted social ties, which is also a critique of hegemonic stories and valuations. By contrast, identities "interdict, which is exactly to play upon all environments rather than be acted upon by some single environment" (White 1992e: 93). From my view, there are at least three ways that Harrison White's network theory might more specifically inform us on the question of social domination. I now address each of these in turn.

Perhaps the strongest version of White's theory of social domination suggests that an identity is dominated to the extent to which they experience redundant social ties and story lines. White is adamant that cloistered and close-knit or "encapsulated" (White

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[18] In the main, White argues that individual humans have a diminished role in this process, in terms of both social efficacy and awareness. As he puts it, "action is induced before actors, who derive from the action

1995a: 1049) ties result mainly in "blocked action."[19] It is true that the vast majority of

daily life is redundancy, in fact this redundancy is as ubiquitous (Cf. Scott 1990) as social

domination itself. Yet identities who are least dominated are those social actors who can

articulate and continually perceive freshness, not redundancy, in story lines, and thereby

move more freely in social disciplines and networks.

As Abell notes, persons are honed by "the frictions/errors/contradictions of their

multiple disciplinary locations," (Abell 1993: 1084).[20] In his article "Network Moves,"

White describes such "multiple disciplinary locations" in terms of "realms" and suggests

that they are key to understanding social domination.[21] He states: "Paucity of realms and

inability to create new realms are signs of being dominated within a larger social

formation. Elites can be defined by appearing in more realms and by ability to induce

new realms" (White 1993a: 7). And again, "It is in leverage for inducing a new realm

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and need not be persons" (White 1992a: 3)

[19] On the ground, such domination can be experienced in a number of ways, all with myriad variations.
The following excerpt, taken off an informal list-serve, does well to highlight the sort of relations I am
theorizing here. An abstract laborer in the computer industry, in the context of the street protests outside
the WTO meeting, reflects on his own experience of social domination on the eve of the year 2000: "I live
in Orlando. Today, on my way to work . . . I heard on our local NPR station that Archbishop Desmond
Tutu was holding a free forum at the UCF arena from 9-11 a.m. this morning. I had the strongest desire to
go. It was overwhelming. I needed to go. It filled my head with the greatest confusion. But then I thought
about being late to work. I thought about all the things I had to do. So I kept driving, and I went to work. I
chose to go to work instead of to go and listen to Archbishop Desmond Tutu hold an open forum at the
UCF arena . . . The man who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his efforts against apartheid. The man
who, every time he is mentioned in the news, I stop what I'm doing and listen to his words. I chose to go to
work. This may have been a once in a lifetime opportunity. . . . And instead, I went to work and sat in a
meeting about how we can make our software more secure from piracy. When was that meeting? From 9-
11 a.m. I can't help but look at these moments in my life as failings . . . of myself. I do it all the time, in a
thousand different ways."

[20] At other levels, the concepts of "locality" and "community" seem to stand in for person on individual or
atomic scale (White 1992a: 132).

[21] Obviously, imprisonment or slavery are extreme examples domination of this form of domination, where
ties are systematically decoupled from identities. The "grounding of teenagers" tries to get at similar
outcomes.

that elites are distinguished; members of the upper class have more already built realms available" (White 1994a: 12).

At a very basic level, for "persons," life is not attending to the same redundancies of disciplines or "realms" day in and day out. Redundancies affix one to a role. White argues that if a particular story told by actors in the capacity of some social role, or a type of tie, "is one of a set among which you can change easily, one may able to gain control. If the story is a fixed one, you lose control" (White 1992a: 211).[22] Fixed stories and redundancies are to be countered by acts of decoupling, by embedding elsewhere to get more control.   Decoupling, in turn, involves switching, which is preceded by stories or "talk."[23]

Central to this first extrapolation of White's theory of domination then, is impoverishment and paucity of network connections.   A second, and slightly different variant of White's critique of domination can be found in his as yet unpublished paper, "Constructing Social Organization as Multiple Networks," (1998a). In that work, he suggests that analysis of alienation is one of the "key theoretical moves" serious sociology must take. He argues:

> I wish to propose one central new idea: Alienation may be as much a matter of difficulties in
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> switchings between institutional contexts as a matter of difficulty within any one such context . . .

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[22] Yet this is not to say that network relations cannot and are not exploited by identities of domination, quite the contrary. In his study of hidden cultural spaces and resistance, James Scott claims that cohesion among subordinate groups is primarily dependent upon "the homogeneity and isolation of their community and work experience," all of which, whether "work, community, authority, [or] leisure – serve to amplify and sharpen a class focus" (Scott 1990: 135). This implies that involution of social network serves an important class function. He goes on to write that, "By contrast, a working class that lives in mixed neighborhoods, works at different jobs, is not highly interdependent, and takes its leisure in a variety of ways has a social life that serves powerfully to disperse their class interest and hence their social focus" (Scott 1990: 135). Networks, then, are almost equally carriers of individuation as much as of segregation.

much of alienation is a consequence of failure and ineptness by actors in switchings between

distinct domains . . . Those who mess up on switchings can become left out of, alienated from, the

ordinary course of human life. (White 1998a: 6)

This point ties in with my previous statement concerning interface (work) disciplines and

network domination. In the above excerpt, White is saying not only that social

domination is a matter of paucity in network ties to different realms, but also that it

encompasses difficulties in switching between different net-domains or disciplines.[24] He

argues: "Much alienation may derive from a disordering of social times through the

improper use of public switchings" (White 1998a: 70).[25]

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[23] Compare Lyotard ([1979] 1991: 10): "[E]very utterance should be thought of as a 'move' in game. . . . to speak is to fight, in the sense of playing, and speech acts fall within the domain of a general agonistics."

[24] White's mapping of alienation resembles Castells' delineation of occupational structure in "network" societies. Castells makes a distinction between three classes of workers, the "networkers," the "networked," and the "switched-off." Castells argues that networkers "set up connections on their initiative, and navigate the routes of the network enterprise." Members of second group, the "networked," are "workers who are on-line but without deciding when, how, why, or with whom." Switched-off workers are "tied to their own specific tasks, [which are] defined by non-interactive, one-way instructions" (Castells [1996] 1998: 244). There seems to be a connection between these three role structures, and differential participation in social disciplines. From White's scheme, networked individuals would be those who are primarily involved in interfaces, in relations of production. Networkers, or the coordinators, for the most part are found in arena disciplines, noted for their values of purity and their movement between different social cliques. Finally, Castells' switchers would be found in council disciplines. Membership in councils implies making decisions and mobilizing for action – having the power and the influence to decide which fork in the road to take. Castells ([1996] 1998: 471) observes,

> network morphology is . . . a source of dramatic reorganization of power relationships. Switches connecting the networks (for example, financial flows taking control of media empires that influence political processes) are the privileged instruments of power. Thus the switchers are the power holders. Since networks are multiple, the interoperating codes and switches between networks become the fundamental sources in shaping, guiding, and misguiding societies.

Castells approach, however, elaborate as it is, does not go as deeply, as abstractly into the mechanisms which constitute the realms of network society. White manages to describe network structure in much finer phenomenological dress.

[25] An initial aim of this project was to pull out the links of meaning between Harrison White's notion of "publics" and what is known as the "public sphere" debate (Calhoun 1992; Fraser 1992; Habermas 1994; Fraser 1997) in critical theory. Unfortunately, and before I knew it, this dissertation project became even more disparate than even I originally imagined, and trying to incorporate White's theories of publics into this work became unnecessary. However, I do think that there are some important links to be made here, and although White has still yet to publish much in this area (but see White 1995a; Mische and White 1998), he has sketched out some provocative ways of thinking about publics. Unlike Habermasian

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Switching can also occur through what White calls "zaps," processes which he says are crucial to the dynamics of agency (White 1993d: 26). White states, "Zaps by actors accompany greater freedom for them, and thus, higher variability in socio-cultural outcomes across networks and realms" (White 1993a: 12). This is an important point for White. In fact, in the outline of a proposed second volume to Identity and Control tentatively entitled, Network Dynamics in Cultural Processes, White sketched a chapter called, "Mobilizing via Zaps through Publics." White argues, "Zapping is a principal mechanism of, and a brokering for mobilization across several domains, on daily as well as on historical scales" (1994a: 5).

A third way of looking at social domination from White's frame would be from a more of a Durkheimian perspective of anomie. Though Harrison White does not really attend to this possibility in his work, one can envision another form of social domination that would have at its center the bombardment or overloading of social networks.[26] I am thinking here of a social condition where individuals or corporate actors become so overwhelmed by network uncertainties that a form of learned helplessness (Cf. White 1992a: 211) ensues. On the ground, such social domination might mean, for example, domination by financial, medical, judicial, and familial, realms all at the same time. This is where social organization works against, rather than with, you, where strings of contingencies from one realm are no longer are buffered from another.

The experience of this third form of domination can also be thought of as resulting from a social actor's failed scheme of prioritizing chunks of incoming

conceptions of the public sphere, for White publics are not an end point to political activity, as social actors intervene in the public sphere en route to some more furious project.

information (White 1973: 46). In other words, not only do social actors find it difficult to cope with the sheer multitude of communications, but also they cannot even frame the latter into a coherent story line for identity. Suicide is end of the line in this regard. Suggesting that suicide is "a personal speculation about context," White argues it arises "when the set of stories available fails to account for how disciplines are woven together as this person" (White 1992a: 210). Priority schemes are part of stories and come from disciplines; they can involve simple rules of thumb, home grown ideologies, or abstract social theory.

From my perspective, these three modes of social domination can become an important starting point for reconceptualizing issues of social domination and personhood in network societies. Conceptualizing domination in terms of type of tie can be an especially salient way at getting at variations of oppression in social environments such as our own, where physical needs are largely being met, yet alienation still looms large. Any effective attempt at overcoming social domination, or helping others overcome it, must take into account the importance of types of tie and network involvement. Let White have the last work on persons:

> All the earlier chapters on ties and disciplines and institutions may sound impersonal, and much too elaborate. But in fact our consciousness as persons results from and are caught up in style for these mazes. Each "I," in the common parlance, is a more-or-less rickety ensemble; it is a firm and whole only temporarily as a facet of one particular constituent discipline energized in some situation and style. In a specific context we may recognize some particular self-operating in one or another of the three species of discipline. But, overall, persons are aptly seen as walking

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[26] Compare Nietzsche on letters as unwanted guests.

> wounded, who evolve out of stochastic processes of continuing bruisings and coalescences among
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> networks and disciplines. (White 1992a: 198)

 In the following section, I identify the crucial characteristics of praxis and action as theoretical categories. I then offer a concise overview of what White means by "getting fresh action." Subsequently, I dissect White's theory of action into its three main components, which I suggest revolve around matters of network position, agents, and strategy. Fresh action on a larger scope, which is to say, annealing, is then addressed. I conclude by providing a brief evaluation of White in terms of the normative criteria for critical theory proposed by Nancy Fraser.

Praxis and Action

Having just mapped out some ways through which important questions of social domination may be apprehended in White's work, I now address in more detail his theory of action. In the remainder of this chapter I will be interested in how White's theory of agency resonates with conceptions of political praxis and radical action advocated by critical theorists and other theorists of democracy. White himself displays his openness to such a connection in a notebook entry penned while studying the work of Marx and Lenin. White scrawls: "Praxis is crucial. Yet Marxism-Leninism is inherently a <u>macro</u> theory, dealing with whole classes over long periods. How many persons can conceivably have an opportunity of praxis at such a level?" (1973). By focusing most of his attention on what he calls the "middle" rather than the "macro" range, does White's theory fills in the dynamics of praxis on less grandiose scale? That is the question to be pursued here. Just how does one get "action the effects of which can be more cumulative

and on a larger scale than from the routines of disciplines, institutions, and also styles" (White 1992a: 230)?

The theoretical relationship between praxis and action is not particularly well stated in literature on social theory. As Bernstein (1971: xii) comments: "Ironically, although the meanings of 'praxis' and 'action' are very close, few philosophers have even raised the question of whether there is any relation between analytic discussions of the concept of action and the interest in praxis among Marxist thinkers." It is my sense that Harrison White's provides an instance of just the sort of theoretical engagement that Bernstein advocates. White's speculations on fresh action are useful for critical theory because, in providing insight into how social actors maneuver within networks of control and how these structures themselves change, White offers the elements of a theory with "practical" or "emancipatory" intent. White's network theoretical orientation emerges as an alternative to the pessimism of the Frankfurt School theorists, the quietism of Habermas' theoretical project, as well as the seemingly endless reflexivity often found in much "post-structural" social theory. [27]

Yet a word of caution is in order. White's hypotheses on getting action might strike some readers as being a shade Machiavellian, apparently lacking the requisite "normative" statements we seem to require in our social theories. Indeed, as I have already suggested, in many respects much of White's theory appears to fly in the face of, say, the "discourse ethics" of Habermas' project. Be this as it may, it seems to me that,

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[27] And also, perhaps, in work in the "game theory" tradition. But White (1992a: 202 n22) comments that the latter is mostly crippled because it does not "concern the induction of identities and disciplines, of social organization." Game theory fails in treating social action "in isolation from the matrix of ecological and social constraints" (White 1992a: 304 n12). In other words, game theory would be more effective if it conceptualized actors at the points of intersection between social networks.

for example, Habermasians should at least recognize, if not appreciate, the implicit critical theory posed by White since he is interested in many of the same concerns, and addresses them at roughly the same analytic level. Indeed, White's theory points to some ways through which it may be possible "to radicalize those institutions that we have already established in Western countries, to direct them toward a form of radical democracy that makes it possible, just in terms of delegitimization, to change or at least to affect administration" (Habermas 1992: 470).

While by no means the only "point" to critical theory, a conception of radical action or "comprehended practice" is at the core of critical theory as an intellectual discipline. Critical theory is supposed to have practical suggestions for changing the world. According to Richard Bernstein (1971: 13):"Praxis is the central concept in Marx's outlook – the key to understanding his early philosophical speculations and his detailed analysis of the structure of capitalism." What is meant by the concept of praxis? Gajo Petrovic (1983: 384) writes that praxis refers "in general to action, activity; and in Marx's sense to the free, universal, creative and self-creative activity through which man creates (makes, produces) and changes (shapes) his historical human world and himself; [praxis is] an activity specific to man, though which he is basically differentiated from all other beings." According to this view, praxis is a self-conscious making of the world, an intervention into social structure. We see that questions of <u>action</u> quickly seep into, and are intertwined with, those of praxis.

By contrast, Shierry Weber's (1970: 37-38) account of praxis — or what she calls "reintegrated experience" — is posited as sort of a higher order game than action. She writes that praxis concerns,

refusal of the destructive forms of experience pressed upon us; recapturing the experiences of action and process; redevelopment of the ability to sublimate – to experience form, meaning, and integration; validation of subject-ness as opposed to object-ness; and de-perversion – liberation of the erotic potential of technology and men which has been distorted for the aims of advanced industrial society.

I hope to demonstrate that Harrison White's theory furthers a more explicit awareness of the second clause in Weber's statement, namely, "the experiences of action and process."[28]

White's contribution is necessary, I argue, because the distinctly "fresh" flavor to social action articulated in Marx's Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach — a statement which, as Fischer ([1970] 1996: 153) notes, "is not an either/ or but a synthesis of philosophical interpretation and of the practical transforming of the world" — still remains relatively under-theorized. Even Habermas' labors, as intensive as they are, too often seem to result in idealistic and laicized conceptions of praxis, one Hazelrigg rightly criticizes as "the equivalent to counting angels on the head of a pin" (1989a: 449). As Dahms (1998: 47) remarks, despite critical social theorists' "avowed resolve to theorize in a more practically relevant manner . . . this claim does not seem to have led to any discernible practical success." I argue that critical theory might benefit from, not so much substituting fresh action for praxis, but rather seeing these two terms in a complementary perspective. Both praxis and fresh action are keyed to interventions in social

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[28] Yet, in focusing so heavily on issues of action, I do not by any means want to slight other forms of critical theory which attack the question of social domination on other fronts. In the same way that an "action" theory is lacking if it misses the other important social dynamics which reduce human beings to lives of unhappiness, misery, and hopelessness, the same can be said of social theories which focus on issues of say, the "body" or the "psyche," without dealing with the problematics of social action. My point in this chapter is that "emancipation," broadly construed, is always about some sort of "fresh action" some making of new worlds (Hazelrigg 1995).

organization. As Calhoun (1995: 124) suggests, "If critical theory is to hold meaningful implications for action, it must grant actors and action a more significant place."[29] White is nominated as a critical theorist because he does just this. So let us follow along White's path to inquire how social identities "get action." Just how does one open what Harrison White calls "the Sargasso Sea of social obligation and context?" (White 1992a: 231)?

White's Theory of Action

Contrary to perspectives which view Harrison White's treatment of action as "worrisome" (Calhoun 1993: 316; cf. Prendergast 1995; Brint 1992), I would like to show how White's theory of agency can be read as a positive and productive contribution to a critical theory of praxis. Like critical theory, White is interested in "intervention," which he defines as "the getting and shaping of action" (White 1992a: 319). The interventionist element to his theory is stated early on in Identity and Control when he writes that "the real riddle will be seeing how it is that anyone can effect action by intention in social context," and White builds his argument to the penultimate chapter that highlights ways, "to overcome, sometimes, that blocking of action embodied in social organization" (White 1992a: 4). Identity and Control does not, however, provide an exhaustive general theory of social action. Rather, it more modestly offers some perspicuous examples and speculations on the "getting-of-action" each drawn from an

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[29] According to Harry Dahms, critical theory has enormous potential for reorienting sociological theory in the new millenium. He writes: "[C]ritical theory is better positioned to contribute to theoretical sociology than any other individual theory or theoretical tradition. To do so, and to remain a vital force in contemporary societies at the same time, critical theory has to reassert the practical orientation that was

eclectic sourcebook of historical case studies and scientific literatures from which he has distilled common features of maneuvering the future.

What does White mean by "fresh action"? Social scientists should by now be accustomed to discourse on social action. In Max Weber's words: "We shall speak of 'action' insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behavior….Action is 'social' insofar as its subjective meaning takes into account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course" (Weber 1978: 4) Readers may not, however, be so familiar with White's adjective "fresh." Just what sort of behavior is implied by "fresh action"? From the dictionary, we learn that fresh means "newly made or obtained… recently arrived…additional or further…not tired or fatigued…not faded, worn, obliterated, etc.…looking youthful and healthy…pure, cool, or refreshing as air." A conception of "fresh action" thus could resonate with critical theories that posit action as involving the struggle for a new, brighter, and livelier futures, whether in the Marxian vein of the sensuous production of life (Hazelrigg 1989b), or in the context of Nietzschean affirmations of life (Kaufmann 1968). Action that is not fresh is stale, redundant, and routine; it closes, rather than opens up, the potential for less oppressive social embeddings and the stories those spaces may provide.

Although Calhoun differs from me in his assessment of the concept, he is on the mark with the recognition that: "Getting action means shaking up existing institutions, reaching up, down, or sideways through them in order to override the constraints common to all 'normal,' specialized forms of behavior" (Calhoun 1993: 316). Fresh

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integral to its initial design, but which has become ever more submerged as a result of the orientation toward abstract theory" (Dahms 1997: 210).

action is about changing and rearranging social hierarchies, changes which have at their

root shifts in social ties and stories and values. Fresh action cuts through domains of

social organization "hitherto nullified by hegemonic perspective" (White 1992a: 254), in

order to open them up in unpredictable ways.[30] White's theory suggests that the classes

to be overthrown are a not neatly discernible group who come wrapped in a package as

individual people, but rather, historically specific regimes of social relations, which can

be perceived as institutions and styles.

Fresh action, according to White, "always arises from accidents and speculations

and gamings which become aspects of more far-reaching and crisscrossing projects of

control" (White 1992a: 72-73).   Fresh action can happen on both local and global levels.

As White says: "From a philosophical point of view, the only universal claims we can

make are local performances" (White 1992a: 131). Fresh action recalls debates about

inducing local history, making new worlds, and "acting where you stand" (Hazelrigg

1989b). Fresh action is extraordinary and rare to be sure, but it is always a possibility.

Not something simply for the high and mighty, getting action "is always a moment of,

and interlude in, ongoing social life" (White 1992a: 262).[31] Getting action always

emerges from the passions, needs and interests of identities in concrete social formations.

White argues that the "fuel" of fresh action comes "from excitation of grievances and

fractures in the motivations of existing networks, identities, and disciplines embedded

through many levels" (White 1992a: 263-4).

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[30] White's model seems to share much with the action frame of reference forwarded by Hannah Arendt, for whom, "to act means to be able to seize the initiative and to do the unanticipated" (Habermas [1977] 1986: 78).
[31] Compare Hazelrigg (1991: 246): "[T]he sources of struggle against tyranny are found nowhere else but in the conditions of tyranny."

White makes four basic claims concerning the getting-of-action.[32] First, "getting action" will tend to "mix together contexts' (White 1992a: 255). Unlike blocked or blocking action which affixes or couples one to a fixed discipline, "Getting action must invoke changing concrete patterns, attaining new varieties and combinations of discipline, role, and position, and the changing must always continue" (White 1992a: 256).

Second, White claims that getting action is not a new form of specialization (White 1992a: 256). This claim undergirds the entire generalist outlook of Identity and Control. White argues that, to the contrary, "the more general and abstract training is more likely to fit with getting action and hence with surviving through changes of opportunity" (White 1992a: 256).

White's third claim is that control (action) is a "two-edged concept." By this he means that it can be used as means to both attain and thwart fresh action. White argues, "Control may be realized in stopping change and thus blocking action, as well as in getting action via changing and mixing specializations, roles, and the like."[33]

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[32] I am using the terms "getting action" and "fresh action" interchangeably. While there might, in fact, be a slight difference in the meaning behind each term, they appear so frequently as an alternative to each other (Cf. White 1992a: 245), that for the purposes of this dissertation, they are basically identical. White does not reflect upon the etymology of other of these words, and the ambiguity of each could very well keep theorists chattering for some time to come. Just what does "getting" mean in this sense? White himself is quite unclear on the matter. From my perspective, "fresh action" can be considered as sort of a destination or way station, an end point to successful intervention that is acknowledged only after the fact. It seems to me that, "getting action," by contrast, is the contingent, ambiguous, and ambagious routes one may take to get there.

[33] The quote goes on: "Similarly, decoupling, which pairs with control, is two-valued: decoupling can be as central in blocking action as in getting action" (White 1992a: 256).

Fourth, White claims that "What getting action does generate unfailingly is inequality"[34] (White 1992a: 257). By this White does not just mean the inequality induced, say, by the wealthy who "get action" through successful passage of capital gains legislation, but rather, inequalities in the sense of continuing injustices and imbalances. White argues that "inequality is exactly…the only systematic regularity one can adduce from the continuing operation , within social spaces, of getting action…Inequality is the by-product of attempts to get action and gain control: Inequality, the most pervasive idiom of blocking action, is the cumulative product of attempts to get action" (White 1992a: 257). Getting action creates unevenness, variability, and departures from the norm.   More policy related, White acknowledges that "inequalities are commonly by-products of getting action, and thus of the elaborate structures associated with blocking action" (White 1992a: 293). But he also suggests that these inequalities can at least be attenuated through conscious planning.[35] As he puts it:

> Planned repartition of rights and duties does invoke and induce inequalities. But planned inequalities are never as large as inequalities that emerge as unplanned by-products. Inequalities are largest just at the disjunctions between social formations. These occur in liminal zones and marginal areas with the least elaborated culture. This explains why it is so very hard to shift inequalities and the rhetorics associated with them (White 1992a: 293).

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[34] White's remark that getting action "generates inequality" seems to reiterate the main point of Marx's Third Thesis: "Hence this doctrine necessarily arrives at dividing society into two parts, one of which is superior to society" (Marx [1845] 1978: 144). What is the "inferior" part of society? That which is "embedded in nature" What is the superior part of society? That part which has practically abolished or transcended (or in White's terminology decoupled) such embeddedness.

[35] It does seem clear that White has more faith in the entrepreneurial, if not the voluntarist capacity of human beings than he does in organizational agencies to right social injustices. See, for example, his discussion of the effects of the changes to the civil service recruitment in Britain in the 1880s, where he concludes that "class bias was enormously greater under the new 'reformed' mode of civil service recruitment" (White 1992a: 226). As it puts it elsewhere: "Show me a fixed network structure of organization and I'll demonstrate to you that it is slipping out of the rational control set up by the initial

One can keep fresh action in perspective by relating it once again to his conception of control. As we have seen, for White, issues of control are endemic to social organization. In his words: "Seeking control is not some option of choice, it comes out of the way identities get triggered and keep going" (White 1992: 9). White's action construct is closely related to that of control, and the latter can be seen as sort of a short-term marker of the former. As he puts it, "getting action may be indirect and delayed. More direct and timely efforts are better described as control" (White 1992a: 232). Or again: "Control is what identities seek in taking action" (White 1993d: 11).

If control is construed as sort of a defensive response to the triggering of identity, then the getting-of-action suggests intentional organizational restructuring, the making of new realms or worlds (Hazelrigg 1989b). Getting action is what White calls a "second-order" project, one that builds upon initial control attempts and ensuing contingencies. Once triggered, identities can potentially become akin to "Movers and shakers," a phrase that White says "is an apt designation for actors while they are making a difference, as distinguished from merely administering or performing" (White 1993d: 27). While control is about the balancing of identities at the intersection of differentially sited disciplines, "identities in action are refractions of what does not fit neatly into social organization of network and discipline" (White 1992a: 40).

Yet control and action struggles are not about lone individuals facing the world — they occur in sticky and gooey social environments, in social disciplines. In control struggles, people must respond "to an environment that consists of other people

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scheme" (White 1992d: 110). The network structures of welfare agencies would, then, prove to be no exception.

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responding to their environment, which consists of people responding to an environment of people's responses" (Schelling (1978: 14). These concatenations, as we have seen, are ruled mainly by social disciplines. Network moves are always tempered and provoked by contingencies and the moves of others in disciplines in tension with their own struggles for control. The interanimations of disciplines "generate and provide the endogenous social energy without which control is mere façade" (White 1992a: 234). Getting fresh action is always a social event, the crafting of a situation, or a project with others. It is the "latent mobilization of what others might mobilize" (White 1992a: 57), of what has been talked about but never enacted, a fusing of new regime as overlap of disparate styles.

White argues that one important way of getting action is through events or situations. Situations stem from "interanimations of talk and ties," and provide "interactions with social charge and mobilizing force." A situation occurs when "a previously predictable, stylized interaction that suddenly becomes fraught with uncertainty, danger, and/opportunity" (Mische and White 1998: 696-698). More importantly, however, situations "provide opportunities for entrepreneurs to seize action in more projective and practically evaluative ways" (Mische and White 1998: 709). These opportunities are triggered and reproduced by variations on the theme of decoupling. Situations are important for both actors and observers, since they "shake up configurations of acceptability and availability, perhaps opening up new spaces (drawn from cross-cutting netdoms) as 'running grounds' for conversations, while others are closed off, and traditional possibilities are rearranged" (Mische and White 1998: 711).

Mische and White suggest that situations are forged in one of two ways. On the one hand, Mische and White argue that "cascade" dynamics can be crucial to the dynamics of situations. Unlike zaps (see above), cascades "involve partial or graduated changes, rather than abrupt turnovers" (Mische and White 1998: 710). Cascades are iterative processes, and may be seen in situations, for example, "when a friend/ colleague relation becomes fraught with romantic possibilities, or [when] a space mission in progress suffers a technological breakdown" (Mische and White 1998: 710).

A second way that Mische and White suggest situations can arise is through the interanimations of network contingencies and ceremonial social dynamics. Examples here could be crashing someone's wedding party, or throwing cream pies at Bill Gates. Mische and White use the example of ethnic protest at a graduation ceremony. However a situation comes about, White claims that "narrative ratchets" are required that smooth over or reconfigure the netdomains that are constitutive of situations (Mische and White 1998: 714). Ratcheting processes can be used by hegemonic forces to reassert control, but also by contending social movements who may anneal (see below) and thereby further embed identity. Itself a special form of decoupling, a ratchet is "the event of abrupt recalibration of a set of stories which no longer can map onto the perceived network realm of population" (White 1993d, 18). Ratchets are related to, but can be distinguished from zaps. In fact, ratchets are needed to cope with zaps, which is to say, shifts in domains or realms. White notes, "The zap reduces ambiguity greatly at cost of greatly enhanced ambage. The ratchet, on the other hand, as it adapts to contingency tends to increase ambiguity with little or no effect on ambage" (White 1993d: 26).

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Ratcheting dynamics span many scales and scopes. It is through ratcheting

processes that we move, between, for example, "sleep at home, or work at office" (White

1994: 23), and we can see ratcheting in the strategic context of Leifer ties. They can

involve revolutions at grand scale and in every day life. White notes, "Pasts are

generated only through [John] Padgett ratchets…Periods recognized in a world are set by

ratchets … This is true of phases in conversation as it is of epochs in history and of

periods in personal life. Particular generations establish themselves upon triggering by a

ratchet," (White 1993d: 23). White's ratchet models also seem to encompass the

Marxian notion of correspondence between relations of production and productive forces,

where styles map to relations, and domains to forces. White (1993d: 20) says that

ratchets (like action) are emblematic of a "higher-order process" than zaps (control).

Ratchets involve twisting down cultural meanings into memorable and meaningful story

sets.

As I mentioned above, getting action may, but need not, involve a project of

grandiose design. On the one hand, White does argue that getting action may involve

"elites, circles of 'movers and shakers,' who have special location and abilities which

yield them insights about . . . these openings and these shuttings in social life" (White

1992a: 230). For the most part, though, White goes to great lengths to disavow any

esoteric interpretation to his fresh action concept, and stresses that all identities are

always in the position of exerting control.[36]   As he writes: "Every identity is engaged in

control efforts . . . There is never in social fact such a thing as an absolute bottom [of

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[36] Compare Hazelrigg (1989b: 272): "Thus, any action, even the most 'utterly routinized,' as Giddens put
it, is transformational in some degree. Such is the point of Derrida's 'iteration.'"

society]" (White 1992a: 12, 266). Even under the most oppressive social conditions, for example, in the IRA's "Dirty Protest," (Coogan 1996) identities — new social actors — can be formed, in that historical case by wearing their own excrement rather than prisoner uniforms.

It would thus be wrong, then, to privilege any one level of action for "the" site of action, as White suggests that similar dynamics may be perceived at many scopes.[37] The same principles of mobilization that work for the "high and mighty," he says, may be also perceived in say, urban street gangs, who "give further color and recognition to what is universal; namely, the interactive, the riposte nature of mobilization" (White 1992a: 57).[38]

The exemplars upon which White draws to make his points about getting fresh action span a wide variety of histories and realms, such as British entrepreneurs, the office of CEO, the army and the church, Glasnost, the Bolshevik revolution, and Italian city states. Yet the details of the case studies he selects are probably less important than those any reader could come up with him or herself. This is especially so given that the "practical limitation" noted by White in the following excerpt, becomes even more "limiting" in secondary work on his project. White comments:

> The example [of change in social system among the ancient Greeks] also illustrates a practical
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> limitation in my exposition. Only historically prominent and otherwise famous or significant
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> instances of action are familiar to enough readers for brief exposition to be effective (if still not

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[37] See Hazelrigg's comment on the critical potential of Erving Goffman's work: "Instances of 'radical concern' often occur in the tiny and momentary, and they are no less 'radical' for it" (Hazelrigg 1992: 248).
[38] White's universalism and naturalism also make him an interesting interlocutor for projects such as those suggested by David Harvey, who argues that since "transformative action . . . arises out of contradiction, it follows that it can in principle be found anywhere and everywhere in the physical, biological, and social

sufficient). I have been and will continue to cite studies without substantial description in hopes

that the source monographs with be consulted. (White 1992a: 256 n.20)

A different sort of study may well indeed try to mine these "source monographs" so that

that better insights into White's arguments may be gleaned. Another route, the one

employed here, is to attempt a basic classification of the main dimensions to White's

theory of action.

The Dynamics of Fresh Action Dissected

From my vantagepoint, there are at least three components to White's theory of action, of

"making a difference, as distinguished from merely administering or performing" (White

1995: 27). The first is a matter of network position; the second is a reliance on agents —

individuals, groups, or even tools that do the work for "principals" — and the third

involves questions of strategy. While all three, of course, come wrapped up in same

"self-contradictory and bizarre" (White 1992a: 231) organizational reality, it is possible

to dissect White's theory into these three components so as to better get a handle on and

to start to mine it in a productive way.

<u>Network Position</u>

For Harrison White, being in the right network configuration of social relations

plays a tremendously important role in the getting-of-action. White argues that,

"Multiplicity in social organization is the key to getting action . . .. Control must build

from others' ties and disciplines" (White 1992: 231, 234).   This multiplicity is important

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world" (Harvey 1996: 55). Similarly, White can find transformative models of process in all areas of

because it extends the reach and the control of any given actor. By participating in a diverse set of social realms, identities (which themselves can be disciplines) can share in the knowledge and information found in some disciplinary story-set. These stories may be beneficial to present and future control projects.

Getting fresh action (or simply control) is thus an irreducibly network phenomenon. With Leifer, White argues:

> [C]ontrol often enlists others to make one's own ideas definite, with those enlisted depending conversely on you for the same purpose. With effective control, direction is jointly determined as is, perhaps, more important, the sense of having achieved something. Learning from others and giving guidance, or the ex post and ex ante in social action, becomes hopelessly intertangled.
> (Leifer and White 1986: 237)

But getting action is not a matter of mindless networking,[39] which is why White stresses that it overcomes regimes, bound up with social disciplines. Getting action is a matter of changing social organization, of reworking discipline. It is about using styles to recreate institutions and thereby local history. Sometimes the strategic use of network ties is the way to get action, but White also argues that getting action is about suppressing networks and eliding levels. As he puts it: "Reaching through [getting action] is as much selectivity as it is persevering through multiple connections"[40] (White 1992a: 260).[41]

"physical, biological, and social world." See chapter three of this work.

[39] See Baker (1994)

[40] Other commentators buttress this line of argument. Arguilla and Ronfeldt (1996: 43), for example, write: "Power is migrating to actors who are skilled at developing networks, and at operating in a world of networks. Actors positioned to take advantage of networking are being strengthened faster than actors embedded in old hierarchical structures that constrain networking. This does not favor actors on any particular part of the political spectrum – it favors whoever can master network design elements."

[41] Ronald Burt suggests that cultivating nonredundancy in social contacts is key. He writes: "Non-redundant contacts ensure exposure to diverse sources of information. Each cluster of contacts is an independent source of information. One cluster, no matter how numerous its members, is only one source of information, because people connected to one another tend to know about the same things at about the same time. The information screen provided by multiple clusters of contacts is broader, providing better

Nor does getting action happen by being too embedded in present position. To the contrary, White claims that "decoupling," which is to say, being freed "from another's ties" (White 1992a: 78), is crucial for getting action. White argues that identities must move to new social locations and positions in order to get further and fresh action. Decoupling is important because it "induces a spread of alternative stories as menu" (1992a: 13)." Getting action plays "off disciplines and their embeddings into still further levels of networks and institutions, making use of decoupling" (White 1992a: 231). Decoupling from ones networks is thus central to White's theory of action. He stresses that decoupling "doesn't happen by accident. People must deliberately decouple in order to achieve some of their ends" (White in Swedborg 1991: 88). Yet this should not be seen as a necessarily brutal or violent process. Rather, decouplings may be seen as "ingenuities…which crosscut the stories of disciplines and the larger institutions and styles into which they may cumulate" (White 1992a: 232).

The management and movement of networks (and one's position within them) is an important part of getting action for White, but this is not the only story. Equally important is the generation of a larger network space that emerges along with, and around, efforts at getting action. As Wächter (1999: 152) comments: "Getting intentional action is in potential conflict with social organization and is confined by the complex nesting of social spaces. A social space has to emerge which allows a certain independence for the actor." Getting fresh action is therefore as much about types of tie

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assurance that you, the player, will be informed of opportunities and impending disasters" (Burt 1992: 23). It should be remembered, however, that the "strength" of your weak ties are meaningless unless they are mapped on to some larger organizational structure (e.g. of disciplines). Having a large social network, in other words, is only conducive to action to the extent that its members are embedded in more specialized realms.

as it is about searching for vacancies (Chase 1995), structural holes (Burt 1992), or "empty spaces" (McDonogh 1987) in network structure, all of which may afford further and fresh control. More specifically, White highlights 'black holes' around catnets as instrumental for identity generation and action. He argues: "Identities emerge initially from rubbings together of control and/ or production efforts in given settings. So it is instructive to think of new identities as especially likely to be generated in contexts indexed around the black hole…in the turbulent contexts indexed around the black hole, sets of identities may emerge in interaction" (White 1992a: 62). Black holes offer up decoupling opportunities.

From Doug McAdam's work on Freedom Summer, White extracts the lesson that social networks may be more important to fresh action than subjectively held values. White comments that, during that particular civil rights mobilization, "it was position in mobilization networks that tipped who actually came, rather than intensity of individual beliefs in … values" (White 1993d: 67). Yet values are also not dismissed by White's approach, far from it. He argues, "Values help each actor orient in and deal with contingent interactions and environment, which give room to attempts at manipulation, and in particular to agency" (White 1993d: 68). Rather than ignoring values, White's reinterprets them in terms of social networks. Changing values requires, in part, changing network position.

According to White, getting action can be accomplished by way of three basic moves, what he calls "reaching through," "reaching down," and "reaching up". These three ways of "reaching" provide the social bridgings from the spaces that "block action"

to those that can potentially be opened up for "fresh action." All aspects of these reachings come wrapped in streams of discipline and style.

The first strategy for action White calls "reaching through." This is getting action that tries to reach "through to other levels and neighborhoods, one's other than those of the disciplines of current routine social action" (White 1992a: 259). While on first reading, the term connotes a getting through in the sense of "getting through to the right person," White suggests that reaching through is both "vertical" and "lateral." Concrete examples for White include mergers, acquisitions, and takeovers.

The second way of getting action, that of reaching down, "is seen as a positive opportunity for action in that it allows for the continued outreach to wider and changing scopes which is indispensable to continuing to get action" (White 1992a: 263). In White's terminology, reaching down seems to imply a relationship of authority and influence. As such, he claims that it need not be "painless or neat" (White 1992a: 269). White provides examples of British entrepreneurship, the USSR in the late 1980s, and GM in the 1920s, as case studies that reinforce his claims about reaching down. White argues that reaching down comes about by shakeups from above, or from the "middle range." Reaching down can, but need not, emerge in a kind of "clamping" down. White states that triage in a hospital (i.e. the sorting of priorities in an emergency situation), can be seen as a "prototype for reaching down on a much larger scale" (White 1992a: 262). At root, reaching down is about breaking up "the hardening crust of issues and interests which continually congeal to block action" (White 1992a: 264). It is about directing and delegating to other identities, and in the process tries to create new institution from the top-down.

White's third and final mode of getting action is what he calls, "reaching up."

This term, White suggests, can be used to describe "features of getting action when

oneself and collaborators are not perceived as already the high and mighty" (White

1992a: 265). White claims V.I. Lenin as credible "expert on reaching up, through a

complex social fabric, to get action on a large scale" (White 1992a: 265).[42] Here, as in

the other two modes, network and other organizational dynamics are at the root of the

matter. As White claims: "Action is gotten by astute juxtapositions of disciplines and

spheres of social formations which normally served to block action" (White 1992a: 266).

In other words, reaching up is a matter of changing types of tie associated with normal

functioning of disciplines. Concrete examples such as using university dorm-rooms to

house migrant workers, occupying administrative offices, and even Habermas' "public

sphere," are examples of "reaching up." The point in reaching up is seeing how existing

institutions can be put together in a different way. White says that similar dynamics of

"reaching up" can be seen at economic, political, and cultural scopes, and he argues more

specifically that rock-n-roll "was a scene of reaching up to get action, in many different

respects at once" (White 1992a: 282)[43]

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[42] The use of Lenin in the capacity of a discussion on "getting action" is somewhat interesting, especially since White typically seems to shy away from explicit political commentary. One of the reasons White gives for little mention of Marx in Identity and Control was the political environment during the time he was working on the book (White 1998b). Yet it hardly seems that Lenin would be a less political figure in this regard than Marx. When pressed on the issue, White suggests that, "Marx is a huge topic . . . Whereas Lenin is an engineer. Most people have not read his early excellent empirical social science from Russian country reports. Lenin's thinking is way ahead of his critic, but he is not on the same scientific plane as Marx." (White 1998b). Be this as it may, in Identity and Control, Lenin is invoked not as an exemplar of good social science, but rather as a figure who managed to "reach up" to get action "on a large scale" (White 1992a: 265). For a different interpretation of the role of Lenin, see Scott's Seeing Like a State. (1998)

[43] For more on White's use of rock-n-roll as a case study for his argument see the section below on "Annealing for Change."

To summarize these perspectives on reaching, one could say that, in "reaching through," one basically takes over a structurally equivalent position in some more embedded social space; in "reaching down" one puts one's power and authority to work; and in "reaching up," one uses others' power to change control structures such as disciplines from below.   It would also seem likely that council disciplines, as "mobilizers," would be involved in these modes of getting action.[44] Getting action can be seen to stem from being in a position to exert control in council formations. White claims that council members may, as initiators, "become central to not just one but to many facets of events of mobilization" (White 1992a: 267).

Agents

As the above section tried to make clear, position in social network is an important component for getting fresh action. This is true whether one is talking about indirect multiplex connections or the more strategically engaged Leifer ties. Yet from White's frame, getting action can also be achieved in more directly social ways, which is to say, by way of explicit utilization of other actors to help realize one's control projects.

Action is jointly determined. White makes us of principal-agent theory to stress the irreducibly social dimensions to action. In Creativity and Careers, White argues: "Agency is the business of any person or other actor being empowered to act for another, alive or dead. Agency is there from the beginning" (White 1993c: 95).   Agents are thus there to help do the bidding for "principals." They may be mentors, lawyers, and even

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[44] Given that Habermas's "public sphere" is an arena, rather than a council, discipline it is unlikely to be the site of fresh action.

computer programs. Engels, for example, was an agent for Marx when he opened up the family factory in Manchester for Marx's peering analyses. Engels thereby enabled Marx to get action by way of his strategic relationship to an exploitative work environment ripe for investigation. Social actors who have agents at their disposal are at an advantage in getting action than those who do not, because agents are conducive to helping principals "switch" between different social realms.

In a 1985 essay, White states this fundamental point: "Agency . . . gets one person to do something for another vis-à-vis a third person, but only with heavy reliance on the lay of the social landscape (White 1985: 187). Agents have either direct or indirect influence over other social actors with whom the principal is engaged. Agents act as decouplers, who can potentially influence a principal's trajectory for action.   Agents facilitate further embeddings — they represent the flip side to the "reaching" for action as they "pull" identities into new social formations. Identities can experience blocked action when there is no such agent, when the agent has no such power, or when the agent fails to intervene. The behavior of agents surely explains much of social domination. Accountants, mutual fund managers, marriage therapists, neurosurgeons and the police, for example, are all social agents who make networks of power available for members of the dominant classes, while restricting the scope of agency for subordinates.

Strategies: Stories and Styles
Along with network position, and the availability of agents, strategy represents a third general way to assess White's theory of action.   As White puts it, strategies are needed to help social actors "negotiate the lay of the social landscape." In a UC Irvine lecture in

the 1980s, White said that "conscious mobilization . . . requires a high order of intelligence, alertness and timing, since there is minimal guidance from formal structure, and maximal dependence on detailed local knowledge and memory of antecedents" (White 1981b: 5).

White's constructs of stories and styles both figure heavily in his assessment of strategies that are best suited to getting fresh action. As should be clear by now, getting action is largely a matter of "switching" network contexts. White claims that the primary way this is achieved is through stories or "talk." White argues: "At any given time, any concrete actor always has available a number of alternative stories" (White 1992a: 140). Recalling Bourdieu's notion of "cultural capital," White's notion of getting action suggests that one not only needs to be in the right place and the right time,[45] but also must articulate the right stories in the process. This requires strategy and gaming. White argues:

> 'Gaming' is current idiom for interacting manipulations. Manipulations certainly trade on the concretely contingent as well as on social maneuvers and interpretive ambiguity. Manipulations often key on weather and shortages. Gaming finds ready, requires and resupplies ambage, ambiguity, and contingency, all three of which are its raw material, its medium, and product. (White 1992a: 112)

This is an important point. All gamings, White claims, which is to say, all manipulations, key on the trade-offs between "ambage, ambiguity, and contingency," that is, between social roundaboutness, cultural meaning, and unexpected happenings. These trade-offs are always shifting. As White argues, "I argue that in getting action in social contexts it

works better to change goals than to pay heavy costs of predetermined control goals; or rather it works better to float with and adjust goals, maintaining a sort of overall control: a delicate balance!" (1992a: 348). In all cases, changing goals means changing stories and accounts, which are the "levers" through and by which getting action is induced.

White argues that stories "can operate as gears, as transcribers between actors and actions of different levels as they maneuver for control" (White 1992a: 231). Because of their capacity to switch social actors between multiple realms, they are crucial for human action. In a recent paper, White (1993a: 2) argues: "My postulate is that recurrent moves by actors back and forth across networks and discourse are what sustain the variety of specializations that one recognizes in socio-cultural structure and process, and which indeed are what characterize social action as human." In Identity and Control, White had stated that, "stories are the essential vehicles for elaborating networks so as to become base for further formations." (White 1992a: 67n). White argues that social movement "becomes possible through build-up, and training in, appropriate cultural modes, of which narrative is first in both ontogeny and phylogeny" (White 1993a: 25). Narratives are learned through mixings of disciplines, types of tie, and contingent events.

Moreover, it is not just the content of stories that matter; social switches require changes in content as well as changes in speech register[46] (dialect, grammar, tense, etc.) that accompanies the culture of the new discipline or realm. White draws upon the use of Bayseian inference to emphasize this basic point. He argues:

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[45] "Timing becomes all — a week late with an idea, and it is dead" (White 1992a: 261). White (1992a: 91) also suggests that actions based on timing are more consequential than those that are simply at the mercy of contingencies.

[46] This speech register also could include, for example, variations in handshakes or jokes.

> In ordinary, everyday social relations, I argue, multiple alternative accounts are being carried along until temporary resolutions at disjunctions which I call switches. At a switching, the continuing juggling among a set of stories is resolved into the account from which the next phase of reality constructing takes off, among relations cohering through that there and then. It is such a resolution which I call a <u>Bayesian fork</u>. (White 1995a: 1049)

White's notion of the "Bayesian fork" allows us to more properly attend to the probability of various stories being invoked in a given network-domain. Those who are skillful at action create and are better at negotiating these "forks," perhaps by having a more variegated narrative palette through which they suffer less blocking action.

Yet Mische and White make clear that switchings are not, primarily, a matter of voluntarist action. Rather, they suggest that

> switching is not merely a function of individual will or purpose: a person can be said to have "switched" when the new setting considers as relevant a different set of discursive signals than the previous set, even if that individual's entire set of ties and signals hasn't changed….Lines in a story are scripted by and with domain, in relation to place and time, physical objects, role occupying others and network choices. (Mische and White 1998: 704)

Stories, therefore, do not come solo any more than do social ties. In fact, stories are deeply intertwined with disciplines (domains) and styles, which comprises another level of strategy for Harrison White, and to which we now turn.

White defines style as a "lattice of constraints and leads for making action possible" (White 1992a: 240). Styles are "the cultural analogues to identities," in that they "are triggered in complex overlappings among networks of meanings" (White 1993c, p 66). While White argues that "there can be no particular type of organization associated with additional control" he does suggest that "there are styles conducive to

shaking up for fresh action" (White 1992a: 237). Styles, like institutions, are

inescapable, and they run the gamut from the hieratic styles of professionalism and the

army, to the latest trend in popular music, for example, "math-rock." Styles are

important for both making up the broader social context in terms of the cultural analogue

to disciplines, and also for maneuvering within that context. White (1992a: 167) argues

that: "Styles both couple and decouple among network populations which overlap in

physical space ….Styles are envelopes from innumerable attempts at control by

identities, [and which] thereafter limit and funnel control" (White 1992a: 167).

One style that we have already observed in this essay is White's endorsement of a

generalist style. Ironically, White says that "clear goals are antithetical to establishing

identities" (White 1992a: 85), which is to say, for intentional and fresh action. Yet these

generalist leanings should not be taken as an advocacy of "slack."   White suggests that

having a style for "fresh action" involves knowing "where and how there are the most

openings for control" (White 1992a: 233). Skillful actors are those constantly on the

lookout for "indirect ties, overlaps, non-reciprocities and the like" (1993d: 4), in short,

for vacancies. As White claims: "Vacancies . . . provide avenues for developing a social

space of social action" (White 1992c: 210).[47] Finding these openings is a difficult task

given all the stories, and because White says that "any social formation whatever,

complex or not," tend to block fresh movement attempts for control (White 1992a: 255).

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[47] In Identity and Control White extends the basic principle of vacancy chains in a number of directions.
The topic of "romantic love" is especially singled out for treatment, a phenomena White (1992: 204)
suggests is "induced by states of queues in what can be visualized as a system of stochastic servers."   In
other words, romantic love is not primarily a matter of deep sentiments and emotion, rather, it is matter of
filling a structural absence in another's network of contacts.

Any identity is always at once utilizing, and is at the mercy of, social disciplines and their styles. Identities might be almost overwhelmed by blocked action all the while they themselves are blocking action on another front. Yet sometimes these acts of blocking action — of sustained hegemonic meaning — can work in favor of the one whose action is being blocked. White argues: "[C]ontrol efforts which block action can be an important initial leverage for somebody's managing, by yet further impulses for control, to generate some action not to be anticipated . . . control is achieved by a sort of jujitsu, by using the strong forces of existing structures against themselves" (White 1992a: 245, 252). By "existing structures," White means network institution, social discipline, and style. Even failure itself, White says, can be useful in further attempts at social action. He writes: "Failures are not mere breakdowns of a physical component. A failure is the social recognition and construction of breakdowns which offers a fresh start. Failure thus permits and stipulates a sharp ending to what seemed locked-in by social pressure" (White 1992a: 12).

In other instances, White says that overcoming blocking action may involve "inveigling others to take an anachronistic view of the future" (White 1992: 230). Getting action needs to attend to meaning as much as network structure, and part of the chore in getting fresh action is obviously trying to shift hegemonic frames of interpretation. Intentional forgetting and arbitrary referral (White 1992a: 11-12) are other tools that White says may be useful, sometimes, for getting action.

Harrison White nominates V.I. Lenin as a strategist who got fresh action. In contrast to Lenin's program of specialization, however, White argues that "general and abstract training is more likely to fit with getting action and hence surviving through

changes of opportunity" (White 1992a: 256). This generality comes from actors who are proficient in control projects drawn from a variety of social realms. White argues that, "control . . . comes only out of fluidity of role, because then one does <u>not</u> have goals imposed upon oneself by the social process" (1992a: 211). White stresses that we must not become too tied to any one domain: "Having anything to do – being subject to routine and responsibility – may interfere with getting action. Sticking to preset boundaries also interferes with getting action (White 1992a: 232).

Yet Harrison White shares with Lenin a conception of the clandestine, surreptitious and unpredictable nature of the getting of fresh action. With Leifer, White notes, "Effective control, we argue, hides its source" (White and Leifer 1986:229), and in an article with Eccles (White and Eccles 1986: 149), White invokes "the subtlety of control." In <u>Identity and Control</u>, White argues that "one can seek control exactly from weaving a maze of uncoordinated and changing contexts around others" (White 1992a: 10). White refers to this form of action as "fugitive control," which "requires disorder as material from which to attempt order" (White 1992a: 10).

In his advocacy of such a strategy, one wonders the extent to which White's penchant for the board game, <u>Go!</u> (Cf. Abbott 1994) — the English version of the ancient Chinese game Wei'chi — has influenced his thinking in matters such as these. As in Wei'chi, White's conception of getting action seems to require "the dialectic of discontinuous connections, concentrated dispersion, encircled counterencirclement, [and] flexible inflexibility" (Boorman 1969: 37). And, like the actors in, say, Granovetter's analysis of weak ties, the accomplished Wei'chi player "will refrain from tight, uneconomical connections between two separated groups," yet "must know the art of

maintaining communications in such a manner that he [sic.] will be able to tighten connections if the occasion arises" (Boorman 1969: 29-30).[48] The "cunning" of action in White enjoys in Go! frame may also be seen in his essay "Going into Traffic" (1983). In that piece, White refers to the importance of social actors becoming "tricksters" in order to better comprehend changes in the urban landscape.[49] White (1983: 473) claims that changes in urban landscape, from trivial to momentous, "all come from and represent thrust and counterthrust of urban tricksters as they congeal into institutions." White argues that the "trickster is an image close to the core of what city people are, wish to be, and believe themselves to be; unless we keep focus on that style . . . we shall mislead ourselves in trying to peer ahead into the economic future of our cities" (White 1983: 473). In Identity and Control, White argues that, "strategic social action … consists exactly in keeping the state of interaction hard to assess through being pregnant with very many possible evolutions" (White 1992a: 86). The meaning of this statement is not to be pigeonholed into any one activity or social discipline — even a scientific one. Social action is about playing ambage, ambiguity and contingency off one another.[50] White's

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[48] Interestingly, Rand researchers Arguilla and Ronfeldt also believe that Go! is a ripe metaphor for cultural struggles in network societies. Comparing the game to chess, they write that [Go!] "is more about proactive insertion and presence than about maneuver. It is more about deciding where to stand than whether to advance or retreat. It is more about developing web-like links among nearby stationary pieces than about moving specialized pieces in combined operations. It is more about creating networks of spaces than about protecting hierarchies of pieces. It is more about fighting to secure territories than about fighting to the death of one's pieces" (Arguilla and Ronfeldt 1996: 106).

[49] The extent to which Harrison White takes this to heart in his own social interactions is an open question. Homans (1984: 307), for one, says that Harrison White, at least in the 1960s as chairman of the Department of Social Relations at Harvard and who dismantled this identity in favor of creating a sole sociology department was a "Machiavellian" character.

[50] James Scott has also noted the importance of ambiguity in his study of the arts of resistance. He writes: "Only on the rarest and most incendiary occasions do we ever encounter anything like an unadorned hidden transcript in the realm of public power relations. The realities of power require that it either be spoken by anonymous subordinates or would be protected by disguise as rumor, gossip, euphemism, or grumbling that dares not speak in its own name" (Scott 1990: 156).

social trickiness comes out of his science, it is not a mere add on; it is the "trickiness" that scientists employ in getting a grasp on their objects.

Harrison White argues that moments of fresh action are rare exceptions to the normal functioning of social organization. Fresh action turns on the social exceptions that succeed in overwhelming tides of blocking action and it also seeds networks, institutions and styles. Arguably at his most "existential," White comments:

> Can the system of apparently inexorable social pressure against change in style . . . be beaten by any corporate groups given their ideologies? Need the Church be a fake? Can doctors be healers? Do siblings treasure each other? They may require unusual individual movers but exceptions come only in social avenues and then only for a while from cross-pressures in precarious balance. (White 1993b: 86).

Annealing for Change

One of the key aims of Identity and Control is to delineate how change in social organization is possible. On the one hand, White says that basic change in social organization is an ordinary occurrence. White argues that, "Incremental adjustments go on all the time, if only to accommodate demographic and other biophysical events," (White 1993d: 23). More weighty changes of social formations, however, are "episodic and severe changes" (White 1993d: 23). It is in this second form of change where White's concept of "annealing" comes in. Annealing is used in reference to social formations that come in styles which are "so locked in that they can change only through turbulent overlay upon one another." In explaining this metaphor, White argues:

> Annealing is a term from metallurgy. To anneal is to heat and thus shake up the mineral insides, hard but more or less at random, and then to cool and encourage resumption of normality with

> attendant hopes that the new formation will have more desirable properties . . . Annealing is an important prototype for gaining control to get action. Annealing disrupted is countercontrol and blocking action (White 1992a: 281).

It seems that term annealing first became part of White's theoretical arsenal with an article on "Wheeling and Annealing" with Eric Leifer (1986). These authors write: "Annealing involves actively a making system worse off in an effort to let it right itself" (Leifer and White 1986: 240). To put this another way, Leifer and White are suggesting that, when trying to effect change, it may be important to heat up the social structure of disciplinary formations in which one is embedded. Leifer and White thereby effectively demolish the corporate myth that the job of management is to extinguish organizational catastrophes on their watch. As they say: "Annealing involves starting an occasional fire so that extant patterns of interlocking will dissolve and form anew as things begin to cool down" (Leifer and White 1986: 240).[51]

White uses the term annealing to describe how change (or fresh action) occurs at even larger scopes, at the level of population. He argues, "The annealing metaphor should be restricted to where the agency concerns population rather than disciplines and the like" (White 1992a: 283, emphasis added). White's apparent "restriction," on this term however, seems remarkable given his preceding arguments concerning scale indifference and self-similarity. On the one hand, White seems to be telling us that scale doesn't really matter; or rather, it matters, but can be bracketed (White 1992a: 20). On

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[51] Yet it should not be thought that annealing can happen only, say, in the corridors or the board-rooms of huge corporations. White comments: "Temperatures of colonialism suggest annealing when they rise high. Popular rebellion is another prototype for annealing, one which may be accomplished in many forms. Annealing need not always depend upon privileged location for its instigators" (White 1992a: 280).

the other hand, White implies that size or scale does matter when he claims that annealing operates "where agency concerns population." Which is it?

While it is arguable that identities not at the level of "population" could use strategies somewhat analogous to annealing in their struggles for control, it also seems clear that White would like to have the term apply more specifically to "intentional but indirect and opportunistic" (White 1992a: 281) social action. "This is getting action conceived on a population base, rather than control concerned with disciplines, identities, and embedding" (White 1992a: 281-282, emphasis added). Annealing involves heating up, cooling down, and changing, the whole network space in which disciplines are embedded. It is not so much acting upon a population, as orchestrating reconfigurations of disciplines embedded within such a population. White comments: "The social analogue of heating is not singular, but in any form must, like heating, consume some resources and requires some coupling to other larger populations" (White 1992a: 282).

For White, annealers are sort of the equivalent to Nietzschean "supermen" those of "heroic action" who make (at first, local)[52] twists on institution, style and history. Annealers are those who organize a mobilization against, and who successfully change style, discipline and institution. White uses the emergence of "rock-n-roll" in America as outlined by Ennis (1992) to emphasize his argument. Ennis' Seventh Stream addresses rock-n-roll as the seventh major genre of music emerge in the United States, one distinguishable from the streams of "pop, black pop, country pop, jazz, folk, and gospel" (Ennis 1992: 17). The Ennis study is a good one for White, given its historical frame, attention to documentary detail, and vivid descriptions of socio-cultural process and

movement. Perhaps anticipating his later reflections on "switching mechanisms, White argues that "the key" to the annealing processes described in Ennis' account of rock-n-roll were the, "spontaneous pickups crossing one stream of popular music into another, without necessarily leaving imprint on the established lists of top sellers" (White 1992a: 284)

Interestingly, despite his distaste for "person as atom" and his heavy emphasis on structural and therefore network dynamics, White recognizes the key influence that individuals can have on the course of history. On rock-n-roll's takeover, he comments: "Among the many important (musical) 'agents' per se there were one or two disc jockeys who proved to have great insight . . . [and] in the French painting world . . . [it was] a single person, Durand-Ruel, [who] was essential" (White 1992a: 283, 285). White's discussions of Adolf Hitler, Bob Dylan, and V.I. Lenin, all attest to the importance of principal agents of annealing actions. Yet, as should be clear by now, identities do not come solo, and White stresses that they "may be surrounded by an entourage" (White 1992a: 242).

Annealers are important in that they foster "an intermediate period of overlay and melding between preexisting institutions," a union which is "followed by rejection as they become separate again, possibly leaving a newborn institution" (White 1992a: 283).[53] In a title of a later article, White (1993b) states his conjecture in the memorable aphorism: "Values Come in Styles, Which Mate to Change." He argues: "The

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[52] The "new comes at a crevice, nook, or cranny, out of sight of the existing big shots" (White 1992a: 319).
[53] Cf. Marx on "transition classes . . . in which the interests of two classes are simultaneously mutually blunted" (Marx 1852 [1994]: 55).

conjecture is that different styles must not only overlay but subsequently must repel and blow apart as part of the cause and the signal of the new style" (White 1993b: 80-81).

One should not think, however, that there is anything straightforward or easy about any of this. Given nested and involuted social contexts, White stresses that annealing often takes a great deal of time, and "may need to be repeated a wearying number of times for substantial improvements to show up out of the throw of the dice" (White 1992a: 282). Each attempt at annealing should, however, be instructive to the identities involved, as there is also much to be learned in social failings and the erosion of identity. As White comments in an article with Mische: "In switchings come realizations, ex post, of what strings of ties were holding a network domain together" (Mische and White 1998: 703). Periods of unrest and conflict are particularly important in this regard. As White puts it "one can hope to see the bare bones, the networks and disciplines in raw unmediated form, best during [a] turbulent period" (White 1992a: 158).

Is Harrison White a Critical Theorist?

In defining what she means by critical social theory, Nancy Fraser writes that, "if struggles contesting the subordination of women figured among the most significant of a given age, then a critical social theory for that time would aim, among other things, to shed light on the character and bases of such subordination." More specifically, she adds, such a critical theory would have to be subject to the following questions: "How well does it theorize the situation and prospects of the feminist movement? To what extent does it serve the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of contemporary women?" (Fraser [1985] 1989: 113-114). Fraser's remarks allow us to evaluate Harrison White's

theories of domination and action against the normative standards of more general critical social theory.

How does White match up? The short response to Fraser's first question seems to be that, from White's perspective, there would appear to be nothing particularly unique about a social formation identifiable as "the feminist movement." Rather, the feminist movement, as a constellation of various social disciplines, identities and styles, must share some important social dynamics with other social groupings at other points in history. As such, White might suggest that the "feminist movement" gets action in much the same way as do other classes or people in society: by shifting ties and sustaining networks through stories all the while dealing with contingencies and seeking new projects in/of/about control. As White (1992a: 257) argues: "[B]uilt into my whole approach is the claim that the same sort of generalities apply to getting and blocking action across very diverse scopes, at various levels of the complex cumulations and concatenations of embeddings of disciplines across various forms of specializations and identities in networks."

In response to Fraser's second question — "To what extent does [e.g. White's work – DH] serve the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of contemporary women?" — I think the answer is extremely well. Consider for example, the problem of domestic violence. To oversimplify, domestic violence occurs when one is embedded in an abusive relationship that seems locked in by social forces. It will cease only when something akin to "decoupling" occurs — e.g. separation, divorce, arrest of the

perpetrator, counseling, etc. — when identities clash, spin and re-embed into newly buffered disciplines of control.

Jay Macleod's (1995) work on the urban underclass further highlights the importance of decoupling dynamics such as these. In his ethnography, Ain't No Makin' It, MacLeod provides the example of James, an African-American who was "assigned" to a remedial (and all black) computer programming class at a technical college. His computer class met during the evenings, with another offered during the day, and James soon came to realize the poor quality of the class in comparison to the other (one which just happened to be comprised of all white students). After noticing this discrepancy, and also the redundancy of stories being told by his instructor in the remedial class, James decoupled from the one, and enrolled in the other. Macleod (1995: 229) notes: "It was only because James swam against the flow of racial and class domination that he learned to act professionally. If he had stayed in the computer class into which he was originally placed, attending evening classes with older people of color who were holding down jobs, he may never have developed the resources to act biculturally." In White's terms, James achieved more control only by virtue of his decoupling and subsequent reembedding into a more appropriate and productive social milieu.

From my perspective, then, we can indeed use White's theory as a "critical framework capable of fore-grounding the evil of dominance and subordination" (Fraser, [1985] 1989: 138), although this is not, of course, White's principle aim. More generally, it should be apparent that White does not believe in a culture or a society which would be completely free from dominance, subordination and inequality, simply because this

would imply a culture or a society free somehow free from relationships of control.[54] As he puts it: "There always are humans, as there are chickens, swarming to be at the top of the heap" (White 1993c: 5). Like Simmel and some post-structuralists, White does not believe in a comforting totality which would completely overcome the fractured nature of social relations, and he thus parts company from critical theorists who see this as either a realistic or a desirable goal.

Conclusion

The French have a word in their vocabulary, <u>salaud</u>, which, as Roland Barthes, tells us, translates into English as "bastard" and is a thoroughly despised character in French culture. According to Barthes, a <u>salaud</u> is: "Essentially someone unstable, who accepts the rules only when they are useful to him and transgresses the formal continuity of attitudes. He is unpredictable, and therefore asocial. He takes refuge behind the law when he considers that it is in his favour, and breaks it when he finds it useful to do so" (Barthes [1957] 1989: 25). Notwithstanding the similarities between this salaud and the characteristics of the "acting subject" implied by White's general theory, I have argued in this chapter that there is an important theory of agency in the work of Harrison White.

To be sure, White's style of action, of intentional history making in the here and now, seems discordant with the common critical theory of our day. It certainly provides a more activist orientation than what is found in the idealist currents of recent and seemingly authoritative "handbooks" on critical theory (e.g. Rasmussen 1996). The latter

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[54] Cf. Hazelrigg (1989b: 261): "As if we might actually awaken one morning to a world, even to an imagination, devoid of constraint, order, control."

volume still clings to philosophy rather than identity as the locus and *raison d'être* of

critical theory, and it is therefore more wedded to the normative (normalizing) than to the

transformative dimensions of critical theory. It is a line of research that clings as if to a

lifeboat to the proper nouns, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Horkheimer, and Habermas, without

ever learning how to swim. Critical theory has become <u>clittical</u> theory, isn't it time we

changed course?

Short of the "end of history," we must act (Hazelrigg 1989), we will act, and we

will need theories of action. As Louis Dupré (1983: 98) has written, "Action is needed,

and the function of theory is to guide it, not merely to describe it." In this chapter, I hope

to have made one case for Harrison White as a guiding theorist.