

Mystified Discourse

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Abstract

Mystification, which classical theorists typically align with the religious mind, plays a recurring role in social theory. It is argued that when confronted with inexplicable phenomena, the religious falsely project a reality beneath appearances. Theorists critique this misapprehension based on naturalistic assumptions, or the presumed impossibility of a transcendental world. However, several authors propose that the concept is neither exclusively religious nor limited to imagined anthropomorphisms, suggesting that this critique is one-sided and asymmetrical. Alternatively, I will examine mystification as a structure or form, apart from its religious deployment and the valuations of theorists who condemn it. Through several contemporary sources, a layered model of reality emerges as a common and necessary condition of scientific inquiry. Using a structuralist discourse analysis, I will attempt to distill what is constant beneath a differentiated surface, or coherence in units larger than the text by examining pattern. This process begins with an inductive examination of mystification as it develops through classical and contemporary social theory, with the goal of defining its essential characteristics, or ‘grammar’. The resulting structure contains ontological and strategic dimensions, which incorporates an independent and opaque reality that also delegates work between the mystified object and the subject. Similarly, I will inductively extract the language or signals of this structure, or mystification as a way of speaking. I will then apply this structure and its associated signals to a theoretical sample to identify the author’s ontological claims. This analytical tool can be used to examine the reality claims in theory generally and how these claims inform operational characteristics, thereby providing a potential enhancement to paradigm modeling. More importantly, I will argue that identifying a structure of mystified discourse is indispensable to programmatic reflexivity and that only trans-theoretical measures permit a

symmetrical examination of theory, or theoretical self-examination. In this way, I am not using sociology to demystify the work of others, but to understand and normalize mystification as discourse across theoretical perspectives.

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1. Introduction

Our world is opaque. The diverse body of social theory testifies to this truth, with each attempting to penetrate the *real* forces at work in social life. If these realities were transparent to the observer, they would be undisputed. Rather, each theory presents a lens and strategy for seeing what is ordinarily hidden from plain view, but also what other perspectives fail to see. Theorists navigate the gap between reality and the appearance of things, but also judge the navigation of others. The misapprehension of reality appears most explicitly within the *projective hypothesis* in the sociology of religion. Theorists argue that the religious mind, when confronted with perfections and the inexplicable, projects or *mystifies* a reality beneath appearances. Projected realities typically take the form of invisible anthropomorphisms, a similar independent force, or will. Theorists argue that because these projected forces are constructed based on *real* natural forces, they possess an essential and qualitative parity with reality, while simultaneously distorting it. These ghosts reflect what is essentially true, but also shroud the world in mystery and obscure our understanding of it.

Although mystification develops primarily in the sociology of religion, theorists also extend the concept to non-religious spheres of life. As a general mechanism of positing a mysterious force where none exists, the concept is versatile. For theorists like Feuerbach and Durkheim, religious projections were the *first* childlike and primitive *representations* of nature's mechanistic providence in the form of a ghost (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 2, 97; Durkheim, 1995, pp. 8,17,22-25). Religious imagery may be the prototypical representation, but Durkheim acknowledges that all representations of nature are delusive to a degree. Marx & Engels similarly describe religious development as an *ideological reflex* or *echo* of material realities, but

they also accuse the economists of their day of mystifying nature, or falsely naturalizing occupations and material disparity (Marx & Engels, 1998, pp. 448-449). In a contemporary context, David Bloor describes mystification as any act of positing inherent or asocial (unconstructed) forces that are resistant to causal analysis. These externalities simply ‘are’ and will also appear in tautologies, proverbs, values, and other expressions that reflect an immutable and ubiquitous reality. As such, Bloor and others argue that mystification can support any conservative objective by appealing to the ‘order of things’ but can destabilize a prevailing order as well by positing an alternative authority. For example, a charismatic leader can lay claim to a higher authority to maintain their position, but also to usurp a tradition or institution. In these ways, theorists develop mystification as adaptable to the varying strategies of persons, groups, and projects.

Whether mystification is framed as a religious or non-religious strategy, or both, the concept is tied to critique, where the investigator points out the errors, concealments, and deceptions of another. Those who mystify are presumably obscurantist in some way, seeking to posit alternate realities for the purpose of concealing truth or gaining an advantage. However, the reader of social theory should carefully attend to the foundation upon which mystification develops as a sociological concept. To argue that a person or group is engaged in the mystification of reality requires that the investigator has a grasp of the ‘real’. In other words, mystification rests on the ontological assumptions of the observer, which allows them to see it in others. Within sociology, and particularly in the classical context, this ontology is largely grounded in *naturalism* or *scientific materialism*, which holds that the universe is comprised

solely of matter and natural forces, differently modified.¹ These theorists can designate and quarantine the religious mind as ‘mystified’ and in error *because*, in their ontology, matter and the natural world constitute *the* ultimate reality. From a materialist perspective, any claim of transcendence *must* be mystified, and this error must be explained in material terms by translating transcendence into immanence. Therefore, if a group is engaged in mystifying behaviour, the materialist will explore and posit the material *causes* and functions of this behaviour. Religion is thereby framed as mundane and fundamentally material activity that facilitates domination, expresses evolutionary forces, builds solidarity, compensates for weakness, or manifests through another psycho-social mechanism (e.g., projection).² In these ways, religion is translated into another form of utilitarian behaviour or a primitive expression of nature, while scientific endeavors will typically escape these explanations. Bloor identifies this tendency as an *asymmetrical* examination that examines causes only in relation to perceived ‘false’ beliefs, because what is perceived as inherently ‘true’ is uncaused and therefore immune from a causal investigation, even when “the same types of causes would explain...true...beliefs” (Bloor, 1991, p. 7).

Logically, these theorists will see mystified entities elsewhere but rarely in their own work, which is properly oriented to *this* world. To demystify knowledge, classical theorists will elevate an empirical methodology as the path to discovering the truths of these material forces.

¹ Also known as *physicalism* in some contexts, which incorporates *exotic* forms of matter (e.g., energy). These views incorporate the principles of *uniformity* and *necessity*, where a physical universe is governed by causal mechanisms. *Philosophical naturalism* also stands apart from *methodological naturalism*, which holds that material assumptions are held merely for the purpose of doing scientific work, while suspending judgement regarding the reality of transcendent forces.

² As current examples, see Florida State College site on World Religions and Beth Azar, *A reason to believe* (Florida St College, 2024; Azar, 2010). Religion is often explained across four dimensions, including immature rationality (mental deficiency/dysfunction), security, solidarity, and control. Azar also adds biological predispositions to the list of causes for religious belief, as do other psychological analyses.

Through this reorientation and the critique of mystification generally, the reader of social theory is left with the impression that they can avoid mystification when specific conditions are satisfied. For example, Marx & Engels argue that the solution to the errors of economists is empirical observation that reveals *real* connections, “without any mystification or speculation” (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 41). Likewise, Durkheim replaces projected ‘ghosts’ with apriorism as the natural product of collective empiricism, or the multiple concurrent observations that form the amassed intellectual capital of society that “transcends” individual experience (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 16-18). Moreover, these narratives conclude with hope and theorists argue that, over time, misapprehension and its irrational projections are eventually swamped by new methods and insights that penetrate reality with greater precision. Just as the natural and real world is properly comprehended, mystifications recede and eventually disappear.

But it is unclear whether a naturalistic and empirical approach fully separates these theorists from the mystification they see in others or the social world. Even from a materialist-naturalist perspective, Roy Bhaskar argued that empiricism only penetrates natural reality to a degree within a layered model of reality. Because a deeper and opaque reality informs the layers above, it can only be *inferred* by observing patterns at the empirical level (Bhaskar, 1998, p. 9; Bhaskar, 1975, p. 124). This penetration of reality is possible only when our observations align with actualities, *and* these actualities are aligned with reality, which requires careful orchestration in the form of repeated and controlled experiment. But even in this scenario, “the processes of nature lie so deep, that, after all the pains we can take, much, perhaps, will remain undiscovered beyond the reach of human art or skill” (Odom, 1966, p. 542).³ Bhaskar agrees

³ Bhaskar and Odom are referring to the physical natural world.

with Marx that “all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided” (Marx, 1894, p. 592; Bhaskar, 1998, p. 8).⁴ Like a stone falling into a lake, visibility is inversely related to depth within an layered universe, meaning that the degree of penetration and associated reality claims are always incomplete. Therefore, Bhaskar argues that even natural scientific inquiry constitutes a *transcendental* exercise because the observer posits something beyond the scope of observation or infers what *must* be true to explain what is observed. Similarly, a layered reality is deduced or inferred as the best explanation for the experimental work of science. The incongruity between the *real* and *observed* universe means that scientists must repeat their experimental work and revise their findings because reality is impenetrable to a degree. In the context of the social sciences, the distance between the empirical and a *transfactual* reality widens, just as the possibility of strictly controlled experimentation decreases.⁵ This leads Bhaskar to conclude that while a social ‘science’ is possible, it is in an “Angst-ridden” state due to the lack of systematized concepts for penetrating reality (Bhaskar, 1998, pp. 16-17). If the natural sciences engage in a transcendental exercise, the degree of inference is only amplified in social research.

Bhaskar’s conception of a transcendent reality in a naturalistic context raises an important question. If a natural science and its rigorous empiricism posits transcendental forces, how is this different from the religious inference through projection? Both appear to posit transcendent forces mediated through experience. We also know that the scientific enterprise was, at least initially, deeply aligned with theism. As I suggested, the separation of these disciplines is not based on scientific methodology, but a scientific materialism that presumes the impossibility of

⁴ This overlap contributed to the rebranding of Bhaskar’s *Transcendental Realism* to Critical Realism.

⁵ Bhaskar argues that *transfactual mechanisms* are ‘real’ causes that inform the *actual* and *empirical* domains.

the transcendental world, or preference given to material realities based on the “moral temper” of scientism (Bhaskar, 1998, p. 6; Midgley, 1992, p. 118). Although Bhaskar argued for a transcendental reality, he also attempted to distinguish between the transcendentalized realities of naturalism and the transcendent objects of idealism, which he rejected (Bhaskar, 1998, pp. 14-15).⁶ He argues that while the scientists rarely acknowledge the transcendental realities that form the basis of their work, these realities remain *potentially* accessible to scientific inquiry, while idealist projections are *inaccessible* to these methods and are therefore *mystified* (Bhaskar, 1998, p. 6). In other words, the difference between a transcendentalized nature and the transcendentalized supernatural is the degree of obscurity. Here again, mystification is assigned to the non-materialist position based on a naturalistic ontology that is accessible only through empirical methodology.

To this point, I have briefly summarized the history of mystification as a concept in sociology, including its foundations. Theorists specifically locate this phenomenon with non-material explanations, based on their materialist assumptions about the nature of reality. As a result, the concept of mystification is largely unidirectional and non-reflexive, becoming part of a naturalistic polemic. I also observed that the concept was extended to non-religious phenomena and potentially to the natural world itself as something transcendent, suggesting that mystification can be separated from the religious mind. But what if we conceptualized mystification differently by rendering it neutral, or stripping it from its naturalistic foundations and expression? To do this, I can examine mystification as a *structure* that is consistent with a layered reality. Structuralism, as it is developed within the social sciences, is uniquely suited to

⁶ Bhaskar encounters tension on this point. He presents nature as transcendent, independent, and largely impenetrable, where its deepest mechanisms are unobserved and posited through inference. Yet, he struggles to reject other transcendentalized objects, derived through the same process of inference.

this project, because it brings into focus the undifferentiated organization beneath a differentiated surface, or the networks that unite elements of social life (Lane, 1970, p. 14; Goffman, 1976, p. 25). In other words, structuralism replicates a mechanism for the pattern detection that Bhaskar describes, but in a sociological context, thereby exposing the *grammar* of mystification rather than its *diction*. In a structural form, mystification is separated from any valuations of error and the associated solutions to the ‘problem’. Moreover, a reconceptualized structure of mystification becomes fully reflexive and symmetrical because the theoretical sources of the concept are not immune from it. Even materialistic theories should be subject to an investigation that considers the mystified elements of these theories. Finally, a structure of mystification does not ignore strategic interests but can incorporate them, as part of the structure. As I will show, the nature of a mystified entity or force incorporates an ontological claim or dimension that immediately implies a strategic range of activity, from absolute obedience to naked ambition. The strategic dimension of this structure will be distilled as a *delegation of work*, which develops from Berger’s own treatment of mystification and how this results in the alienation of humanity’s constructive capacities.

To develop this structure, I will work through four steps. The first objective is to develop an understanding of structuralism by reviewing some primary sources in linguistics, sociology, philosophy (Chapter 2). I will show how structuralism proceeds in two complementary directions, which theoretically assumes a layered reality where invariance positively correlates with depth, and methodologically systematizes empirical patterns in provisional concepts. I will also discuss my choice of discourse analysis as a complementary method to my structuralist approach, because discourse assumes that text maintains coherence in units larger than the sentence. In this way, discourse analysis goes beyond the technical properties of text and

incorporates a hermeneutical dimension by considering implicit content. Through a *structural discourse analysis*, I intend to expose the grammar of mystification, beneath its empirical, immediate, or situated usage (diction).

Second, I will explore the development of the concept of mystification through the classical and contemporary social theorists that use it (Chapter 3). I will begin with the work of social theorists like Comte and Feuerbach in the 19th century, who describe religious projection as the misinformed response to ‘real’ stimuli. Although projection becomes synonymous with mystification and the religious mind through most classical theorists, this connection persists through several 20th century theorists, like Berger and Barnes. Through these sources, and consistent with a structuralist approach, I will begin with an empirical analysis of selected theoretical texts to enumerate their underlying organization, but without speculating about the ultimate origins of these structures. This process of tracing the concept will include consideration for other phenomena that may incorporate and broaden the application of mystification, such as charisma, ritual, and myth. Likewise, I want to separate mystification from other concepts that do *not* embody the developing structure, like theorizing and secrecy. Moreover, the developing structure must incorporate diversity or what is *constant* across the differentiated use of mystification in theory. This systematic, inductive, and iterative process ensures that structure is rooted in pattern, while avoiding the reductionist errors of a privileged perspective. In sum, I will be moving from the differentiated and partisan usage of mystification to its pattern, before distilling the undifferentiated structure of mystification.

Third, distilling a structure of mystification does not yet provide a useful tool for detecting it in language (Chapter 4). Because mystification may not be explicit in text and speech, I need to explore its *signals*, or the features of language that *imply* or *suggest* mystified

realities. If reality is layered and structure is both ordering and non-empirical, this means that although actors may be unaware of the grammar that frames the conversation, signals will be

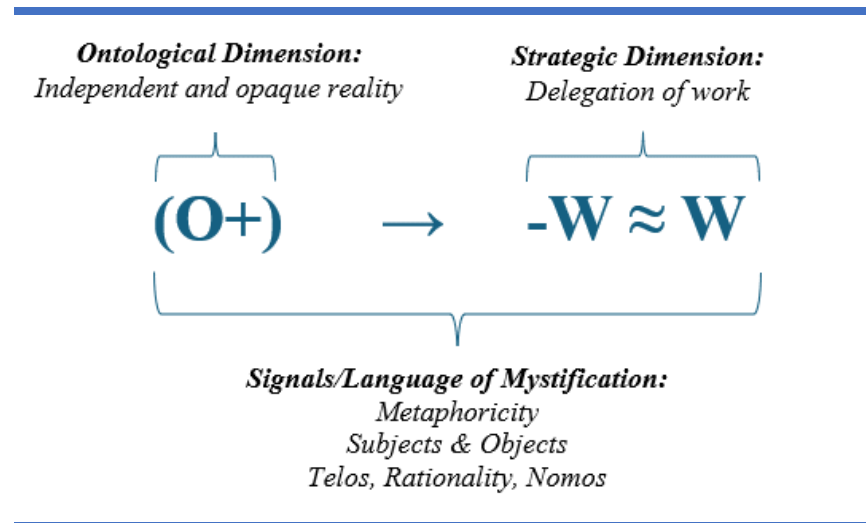


Figure 1 - Preview of the structure of mystification and its signals

present. Like the process of distilling a structure of mystification, I will inductively extract its signals from various theorists who use metaphoricity, the constitution of subjects and objects, and teleo-

rational language in text. The outcome of this process can be visualized in *Figure 1 - Preview of the structure of mystification and its signals* (with sensitizing concepts added in *Table 1 - Sensitizing language associated with the structure of mystification*). The distilled structure and its signals will then be applied to a social theoretical product, as a case study. In this fourth step (Chapter 5), once mystification is separated from its materialist foundations and framed as a structure, I can apply it reflexively as a trans-theoretical measure to uncover a theorist's ontological claims and strategic outcomes. In this case, I have selected Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* for an ontological investigation.

Finally, I will consider how the structure of mystification and its signals interact with theoretical paradigm modeling. While these paradigms sometimes posit dichotomies at the ontological level, applying greater depth to these models can enhance our understanding of theory. The question is not *whether* a given theory claims an obscured and independent reality,

but *what* is it mystifying? In this way, we are not using sociology to demystify the work of others, but to understand and normalize mystification as discourse across theoretical perspectives. In this way, adding depth to the analysis of theory, including techniques for reading signals, can mitigate false dichotomies, improve transparency, and place theoretical polemics into perspective. Likewise, this approach attempts to uncover reality claims *before* evaluating their reasonableness, just as discourse analysis can assist in measuring the scope of a paradigm's utility by examining text, rather than fitting texts into the paradigm. What follows is a preliminary entry into this territory by inductively developing both a structure and its corresponding language to reflexively explore the ontological claims of theory, or to facilitate a theoretical self-examination.

2. Structuralism as Theory and Methodology

Structuralism and Ambiguity

Structuralist ideas reach back into antiquity and its foundational principles appear in various sources, including ancient biblical texts and Plato. These sources present a divided reality, where the empirical or physical world is illusory but also patterned after an ultimate truth. The latter is ‘real’, while the former appears in shadow.⁷ These ancient foundations are rarely expressed by theorists who use structuralism, but reappear in Bhaskar’s philosophy of science, which I will review later in this section. Nonetheless, as a theoretical and/or methodological approach, structuralism appears across disciplines, including the philosophy of mathematics, literary theory, linguistics, and psychology. In each discipline, the approach is applied to different phenomena and evolves unique features. In a sociological context, structuralism typically appears alongside functionalism and the work of Émile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons. As a result, students usually associate structuralism with *systems theory*, which examines how social institutions function to stabilize each other and society, thereby furthering human survival. But because structuralism has diverse applications, defining this approach with precision is difficult.

Variants of structuralism lead Michael Lane to suggest that its imprecision allows for great versatility as a methodology. As a heuristic device, structuralism is applicable within diverse theoretical perspectives, even when authors are unaware of it (Lane, 1970, pp. 20,26).

⁷ See Plato’s *divided line* and the *cave*, or references to the patterns imparted by God for Tabernacle construction, as a shadow of heavenly realities (Plato, 1955, pp. 274-286; Exodus 25; Numbers 8; Jeremiah 33; Hebrews 8).

Lanes describes this as a process of moving (inductively) from complex networks to something unified, but not the reverse:

The essential quality of the structuralist method, and its fundamental tenet, lies in its attempt to study not the elements of a whole, but the complex network of relationships that link and unite those elements. (Lane, 1970, p. 14)

But agreement about the fundamental tenets of structuralism is difficult to find, and descriptions change subject to the degree of emphasis on non-material, material, or subjective realities. In an idealistic or non-materialist context,⁸ structuralism will posit ultimate and immutable structures, such as a mind, spirit, reason, or will, as the foundation of all reality and exhaustive of it (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 15; Guyer & Horstmann, 2019, pp. 2-3). These ultimate realities are wholly different from the material world and therefore ahistorical. In a materialist (naturalist) context, authors tend to grant matter qualitative equivalence with spirit and reify physical forces as things with purpose, guidance, care, etc. Here, biological, evolutionary, or other forces will occupy the position of the ultimate structure. This raises questions about the source of these material conditions, unless one is willing to concede that matter begets seemingly non-material things, like consciousness.⁹

Alternatively, an existentialist approach will elevate subjectivity to chart a different course, apart from non-materialist and materialist structures. If reality is layered, the origin of one structural layer may originate with other layers or unseen forces, including the possibility that structure is produced and sustained through *intersubjectivity*, as Berger & Luckmann, Giddens, and others suggest (Giddens, 1984, p. xxv; Berger & Luckmann, 1967, pp. 34-35). In

⁸ Ontological idealism holds that epistemological idealism finds truth only because reality itself is a form of thought that we participate in, while epistemological idealism maintains that human knowledge is determined by the structure of human thought alone.

⁹ A common criticism of the materialist approach is that the features of the universe cannot be explained from within the universe itself, *unless* matter is granted transcendent properties.

this context, structures are not ahistorical, but merely enduring. For example, Bhaskar's *duality of structure* states that the social conditions of production are unconsciously reproduced through conscious production (Bhaskar, 1998, pp. 34-35). Or in Giddens' theory of *Structuration*, he describes structure as *both* the framework *and* outcome of expressive activity (Blumer, 1998, p. 168; Giddens, 1984, pp. 2,25-26). Through these arguments, subjects can produce objective structures, thereby mitigating immutability of an external/foreign object and maintaining the imperialism of the subject. But this explanation has problems like those encountered by the materialist approach, as noted above. As Berger observed, whether people make their own objective universe is immaterial, because this does not explain what frames or causes our 'object making' behaviour (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 28-48). In other words, if emphasis on the object circles back to become an emphasis on the subject, and the activities of the subject are again attributable to an object, we find ourselves back at the beginning.

To divorce structuralism from the problem of ultimate questions, *contemporary structuralism* invests in vigorous empiricism to enumerate deeper structures, but not ultimate ones (Gonos, 1977, p. 856). This approach has practical and ironic effects. First, this type of structuralism limits itself to "the belief that all manifestations of social reality...practised in any society, constitute languages, in the formal sense", but refrains from considering the source of language (Lane, 1970, pp. 13-14). We build, but with materials not of our making, at least not in the immediate or proximate sense. In this way, contemporary structuralism allows for ultimate structures, but simply leaves this as an open question.¹⁰ Practically, this approach can operate within disciplinary limits, allowing a theorist like Parson's to consider the deeper *structural*

¹⁰ An interesting perspective of this problem appears in the natural sciences as well. For example, Cognitive Psychologist Donald Hoffman suggests that for science to grow beyond current descriptions of the universe, scientists may need to discard the framework of time/space.

imperatives in a social context, without delving into the ultimate source of these imperatives. Secondly, and ironically, the vigorous empiricism of this approach tends to multiply ultimate question because it investigates patterns as the hallmark of any structure. The more patterns that a contemporary structuralism uncovers, the more questions arise about the source of these patterns and ultimate structures. Therefore, while reference to an enduring structure seems to mark a transition away from ahistorical forces, they may only engender them – what forces best explain the patterned construction, and what concepts best capture these forces? The suspension of ultimate questions becomes increasingly important considering this multiplication of data and pattern.

For example, Gonos argues that Goffman appears as one type of theorist but is really another. Goffman's micro-sociological approach seems to align squarely with Symbolic Interactionism and constructivist paradigms generally, in part because he carefully outlines the adaptive capacities of interactants in local context, producing a vast number of observations and concepts. But while his emphasis on transactional realities mirrors constructivist methods, he inverts the interactionist's emphasis on the actor and world-building.

By translating concrete obligatory acts into terms of expressed involvement, we have a way of showing the functional equivalence of aspects of such diverse phenomena...underneath apparent differences, we shall be able to glimpse a common structure. (Goffman, 1963, p. 36)

Goffman's detailed examination of proximate patterns only exposed the "rules for cognition and conduct" that interactants discover and use in support of pre-existing social structures (Gonos, 1977, pp. 865-866). Unlike constructivists, who avoid the leap to ahistorical structure because this diminishes the imperialism of the subject, Goffman describes the same order as *sacred* (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018, pp. 110-111). In doing so, he applies a structuralist

framework through his assertion of an immutable object or what Bhaskar describes as a *transfactual mechanism*, which the “rich texture of everyday social life” and its “endless wonderment” seems to require (Gonos, p. 856; Bhaskar, 1975, p. 246). Goffman acknowledges that the content of these sacred rules will vary across settings, but through this variance he also concludes that there are *always* rules and they are *always* sacred. In this way, the deeply complex and patterned nature of proximate interaction prompts ultimate questions and a subtext within Goffman’s scholarship. His exploration of situational proprieties, personal fronts, and shame becomes imbued with a nomic character that leads the reader into deeper structural waters (Goffman, 1963, pp. 22,24,26-28).

Theoretical Fluidity

Structuralism may lack a precise definition, but theoretical ambiguity and elasticity are nothing new. For instance, Berger uses the concept of *internalization* to describe the error of transforming constructed phenomena into something unconstructed or invariable. However, he also and ultimately roots the human production of reality in *real* biological conditions.¹¹ Likewise, Durkheim references the “real...cosmic forces” that generate phenomena but rejects any doctrine that reduces social activity to these conditions (Durkheim, 1951, pp. 309-309; Durkheim, 1982, pp. 123-125,159; Berger P. L., 1972, pp. 163-164; Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 51). Here, a generative phenomenologist asserts an external structure or deeper cause of social construction, while a structural functionalist minimizes the influence of objective forces on daily life. Theoretical labels are therefore tricky because betrayals, corrections, and concessions

¹¹ Berger uses the concept and biological metaphor of *organism* to describe this impulse.

regularly appear. Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba (2018, p. 109) argue that there is a growing recognition that paradigmatic boundaries are permeable:

Various paradigms are beginning to ‘interbreed’ such that two theorists previously thought to be in irreconcilable conflict may now appear, under a different theoretical rubric, to be informing one another’s arguments.

Foucault’s eclecticism provides a further example of this fluidity. Theorists describe him as a positivist, archeologist, discourse analyst, hermeneutician, genealogist, postmodernist, or, when all labels fail, a Foucauldian (Lather, 1991, pp. 6-8; Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, pp. 19,238,254; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 55-156; O’Reilly, 2005, p. 53; Rothe, 2010, pp. 462-463). Likewise, the separation between postpositivism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism is often difficult for the reader to discern, and some of these distinctions can appear forced, like the apparent difference between interpretivism and hermeneutics (O’Reilly, 2005, pp. 49,52). Ambiguity only increases when we frame our theoretical lenses as a paradigmatic worldview, which includes ontological, axiological, and other dimensions. Some describe this as a “blurring of genres”, where “inquiry methodology can no longer be treated as a set of universally applicable rules or abstractions” (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018, pp. 108-130).

The use of theoretical labels within polemics further aggravates this problem because theorists often propose remedies based on the classification of others, using a dense theoretical taxonomy. Theoretical models often rely heavily on critique. For example, Marx rejects bourgeois economists, Weber criticizes Marx, Bourdieu corrects Weber, and so on, with each presenting their respective models as the solution to past shortcomings. Sometimes, apparent contradictions and theoretical conflict rely on carefully selected published materials to support a classification, which is problematic when critiquing prolific authors. For example, the volume of

material produced by Barthes or Weber reflect their expanding thought and the clarification of ideas with each successive publication, making the volume of ideas nearly uncontainable. Similarly, authors may publish a corrective work, which others may elide in favour of containment. Peter Berger is sometimes victimized in this way, where critics alleged that *The Sacred Canopy* and *The Social Construction of Reality* promote extreme relativism and/or trivializes religion. But these critiques often omit *A Rumour of Angels*, which offers an important counterweight to his thought (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 25).¹² Berger himself eventually repudiated his thinking on secularization, which informed his early scholarship (Thuswaldner, 2014).

In these ways, “any effort at definition domesticates, analytically fixes, and mobilizes pro and contra positions” (Lather, 1991, pp. 4-5). But the intent of this discussion is not to eliminate theoretical paradigms or undermine all forms of theoretical critique, but to underscore the tenuous nature of these paradigms. More importantly, this ought to lower the alarm regarding the ambiguity of structuralism, because it is in good company.

Developing Structuralism through Structuralists

Despite structuralism’s ambiguity, it is possible to provide a description of its assumptions and how these guide the research process. I will also validate and distill structuralist principles by reviewing several theorists who demonstrated commitment to this

¹² In *A Rumour of Angels*, Berger distances himself from accusations of relativism by making a key distinction between *projection* and *reflection* as constituting the sacred nomos, reasserting a fundamental reality beneath externalizing subjectivity.

approach. Once established, my intent is to replicate a structuralist investigation to uncover the underlying grammar of mystification, or the organization beneath the differentiated surface.

Linguistics and Anthropology

Generally, structuralism assumes that empirical parts relate in some way to a non-empirical or obscured whole in a layered fashion. The positions of these parts are relative to the whole, where a whole may also be a part of another whole, and so on, constituting the taxonomic character of structuralism. Subject to my position in this order, I may be able to see the parts and the proximate structure of these parts, but deeper structures become increasingly invisible to me.



Figure 2 - L. Christensen (2024)

ice cream become the more uniform and stable they are. This does not mean that the complex flavours of ice cream can be reduced to cream, nor can cream be reduced to dairy, but a causative relationship is implied. This means that a supporting structure informs the development, form,

For example, if I order chocolate ice cream in a local shop, I may glimpse the structure of cream in this flavoured form, but the supporting structures of dairy, agriculture, and biochemistry are less perceptible. Opacity is also positively correlated with invariance. While there may be hundreds of flavours available, the deeper the supporting structures of

and appearance of the layer above, just as each layer contains the essence of the layer below. Moreover, because the invariant properties of complex phenomena are increasingly opaque, I must theorize (or infer) them based on empirical patterns. Claude Lévi-Strauss describes this as a process of *translation*, from an empirical set of *codes* to *language* that captures uniform properties (Lévi-Strauss, 2014, pp. 9-10). The search for invariance reflects a “basic need for order in the human mind and since...the human mind is only part of the universe, the need probably exists because there is some order in the universe and the universe is not a chaos” (Lévi-Strauss, 2014, pp. 11-12). In these ways, structuralists employ a unique dialect, describing levels of what lies *beneath* or *above*, the *real* and *illusory*, *vertical* and *horizontal* meanings, *harmonies* and *melodies*. The goal is the discovery of invariance within a highly variant but patterned empirical world in support of theorized structures, which frame social life. In these ways, structuralism may be summarized along dimensions of opacity, variability, and pattern, with underlying assumptions of order.

Ferdinand de Saussure is one of the founders of the structuralist movement within linguistics. He begins with the basic observation that the empirical nature of language is deceptive because we falsely assume that there is a natural or intrinsic linkage between objects,

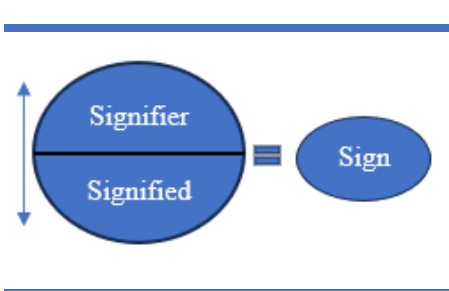


Figure 3 - de Saussure's structure of the linguistic sign

the sound-images (phonemes) we use for them, and the concepts that these images conjure in the mind. Despite our unthinking acceptance of naturalized language, de Saussure argues that an underlying structure is at work beneath all manifestations of language, or the *linguistic sign*. In summary, a sound refers to a sound-image, or

signifier, which has a corresponding concept, or the *signified* (Figure 3 - de Saussure's structure

of the linguistic sign). The connection between the signifier and the signified in the linguistic sign constitutes the ahistorical (unconstructed) structure of language. On this basis, de Saussure defines two principles of the sign that delineate its mutable and immutable properties. On one hand, the sign is constructed and fully arbitrary, meaning that the connection between the sound-image of ‘cat’ to a particular mammal was invented but solidified over time, through conventional usage. Once conventionalised, this arbitrary linkage becomes obligatory for the language user, making it highly resistant to change. Therefore, he argued that “language always appears as a heritage of the preceding period” and we can only imagine the originating act of naming. Inherited signs and their structure comprise the stabilizing and creative dimension of language, because the *necessary* linkage between signifier and signified orders conventionalized yet constructive activity. Without this structure and the resulting convention, language would fall into chaos as a string of momentary phonemes (de Saussure, 1970, pp. 44-45, 48-49).

Habitualized language (*langue*) through a community of speakers allows the individual linguistic user of language (*parole*) to be understood (de Saussure, 1970, pp. 52-53). However, because the structure of the sign is empty and only filled through convention, the bond between signifier and signified *can* change over time. Perpetuated signs are the property of everyone and, by definition, are vulnerable to alteration. “Because the sign is arbitrary, it follows no law other than that of tradition, and because it is based on tradition, it is arbitrary” (de Saussure, 1970, pp. 49-50). But even if practical impediments to altering these bonds are overcome, innovation rarely disposes of the “old substance” completely, resulting in a “loosened” bond (de Saussure, 1970, p. 50). Consider the word ‘awful’, which originally meant to be ‘full of awe’ or reverence, but eventually incorporated dread and terror. Today, the term is casually used to describe something that is ‘very bad’, but retains a supernatural undertone, as if the gods caused the

affliction. The stable *and* shifting relationships in the sign highlight the coordinates of structural analysis, including the axis of simultaneities (synchrony) as relations of coexisting things without time, and the axis of successions (diachrony), or things located on the first axis with their changes (de Saussure, 1970, pp. 54-56). But the structure of the sign constitutes the immutable force within his model, and de Saussure’s early students maintained that this was an ahistorical and innate characteristic of humanity (de Saussure, 1970, p. 56; Lane, 1970, pp. 22,29). In other words, the structure of the sign transcends and supports the stable construction of language.

Invariance necessarily transcends diachrony and synchrony, which led anthropologists like Claude Lévi-Strauss to define structuralism as “the quest for the invariant....elements among

superficial differences”, or the “synchro-diachronic” structure (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, pp. 429-431,443; Lévi-Strauss, 2014, p. 8). Confronted with the complex codes of the phenomenal world,¹³ “the problem is to find what is common to all of them”, or the ordered continuity beneath the disordered and discontinuous (Lévi-Strauss, 2014, pp. 9-12; Lévi-Strauss, 1955, pp. 430-431). To do this, Lévi-Strauss uses a process of *double translation*. First, the observer works to detect repetition in and across time in phenomena that otherwise appear arbitrary or

Figure 4 - Levi-Strauss’
synchro-diachronic structure of
the Oedipus Myth. Rows are
diachronic units, over time.
Columns are synchronic.

random. The appearance of pattern not only repels the absurdity that comes with randomness and chaos but leads to the second translation of pattern into structure, or an originating system. Lévi-Strauss applies these principles to phenomena like myth and kinship that appear localized but carry the fingerprints of synchro-diachronic structures (Lévi-Strauss, 2014, pp. 11-12). This

¹³ Or the experienced world, as it appears.

methodology rests on the theoretical assumption that the “mind is everywhere one and same and... has the same capacities”, though the development of capacity is environmentally specific and subject to cultural variation. “You cannot develop all the mental capacities belonging to mankind all at once. You can only use a small sector, and this sector is not the same according to the culture” (Lévi-Strauss, 2014, p. 19). The structural properties of the ‘mind’ generate common impulses, leading Lévi-Strauss to posit the universal presence of unique intermediaries in myth, and its functional equivalence with science (Lévi-Strauss, 2014, pp. 23-24,32-33). In this way, Lévi-Strauss does not begin with universal impulses or characteristics, but with patterns, which spark an interpretive process that culminates in a universal mechanism.

The work of Lévi-Strauss and his structuralism drew the interest of another anthropologist due to the timing of its appearance in history. Maurice Bloch noted that Lévi-Strauss’ emphasis on the common mind was an important correction in social theory, which had grown increasingly hostile to the study of innate human characteristics. He argues that by the late 19th century, the influence of anthropology peaked based on the “unilinear character” of human history and evolutionary principles. Anthropologists studied our ‘primitive’ past as a window into human progress, moving from one stage to the next (Bloch, 2005, p. 5). However, during this time, he argues that competing accounts and fundamental criticism of these assumptions generated a crisis that led to the *constructivist movement*. The notion of universal, natural and linear progression, including the ethnocentrism that often accompanied it, declined. In its place arose a theoretical position that placed emphasis on the historical specificity of culture, its disordered appearance, and complexity. Bloch argues that focus in the social sciences shifted from the unilinear and universal to the *production* of culture by “infinitely variable creatures, constructed entirely by the whims of innumerable accidents of communications”

(Bloch, 2005, pp. 6-8,11). He also argues that, methodologically, the academy discouraged attempts to generalize findings and even condemned innatist claims on the basis that “we should never judge or evaluate others” (Bloch, 2005, p. 11). But the corrective turn toward an unbalanced cognitive relativism generated other problems. An overemphasis on constructed outcomes tends to produce fragments or assemblages of descriptive anecdotes, while eroding commensurate units of analysis.¹⁴ Bloch describes this as a deep relativism that plagues modern anthropology and the humanities generally, contaminating pedagogy and preventing meaningful interdisciplinary discourse (Bloch, 2005, pp. 9-10,12,97,143-144). In this way, deterministic, ethnocentric, and evolutionary thinking was exchanged for “disembodied phenomena”, continual transformation, and localized dialogue (Bloch, 2005, pp. 14-15).¹⁵ Lévi-Strauss’s contribution was to re-posit a generalized grammar that patterns development and provides meaning to “the concerns of the moment”, and Bloch supports this corrective (Bloch, 2005, pp. 2,96,141). This does not mean a return a singular history of humanity, but the retention of some innate human characteristics as a necessary premise of research. Using a form of *epistemological monism*, Bloch wants to unite actors with their environment, or “the inseparable totality created by the...specificity of human history and the properties of natural being in the natural world” (Bloch, 2005, p. 17). The aim is to study core concerns and questions in a way that aligns with other disciplines by enabling communication around common units of analysis (Bloch, 2005, p. 18). Like Lévi-Strauss, Bloch holds that patterns and recurring connections across cultures

¹⁴ Talcott Parsons made a similar observation, which I will discuss in the coming section.

¹⁵ Bloch’s specific description of the transition from unilinear and innate human characteristics to constructivism in the humanities parallels scholarship in worldview analysis, or the history of ideas. For example, James Sire documents the history of the Western mind, which moved from naturalism, to nihilism, to existentialism. The constructivist (or *diffusionist*) framework adheres to existentialist assumptions and the elevation of the subject.

represents a synchrony of form, attributable to a cognitive foundation or the “unique combination of unified biological and historical factors” (Bloch, 2005, pp. 17,141-142).

Through these authors, several structuralist principles emerge that inform this project. First, these authors assume a layered reality, where invariance positively correlates with the depth of reality. Language is constructed on the foundation of an invariant structure of the sign, just as myths display a common impulse that incorporates common characters, like intermediaries. Second, we see that structuralism is aligned with *a posteriori* approach, where empirical patterns point to non-empirical realities. It is *through* language that the structure of the linguistic sign is revealed, just as the investigation of multiple myths leads to a synchro-diachronic structure. Likewise, an examination of mystification and its pattern in text can point us to its structure. Finally, Bloch introduces a concern for developing commensurate units of analysis, which indirectly points to structure, but also reflexivity. The search for structure is also, in part, a search for a common language and trans-theoretical measures that support programmatic reflexivity.¹⁶

Sociology and Philosophical Foundations

During the 20th century, Parsons joins authors like Lévi-Strauss in developing a structuralist approach. Parsons does so through *systems theory*, where structures are observable in patterns or clusters of phenomena that reflect *universal imperatives* and *imperatives of compatibility*. The former refers to the functional prerequisites of any social system because it must satisfy biological needs, such as nutrition and safety, while supplying the minimal amount

¹⁶ Programmatic reflexivity refers to a sociology of sociology, or theoretical self-examination. To be discussed in more detail in the coming section on method.

of supportive socialization. The imperative of compatibility refers to the limited range or tolerances of coexistent structural elements, meaning that a structure like the *occupational role system* will minimally align with a given *kinship*, *religious*, and *power* systems (Parsons, 1951, pp. 28-29,152,165,167). In this way, there are empirical clusters of relations, but also relations between clusters that are mutually supportive to the system at large. However, while universal imperatives and imperatives of compatibility function as the underlying determinants of behaviour, these are permeable to a degree and integrated with agency. This is the dynamic nature of structure in Parson's framework. Actors may deviate from ideal integration and destabilize systems, but the degree of deviation is also mitigated through *adaptive structures* (Parsons, 1951, pp. 28-29). Likewise, he argues that the patterns of our orientation toward different objects or our selective *value-orientation* becomes a source of structure (Parsons, 1951, pp. 167-168). But just as determinants are not absolute, value-orientation and choice do not fully account for system stability. He observed that different constellations of culture are determined by a society's orientation along the axes of *universalism*, *particularism*, *ascription*, and *achievement* (Parsons, 1951, pp. 102,173). These axes function as another structural layer. For example, placing value on universalism and achievement will allocate resources and rewards based on occupational success, while emphasis on particularistic ascription produces inherited status and traditionalism. In sum, structure in Parson's theory operates at the level of imperatives *and* parameters, where the latter becomes increasingly penetrable by agency. Without these structures, the range of activity would be endless and random (Parsons, 1951, pp. 167,173).

Parson's argument that structures are permeable reflects his level of analysis and the limits of sociology as a discipline. His theory penetrates reality at the level of social systems and

institutions, while the imperatives in his model remain distant. The degree of permeability and variance decreases for the (deeper) universal imperatives and imperatives of compatibility but increases along the (shallower) axes of value-orientation. Parson's focus is on the proximate forces that frame social life, which also allow for the incorporation of agency that accounts for cultural diversity. At this level of analysis, Parsons also places greater emphasis on the development of concepts, as the simplest and most proximate form of structure. Like Bloch, Parsons is concerned about the fragmentation of knowledge in the social sciences, or the lack of commensurate units of analysis. But the relationship between structure and concept requires more explanation.

For Parsons, structures *are* also classificatory and conceptual schemes that provide context for analysis, serving a critical scientific function (Parsons, 1951, pp. 21,152). He argues that without the systematization of structural models, including common concepts, orderly growth, and testing, and the interdisciplinary integration and growth of sociological knowledge becomes impossible. Specifically, he argued that:

By conceiving the processes of the social system as action processes in the technical sense...it becomes possible to articulate with the established knowledge of motivation which has been developed in modern psychology and thereby...to tap an enormous reservoir of knowledge. (Parsons, 1951, p. 20)

Structures, like concepts, capture what is less variable or substantive across variable phenomena. In this way, Parsonian structures resemble Weber's *ideal types*, in that they are heuristic devices for revealing integration with and variance from a standard. The researcher posits a concept to capture a range of phenomena, which is then tested and potentially amended, retained, or discarded. A similar treatment of the concept is evident in Thomas' *operative realism* and Blumer's *sensitizing concepts*. The former requires the researcher to make a "reality claim" for

any associated concept, while the latter uses concepts not as archetypes but as implements for interpreting concrete occurrences (Thomas, 2006, p. 100; Blumer, 1998, pp. 147-149).

Many sociologists pursue the conceptualization and classification of empirical patterns, or what Simmel describes as the “unification of what is homogeneous in terms of substantive criteria” (Simmel, 1955, p. 189). The homogeneity Simmel references lie beneath phenomena that initially appear to be quite unique and unrelated. For example, each case before the courts involves unique evidence, characters, and circumstances. However, it is relatively common for courtroom participants to grieve that ‘justice was not served’. Within this simple complaint is a layered reality, where something homogeneous requires the service of vastly different cases in the courts. The concept of ‘justice’ unifies this homogeneous requirement, or principle. As a structure, the concept of justice also recedes from view as a non-empirical standard and something that transcends the subject. The concept points to the presence of other forces, which are often perceived by the subject as ‘more real’ than the circumstances of daily life.

Therefore, conceptualization and classification are consistent with a structuralist approach, but structuralism cannot be reduced to concepts. Structuralism as a methodology is largely focused on classification, conceptual models, and taxonomy. Ordering and conceptual development is helpful for exposing repetition and novelty and provides a mental map of the world. But each concept also implies a pre-existing stereotype, or non-empirical coding for the observed homogeneity (Goffman E. , 1976, p. 25; Giddens, 1984, p. 16; Durkheim, 1951, pp. 42-43; Gonos, 1977, p. 859; Lane, 1970, pp. 13,15; Midgley, 1992, p. 59). Concepts do not precede or produce the pattern under observation, but are the names given to forces that *do* produce the pattern. Therefore, concepts are posited in language but also discovered. The notion of ‘discovery’ assumes that pre-existent structures are concealed beneath their perceived operation,

or a fundamental difference between the appearance of things and their essence (Godelier, 1970, p. 341; Marx, 1973, p. 5). Sociology is awash with concepts that name patterns but also imply underlying forces. Concepts like *habitus* and the *schemata of perception*, amassed *typifications*, *mimetic reiteration*, *frame*, and *reified power and economy*, all appear consistent with structuralism's general preoccupation with undifferentiated forces beneath the differentiated surface. These concepts do not merely classify observed social and behavioural phenomena but speculate a hidden logic (Godelier, 1970, pp. 343,356). In a sociological context, the theorists who posit these concepts make use of *methodological structuralism*, but may not acknowledge, discuss, or explore the presence of this hidden logic. In this way, the conceptual dimension of structuralism helps to explain its versatility as a methodology, because it can operate within the limits of a given discipline and a contemporary structuralist framework. The social researcher can aggressively pursue the conceptualization of empirical phenomena without making a hermeneutical leap to ultimate structure. But Peter Berger may be an exception.

Berger, in what appears to be a structuralist turn, explores the “intrinsic human propensity for unified thought” and “prototypical human gestures” in *A Rumor of Angel* (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 29). Methodologically, he examined patterned human behaviours and applied conceptual labels, but goes further to describe these behaviours as “signals of transcendence” (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 52-53). For example, the *Argument from Play* is used to capture the persistence of *games* across cultures, which temporarily replace the “serious world” with a “separate universe of discourse” that produces joy and escape (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 58-59). *Arguments from hope* and the persistent denials of death comprise additional signals (*Figure 5 - Berger's Signals of Transcendence*). Attendance at any funeral will reveal these latter patterns, where the deceased is often discussed as being present, watching over the proceedings, or in

dialogue with those left behind. Although Berger delineates these signals by moving from a sociological to religious analysis, the identification of deeper and non-empirical forces can take

Argument from Ordering – ordering gestures that provide reassurance on a metaphysical level. E.g., it will be alright.

Argument from Play – temporary and organized suspension of the serious world, a bracketed reality, where the deathlessness of childhood is reasserted.

Argument from Hope – future orientation that imagines a fulfillment of promise, often in the face of chaos, suffering, and death.

Argument from Damnation – proclamations of absolute and certain anticipatory judgement.

Argument from Humor – the presentation of the incongruity of the human condition, as a commentary on our finitude and relativity. Expresses disbelief in the dignified isolation of humanity.

Figure 5 - Berger's Signals of Transcendence

almost any form in social theory, including the ‘natural’ or simply ambiguous. For example, Parsons and Bloch posit ontological depth when they observe that structural stability and uniformity likely originate with deeper biological or natural forces (Parsons, 1951, p. 10; Bloch, 2005, pp. 17,141-142). Likewise, ambiguous forces appear in Lévi-Strauss’ statement during a radio broadcast that “I appear to myself as the place where something is going on, but there is no ‘I’, no ‘me’” (Lévi-Strauss, 2014, pp. 3-4). As I discussed, locating patterns within empirical

phenomena engenders more questions about ahistorical and structural forces.

Finally, just as conceptual development and pattern identification imply underlying structural forces, so does the process and procedures of any scientific inquiry (Godelier, 1970, pp. 341,343). By virtue of engaging in any inquiry of any phenomena, the researcher declares the presence of opaque causal forces, acknowledged or not. Roy Bhaskar demonstrates this in his philosophy of science and his theory of *Transcendental Realism*. He argues that scientific observation is nonsensical in the absence of a progressively opaque and stratified reality, which

he divides into the transcendent domain of the *real*, the domain of *actual* events, and the empirical domain of *experience* (Bhaskar, 1975, pp. 8-9,13). Experimental repetition and

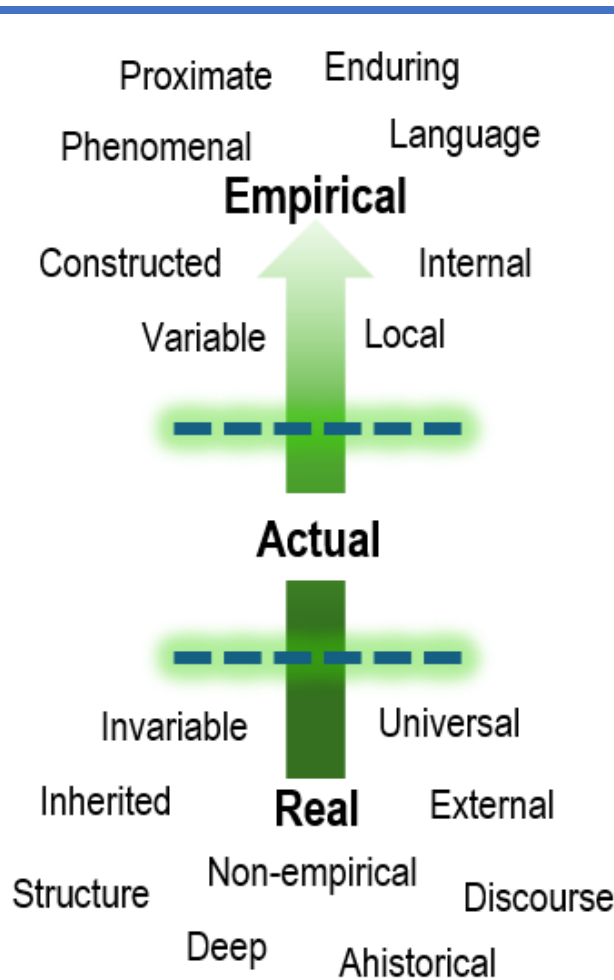


Figure 6 - Layered reality, structuralism, and associated concepts

progressive discovery reveal this stratification because we can only glimpse reality through highly orchestrated observations of the actual. If reality were transparent and plainly evident, no orchestration would be required and there would be no progress, only instantaneous discovery. Because we can only glimpse what is real through the actual, and only glimpse the actual through the empirical, our conception of the real is imperfect and partial. Therefore, “only a concept of ontological depth enables us to reconcile the twin aspects of scientific development, growth and change” (Bhaskar, 1998, pp. 12-13). This is what Lévi-Strauss described as

the expression of the intangible in the tangible, which ordinary sense perception cannot easily comprehend, making it prone to false testimony about these opaque realities (Lévi-Strauss, 2014, p. 6). Sociologists apply systematic and disciplined inquiry precisely because reality is structured and the forces beneath observable social phenomena are, to varying degrees, impenetrable. Although Bhaskar is unconcerned with social theoretical development per se, his

framework aligns with and supports the ontological concerns of structuralism, beyond its methodological utility (Bhaskar, 1975, pp. 188-189). From his perspective, sociology needs to develop a dimension of inquiry that aligns with the “intransitive dimension of philosophical ontology”, or a means of finding the invariant forces that frame social life (Bhaskar, 1998, p. 11).

Summary

Structuralism proceeds in two complementary directions. Theoretically, it assumes a layered reality where invariance positively correlates with depth. Methodologically, it systematizes empirical patterns in provisional concepts or structures because these cannot be reduced to the underlying forces they imply. Therefore, social theorists who reference universal characteristics of social life do not mean that these characteristics are eternal, because patterns appear alongside transformation at the social level. As Parsons argued, stable structures also exist in relationship to other supporting structures, where alterations in one pattern will affect another. Therefore, he acknowledges that the most stable social structures may deteriorate and vanish over time, despite their invariable appearance in pattern. This means that we can describe social structures as more or less enduring, *subject to* their position in the stratified order (Bhaskar, 1998, p. 38). Furthermore, because the degree of visibility of these structures decreases as the depth of reality increases (toward ultimate causative structures), reasonable inference plays a greater role when discussing the existence and nature of deeper structures. Therefore, if mystification is structural, it potentially constitutes a form of discourse that signals an ordered and layered reality, as a *structure of structuring*. This would also constitute a unique discourse because it operationalizes Berger’s signals of transcendence in language and text, but also precedes them as an increasingly invariable structure. In other words, if a structure of

mystification represents a pattern of positing distant and opaque realities, this is assumed within Berger's signals.

Risks

A structural approach still leaves the researcher with an “awkward problem” of translating observed phenomena into “something else”, from immanence into transcendence (Thomas, 2006, pp. 98-99; Berger P. L., 1974, p. 126). This produces several objections and risks for the current approach. An immediate and constructivist concern is that the emphasis on structure and pattern negates agency and innovation. However, determinism decreases as the structuralist approach evolved through the 20th century, in part because authors more readily discard naturalistic assumptions and metaphors of mechanization. Several theorists have worked to balance the problem of overemphasis on conceptualization against the empirical, including *operative realism* and *Structuration*. Parsons' extensive project was also simultaneously concerned with the integration of structure with agency. Similarly, some observe that “deeper levels or strata of reality are successively unfolded” or reproduced and transformed through “local anchorings” over time (Bhaskar, 1998, p. 12; Bloch, 2005, p. 16). But this model also assumes that deeper causal structures become increasingly impenetrable through agency. Even through the conceptualization of proximate structures, this approach invites perils of the privileged perspective and false consciousness within the paradigm, where the researcher claims to see the world differently from the subject. In addition, by positing a structure, the researcher can easily discard subtle differences, ignore resistance, and suppress richness by rendering social phenomena indivisible. The structural researcher is also more likely to ignore historical development and lean toward a conservative strategy by merely affirming current conditions.

Even by affirming the ‘law of transformation’, where structures morph through interdependencies and reproduction, this structuralism lacks a clear formula for social change or structural genesis (Lane, 1970, p. 17). At a minimum, this appears unfriendly to emancipatory interests and creativity. However, critique also thrives on the pure theoretical form as a stationary object, even though social science practitioners rarely stand still. It is difficult to attribute a loss of richness to Goffman’s research or to suggest that Foucault’s use of structure in his archaeology ignores historical development. Therefore, even though the structuralist approach carries risk, users have developed tools and mitigation strategies that introduce balance, without losing its most distinctive contribution of identifying the underlying and invariant forces that frame the social world (Lane, 1970, p. 14).

Method – Discourse Analysis

As noted earlier, I intend to apply a structuralist theoretical and methodological paradigm to examine mystification in social theory. A structural pattern of analysis follows three phases, including a review of the existing concept and development, the identification of patterns and stable elements that permit comparison and classification, and the distillation of mystification as a form or organizing principle, including its syntax, oppositions, and transformations (Lane, 1970, pp. 26-28,34-35). I will be tracing the concept of mystification as it is developed in social theory and related disciplines, including its usage and aliases. The goal is to develop a working structure, which captures its diverse and empirical manifestations in theoretical literature. This assumes that mystified language is both a formal system (as structure) *and* linguistic expression, with the latter having arbitrary but patterned characteristics that *signal* the structured form within a layered ontology, requiring hermeneutical techniques to penetrate. This process of translation will proceed along two directions, by testing the structural assumption through a *variance*

question (i.e., is it stable or unstable?), but also how mystification is deployed through a *process question* (i.e., how, when is it used) (Maxwell, 1994, p. 82). Because mystification does not appear to be discoverable through quantitative measures, I am engaging in a qualitative Discourse Analysis (DA).

DA presents advantages such as efficient data collection, availability, cost effectiveness, unobtrusive access, stability, and precision. It is also compatible with diverse theoretical perspectives and may be used in conjunction with other methods and techniques. But DA is significantly aligned with structuralism due to their mutual reliance on a process of translation, from a surface understanding of a text to an underlying synthesis. Just as structuralism implies properties beneath the empirical surface, DA “usually refers to research that aims at uncovering the features of text that maintain coherence in units larger than the sentence” (Perakyla & Ruusuvuori, 2011, p. 672). As such, DA goes beyond textual analysis, including the coding of technical properties, terminology, syntax, style, or genre (van Dijk, 1983, pp. 270-279). It also goes beyond languacentricity or the aggregated multiplicity of perspectives, because we cannot “assume that the reality of texts is exhausted by our knowledge about texts” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 14). Therefore, DA incorporates a hermeneutical dimension by incorporating implicit and unsaid content in text, including the apparent assumptions of the author. This means that the conclusions of DA ought to be tentative because it does not provide an “unambiguous entry point to the understanding” (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, pp. 230-232; Fairclough, 2003, p. 11).

Caution is required because language rarely reflects the inner subjective world of the speaker or context, but it does “generate a version of this world that is in part a transient one” (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 229). Even the same writer may describe the same event differently across contexts or clarify an omission in subsequent publications. Textual samples

may be incomplete, and the author is rarely available to clarify these ambiguities (Bowen, 2009, pp. 31-32). Likewise, physical records may appear independent, naturally occurring, and durable, but these too have a fluid relationship with the social context, as products and producers of social meanings. Finally, “what we are able to see of the actuality of a text depends upon the perspective from which we approach it, including the particular social issues in focus, and the social theory...we draw upon” (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 14,16). The lens that informs the DA process will provide visibility of one reality, while rendering others opaque, negating the multiplicity of the data (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997, pp. 267, 271). For example, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) typically assumes an underlying reality of exploitation as foundational to social life. As such, it applies a *hermeneutics of suspicion* by emphasizing language as a constituting force of oppression and liberation. By taking an “explicit sociopolitical stance”, CDA seeks to uncover the symbolic reproduction of domination, meaning that “nothing is innocent” (van Dijk, 1983, pp. 252-253,257-259; Lather, 1991, p. 25). Unless the researcher recognizes and manages this risk by including multiple perspectives, evidence of contradiction or variance will be missed in the analysis, including traces that reveal how identities and relationships are being remade (van Dijk, 1983, p. 261; Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 238; Lather, 1991, pp. 89,99). Therefore, my approach needs to avoid techniques that trap texts, rigid categories that filter content, or pre-structured interpretations that elide multiplicity in favor of a core meaning (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, pp. 231-232).

To establish mystification as a structure and to satisfy my variance question, I cannot focus on a single or contained textual sample, but the development of the concept over a range of theoretic material, both classical and contemporary. An exhaustive review is impossible, so I need to make a “strategic choice” of selected sources that is sufficiently broad to support this

development (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 14). However, because theorists rarely focus on mystification exclusively, define it precisely, or develop it in a sequential or coordinated manner, it appears in fragments. By inductively collecting these pieces, my goal is to assemble them into a *form*, or synchro-diachronic structure. However, a structural form of mystification is not an accumulation or sum of these fragments, but requires their analytic incorporation, or the stable unification of their homogenous properties (Flyvbjerg, 2006, pp. 13,16). There are numerous examples of this process, and authors often represent structure visually as formulas or diagrams. For example, Bhaskar represents his *Transcendental Realism* as $D_r \geq D_a \geq D_e$ to show the fundamental discontinuity between the domains of the real, actual, and the empirical (Bhaskar, 1975, pp. 20-22). Zilberman develops the structure of $\frac{(A)B}{C}$ that represents social modalities of thought, or what is absolutely true (A), conventionally true (B), and absolutely untrue (C) (Zilberman, 1988, pp. 40-43). Alternatively, Barthes develops a diagram for his second-order semiological system, just as Lincoln provides a three dimensional model to represent the complex relationship between myth, history, fable, and legend as variant expressions of credibility, truth, and authority (Barthes, 1957, pp. 138-140; Lincoln B. , 2014, pp. 14-18).¹⁷ These visuals leverage mathematical form as a metaphor to illustrate the invariance of structure, but also to map the author's process toward its development. I will use a similar method in developing a structure of mystification.

If I can distill an invariant form of mystification, we still need to understand its expression in language (i.e., signals) toward answering my process question. To begin, if mystification does not explicitly appear in text, what are some associated and detectable

¹⁷ See Figure 20 - de Saussure's structure of the linguistic sign and the 2nd Order and Figure 22 - Lincoln, discourse types and their alignment with credibility, truth, and authority.

characteristics of mystification? For example, various authors explore the use of metaphors, objectification, teleology, and rationality that signal or reference mystified forces or entities. The goal is to establish a form that captures the varied usage or deployment of the concept, and then to detect it in complex and varied textual samples. Again, there are numerous examples of DA that inform this type of approach. Barthes examines myth-making discourse in historical narrative and other genres, including fiction, photography, diaries, and news publications. These products frequently contain a “reality effect,” where authors claim authority over what is ‘really’ happening in a given context. We can observe this through a variety of techniques, including temporal distortions or fake sequences, bridge material, non-descriptives, non-confirming statements, verisimilitude, naturalization, tautologies, and so on. (Barthes, 1981, pp. 127,132-133,138-139).¹⁸ Griffin conducts similar research using Event-Structure Analysis (ESA), which replaces a narrative’s temporal order with “expert judgement or knowledge” about the typical connections between events (Griffin, 1993, p. 1105). For example, an author makes truth claims within a narrative, appearing to understand actions within a “holistic configuration” of events that are highly logical and intelligible in their central themes (Griffin, 1993, pp. 1097-1098). The account “lulls readers into accepting the narrator’s account as simply ‘happening’” by eliding complex interactions, causes, and sequences in the account (Griffin, 1993, p. 1099). ESA processes these accounts through ideal types, comparables, and counterfactuals to test the narrative, before forming an “imaginative re-enactment” of the story (Griffin, 1993, pp. 1100-1103). These tools interrogate the original account to expose distortions and glossing, but also to re-build an interpretation “brick by brick” (Griffin, 1993, pp. 126,1104,1117; Alvesson &

¹⁸ *Verisimilitude* is defined as the stagecraft of authority and the factual, usually infused with categorical language, clear methodology, and the presumption of presence by the author, who appears to convey a firsthand account (O'Reilly, 2005, pp. 212-213).

Skoldberg, 2009, pp. 231-232,236). While ESA focuses on rebuilding narratives and goes beyond the current project, it provides important analytical insights for detecting problematic features in text. Finally, there are recent developments in expressive meaning, or the ‘emotional turn’ within DA. Developed through international relations, these researchers argue that evaluation and emotion are inseparable and encoded within discourse (Alba-Juez & Mackenzie, 2019, p. 6). Phonological and syntactical features will reveal the attitude and position of the speaker, conveying insubordination, appreciation, regret, favor, annoyance, and judgement (Alba-Juez & Mackenzie, 2019, pp. 7-9). If we can establish a structure of mystification and its expressive characteristics or signals, I can apply these techniques to an existing theoretical text.

This approach is also consistent with the interdependent principles of *symmetry* and *programmatic reflexivity*. David Bloor develops these concepts as part of the *Strong Programme* in the sociology of knowledge, which defines asymmetry as the tendency of persons and groups to designate some phenomena as socially constructed and others as inaccessible, asocial, and immutable. The latter constitutes mystification in his model, or the sacred imagery of a body of knowledge that renders it immune from causal analysis. For example, Bourdieu & Wacquant explore this problem within academia, where intellectuals will claim “radical chic” imagery, which is simultaneously anti-conformist in its denunciation of hierarchy but reformist when in the presence of “inferior cultures or the minor genres of legitimate culture” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 54,84-85). This is the *trojan horse* effect, when researchers become unwitting conveyers of unacknowledged universals, over which they have a monopoly (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 56,67,88). Symmetry argues that if social construction is the principle, then *everything* must be constructed and subject to the same level of analysis. Therefore, if we establish a structural form of mystification (as patterned), the claim of sociology that it

demystifies knowledge constitutes an asymmetry, unless its own mystified claims are open to examination (Bloor, 1991, pp. 7,46-47; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 49,51).

Symmetry promotes reflexivity, but not in the form in which reflexivity is typically understood. Personal reflexivity reduces the distance between the researcher and the subject matter through a process of ‘turning back’, or the researcher taking themselves as an object (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 72). By acknowledging potential biases and disclosing uncertainties, the writer or speaker cautions readers about the uncritical acceptance of findings (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, pp. 423-425; Cheek, 2018, pp. 325-335). This method reflects a distrust of the objective and detached researcher and concerns about power relations in research. However, critical self-reflection does not encompass the type of reflexivity under consideration here (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018, p. 143; O'Reilly, 2005, p. 222).¹⁹ Rather, symmetrical analysis as outlined above becomes *programmatic reflexivity*, or a sociology of sociology that uncovers a “state of unthought” and its “progressive constitution” in the discipline (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 238,259).

Personal and programmatic reflexivity are operationalized differently. For example, the former is accompanied by procedures to increase transparency, such as logging research decisions and rationale, and disclosing funding sources, feelings, and experiences (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 415; Tracy, 2010, p. 842). A potential problem with personal transparency is that it can simulate legitimacy once normalized, or a new form of verisimilitude. This is correctable in more robust forms, where the researcher actively includes exceptions, counter opinions, and opposing theoretical perspectives as corrective measures (Lather, 1991, p. 76; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 419; Wolcott, 1994, p. 42; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, &

¹⁹ The reflexive turn counters the elevated, pure, and trustworthy researcher of positivism.

Spiers, 2002, p. 9,12). A diversity of incorporated perspectives also functions as a type of *triangulation* by helping “the researcher guard against the accusation that a study’s findings are simply an artifact of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator’s bias” (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). Triangulation also marks a transition toward programmatic reflexivity. Moving beyond transparency, researchers acknowledge their role as “cultural producer(s)” and add a systemic cross-examination of the social and intellectual unconscious embedded in their analytic tools and operations (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 36,40,72).

We inescapably convey messages, explicit and implicit, about social worlds and about our understandings of them. We construct social actors and social actions. We construct cultures through our own acts of representation. (Atkinson & Coffey, 1996, p. 137)

This objectivizes the organizational and the cognitive structure of the discipline, embedded in theory, problems, binaries, and judgement (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 40-42; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018, p. 143). The problem of bias is extended to the “invisible determinations inherent in the intellectual posture”, the *scholarly gaze*, epistemocentrism, and the ethnocentrism of the scientist (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 69-70). As such, this level of reflexivity draws resistance, first because it problematizes immutable elements in a body of knowledge, but also because it attacks the “charismatic self-conception of intellectuals who like to think of themselves as undetermined (and) ‘free floating’” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 43-44,72,247; Bloor, 1991, pp. 46-47). Therefore, a symmetrical reflexivity turns the program of research back onto itself, which Berger also described as “relativizing the relativizers” (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 28). The challenge is to “historize reason without dissolving it”, to engage in a thorough deconstruction without falling into the “deadly alternative” of nihilism, where nothing

can be taken for granted (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 47,66; Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 267).²⁰

The provisional and non-sectarian nature of structural work helps to mitigate the risk of paralysis associated with programmatic reflexivity. The underlying assumption of a layered reality includes opacity, or the “imprecise, fuzzy, wooly” nature of the real that limits our findings (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 22-23). My approach also incorporates theoretical breadth in defining structuralism itself and through the conceptual development of mystification as a multi-theoretical project. The consultation with diverse voices, including consensus, critical, phenomenological, and hermeneutical theorists contributes to a dispersal of authority, balance, and mitigation of bias (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, pp. 273-275; Lather, 1991, p. 85). However, I am still using structuralism as a lens to detect uniformity across sources, meaning that my project is also a hermeneutical one. In some cases, theorists speak to mystification directly, but the implicit, ambiguous, and hidden features of a text are often foundational to the explicit. This is apparent in the concept of asymmetry, which itself does not appear in text, but is identified by Bloor as pervasive (Fairclough, 2003, p. 17; Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, pp. 304-305,312-313). For example, mystification may be present in *aliases*, or processes and concepts that closely resemble the mystified form, but under a different name, such as nominalization, projection, and naturalization. These taxonomies require “ruthless questioning” and careful attention to the “particular aspect” of their appearance, because they are not given by text or reality itself (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 235,249; Morse J. M., 1994, p. 30; Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2011, p. 4). Using interpretive skills to identify commonalities

²⁰ Bourdieu criticizes Bloor on this account as going too far.

and distinguish subtle differences increases the risks associated with a privileged perspective of speaking for the subject. I will compound this problem if I omit elements of the text that contradict my interpretation, particularly as the volume of material increases. Nonetheless, *saturation* or concluding that “comprehending is complete” is unlikely in this scenario and this highlights a persistent tension within DA (Morse J. M., 1994, p. 30; Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2011, p. 4).

Finally, because I am drawing from diverse theoretical sources over time to develop a structure of mystification, my project has genealogical characteristics. This type of DA is sometimes called Historical Discourse Analysis (HDA), or a genealogical method, where “the constitution of subjects and objects is explored in historical context” (Perakyla & Ruusuvuori, 2011, p. 1118). The approach attempts to trace a given concept as “an immense repository of naturalized preconstructions” that evolves over time but retains its enduring features (Perakyla & Ruusuvuori, 2011, p. 1118; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 241). Although users scarcely define the specific techniques for this approach, several provide examples of this method. Talal Asad uses a genealogical method in this study of modernity and argues that while this movement will present absolutes, these are presentations and distortions that obscure broader objectives. For example, he suggests that notions of tolerance in the modern state seem to condemn violence but conceal a new regulated form of aggression (Asad, 2003, p. 8).

It is right to say that modernity is neither a totally coherent object nor a clearly bounded one...modernity is a project – or rather, a series of interlinked projects – that certain people in power seek to achieve. (Asad, 2003, p. 13)

Asad’s approach resembles the work of Foucault, who likewise argues that the advent of humane objectives in modernity is merely a new expression of power as a singular strategy, reinvented as a “whole series of ‘carceral’ mechanisms” (Foucault, 1977, pp. 307-308). Moreover, in his

examination of secret societies, Simmel traces the increase of secrecy in modernity through our declining awareness of subjectivities and the increasing demand for selective disclosure (Simmel, 1906, pp. 9,14).

Within these similar approaches, the discourse under study is the evolution of a single concept (i.e., tolerance, power, secrecy) manifested in language, over time “in various, changing contexts, in different types of texts...to make a synthesis” (Perakyla & Ruusuvuori, 2011, p. 1118). However, while my project may reference historical context, it is not the focus, nor is structure necessarily the focus of HDA practitioners. While Asad and Foucault expertly outline the movement and flux of history, they do not *explicitly* identify power as structural within their respective projects (Park, 2012, p. 394).²¹ While a mixed-methodological approach would strengthen this project by combining structural objectives with HDA methods, this practically exceeds the limits of this project (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 33,227). As such, my project will lack the depth of historical analysis typical of an HDA approach.

In summary, I am surveying diverse social theoretical sources over time to trace the concept of mystification to distill its structural form. As a structure, I will explore its variable content or signals in language, which I will then apply to an existing social theoretical text, as a programmatic reflexive turn. In this case, I have selected Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* as a case study, due to his theoretical ambiguity and the interpretive challenges associated with this book. As I noted, Foucault’s work resists paradigmatic labels, which may otherwise bias my approach to the text. Likewise, students and scholars alike interpret Foucault differently, which prevents me from relying on a consensus. This selection also involves the secondary sampling of

²¹ Simmel does both regarding secrecy.

specific or narrow texts to test and possibly support mystified discourse as an enduring structure (Fairclough, 2003, p. 7). This assumes that a structure of mystification is observable through the author's use of signalling language, through an *a posteriori* investigation. We are working backward from language to structure, as both production and reproduction of its conditions.

3. Tracing the Concept

In this section, I will begin to trace the concept of mystification inductively as it develops through classical theorists, including Auguste Comte, Ludwig Feuerbach, Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber. In these theorists, the majority deploy the concept interchangeably with projection, and from a materialist perspective. As such, mystification is the act of projecting a spiritual reality in place of a proximate or material one. As I noted, some authors may use an alias for mystification, or embed this concept inside another, such as Weber's discussion around charisma. The goal is to distill a working structure that captures its diverse and empirical manifestations in theoretical literature. This structure is not an accumulation of perspectives and uses, but their analytical incorporation and translation into a stable form. Through this process, the concept is stripped of its materialist origins and related valuations, *before* we can refine it further through contemporary sources.

Confusion, Projection, and the Classical Form

The concept of mystification plays an important role in social theoretical thought, and its earliest form develops in the context of the Enlightenment and the corresponding growth of naturalism. Under the influence of Newtonian and Cartesian physics, many theorized about the mechanization and general harmony of the universe (Odom, 1966, pp. 536, 540; Williams, 1978, p. 254). These mechanized descriptions rested on principles of *uniformity* and *necessity*, where the universe is comprised of a “single substance differently modified” and governed by rules of motion (La Mettrie, 1912, pp. 125, 148; Giddens, 1984, p. 2).²² The seemingly perfect operation

²² *Uniformity* is a nuanced concept whose meaning will vary subject to the underlying worldview. Within a naturalistic framework, uniformity refers to a ‘single substance’ (matter) that also rejects the transcendent. This type of uniformity is associated with *scientific materialism*, *scientism*, and/or *physicalism* (to include exotic matter,

of the natural world captured the imagination of scientists, clerics, and the public alike, becoming the first premise of all truth-seeking examination and rationality (Robinson, 2007, pp. 615-616). Initial advances in scientific knowledge made it seem possible that everything could be brought under observation, leading to singular explanations for phenomena (Midgley, 1992, pp. 61,76,84). For example, La Mettrie in the 18th century reduced all animals to a “walking plant...a machine which winds its own springs...the living image of perpetual movement” (La Mettrie, 1912, pp. 93, 97). By the 19th century, unilinear evolutionary principles informed the view that humanity is progressing along a single pathway, moving from one stage to another. Scholars within archaeology, anthropology, linguistics, and the social sciences believed that this progression was certain based on the assumed universality of human characteristics, which generate a singular history and social form, albeit at different rates. Within this framework, methods of observation would take a predictable and conservative form, where ‘primitive’ peoples become a window to our past just as modern society reveals their future (Bloch, 2005, pp. 5-6). The alignment of seemingly infinite scientific advance with these modern discoveries became a formula for the discovery of truth, challenging the mystery and invisible forces that plagued the medieval cosmology. Each new discovery would erode and eventually replace these ‘primitive’ ideas while producing a destructive posture for the scientist “who sweeps away existing superstitions” (Midgley, 1992, pp. 79,192).

In this regard, Giddens describes 19th century social theory as an “orthodox consensus”, holding to evolutionism, material laws, and an objectivist standpoint for the researcher (Giddens, pp. xv-xvi,xxviii,1). Likewise, Gerth and Mills describe classical theory as a “single-factor

energy, etc.). Uniformity apart from naturalism refers merely to an expected order in the cosmos as a methodological assumption necessary for scientific investigation.

theorem” that postulated mono-causality or the presence of singular originating forces behind all phenomena (Weber, 1946, pp. 46-47). These principles are embodied in Auguste Comte’s positivist philosophy, which describes three phases of cognitive and social development, including the *theological*, *metaphysical*, and *scientific*.

Positive philosophy...alone has been advancing during a course of centuries, through which the others have been declining. This general revolution of the mind is nearly accomplished...bringing social phenomena within its comprehension...into one body of homogeneous doctrine. (Comte, 1975, p. 84)

The metaphysical and scientific phases represent advances, with each overcoming the deficiencies of the one that precedes it. Comte viewed the theological phase as the necessary starting point for the pre-positive mind, which explains primary and ultimate causes for phenomena in supernatural terms. The metaphysical phase is transitory and only replaces supernatural agents with other abstract entities, while the final and positive state searches for the natural *laws* that govern our world (Bourdeau, 2023, p. 13; Martineau, 2000, p. 28). Different actors with varying objectives dominate each phase, but in the final and normal phase, science leads us to the truth. Comte also envisioned sociology, or “social physics”, as the course that incorporates all sciences and reduces their laws to a small number of universal explanations that form the basis of social reorganization (Comte, 2000, pp. 77-84). The vision of progressive rationality in Comte, and classical social theory generally, anticipates the triumph of positivism not just as a method, but as a universal state of mind and “new social ethos” (Martin, 1966, p. 355). In this final condition, all disagreement evaporates, and a kind of secularized religion emerges as a state of complete harmony, where we order our lives based on the natural relations we collectively share. Humanity becomes the new focus of worship and the source of moral rule (Bourdeau, 2023, pp. 26-27).

It is within classical theoretical development and Comte’s theological phase of social development that the concept of mystification begins to take shape. The early state of the pre-logical human mind believes in a fictitious or “fundamental unreality” before giving way to a growing rationalism (Martin, 1966, p. 355; Schmaus, 1996, p. 430). Comte argued that the

$P \rightarrow {}^E N+ \rightarrow L$

religious mind rightly seeks the essential nature of things and the immediate causes of phenomena (P) but projects a supernatural (N+) Will or deities in error (E). The effect of theological belief is to “mystify the people” and produce “mental subjection” that prevents

Figure 7 -
*Projection/mystification and
resolution in Comte*

“real progress” (Comte, 2015, pp. 51,207). The only variation in the metaphysical stage is that supernatural entities are replaced with abstractions, such as nature or some other entity or force (Martineau, 2000, p. 28). Both stages misidentify causes and fail to comprehend the natural laws (L) at the root of all things (*Figure 7 - Projection/mystification and resolution in Comte*).

Regardless, he viewed the movement through these stages as necessary and suitable because they incite investigative labour, which is the seed of positivist philosophy. Comte envisioned a developmental and linear history through which our investigatory capacities mature and eventually lead to our graduation from a theological to sociological synthesis (Martineau, 2000, pp. 24,27,30; Bourdeau, 2023, pp. 13,27). As such, Comte pathologizes these earlier phases and forecasts their disappearance, but also redeems them through their evolutionary and preparatory role.

However, projections also appear within Comte’s own theory. Ernest Becker argued that the classical framework developed in response to the decline of religious symbols and the corresponding need for these symbols during the Enlightenment. Theorists were compelled to posit a new sacrality rooted in the natural world and humanity, and indeed, this appears to play a

Ludwig Feuerbach likewise maintained that the material world is the “sum of all reality” and that “mankind consists of nothing else than a continuous and progressive conquest of limits” (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 26,127,162,177-178). He also argued that a pathology afflicts primitive and religious thought, where we mistake one thing for another. But Feuerbach develops the projective hypothesis in greater detail and becomes the model for anti-religious argumentation to this day. The seed of mystification lies in humanity’s inherent possession of thought (intellect), will (energy), and affection (love), which exert force on the individual consciousness and appear infinite (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 4-5). The true source of this infinitude lies in the *cumulative capabilities* of the species, or the *compensatory principle*, where an individual who possesses one attribute in abundance compensates for the person who has a deficit. This balanced perfection in the aggregate confronts the finite individual, who experiences a disjunction between this infinite essence and personal limitations (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 29,129). Feuerbach argues that the religious mind feels impoverished in the presence of these infinite powers and mistakenly objectifies them in an infinite entity, or a god. This supernatural entity embodies the perfection of the species as a distinct nature, personifying universal characteristics that properly reside in society (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 62,176). This early stage represents imaginative work and childlike engagement in *free play* because we discard our personal quantitative limitations, while retaining our essential nature. In other words, once quantity is externalized or alienated, the religious mind is humbled before a god who is quantitatively infinite, but qualitatively identical to the worshiper (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 11,97,162,178). The masochistic nature of religion is apparent because the mind is subjugated to a projected version of itself, leading Feuerbach to propose that it is no coincidence that “what pleases man, pleases God also” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 22). As evidence, he observes that humanity occupies a position of

privilege in the religious schema and prayer, where an omnipotent god is ultimately governed by prayer under the guise of humility (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 63,88). Within this resemblance between humanity and God, Feuerbach merges the concepts of projection and mystification, or the illusory externalization of a distinct nature (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 176,185).

While the projection of these good qualities may appear benign, Feuerbach adds that this inferior form of thought is also foolish, lazy, intolerant, contradictory, and violent to humanity (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 202-207). The potential harm lies in the worshipper's withdrawal from the concerns of this world, displaced by their longing for eternity. To move past this moment of immaturity, the believer must reclaim thought, will, and affection from the divine as the infinite qualities of the species. Only then will the deity become an "existence without qualities... an insipidity, an absurdity...what he is to me is to me all that he is" (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 13). The energy and work that was previously routed to the divine is eventually redirected to the edification of the world and humanity (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 219-227). Only through rational and mature contemplation can humanity rightfully reclaim this power, freedom, and "unending fullness" in itself (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 127,162).

Feuerbach specifically identifies the phenomena that confronts the mind as an infinitude of qualities present in the aggregate, or the social (S) realm. Because he frames this problem in part as a quantitative one, humanity requires a proportionate (α) projection to an infinite deity (D). This error (E) alienates human qualities (-Q) of thought, will, and affection to this projected entity, thereby relinquishing control (-C) of the infinitude that naturally resides in society. Only rationality (R) reclaims the predicates attributed to the deity as human universalities, the absolute truth of our nature (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 4-5). What results is a dramatic account that begins with society's alienated infinite essence and concludes with its eventual return. This model

combines a structure of projection with its effects, including a masochistic subjugation (*first*

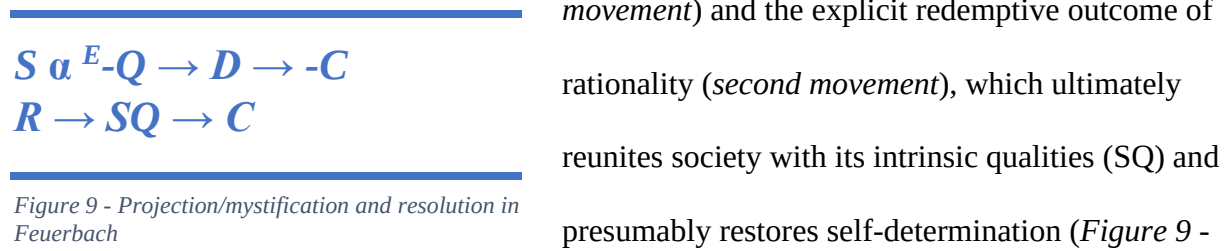


Figure 9 - Projection/mystification and resolution in Feuerbach

Projection/mystification and resolution in Feuerbach).²⁴ Feuerbach's model also informs the general development of the sociological analysis of religion (e.g., Durkheim) and its underlying assumptions, including the idea of an evolutionary alignment between the social and natural worlds, where we progress from an irrational to rational state.²⁵

Feuerbach and other classical theorists generally assume that once rationality is achieved, the results are the same across cultures because there is a "unanimity between rational minds" (Lyotard, 1979, pp. xxiii-xxiv; Schmaus, 1996, pp. 429,435). These theorists held an unquestioning vision of society as a delimited and integrated unity that eventually finds *equilibrium*, realized in the present or future (Giddens, pp. xix,xxvi).

If God is really a different being from myself, why should his perfection trouble me? Disunion exists between beings who are at variance, but who ought to be one, who can be one, and who consequently in nature, in truth, are one.
(Feuerbach, 1881, p. 29)

In this way, Feuerbach's belief in the alignment of natural and social progress that leads us toward a singular truth assumes the presence of a dominant script or universal discourse.²⁶ This assumption further supports the deductive formulation of laws and generalizations, including

²⁴ Or *secularization*.

²⁵ Modern forms of this argument also appear in the 'new atheism' movement.

²⁶ This marks the mystified elements in Feuerbach's own theory.

tools conducive to their discovery (Giddens, 1984, p. xviii).²⁷ Finally, religious contemplative activity uniquely projects invisible anthropomorphisms whose origins are shrouded. Like building a lock whose combination I cannot remember, I create an opaque force for myself. From Feuerbach's perspective, this mystifying activity is innocent in the context of evolution because it is involuntary and represents an uninformed effort to comprehend our surroundings. But its sinister nature appears in the context of the modern and rational age because the child, now grown, should know better.

Émile Durkheim mirrors and elaborates on Feuerbach's compensatory principle through the *division of labour* and *organic solidarity*, where the interdependence of our distinct contributions to social life bond us together. Our introspective consciousness restrains our comprehension of social reality and the rich *accumulations of intelligence*, as a *sui generis* (Durkheim, 1982, p. 37; Durkheim, 1995, pp. 15,266). This amassed intellect appears in crystalized institutions, social facts, concepts, and ideas, which confront the individual from birth as externalized creations that transcend personal consciousness. To comprehend this reality, Durkheim argues that "man is double" because we contemplate the world through *empiricism* and *apriorism*, as two distinct epistemologies (Durkheim, 1995, p. 15). The former involves the process of observing "bits and pieces" in world, while the latter uses rational categories in advance of observation.

If, as is granted to us, this synthesis *sui generis*, which constitutes every society, gives rise to new phenomena, different from those which occur in consciousnesses in isolation, one is forced to admit that these specific facts reside in society itself that produces them and not in its parts. (Durkheim, 1982, p. 39)

²⁷ Classification systems and biological metaphors are built on this foundation, drawing on evolution and adaptation as operative principles (Giddens, p. 1). Durkheim, for example, will refer to types of law as separate "species" (Durkheim, 1951, p. 55; Durkheim, 1982, p. 83).

He defines apriorism as the psychical manifestation of accumulated intellectual capital, the product of multiple concurrent observations that transcend time, space, and our personal experiences (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 12,16-18). In this way, the individualized consciousness is free and unrestrained on one hand, but also subject to the collective forces imposed upon it, like an inherited instinct or ontological substratum (Durkheim, 1982, p. 51; Durkheim, 1951, pp. 319-320). Society may penetrate the individual to varying degrees, who gains only a superficial understanding of it as something fundamentally external. The primitive and speculative mind confronts this ‘other’ and more complex form but uses religious expression to attribute this transcendent capacity to the divine, rather than collective forces (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 9,17,25). In this way, gods are the hypostatic form or symbol of the combined consciousness of society, or the “collective representations that express collective realities” (Durkheim, 1951, p. 312; Durkheim, 1995, p. 9). For Durkheim, these powers greatly surpass the individual and appear worthy of worship but are just an obscure representation of our ascendancy in the collective (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 22,227,431). This represents a paradox. We act irrationally because our adoration is misplaced and we impose religious imagery of sacredness, transcendence, conscience, the soul, emblems, and so on. But this is also rational because this activity represents an objective reality and has the “group as its basis” (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 230-233,262,271). The error does not originate in the social facts that are symbolized, but in the symbols themselves (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 263,267). Nonetheless, Durkheim argues that religion is part of our natural development as collectives and fulfills a social purpose (function) by connecting us with externalities we hold in common (Durkheim, 1995, p. 2).

Although Durkheim identifies religion as the *first* system of collective representations, these are merely approximations or metaphors for the transcendent force of society, as *nature*’s

highest expression (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 8,17,22-25). As such, representations are not limited to religion proper and Durkheim's sociology maintains that the world is known *only* through approximations that attempt to penetrate an obscured reality (Durkheim, 1995, p. 227). For example, apriorism implies the use of concepts, which are deposited in us and can originate only from the collective as shared mental constructs (Durkheim, 1995, p. xviii). As representations, concepts are products of collective elaboration that exceed personal experience and grant access to *other* worlds by allowing us to recognize types and classify objects (Durkheim, 1995, p. 436). However, once in possession of the concept, I may add my unique understanding to it, apply it in different settings, and even contribute to its modification based on experience. Durkheim notes the use of metaphor in this context, which translates complex events across diverse realms into a singular expression as we strive to come ever closer to the nature of things (Durkheim, 1995, p. 17).

These shared constructs may be applied to moral and axiological dimensions as well. This is why philosophical and religious traditions attribute morality to a god because the “inadequate sketch of it contained in individual consciences cannot be regarded as the original type”. Again, a transcendent morality springs from society and stands in contrast to the individual form, while manifesting itself in our passion for vengeance or *ultimate justice* (Durkheim, 1951, p. 318).²⁸ For example, when confronted with an egregious crime, we are likely to point to the breach of a transcendent force or principle, regardless of our direct connection to the criminal act. We may or may not involve a god in this formula and say that a *crime against humanity* was committed, opting to make an appeal to a universal right or moral

²⁸ Ultimate justice is borrowed here from Peter Berger's *argument from damnation* but aligns well with Durkheim's discussion on this subject.

standard. Likewise, Durkheim observes that the worship of gods may be replaced with reverence for human personality, as something sacred and possessing cult like characteristics, where “man has become a god for men” (Durkheim, 1951, pp. 313,334-335). These varieties of customs, beliefs, and institutions appear as a “definite type of architecture”, self-validating, and separate from personal consciousness (Durkheim, 1951, p. 313). Like religion, these *represent* complex realities of a different order whose early comprehension relies on transcendent and metaphysical conceptions (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 17,334-335). Religion may be among the *first* representations that also embodies a unique intensity or psychic exaltation, but Durkheim observes that this is common to any state in which the mind *adds* something to what is immediately given. The projection of greater connection or meaning suggests that “there is perhaps no collective representation that is not in a sense delusive”, and that “religious beliefs are only a special case of a very general law” (Durkheim, 1995, p. 228).

Durkheim argues that the generalization of projective activity suggests that humanity exists in a condition of “pseudo-delirium”. This delusional activity occurs when we add properties to things that do not inherently possess them, thereby transforming a commonplace object into a “sacred and very powerful being” (Durkheim, 1995, p. 229). But this delusion also takes a *pseudo* form because collective representations are projections of actual collective inspiration, and it is only through objectification of this projection that representations are imbued with sacredness. The problem is that the reality we imagine combines with the social reality to create instability (Durkheim, 1951, pp. 330,334-335). As noted above, the inconsistent handling of the concept, once multiplied across a population, produces misunderstanding and conflict because we uniquely add to these concepts and understand them differently. The challenge is to move beyond *fleeting* representations and to think *logically*, which is also to think

impersonally (Durkheim, 1995, p. 437).²⁹ Collective representations provide a limited measure of objectivity, persistence, and generalization, because they are imperfectly tested through personal experience. In contrast, a scientifically wrought concept that is derived through controlled and rigorous methods provides stable ground for common intelligence and ideals (Durkheim, 1995, p. 440).³⁰ Only an objectivist standpoint can accurately discover the movement of impersonal and material forces (Giddens, 1984, pp. xv-xvi,xxviii,1). Durkheim believed that these new ways of investigation will correctly root and preserve our distinctive attributes, eventually eclipsing religious passion and the darkness of these primitive and imaginative forms (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 25,240,431,448).

For Durkheim, all gods provide a world of mystery and escape, but die when worship ceases because these lower representations are dependent on human energy to survive, and this represents a deficit (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 22,227,431,349-350).

The illusion of which he so willingly entertains, has always been for him a cause of weakness; that his dominion over things only really began when he recognised that they have a nature of their own, and when he resigned himself to learning from them what they are. (Durkheim, 1982, p. 46)

The goal is to move from a position of weakness to dominion over the material world, and this happens through a corrected understanding of phenomena. By speculating about an opaque reality, Durkheim suggests that we imagine a world of subjugation to a foreign actor. Again, masochism appears through tendencies of self-deprivation and subservience (Durkheim, 1982, pp. 62, 143; Durkheim, 1995, pp. 25,30). Like Feuerbach, Durkheim argues that we cannot achieve dominion until this subservience to higher authorities is set aside (Durkheim, 1982, pp. 46, 143). But if we objectively uncover and understand the truth of the world, it comes under

²⁹ Durkheim describes this analytical approach as “cold, dry analysis”. (Durkheim, 1982, p. 73)

³⁰ Durkheim acknowledged that scientific authority also rests on human construction, like other representations.

our control because only an unobscured nature is subject to manipulation (Durkheim, 1982, p. 143). Here, Feuerbach’s *second movement* reappears in Durkheim, whereby rationality restores self-determination. His requirement that systematic objective examination precede sentiment, ideology, or pre-conception, is what leads the observer to truth and control versus the illusion of unlimited power that religious representations afford (Durkheim, 1982, pp. 37,61,68,72).³¹ As these new methods of reason and truth progressively take hold, religion will continue its decline, though it “has a right to exist” (Durkheim, 1982, p. 432; Durkheim, 1995, p. 15). Like Feuerbach, he maintains that the natural world is imbued with rationality, which also resonates with the mind (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 16, 24).

In summary, Durkheim maintains Feuerbach’s model for religious projection, but extends this to representations (S+) generally, which is the act of adding something to what is immediately given in society. This projective activity is rational because of its basis in the social, but still represents an error (E). The representations of social forces are not limited to qualitative features, as articulated by Feuerbach, but reflect collective realities as nature’s highest expression. Society’s (S) immense production still requires a proportionate (α) representation, but these social forces remain obscure in Durkheim’s projective model. Uniquely, the effects of

$$S \propto^E S+ \rightarrow -C/C+$$

$$R \rightarrow S \rightarrow C$$

Figure 10 - Projection and resolution in Durkheim

this projection are twofold, involving a masochistic dimension in which control is lost (-C) in service to an external force, but also gained through a sense of ‘unlimited power’ (C+) that only illusion can

provide. Durkheim does not explore how these projected forces export power back to the

³¹ Durkheim’s argument here is in tension with society as a *sui generis*, or an entity of another kind. Our ability to manipulate this external order is unclear.

subject, which really means that subjects can empower themselves through projective activity. Nonetheless, these complex effects of projection support a strategic dimension, where subjects are involved in an exchange and may have something to gain. He repeats Feuerbach's argument that only rationality (R) corrects the error and restores real control (C) to society, but the potential benefits of projection and pseudo-delirium would potentially support an ongoing resistance to rationality (*Figure 10 - Projection and resolution in Durkheim*).

The structural and strategic dimensions of projection appear in the work of Karl Marx as well, though he develops and discusses the latter more explicitly as *mystification*. Like others, Marx concludes that the production of religious ideas is rooted in the reality of material activity, meaning that these ideas are “ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process” (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 42). Just as Feuerbach states that the “world is the sum of all reality”, Marx maintains that “what individuals are depends on the material conditions of their production” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 162; Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 37). Religious projections do not represent a qualitative variance, but a quantitative one, meaning that the projector and the projected “in nature, in truth, are one” in essence (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 29; Durkheim, 1995, p. 227; Marx & Engels, 1998, pp. 252-253, 570). However, like Durkheim, Marx does not confine mystifying activity to religious thought and suggests that projective activity generally exists as a distortion of things, or an opacity that shrouds the world in mystery and obstructs our understanding. For example, commodities may have a simple appearance yet possess a mysterious nature, because once a product enters relationship with other products through exchange, “it is changed into something transcendent” (Marx, 1967, p. 76). Transcendence refers to a product's apparent independence from its physical form and the unique social labor that produced it. Although a product must have a *use-value*, commodity exchange elides this from the determination of value,

where the commodity merely embodies a *quantity* of homogeneous labor relative to other commodities. In this way, the exchange process substitutes the human element of social relationships with something material.

The relations connecting the labor of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work...but as material relations between persons and social relations between things (Marx, 1967, p. 78).

Independent and transcendent commodities conceal our *real* social connection, and the communication between products displaces the communication between producers. This is the new language of modern society where “value...converts every product into a social hieroglyphic” (Marx, 1967, p. 79). The exchange process not only conceals social relationships but makes the process, to some extent, indecipherable and independent. This reaches a pinnacle in the *money-form* where the social character of our labour appears as an objective and homogenous character stamped upon the product. Once marked with a price, the product’s history is obliterated, and it comes to possess an inherent value that renders the investment of social labour invisible. The result is that commodities are “endowed with life” and become objects of worship, which Marx identifies as *fetishism* (Marx, 1967, p. 77).

Like a projected deity, commodity exchange acts back on the producer by concealing social labour and compelling them to shape the world in support of it. Because these material relations are the foundational and prevailing reality in society, religion itself falls into service. For example, Marx observes that Christianity’s emphasis on an essentialized humanity aligns well with abstract labour, making it the “most fitting form of religion” for bourgeois society (Marx, 1967, p. 83). In addition to cosmic support, the constant fluctuations in an exchange market leaves producers in a passive and adaptive role, where the actions of objects rule over

them (Marx, 1967, p. 79). Because the movements of the market appear accidental and autonomous, producers attribute exchange value to some independent force within the market. This is why bourgeois analysts of Marx's day treat the development of commodity exchange as self-evident, assuming parity with objects in the natural world. In the *German Ideology*, Marx critiques the mystified form and attempts to expose this as something tactical. He defines mystification as "premiseless thinking" or the "sweet oblivion" that frees the thinker from concrete categories (Marx & Engels, 1998, pp. 34,460). This can take different forms. In his critique of Philosopher Max Stirner, Marx identifies the use of abstraction to universalize concepts, like 'the state' and 'religion' (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 301). This strategy objectivizes these entities and derails any discussion about their design or origin, making them inaccessible (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 491). Likewise, economists link innate capacity to occupational forms (e.g., a born poet), which naturalized outcomes for the marginalized and privileged alike (Marx & Engels, 1998, pp. 448-449). It follows that these characteristics are linked to property ownership and capital, thereby reducing exploitation to a tautology, or 'it is what it is'. Mystification renders these general class relations "solemn and holy", concealing the underlying material relations that suppress individuality. If personal uniqueness is granted at all, this appears as a mere embellishment of existing conditions (Marx & Engels, 1998, pp. 246,465).

The solution proposed by Marx is, again, a rational one (R), though he places emphasis on praxis. While other theorists posit a secular rationality, Marx observes that this is merely an attempt to duplicate the religious paradigm in secular form, moving an essence from one realm to another. Moreover, these theorists focus their attention on thought and abstractions, thereby failing to move beyond a scholastic or *contemplative materialism*. Marx agrees that empirical observation ought to displace mystified knowledge to expose the *real* connections between social

structures and production. This process strips these relations of their transcendent character and rightly places them under the “the power of united individuals”, as a new force that understands these “inorganic conditions” (Marx & Engels, 1998, pp. 89-90). However, because society is to blame for current conditions, the burden also rests with society and the oppressed to rectify the problem through revolutionary activity (A) (Marx & Engels, 1998, pp. 227,569-571). This moves beyond a mere theoretical reinterpretation of the world to the work of changing it (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 571). In this way, Marx problematizes the first term of the projective structure, where society (S) is conceived as an externality that leads to error, rather than squarely grounding the error with actors. This reduces mystifying activity to strategic exploitation, not an involuntary or evolutionary response to a *sui generis*. The error of asociality³² is still at play, but he frames this mystification as an intentionally deployed and conservative tool in the hands of

$$\begin{array}{l} {}^E S+ \rightarrow -C/C+ \\ S \rightarrow R/A \rightarrow C \end{array}$$

Figure 11 - Mystification and resolution in Marx

those who wield it, or the dominant class. The paradoxical effects of projective or mystifying activity also reappear in Marx, where surrendering control to an asocial entity (-C) yields stability and

preservation (C+) for the user (Figure 11 - *Mystification and resolution in Marx*). Whether this projection involves Germanic omniscience, the natural domination of property, or the essential nature of consumption, a vast mythology of independent concepts used by these economists and philosophers simultaneously empowers *and* disempowers (Marx & Engels, 1998, pp. 71,117-118,245,545).

³² *Asociality* was discussed earlier in this paper. This is used by David Bloor to describe any unconstructed phenomena that is inaccessible to causal inquiry.

Max Weber’s discussion about the charismatic personality further illustrates the paradoxical effects of projection (-C/C+), where authority is won based on qualities that are *gifted* through some external force.³³ Interest in transcendent forces peaks when the world is over-rationalized, intellectualized, or disenchanted, inviting these mystical forms. Charisma involves a retreat into these transcendent realms, requiring a type of possession or inspiration where the actor functions as a submissive vessel for another (Weber, 2012, p. 360; Weber, 1946, pp. 155,282). Once the charismatic person yields to the calling of these forces and falls into service, they supersede material conditions and other claims to legitimacy (Weber, 1946, p. 80). Just as Marx suggested that a mystified form obliterates history, Marx noted that “charismatic



Figure 12 - Charisma and tunnel fashion
(K. Giarla, open source)

authority repudiates the past, and is...in this sense a specifically revolutionary force...foreign to economic considerations” (Weber, 2012, pp. 361-362). Therefore, charisma is typically active within prophetic and expanding political movements, suitable for generating turbulence and change (Weber, 2012, p. 370). The public life of the charismatic actor reflects the influence of an external force through special clothing, food, and other possessions that relativize existing rules and structures, as though they no longer apply (Weber, 1946, pp. 115,191,248,370). But with this freedom from material limitations comes exclusivity and

isolation. The charismatic personality will draw crowds and honour but will typically keep an

³³ Ironically, Weber’s discussion connects charisma to reform, meaning that Marx’s revolution may require that which he condemns in the economists, or mystified authority.

entourage and maintain exclusive space away from adoring fans. For example, the advent of ‘tunnel fashion’ illustrates the connection between giftedness, transcendence, and isolation. In *Figure 12 - Charisma and tunnel fashion*, we see an NBA star setting himself apart through clothing, but also note the headphones that act as a *do not disturb* sign for onlookers, keeping the masses at a distance. Because charisma flies above material conditions and convention, this can

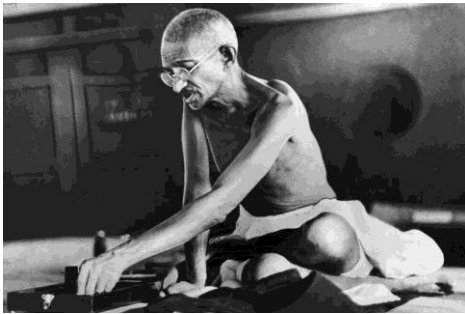


Figure 13 - Mahatma Gandhi (K. Sharma, open source))

align with extreme poverty as well, as another physical sign of the *calling* (*Figure 13 - Mahatma Gandhi*).

Whatever the outward form, charisma requires submission and service to the gift and the giver, and the duration of the actor’s authority is dependent on the regular demonstration of exceptional, supernatural, or even magical ability. As soon as the spirit of the actor

withdraws and demonstrations cease, authority must be derived from another source before credibility is lost (Weber, 2012, p. 370; Weber, 1946, p. 252).

Weber does not speak to mystification directly, but his discussion about charisma is generally aligned with the model I noted in *Figure 11 - Mystification and resolution in Marx* ($E^+S \rightarrow -C/C^+$), in that an asocial force is credited as the source of the gift, resulting in a surrender and corresponding benefit. Weber’s emphasis is on the strategic dimension of mystification in the context of leadership, where the source of a skill or ability is mystified for the purpose of establishing authority. However, his argument is unclear as it relates to the error (E) of the projection, stating only that charismatic power requires social validation to make it real (Weber, 1946, p. 247). Consistent with the idea of a *calling*, this implies that charisma may be thrust upon the actor by others who *recognize* that external forces are at work. In fact,

contemporary studies of giftedness support this perspective and frequently conclude that “the most highly able individuals (are) those most likely to deny being gifted” (Swiatek, 1995, p. 159). On one hand, denial validates the power of the gift and the related pressure to perform, including the fear of failure, loss of peers, and so on (Swiatek, 1995, p. 158). On the other, this resistance problematizes the idea that mystification provides clear strategic benefits for the actor, though it may in select cases. In these ways, the error of the projection may be secondary within our model, just as we need to revisit the effects of mystification as conveyed by classical theorists.

This far, I have articulated mystification as a structure within various classical theorists. I have also argued that mystification is used synonymously with religious projection and is packaged within Weber’s concept of charisma. But before we proceed to distill these perspectives into a single structure that represents these classical theorists, I need to separate or disentangle mystification from the concepts of secrecy, theorizing, and mystery.

Distilling the Classical Structure of Mystification

Georg Simmel examined the broad effects of *secrecy* in secret societies and argued that surrender to one entity signals exclusion to others, producing trust and worthiness for those on the inside but reverence and desire among outsiders (Simmel, 1906, pp. 22-30,41-42,60-61). Insiders who are party to the secret are likely comforted through their association, while outsiders struggle to look behind the curtain and to find a seat at the table (Simmel, 1906, pp. 35,40). This dynamic appears most clearly in secretive organizations, where hidden rituals and progressive access to restricted information marks hierarchy and proximity to a mystical realm. Simmel describes this as intentionally securing a “second world”, where gatekeepers control the flow of information (Simmel, 1906, p. 59). In these ways, secrecy as a strategy or practice, is

available to any actor who wants to strengthen or protect their position, seduce, reward, threaten, or even terrify (Simmel, 1906, pp. 32,34,61). But this strategic dimension of secrecy exists alongside its structural form.

Thus we might arrive at the paradoxical idea that, under otherwise like circumstances, human associations require a definite ratio of secrecy which merely changes its objects; letting go of one, it seizes another, and in the course of this exchange it keeps its quantum unvaried. (Simmel, 1906, p. 38)

Note that the effects and objects of secrecy vary, but the phenomenon of secrecy itself exists as an invariance in Simmel's argument. However, while these effects mirror or help to broadly explain the paradoxical outcomes of projective or mystifying activity (-C/+C), secrecy is also of a different *type*. Specifically, unlike the concept of Weber's charisma, secrecy may not involve a projected and supernatural force, because I can hold anything secret by virtue of my work to conceal it. For example, I can wrap a present to conceal its content, but this content is otherwise unobscured once unwrapped. In contrast, a projected force is inaccessible and maintains a measure of secrecy *independently*. Therefore, Weber's development of charismatic leadership conforms to projection because of the nebulous and external forces at play, and the charismatic actor can only transcend material and social realities when *another* reality is the source of giftedness. Similarly, for Feuerbach and Durkheim, forces and entities are projected and possess mystical or inaccessible properties that shield them from experimental control (Durkheim, 2014, p. 78; Durkheim, 1995, p. 14; Feuerbach, 1881, p. 185). Therefore, the difference between a mystified entity and Simmel's description of secrecy is that the latter includes any act of concealment performed by a human actor, while mystification posits independent and opaque forces that regulate their own discovery (or revelation). In this way, secrecy is distinct from mystification.

On this basis, the difference between theorizing and mystification also becomes apparent within the classical model. The development of any theory may seem to align with Durkheim and Feuerbach's definition of projection, where we add something to what is immediately given in society (S+). For example, I may speculate about a potential and hidden cause of a social phenomenon, which may involve forces that are not immediately observable. But the act of theorizing differs from mystification as these authors develop it, because mystified entities or forces are impenetrable to scientific methods. Theories involving natural forces remain testable within a scientific framework and all scientifically untestable forces become mystified within a naturalistic ontology. This was why Comte placed emphasis on the discovery of *natural* laws as the solution to theological thinking, just as Durkheim claimed that society is *nature's* highest expression.³⁴ Within naturalism, theorized forces and entities remain discoverable, at least eventually or potentially. Therefore, it is more accurate to represent projection and mystification as positing an *independent* supernatural entity or force ((N+)) rather than an obscured asociality ((S+)), because the supernatural (vs. the super-social) is immune to empirical examination. The non-empirical and religious mind is consumed with "insoluble questions", hence the traditional connection between mystification and religious thought (Comte, 2015, p. 51). The religious actor does not project a mere mystery pending exposure, but an independent *other* that is ontologically distinct, even though the effects (C+/C-) of these activities may be similar or the same.

³⁴ Within a materialist framework, the social world remains an expression of nature, albeit a complex one that is very difficult to explain.

In sum, I am suggesting that the concepts of secrecy, theorizing and mystery are distinct from mystification. While these concepts may share attributes with mystification, in terms of their effects of losing and gaining control (C+/C-), mystification uniquely posits an opaque and

Classical	Comte	$P \rightarrow {}^E N+ \rightarrow L$
	Feuerbach	$S \alpha {}^E Q \rightarrow D \rightarrow -C$ $R \rightarrow S Q \rightarrow C$
	Durkheim	$S \alpha {}^E S+ \rightarrow -C/C+$ $R \rightarrow S \rightarrow C$
	Marx & Engels	${}^E S+ \rightarrow -C/C+$ $S \rightarrow R/A \rightarrow C$

Figure 14 - Summary of the classical structure of mystification

supernatural force or entity, as classical theorists develop it. With this clarification in mind, we can distill a basic and unifying structure of mystification and its effects from the work of these classical theorists, as summarized in *Figure 14 - Summary*

of the classical structure of mystification. This structure must incorporate three features, as outlined below.

First, we need to separate the concept from its materialist roots, leaving a structure that suspends judgement regarding transcendental claims. As summarized above, classical theorists evaluate the truth or falsity of a mystified entity itself or attribute all projections to deliberate trickery or self-deception. They attribute the error of mystification to the religious mind based on naturalism's own ontological claims, meaning that any supernatural or transcendental claim *must be* mistaken or obscurantist, because it cannot be scientifically confirmed. This assessment of mystification as an error is also foundational for their respective solutions, wherein a non-mystified, rational (R), or material form of thought becomes a prerequisite for the discovery of truth and restored dominion (C). We observed that while classical theorists vary in their interpretation of this error and the solution, Weber omits this valuation (of error) altogether when discussing charisma. Therefore, because I am concerned with the structure of mystification

proper, the variable truth or falsity of mystification is secondary to this project. In other words, by separating mystification from the polemic of naturalism we democratize the concept and open reflexive opportunities. As such, we can tentatively remove the question of error (E) from the reduced form and its associated solution, thereby deferring any questions about the truth or falsity of the mystified claim. Assessing the reasonableness of any inference to a deeper reality is certainly important, but secondary to the structure and this project.

Second, the reduced structure must incorporate the variety of ways that theorists developed mystification, thereby capturing the core argument. As discussed above, we can replace asociality (S+) with an independent supernatural force ((N+)), or something that is added to the empirical (vs social) world as a distinct reality. In doing so, we separate mystification from secrecy and the act of theorizing, which may posit realities that are outside of the social realm, but still within a physical or empirical reality. Comte and Durkheim elevated *nature* as a higher reality that is foundational to the social, but they do not argue that nature is mystified. Rather, they suggest that mystification involves the *supernatural*. Therefore, substituting the asocial with the supernatural in our model is more consistent with the arguments of these classical theorists.

Finally, the reduced structure should allow for other varieties of content or applications, as a unification of what is homogeneous across these theorists. Structure that fails to incorporate variation also fails as a structure. The reduced structure should allow for differences, regardless of the precise nature of the error (e.g., accidental, sinister), the stimulus for projection (e.g., collective capacities), or what is specifically projected (e.g., infinite qualities/quantities). In summary, my distilled structure of the classical deployment of mystification (*Figure 15 -*

Projection/Mystification as a reduced form) removes error and associated solutions, while substituting an independent supernatural entity or force for the asocial.

But this refined model still presents some problems. First, while classical theorists typically connect mystification to religious thought, Weber and Marx apply or incorporate the concept more broadly to naturalized economy and charisma, just as Durkheim extended projection to representations generally. Classical authors hint at the expanded application of

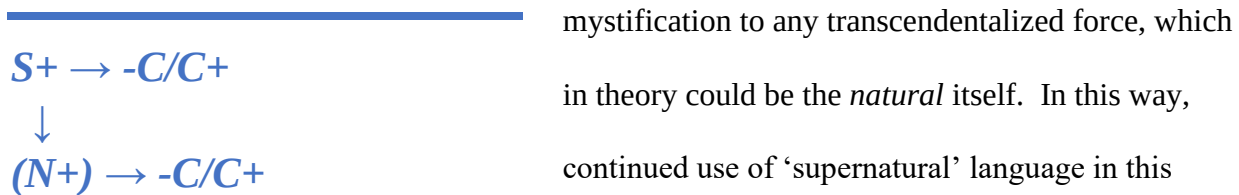


Figure 15 - *Projection/Mystification as a reduced form*

structure can be misleading, as this carries a religious connotation. Secondly, while theorists maintain the paradoxical effects of projection or mystification throughout, the notion of *control* or dominion remains unclear. As noted above, while a charismatic leader may exemplify submission to a supernatural force of some kind, this may not produce an advantage (C+) for the actor. For example, a religious martyr may gain followers, but it is imprecise to say that they win control in the process or enhance their dominion over their surroundings. Moreover, while the reduced model represents a synthesis of the classical form, this remains a draft structure as we explore contemporary theorists. This I will do in the next section.

Contemporary Forms

Rethinking Control and Error

Since the mid-20th century, assumptions within the classical model remain persistent in the work of some theorists (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 45-46). Several authors continue to describe

mystification as a uniquely religious error and irrationality that eventually becomes superfluous to new methods or material realities. It is the seemingly unique and strange projection of “invisible anthropomorphisms” that remains the definitive criteria for distinguishing religious from non-religious thought (Lauwers & Dobbelaere, 1973, p. 544; Weigert, 1974, pp. 484-485; Barnes, 1997, p. 380). This narrative appears most clearly in the generative phenomenology of Peter Berger in the late 1960’s, where it takes a familiar form. From his perspective, we differ from other animals who are born into a species-specific environment. The human *organism* is uniquely unspecialized and unfinished for a prolonged period after birth, meaning that children are dependent on others for their survival (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, pp. 47-48, 156). This interdependence produces the human world, but the primitive mind can only speculate about the origins of this world. Herein lies Berger’s definition of mystification, where social products are mistakenly perceived as non-human facticities, thereby alienating the productive capacity of society to another (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 86-89; Berger & Luckmann, 1967, pp. 111-112). Over time, we over-objectivate society and project an external, sacred, and cosmic *nomos*,³⁵ which represents the “opposite of chaos” and imposes a “fictitious inexorability” on the constructed world (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 25-26, 95-96). The difference between religious and non-religious thought is that the former perceives the world as the *product* of these external forces, while the latter comprehends society as the *producer*. Berger also frames this activity as beginning with *opus alienum*, or the externalization of our proper work to another, and the corresponding act of reclaiming this work as *opus proprium* (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 86). Berger

³⁵ Nomos (νόμος) refers to a law, rule or regulating principle that provides order. In Durkheim, *anomie* as an insatiable torture results from the misalignment between our appetites and the means to fulfill them. Social moderation of appetite brings these appetites and means into alignment or equilibrium (Durkheim, 1951, p. 247). Also developed in Berger & Luckman as “nomization”, where society provides the remedy for a solitary and chaotic existence through meaning and order (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 170). Nomos is in general reference to this meaningful and stabilizing order.

maintains that non-human facticities and a sacred cosmos ((N+)) are projected as a nomic strategy, similar to those who stress the conservative power of an externalized authority that holds a “monopoly over the universal” (Bloor, 1991, pp. 5,7,41; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 88).

Berger explicitly identifies the masochistic effects of this projection when supernatural forces act back on the producer by rendering the actor passive and destined (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 85-86). Consistently, he and other authors present the effects of projection as a *swap*, where authority or something similar is alienated and then received in exchange (-C/C+). Again, this formula lacks a structural quality because the actor may not yield authority, control, or clearly benefit in every instance. The ambiguity of these effects appears in the *genius myth* and heroic acts. For example, authors like Talal Asad, Montuori & Purser describe the phenomenon of genius as inspiration that is wholly unattainable and mystified as something bestowed by a higher power, granting the genius mastery that operates “outside...the existing social and historical context” (Asad, 2003, p. 51; Montuori & Purser, 1995, p. 94). Like Weber’s charismatic leader, the genius is special, and the mystification of genius produces an unconstructed subject who stands apart from their history, peers, and admirers (Montuori & Purser, 1995, p. 94). This separateness may result in isolation, where the genius is rarely understood or accepted until after death, as a posthumous reward (Montuori & Purser, 1995, pp. 77-79). Likewise, the paradoxical effects of projection return something to the actor, but this *something* could, hypothetically, be *anything*. The cost of genius becomes subjective. These effects are further complicated when we introduce destiny or remove temporal limits. For example, my surrender of control in the present is not masochistic if this is my cosmic purpose or in response to a non-empirical reward. Likewise, my interim surrender may be necessary as part

of a larger sequence or a seasonal strategy, which Weber implied in his description of transitional authority when traditional forms displace charisma.

In this regard, a significant contribution of Berger's theory is the introduction of *work* that a subject exchanges with the projected force, which helps to resolve this ambiguity. Although he initially frames this concept of work as the act of alienating and then reclaiming our constructive capacity, the concept provides a more neutral foundation that represents a cosmic division of labour or *delegation of work*. The actor's projection of an opaque and supernatural

$(N+) \rightarrow -W \text{ (alienum)} \approx W \text{ (proprium)}$

force defines the role that each will play, with the former carrying one load and the actor another. If we apply this

Figure 16 - Mystification and the delegation of work

to the paradoxical effects of projection, *work* is first alienated (-W) to another and a variable measure is assigned to or accepted by the actor ($\approx W$), dependent on circumstances or the mystified force involved (*Figure 16 - Mystification and the delegation of work*). Because the type of work is inconsequential in this model and is unlimited by notions of control or dominion, we can apply this to diverse phenomena. For example, I can mystify the accumulation of wealth by naturalizing this activity, equating this pursuit to my need for food or sleep. Alternatively, if I assign a larger measure of responsibility to an external force, including provisions to sustain my life, my role is to humbly accept my material conditions. Whether this arrangement involves nature, gods, or other forces, the resulting delegation of work assumes an immutable form and imbues the actor with purpose. Berger appears to apply the concept of work more broadly through *mimetic reiteration*, where specific linkages are made between microcosmic and macrocosmic forces (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 37-38). A god or hero can become analogous and foundational to current institutions and roles, and the act of *miming* a cosmic template, like 'God

the Father’ or ‘Mother Earth’, will appear in family life and environmentalism alike. Therefore, mimetic reiteration alienates a particular job in its perfect form to another, which then becomes *the* example for the actor to follow in *this* world, albeit imperfectly.

While the concept of work helps to clarify the paradoxical effects of projection (C-/C+), Berger maintains that mystification is a mistake and obfuscation of a truth. This claim is repeated by many contemporary theorists. For example, some observe that despite nature’s chaotic and destructive manifestations, we regularly describe it as a benevolent force, or an external power that supplies life and order (Robinson, 2007, pp. 606-607,613; Midgley, 1995, pp. 13,76; Asad, 2003, p. 57; Derrida, 1994, p. 195). Likewise, Michel Foucault observed that modern and meticulous methods to correct behaviour are concealed beneath universal notions of *humane* activity, even though they are more intrusive than torture (Foucault, 1977, pp. 55,92). An actor may apply these immutable and inaccessible images to any position, idea, or value, to satisfy an objective or make it appear that objects directly supply these images, even when they contradict empirical evidence (Robinson, 2007, p. 613). However, even if we grant that mystification can incorporate forms of trickery or manipulation, it may be inescapable. For example, we observed that classical theorists propose non-mystified solutions, such as rationality grounded in physical reality. But does this approach escape mystification? Both Midgely and Bhaskar observe that the unqualified belief in our faculties to perceive the universe with accuracy through observation requires its own leap of faith in the form of *naïve realism*.

If we think of the world as ordered, we are expressing confidence in our own faculties as in tune with it and suited to find that order...If, by contrast, we think of it as illusory, we may be thinking of our faculties with despair as hopelessly deceived. Or again, we may be trusting that we have certain faculties which can pierce through that screen, though others are misled by it. (Midgley, 1992, p. 101)

Bhaskar frames this problem as *empirical realism* and the *epistemic fallacy*, which assumes an immediate resonance between our perception of an object and the object itself (Bhaskar, 1975, pp. 16-18). Even if we abandon religion, we grant the natural mind a unique capacity to see and describe things with clarity. This privileged perspective and the corresponding claims to impartial observation are questionable because mental pictures precede these observations and filter what must be true or what can be seen at all (Midgley, 1992, pp. 15,59). The potential inability to escape a mystified perspective led Malinowski to critique Durkheim, who tried to discredit the “ghost like creatures that distort the true appearance of things” but believed in the “gigantic ghost of the Collective Soul” (Durkheim, 1982, p. 62; Malinowski, 1948, p. 27). In sum, if mystification is a pathology, we may all carry the virus of “premiseless thinking”, as Marx and Engels described it (Marx & Engels, 1998, pp. 34,460).

These arguments democratize the potential of error by separating it from the religious mind, but others also separate error from mystification, or reframe what error means in this context. Theorists generally assume that mystified forces are the product of human imagination or inventions in response to an immense empirical reality, but the connection between invention and the unreal is tenuous. If authors like Midgely and Bhaskar correctly argue for the prevalence of projected realities, do these realities constitute pure fabrications in every case? Or, to frame this differently, if ontologies are layered and multiple, projection may be something more than mere invention. In fact, Berger attempts to make a correction in *A Rumor of Angels*, where he posits the possible inversion of *projection* as a *reflection* of other realities (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 46-47). In contrast to Feuerbach and other classical theorists, he appears to reassert “an other reality...which transcends the reality within which our everyday experience unfolds” (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 2). This does not mean that human imagination or construction is uninvolved, but

that patterned constructions cannot be arbitrary fabrications, but function as indicators of a non-empirical world or worlds (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 47). Therefore, Berger suspends the ontological judgements associated with invented projections to allow for mystification as imagery with a non-empirical reality as its basis. David Martin makes a similar observation that the historic failure to suspend these assumptions (of error) and “certain axioms” within in the classical sociological analysis of religion inhibits the extension of concepts to other phenomena (Martin, 1966, p. 354). In this context, we now turn to contemporary theorists who consider the constructs we use in response to multiple ontologies.

Rethinking the Supernatural through Layered Ontologies

In comparing the Lurianic creation account³⁶ and structuralism, Ethnologist Jerome Levi argues that we perceive highly differentiated surface structures as mere refractions of non-empirical and undifferentiated realities (Levi, 2009, pp. 933, 937). As refractions, surface elements are derived from a deeper structure, but also obscure it (Levi, 2009, p. 942). “Consequently, not only is all of reality in a state of existential separation, it also is all composed of the same cosmic fragments” (Levi, 2009, p. 943). These fragments constitute the universal grammar of myth that reflects the “the ultimate deep...(and) unitary structure of the human mind”, but also problematizes the qualitative difference between mysticism and the scientific mind. Both approaches attempt to penetrate a unity beneath our empirical variance and perception (Levi, 2009, pp. 934-939,943,974-975,977). Midgely concurs that science speaks to the unitary origins of the empirical, through the Big Bang or forms of the Anthropic Principle, yet these forces are obscured (Midgely, 1992, pp. 26, 97, 120). The formula for penetrating the non-empirical is hermeneutical because it involves mental constructs, or the imaginative

³⁶ A school of Jewish mysticism, named after Isaac Luria (1534-1572).

extensions of our sense perceptions (Levi, 2009, pp. 942,977; Midgley, 1992, p. 96). While the use of intuition to describe the origin or purpose of things constitutes the mystical element of this formula, it remains a sufficiently rooted and sensical within a layered framework.

Layered realities and hidden causal mechanisms are central to Roy Bhaskar’s *Transcendental Realism*.³⁷ While his ideas were discussed earlier as foundational to structuralism, further discussion is warranted here. In his philosophy of science, he argues that the intelligibility of experimental work and the evolution of scientific discovery requires an ontological distinction between the *real*, the *actual*, and the *empirical* (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 13). The domain (D) of the real (r) is the *intransitive* dimension, which is a non-human and invariant world that is “out of phase” with actual events (a) and our experiences of these events (e). Being ‘out of phase’ means that only the real world is structured and cannot be reduced to what is actual or experienced (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 35). Therefore, my experiences will not fully explain what is actually occurring, nor will an exhaustive record of actual events fully explain what is real (Bhaskar, 1975, pp. 112-113). A suitable illustration of this relationship would be the

Typical Case, $D_r \geq D_a \geq D_e$
Special Case, $D_r = D_a = D_e$

Figure 17 - Bhaskar and the relation between the real, actual, and empirical

presence of a mouse inside of my home. I suspect the reality of the mouse, but the mouse rarely appears in the open and even when it does, I will

rarely see it. Because of this, I must deduce the reality of the mouse based on the sparse empirical evidence it leaves behind. Bhaskar also illustrates this in a formula (*Figure 17 - Bhaskar and the relation between the real, actual, and empirical*) where the typical case involves

³⁷ Although more commonly referred to as *Critical Realism*, which combines his *Transcendental Realism* and *Critical Naturalism*. I use *Transcendental Realism* here because I am drawing from his philosophy of science, where *Critical Realism* does not appear.

the inequivalence of domains. Only in rare circumstances will my experience of actual events fully reflect the real causal mechanisms at play, constituting a *Special Case*. The purpose of experimental activity is to produce and reproduce *circumstances* that expose invisible causal mechanisms that would otherwise remain beneath the surface. To do this, science deploys socially produced *transitive* objects or raw materials, including theories, techniques, tools, and methods, to uncover the *intransitive* and real objects of knowledge (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 21). Without these real and intransitive objects, scientific experimentation is non-sensical, because controlled and repeated observation is only necessary when obscured and independent mechanisms are targeted. Therefore, only a stratified, obscured, and independent reality explains the idea of scientific progress, discontinuity, and the accumulation of knowledge. Alternatively, if our descriptions of reality were limited to and exhausted through observables, science would be a completed project (Bhaskar, 1975, pp. 156-157,170,189).

Complicating this formula are the interactions between independent causal mechanisms, which creates a diverse and fluctuating world of actual phenomena that we can only partially decipher. A stratified and obscured reality means that even the most carefully controlled empirical observations do not produce *laws* in the conventional sense, but only *normic* and *tendency* statements. Even when successive discoveries move us closer to an understanding of the real forces at work, our descriptions remain fallible and speculative (Bhaskar, 1975, pp. 47,169,211,235). More importantly, Bhaskar argues that “normic statements are not second-best kind of empirical generalizations...they are not empirical statements at all” (Bhaskar, 1975, pp. 101-102). Like metaphors that “stand in for” what is inadequately understood, scientific models are “hypothesized inner structures” that experience confirms or falsifies over time (Bhaskar, 1975, pp. 124,158,179). Our descriptions of these things are socially produced and remain the

only avenue for knowing objects that belong to another domain, meaning that “what is explained is never the ‘pure’ phenomena, but always the phenomena read in a certain way” (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 190). Therefore, the knowledge we accumulate through scientific inquiry is the production of *second order knowledge* or the *changing* knowledge of *unchanging* objects and their interactions (Bhaskar, 1998, p. 8). But speculation about these obscured realities remains necessary for advancing our understanding, where “deeper levels or strata of reality are successively unfolded” using existing resources and tools that we modify and refine in the process (Bhaskar, 1998, pp. 11-12).

Interestingly, as I noted earlier, Bhaskar develops his philosophy from a naturalist perspective. He would therefore concur with our separation of theorizing from mystification in the classical context, because the former speculates within a discoverable reality, while the latter does not. Therefore, Bhaskar agrees that a theorized object remains an “object of scientific explanation”, but to theorize a noumenal object is to “hypostatize it” (Bhaskar, 1998, p. 6). But in his model, the natural objects of science are granted transcendental features.³⁸ He establishes that an independent and obscured reality must be philosophically necessary for scientific work to be comprehensible, while leaving the task of discovering what these real forces are to science (Bhaskar, 1975, pp. 52,146). The progression and constant revision of scientific findings only make sense within this stratified reality, where we hypothesize about an unchanging stratum subject to testing (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 170). More importantly, through his focus on scientific work, he frames the domain of the real (D_r) as both natural *and* transcendent (Bhaskar, 1998, pp. 14-15). He goes beyond naturalization as a strategy to the real transcendence of natural forces

³⁸ Other Critical Realists, like Peacocke and Polkinghorne, capitalize on Bhaskar’s model of reality but discard the materialist assumptions. Ironically, Bhaskar’s layered reality has become popular among theistic scientists.

based on their invariance, independence, and permanence (Bhaskar, 1998, pp. 38-40). The attributes of the natural world stand in stark contrast to social structures and our transitive world, because “there could be a world without men” that exists apart from our knowledge of it (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 250). In this way, while the classical form of mystification critiqued the

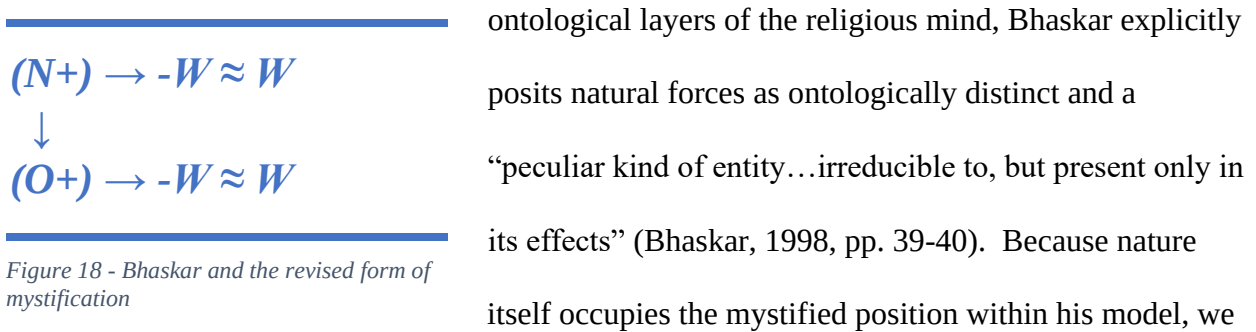


Figure 18 - Bhaskar and the revised form of mystification

can also amend our working structure as shown in *Figure 18 - Bhaskar and the revised form of mystification*, by replacing the opaque supernatural ((N+)) with an opaque super-ontology ((O+)). By framing mystification as the activity of positing an additional reality, both supernatural and natural phenomena are incorporated into this structure. In other words, Bhaskar’s philosophy helps us to resolve the supernatural and religious connotation within the distilled classical structure, which was summarized above. While some classical theorists expanded the application of mystification (or projection) to non-religious phenomena (e.g., representations), Bhaskar includes the natural world as necessarily transcendent in a layered reality.

The notion of assigning *something* to another ontological domain appears in other sources as well. In this vein, while Bhaskar was concerned with developing a new philosophy of science, David Zilberman developed a science of philosophy and thought. He argues that philosophy is a reality *sui generis* or *natura secunda* that is unaligned with the material objects of the natural sciences or religious representations, yet essential to civilization as a material and

(Absolute Truth) Conventional Truth
Absolute Untruth

N – Norms (temperament, significance)

I – Ideas (interest, meaning)

V – Values (character, signification)

Theorist – Projective

e.g. Chinese

(N)V

I

Methodologist – Constructivist

e.g. Indian

(I)N

V

Phenomenologist – Existentialist

e.g. Japanese

(V)N

I

Injunctivist – Conceptual

e.g. Tibetan, Soviet

(N)I

V

Logicist – Axiomatic

e.g. Hellenic

(V)I

N

Empiricist – Axiological

e.g. Western

(I)V

N

Figure 19 - Zilberman's principle, modalities, and reflections of thought

spiritual process (Zilberman, 1988, pp. 1-5,7). Using Hindu philosophy, Zilberman presents an observable philosophical *principle* as a concrete object for science and a system of culture. This principle or form is visualized below and contains three terms on which social modalities or systems of thought are built:

(A)B
C

The first term ((A)) represents what is objectively present as an *absolute truth*, uncontestable, and completely immune from falsification. The second term (B) is the *conventional truth* as it relates to observable phenomena. Finally, the *absolute untruth* (C) is the byproduct or remainder of the previous two and is inconceivable to the actor. Actors engage in philosophical activity on this foundation and Zilberman identifies three general modes of this

activity, including the *deontic*, *apodictic*, and *hypothetical* modalizations (Zilberman, 1988, pp. 34-35). Each mode involves the placement of *norms* (N), *ideas* (I), or *values* (V) in the position

of absolute or conventional truth. The deontic mode holds norms as an absolute or conventional truth, the apodictic assigns truth to ideas, and the hypothetical elevates values. The various combinations of absolute and conventional truth manifest as six different *reflections* (*Figure 19 - Zilberman's principle, modalities, and reflections of thought*), which have implications for the actor's behaviour and consciousness. For example, the empiricist-axiological reflection is typical of western thought and combines apodictic and hypothetic modalities as absolute and conventional truth respectively. Ideas are objectively present and unquestionably true ((I)), which focuses a person's activity on their interests and knowledge accumulation, while personal meaning and sensual experience appear in consciousness as an arbiter. The placement of values as conventional truth (V) in this mode adds character as a moldable object, just as axiomatizing or "significational position-taking" appears in consciousness. The result of this combination is that norms are rendered inconceivable, including its directives and the associated "ought-to-be-doing metaphysics of certainty" (Zilberman, 1988, pp. 41-43).

For Zilberman, it is possible to reveal the modalities and their manifestations in each culture by examining historical processes through the lens of present or future conditions, as indicators of the whole. Whatever the mixture of modalities or the reflections involved, these philosophical structures genetically shape social organization, "hence, the development of a specific type of thinking always depends on the material content of the original genetic unit of that type of thinking" (Zilberman, 1988, p. 6). His *genetic epistemology* reconstructs the real philosophical type that members of a culture consumed, or are consuming, as a symbolic commodity of a cultural ideal (Zilberman, 1988, pp. 8-9,32).³⁹ Operationally, the western

³⁹ Zilberman uses modalities and reflections as ideal types and methodological tools, in a manner like Weber.

typology ($\frac{(I)V}{N}$) and the absolute truth of ideas within the apodictic modality supports an internal frame of reference, true self-interest, and an opposition to normic forces, like tradition, religion, etc. (Zilberman, 1988, p. 316). The belief in personal autonomy, subjectivity, change, and progress, are simply “incompatible with the presumption of regularities in social life” (Zilberman, 1988, pp. 323-324). Because more than one typology may be present within a culture, the blended discourse in the West will include counter arguments and crises associated with the erosion of traditional and harmonious structures in the face of growing solipsism. Nonetheless, apodictic thinking will see this normic opposition as non-sensical because norms are sublated to personal interest and experience (Zilberman, 1988, pp. 307-308,323).⁴⁰

For our purposes, Zilberman’s *principle* model incorporates a layered reality in two ways. First, because an absolute reality (A) is universally present (or patterned) across the modalities of thought, Zilberman proposes a structure that captures this pattern. Second, this structure and the presence of an absolute truth means that thinkers are always structuring their reality by positing norms, ideas, or values as immutable and inaccessible. In doing so, we also relegate the remaining terms (norms, ideas, or values) to the conventional or inconceivable realms of reality. This means that an absolute truth is *always* present in the structure of thought, while its content varies across and within cultures. Moreover, Zilberman does not evaluate or order the modalities of thought but describes how each produces a unique constellation in culture and consciousness. Therefore, the essential presence of an absolute truth is revealed in the behavioural orientation and consciousness of the actor.

⁴⁰ Ernest Becker and other Enlightenment scholars thoroughly document the crisis associated with competing and transitional forms of thought, though in a less formalized way than Zilberman.

While Zilberman's model does not suggest further alterations to our structure of mystification, it strongly resembles it. Although he presents three elements (norms, ideas, and values) that comprise his modalities of thought, one is always elevated to the position of absolute truth. As such, this model maintains neutrality because the modalities are not ordered, just as our structure of mystification attempts to escape a materialist bias by allowing for variable ontologies. Mystification may involve other non-religious (i.e., non-supernatural) realities. In addition, this structure functions like a *gene*, producing various constellations in culture. This strongly resembles our delegation of work, where the arrangement of elements frames the behavioural orientation of the actor. Therefore, just as the mystification of ideas will support the pursuit of my personal interests, the mystification of norms will subdue them and engender an obedient posture. Finally, Zilberman argues that what is posited as absolute truth is revealed through empirical fragments, suggesting that we can infer an underlying (non-empirical) structure of reality based on observation. This is consistent with our structuralist strategy, that attempts to locate what is undifferentiated and stable beneath a differentiated surface.

In summary, the theorists in this section respond to the problems we identified with the distilled classical structure of mystification. Berger introduces the idea of *work*, which we adopted as a neutral replacement for *control* in the classical model. While notions of control or dominion may be involved, a cosmic delegation of work incorporates greater variance. Secondly, Bhaskar argues that a deeper reality *must* exist to make scientific inquiry comprehensible, and he agrees with Levi that these deeper layers are only perceived through fragments at the empirical level. These arguments prompted us to change our working structure by replacing the opaque supernatural ((N+)) with an opaque super-ontological ((O+)), thereby allowing for more variance. Finally, Zilberman's science of philosophy lends support to our

model and approach by presenting a neutral structure of thought that always posits an absolute truth of variable content that is revealed through the empirical world. As these perspectives broaden the scope and ubiquity of super-ontological and mystified claims, I now turn to myth and ritual, which appear to incorporate and extend mystification to other objectives and spheres of activity.

Myth and Ritual

Just as charisma incorporated mystification, we need to consider myth and ritual and how they relate to the structure of mystification. Berger argued that mystification and mythology emerge simultaneously, suggesting that they share characteristics. In other words, myth and ritual may align with our structure insofar if they deploy ontological depth, inherent opacity, and the delegation of work (*Figure 18 - Bhaskar and the revised form of mystification*). Various authors incorporate these elements in their study of myth and ritual, but in different ways. For example, Ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss explicitly posits hidden forces as the basis of these phenomena, or an underlying truth that supports mythologizing activity. Others like Semiotician Roland Barthes and Historian Bruce Lincoln focus on the strategic benefits of positing these opaque realities, or the operational characteristics of myth. Likewise, Anthropologists Maurice Bloch and Talal Asad broaden mythology to include any truth building activity, where distance, invisibility, and otherness help to anchor any position. Again, like charisma, I cannot reduce myth and ritual to mystification, but they incorporate its structure. As such, we are not concerned with valuations of a given myth or whether the account is true or false, but with the pattern of deployment and common use of super-ontologies, whatever their content. To begin, I will revisit Lévi-Strauss's reframing of the mythical account.

Lévi-Strauss uses the mythical and mystical interchangeably, but also attempts to bridge their apparent divide from the scientific. His seminal research challenged conventional perspectives that denigrate myth as purely situational or creative activity, as a chaotic form of “idle play” and “coarse speculation” (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 428). This led to the separation of myth as a primitive form of thought that fails to reach the truth, unlike other forms of knowledge. But Lévi-Strauss observed that the “astounding similarity between myths collected in widely different regions” can only be explained through universal forces (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 429). To establish this, he distinguished between the isolated units or melodious features of mythical accounts and their *gross constituent units*, or mythical *harmony* (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, pp. 430-431, 433-435, 442).⁴¹ To uncover these harmonious features, he observed that diachronic elements of a given myth can be bundled as a synchronic feature within *and* across accounts. While each story has a unique melody and incorporates different settings and characters, Lévi-Strauss’s synchro-diachronic structure unifies these mythical accounts and incorporates their variations. For example, he observes the consistent presence of characters or objects that function as intermediaries (harmony), albeit in very different forms (melody), such as the *coyote* that mediates between herbivores and carnivores, or mist that mediates between sky and earth (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 441). Therefore, myth is contextual but surpasses context because it incorporates a complex layer of harmony or pattern, revealing historical and ahistorical content. In other words, if mythical accounts separated by geography and time persistently synchronize their content, this reveals an ontological narrative that aligns with the stratification that Bhaskar, Zilberman, and others explore. The mythical story may contain illusory elements, but still

⁴¹ He also describes this as the *horizontal* and *vertical* features of myth, corresponding to the diachronic and synchronic.

maintains a qualitative equivalence with science, as both are a means of developing a comprehensive and ultimate understanding the universe (Lévi-Strauss, 2014, p. 17). Lévi-Strauss concludes that harmonious features of myth are only explained through deep and unitary forces, or a common intellectual impulse that “seep(s) to the surface”, transcending localities (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, pp. 429-431,443).

This ‘seeping’ appears in classical models generally, where real forces manifest themselves diversely at the surface. As I discussed, this appears most explicitly Durkheim’s representations, which is merely the act of adding something to what is immediately given in society. This process of adding is both rational and illusory, based on something real while also misapprehending and obscuring it. Through representations, Durkheim links his projective hypothesis to myth, which consists of these same representations in *belief*. Ritual is defined as the *rite*, or modes of action in relation to belief. The mythical mind projects representations and divides the world into the sacred and profane, while a consecrated personage (e.g., priest figure) uses words, gestures, and formulas to engage the sacred reality through the rite (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 34-35). From Durkheim’s perspective, the posited reality, albeit obscured in sacred imagery, retains a rational connection with underlying and real forces.

But even if these underlying and ‘real’ forces are absent, the strategist can still posit them in myth, for a variety of purposes. For example, Barthes uses myth and mystification interchangeably as an intentional, common, but sinister form of discourse (Barthes, 1957, p. 70). This constitutes a *metalanguage*, or a *second-order semiological system*, based on de Saussure’s structure of the linguistic sign (*Figure 20 - de Saussure's structure of the linguistic sign and the 2nd Order*). The first-order structure of language requires the combination of a signifier (word image) and the signified (concept) to produce a sign. However, mythical or mystified speech

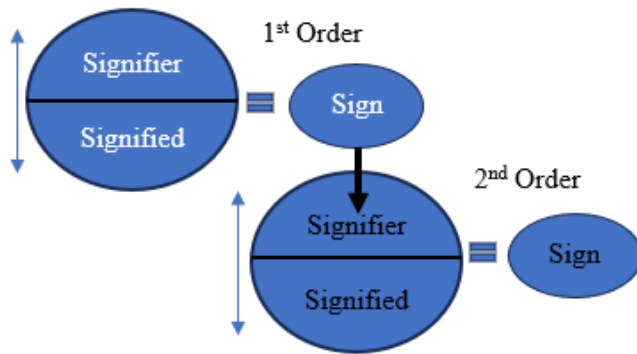


Figure 20 - de Saussure's structure of the linguistic sign and the 2nd Order

only the melody exists for the purpose of inventing the underlying reality. For example, the image or sign in *Figure 21 - Writer on vacation (open source)* is both qualitatively impoverished



Figure 21 - Writer on vacation (open source)

and quantitatively abundant, which myth can readily appropriate. Because the depth or historical content of the image is elided, it can be re-presented as something else, such as a 'writer on vacation' (Barthes, 1957, pp. 226-227,229,256). When myth applies these signifiers, the onlooker concludes that the writer is essentially different from the average vacationer, who leaves their work at home. The writer cannot help but write and the sign externalizes the naturalness of this activity, just as it renders all competing opportunities within the image secondary. This "singularity of a vocation" travels with the traveler as a true purpose and "remote celestial habitat" (Barthes, 1957, pp. 22-25). Most people have jobs, but the writer has a *calling*, a true purpose or gift that originates from an opaque source that compels the work

will steal the sign and transform it into a signifier, as a second-order deployment. This relies on the ambiguity and availability of the sign, which can be repurposed to smuggle in a "stable order of essences" to naturalize and affirm concepts (Barthes, 1957, pp. 138-140). Here,

and quantitatively abundant, which myth can readily appropriate. Because the depth or historical content of the image is elided, it can be re-presented as something else, such as a 'writer on vacation' (Barthes, 1957, pp. 226-227,229,256). When myth applies these

to continue. In this way, once the raw material of a sign is coopted within a second-order, “myth has in fact a double function: it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something, and it imposes it on us” (Barthes, 1957, pp. 223-226). Like Jean Baudrillard’s *simulacra*, the reality of the image is liquidated and then reanimated as a counterfeit reality (Baudrillard, 1981, pp. 6,47).

Barthes describes myth as a type of *mana* that permeates everyday language (Barthes, p. 217). Choosing from an endless variety of vacuous signs, myth anonymously conveys ideology and identities through film, literatures, ritual, food, and clothing, rendering these ideas natural and eternal (Barthes, 1957, pp. 54-55,252-255). Contentious and complex issues like warfare may be repackaged as isolated resistance by a ‘band’ of fighters, a ‘mission’ that implies destiny, or a matter of ‘honor’ that lingers as a nebulous but inherent standard (Barthes, 1957, pp. 152-158). Barthes also provides examples of subtle but sophisticated techniques for locating mystified causal forces through *peremptory* and *inoculating* language. The former uses tautology, proverbs, and common sense to ground truth “on the arbitrary order of him who speaks it” (Barthes, 1957, p. 270). Alternatively, the latter admits to an accidental or inconsequential evil to cover a principal evil, making it appear that the main event ‘just happened’, never happened, or is attributable to another (Barthes, 1957, pp. 264-265). Through these techniques, the user renders causalities opaque and alienates responsibility, because the “style excuses everything, absolves us from everything, notably any historical reflection...(as) a technique of evasion” (Barthes, 1957, pp. 120-121). This evasiveness implies that work is delegated through myth, which David Bloor similarly described as the “outward flow of energy and inspiration” that characterizes mystified thought (Bloor, 1991, p. 49). If myth mystifies war

as a matter of destiny and honor, my job is to answer the call, just as peremptory and inoculating language can alienate authority and reduce my culpability.

The evasiveness of myth leads Barthes to conclude that mythology is an ideological discourse uniquely deployed by bourgeois power interests, but his development of the concept appears to precede the alignment with class. As a second-order semiotic system, it is conceivable that *anyone* can deploy myth to expropriate, empty, and infuse any sign with mystified content. This extension of the concept appears in Bloor's theory as well, where he argues that mystification serves any conservative or defensive position that seeks to anchor current conditions in the transcendent. Mystified knowledge becomes immune to causal investigation and is therefore immutable, true, and appearing as a standing exception to constructivist ambitions (Bloor, 1991, pp. 46-47). Therefore, Bloor suggests that an ascending movement will work to demystify existing knowledge to render it malleable, while traditional institutions will use the opposite strategy to stabilize threatened social imagery (Bloor, 1991, p. 78). But if the counterfeiting work of myth is not necessarily aligned with class, is it necessarily limited to conservation or anti-constructivist motivations?

Maurice Bloch agrees that myth and ritual conserve knowledge by *anchoring* and *distributing cognition*. Through ritualistic action, the actor connects with a symbolic entity that simultaneously possesses real proximity *and* distance from the actor. "The more ambiguous, yet convincing, the relationship, the more it can be evoked" as a source of cosmic strength that is immune from evaluation (Bloch, 2005, p. 36). The ambiguity of the entity corresponds to the language of ritual, which incorporates metaphor, extensive quotation, complex symbols, and emotive states (Bloch, 2005, pp. 115-116,125). More importantly, the truth claim conveyed through ritual is based on an inherently trustworthy source, thereby transforming ritual into an

act of *deference*. This activity “fundamentally alters the relation between understanding and holding something to be true” or a shift in the “economy of the necessity of understanding” (Bloch, 2005, p. 127). Therefore, Bloch argues that ritual effectively requires us to abandon the search for intentionality behind institutional devices (Bloch, 2005, pp. 126-129,135-136). This may appear alongside religiosity, but Bloch asserts that ritualized activity permeates social and institutional life, or whenever compulsory deference is needed. This means that “invisible and indeterminable others” appear in the claimed truth of other forces, like habitus, typified activity, custom, the numen, ritual quotation, culture, and other phenomena that are simply ‘given’, escaping explanation and even conscious reflection (Bloch, 2005, pp. 128-129). Any attempt to scrutinize the source of these phenomena results in an endless regress to an authoritative and undefined destination (Bloch, 2005, p. 131).

The connection between truth claims and deference becomes central to Lincoln’s examination of myth as both a source of authority and an instrument for social alignment.

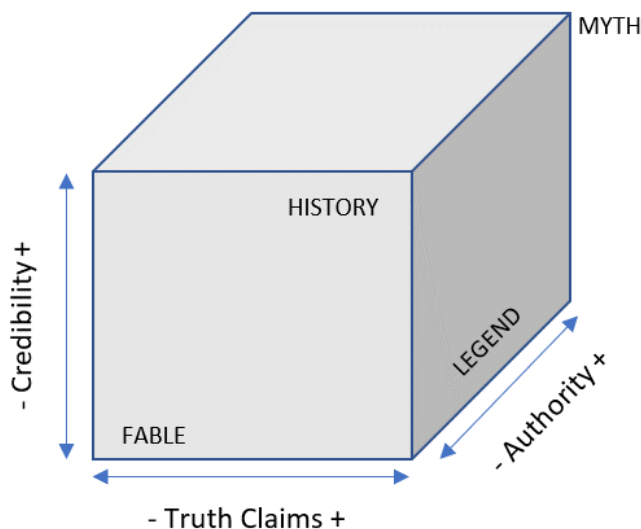


Figure 22 - Lincoln, discourse types and their alignment with credibility, truth, and authority

However, Lincoln expands on the seemingly conservative function of mythical discourse, which he describes as a multi-directional, accessible, and effective “instrument of struggle” that yields qualitative and quantitative dividends (Lincoln B. , 2014, pp. 4-5,9,18-19). As such, his framework allows myth and mystified discourse to be

counterhegemonic (*Figure 22 - Lincoln, discourse types and their alignment with credibility, truth, and authority*). For example, a revolutionary movement can use myth to claim authority for the movement, while building new alliances. Claims to authority are ahistorical and therefore provide *paradigmatic truth* in the form of ultimate purpose, telos, and authority (Lincoln B. , 2014, pp. 14-18). Unlike fables and legend, myth encodes a credible celestial blueprint for constructing society by moving beyond the mere descriptive attributes of historical record (Lincoln B. , 2014, pp. 23-24). Trust in paradigmatic authority becomes most apparent when these claims come into conflict, with each claiming to override the other on universal grounds. A common example of this appears when innate human rights clash with authoritarian regimes, each with their own truth claims. The following is an excerpt from a UN Security Council report regarding North Korea, where the truth of one position can assess the other as deviant:

The country's sense of insecurity does not come from any real external threat or so-called "legitimate security concerns," but, instead, the innate flaw of the regime itself: "a bizarre family cult dynasty". (Security Council, 2024)

Moreover, Lincoln argues that claims to paradigmatic truth also address critical identity questions, forming new alliances and enemies. Therefore, some nations unite under the banner of human rights, while others unite against them. Tools like slogans, historical narratives, and genealogies, may all accompany a mythologized account to delineate these identities, or what Lincoln describes as *sentiment evocation*. More importantly, this model suggests that claiming true and authoritative accounts require a departure from a proximate frame of reference. In this way, Lincoln moves beyond the conservative function of myth perpetuated by Barthes, Bloor, and others by extending the mythologized form to the potential modification of social patterns. As such, myth can supplement and displace violence, for example, as a revolutionary force by transforming "simple power into legitimate authority" (Lincoln B. , 2014, pp. 1-2).

Similarly, Asad examines secularization as a revolutionary force, which deploys the formula of myth and authority to reconstruct familiar oppositions like belief vs. knowledge, reason vs. imagination, history vs. fiction, natural vs. supernatural, and sacred vs. profane (Asad, 2003, pp. 22-23). While modernity indicts all forms of otherness and labels myth as primitive, *otherness* is redeployed in a new mythology to establish the truth of new doctrines (Asad, 2003, pp. 22-23,29-30). “Although profanation appears to shift the gaze from the transcendental to the mundane, what it does is re-arrange barriers between the illusory and the actual” (Asad, pp. 36,52). Therefore, myth pervades modernity, and secularization is simply the assertion of reason and the sovereign self as new transcendentalized entities. Modern discourse and the secular become a new ideological construct that imagines a worldly essence and history that is self-evident, rendering the traditionally transcendent as a product of the human imagination (Asad, 2003, pp. 193-194). Subjectivity is transformed from the product of transcendent experience to the material cause of it, which greatly multiplies sensual pursuits, agency, *and* responsibility. Moreover, because conscious intention is central to agency and stands opposed to externalized and disempowering forces, resistance to these forces is paramount and romanticized (Asad, 2003, pp. 52,71-72). The internalization of transcendence produces an unusual delegation of work and constellations in culture, including a growing responsibility for suffering, meaning that accidents become objects of discipline and pain becomes the object of blame (Asad, 2003, pp. 73-74). Without an externalized transcendent and providential force, the sovereign self carries this burden (Asad, 2003, pp. 101,105). Here, all the work is absorbed by the subject.

Asad’s observations regarding the work inherited through the modern myth connects us back to Zilberman and the commentary of other authors. Zilberman noted that the modality of thought is revealed through the lens of present conditions, as indicators of the whole. Therefore,

he observed that the western empiricist-axiological modality ($\frac{IV}{N}$) is reflected in the behavioural world, characterized by personal “significational position-taking” and the inconceivability of “ought-to-be-doing metaphysics” or directives (Zilberman, 1988, pp. 41-43). This closely resembles Asad’s assessment that the western mind is characterized by the transcendentalized self and reason, but Asad merely expands on the behavioural outcome, as do other authors. For example, Ernest Becker describes the western transition from theodicy to *anthropodicy*, or the adoption of a solely human narrative. He describes the accompanying behaviour as “moral groping”, consistent with Zilberman’s description of inconceivable directives. Likewise, Foucault describes the modern west not as a beacon of freedom, as it often claims, but a culture of “meticulous calculations” or subjective control. Or consider Lewis’ concept of “man-moulding”, as the imperative for human remedies for the problems of evil. In the absence of transcendentalized norms, norms are enforced through a transcendentalized subjective control (Becker, 1968, pp. 16-19,33; Foucault, 1977, pp. 37,53; Lewis, 1944, p. 60).

The myth building activity that Bloch, Lincoln and Asad describe appears to broaden mythologizing as truth building activity, where distance and otherness is posited to anchor a position that also frames the conditions of existence. Again, while myth and ritual cannot be reduced to mystification, they incorporate its structure. Moreover, even if the posited ontological basis of myth is rejected and a purely strategic form emerges, this does not negate the pattern. The great variety of strategic deployments supports the structure by establishing its common use. To extend this even further, Goffman applies this to the micro and interactional world. He extends Simmel’s “second world” and the informational gatekeepers of secret societies to interactants who manage their own social face (Goffman, 1967, p. 10; Simmel, 1906, p. 59).

Myth building re-appears in daily interaction, or what Goffman describes as the faithful performance of ritualized communication codes, which are highly sensitive to microscopic discrepancies and missteps (Goffman, 1967, p. 43; Goffman, 1976, pp. 8,18). He describes these codes as sacred and enshrined in ritual because a nomic order is at stake, which means that our adherence to facts becomes secondary to a performance that projects a responsible and safe interactant. We therefore work to protect the sacredness of ourselves and others as fellow-worshippers of this ceremonial order, as an ultimate reality (Goffman, 1959, p. 15; Goffman, 1976, p. 8). This means that I can project and claim multiple identities for myself *if* I operate within the traffic rules of interaction (Goffman, 1963, p. 8). The co-existence of discipline and the dramaturgical nature of claimed identities means that a clean performance conveys that the reality is as it appears, while carefully distancing all anomic, discrediting, and unflattering information to preserve our ascendancy (Goffman, 1976, p. 27; Goffman, 1959, pp. 67-68). In other words, through presentation, we mystify both the reality of the ideal through adherence to the sacred order and any discrediting information as an unreality. Even through a photograph, imaginable and desirable characteristics appear real and mystified, where viewers worship a perfection and elevate the perceived identity, while mourning their inability to attain it (Goffman, 1976, pp. 8,18; Goffman, 1959, pp. 67-68). In selecting the ideal image, we also negate and cull unflattering content, as if it never existed. In sum, the great diversity of drama in Goffman's model, including the persistent avoidance of embarrassment, reflects an assumed, nomic, and sacred order. The patterned work done by the actor points back to or signals a super-ontology.

Summary

The current section surveyed mystification as it appears across classical and contemporary theorists, with the goal of building and distilling a structure of mystification (*Figure 23 - Distillation of the structure of mystification*). Within the “orthodox consensus” of classical theory, Comte’s positivist philosophy locates and develops the concept of mystification across theological and metaphysical stages of cognitive and social development (Giddens, 1984, pp. xv-xvi,xxviii,1). The theological and metaphysical mind is immature and consumed with

Classical	Comte	$P \rightarrow {}^E N+ \rightarrow L$
	Feuerbach	$S \alpha {}^E -Q \rightarrow D \rightarrow -C$ $R \rightarrow S Q \rightarrow C$
	Durkheim	$S \alpha {}^E S+ \rightarrow -C/C+$ $R \rightarrow S \rightarrow C$
	Marx & Engels	${}^E S+ \rightarrow -C/C+$ $S \rightarrow R/A \rightarrow C$
Refined Concept		$S+ \rightarrow -C/C+$ $(N+) \rightarrow -C/C+$
Contemporary	Berger	$(N+) \rightarrow -W \approx W$
	Levi, Bhaskar, Zilberman	$(O+) \rightarrow -W \approx W$

Figure 23 - Distillation of the structure of mystification

of all things. Comte pathologizes these earlier phases, but views them as necessary for inciting investigative labour and planting the seeds of rationalism, culminating in the scientific phase (Martineau, 2000, pp. 24,27,30; Bourdeau, 2023, pp. 13,27).

fictitious, illogical, and insoluble unrealities (Martin, 1966, p. 355; Schmaus, 1996, p. 430; Comte, 2015, p. 51). From his perspective, these earlier stages are consumed with the essential nature of things and the immediate causes of phenomena, but project supernatural beings or other entities in error (Martineau, 2000, p. 28). As such, we misidentify causes and fail to comprehend the natural laws at the root

Feuerbach maintains Comte's materialistic ontology but identifies the phenomena in Comte's formula as the infinite qualities present in the aggregate, or the social realm (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 26,127,162,177-178). As a quantitative problem, humanity projects a proportionate deity in error and alienates the human qualities of thought, will, and affection. Through this process, we relinquish control of the infinitude that naturally resides in society. Feuerbach explicitly posits rationality as the solution to the problem of mystification, whereby we reclaim our alienated predicates as the absolute truth of our nature (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 4-5). This journey from pathology to a rational scientific destination reunites society with its intrinsic qualities and self-determination. Here, Comte's and Feuerbach's early model of projection and mystification provides a basic structure, its masochistic effects, and the redemptive role of rationality. The act of projecting is innocent and involuntary, but also necessary within their evolutionary framework. However, Feuerbach observes that this ignorance grows increasingly sinister when rationality appears as a clear alternative.⁴²

Durkheim maintains Feuerbach's model of religious projection but extends it to any opaque representation of collective realities. He argues that because our introspective consciousness restrains our comprehension of social reality, opaque representations are delusive because they add something to what is immediately given (Durkheim, 1982, p. 37; Durkheim, 1995, pp. 15,266). This means that projective activity is both in error *and* rational because of its basis in the social (Durkheim, 1995, p. 228). Therefore, representations remain proportionate to society's immense production while simultaneously obscuring these social forces. Durkheim

⁴² The movement from non-culpable to culpable projection reappears in naïve and sophisticated pluralism respectively in the sociology of religion. The former asserts that religions are true as culturally specific expressions in relation to an ultimate reality, while the latter asserts that all religions are false because the ultimate reality is unknowable or absent.

further delineates a twofold effect of projection, including the masochistic loss of control to an external force and a false sense of unlimited power, or strategic benefit. Like Feuerbach, he argues that only rationality corrects the error and restores real dominion to society.

Marx develops the structural and strategic dimensions of projection as well and identifies religious ideas as an ideological reflex to material relations (Marx & Engels, 1998, pp. 37,42). He posits a qualitative equivalence between the projector and the projected, who are essentially one “in nature, in truth”, meaning that projection represents a quantitative variance (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 29; Durkheim, 1995, p. 227; Marx & Engels, 1998, pp. 252-253,570). Like Durkheim, he does not limit mystifying activity to religious thought and suggests that projective activity generally persists as a distortion of reality, or an opacity that imposes mystery onto material relations. The error of asociality is still at play, but he frames this mystification as intentionally deployed by a dominant class within an exploitative and conservative formula, which directly informs his solution. Marx argues that empirical observation displaces mystified knowledge and unmask *real* material relations, leading to a transfer of control to the oppressed (Marx & Engels, 1998, pp. 89-90). Marx squarely grounds the error and solution with actors and moves away from an involuntary or evolutionary response to a *sui generis*. Therefore, the transition to an empirical foundation is not passive or inevitable, but the result of revolutionary activity (Marx & Engels, 1998, pp. 227,569-571). The paradoxical effects of projective or mystifying activity reappear in exploitation, where surrendering control to an asocial entity yields stability and preservation for the oppressor. This model is clear within the *German Ideology*, where Marx exposes the mystified knowledge of economists, who naturalize Germanic omniscience, property, and consumption. In this way, they deployed a mythology of premiseless concepts that

simultaneously empowered some at the expense of others (Marx & Engels, 1998, pp. 71,117-118,245,545).

Weber's treatment of the charismatic personality was not reduced to my working structure of mystification but incorporates it. He argues that in charisma, an asocial or supernatural force is credited as the source of a gift that demands surrender and bestows authority (Weber, 2012, p. 360). Therefore, mystification becomes a critical ingredient for the stabilization of charismatic leaders, who are compelled to demonstrate their giftedness. Weber is also unconcerned with the question of error, stating only that the reality of charismatic authority merely requires social validation (Weber, 1946, p. 247).⁴³ But just as charisma appears to incorporate mystification but cannot be reduced to it, I also reviewed the concepts of secrecy and theorizing as distinct concepts. The paradoxical effects of secrecy resemble the effects of mystification and charisma, where something is surrendered and gained through the process. However, since I can secret anything, I am not required to project an external force. Likewise, the act of theorizing adds something to empirical phenomena, but these are potentially observable or pending discovery, which does not reflect mystification as classical theorists developed it. Rather, their development of mystification implies an opaque, ontologically distinct, and non-empirical force, or an independent *other*.

To further refine the model, I distilled a basic structure of mystification and its effects by retaining what is essential to the concept and relevant to this project. The valuation of error or falsity by some theorists becomes the basis of proposed solutions, but authors frame this error

⁴³ Daily language typically acknowledges an external and mystified source of giftedness. For example, gifted personalities are 'born with' these attributes, or they were 'born to do' certain things. Attributing these 'gifts' to chance or random biological mechanisms still implies an attached destiny, only through material (vs. supernatural) conditions. This mystifies the material domain because chance does not exclude orchestration or purpose. This *casino metaphor* will be discussed further in the coming sections.

differently or omit it altogether. In addition, because my project is concerned with the structure of mystification apart from a naturalistic ontology, I tentatively removed the question of error and associated solutions. Finally, to separate mystification from theorizing, we replaced asociality with an independent supernatural force, or something that we add to the natural world. In doing so, we arrived at a reduced structural form that is consistent with *and* incorporates the different ways in which authors develop the concept. But this refined model still presents some questions and problems. While authors typically attribute mystification to the religious mind, some apply the concept more broadly, which raises questions about the scope of the assumed pathology. In addition, the notion of control within the paradoxical effects of projection remains unclear. Therefore, while the reduced structure summarized the classical form, there were problems with this structure. First, reference to supernatural forces within the classical model carries religious connotations, which is potentially inconsistent with the extension of mystification to other (non-religious) representations. Secondly, the notion of control within the paradoxical effects of projection remained unclear.

To help resolve these questions, I explored the work of several contemporary theorists. Although theories about the projection of “invisible anthropomorphisms” persist in the sociology of religion, Berger uniquely suggests that *work* is exchanged with the projected supernatural force (Lauwers & Dobbelaere, 1973, p. 544; Weigert, 1974, pp. 484-485; Barnes, 1997, p. 380). Because the type of work is secondary and unlimited by notions of control, it applies to diverse phenomena within the paradoxical effects of mystification (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 85-86). As a cosmic delegation of work, labour is first alienated to another and a variable measure is accepted by the actor (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 37-38). Further, Berger later suspends the ontological judgements typical of classical theorists by reframing projection as reflection, or when patterned

projection signals non-material forces. For others like Levi, this is framed as a refraction of non-empirical and undifferentiated realities through a differentiated surface (Levi, 2009, pp. 933, 937). As refractions, surface elements are derived from and obscure a deeper structure, meaning that non-empirical realities must be interpreted based on our sense perceptions (Levi, 2009, pp. 942,977; Midgley, 1992, p. 96). Rather than projecting outward from a material reality, the latter reflects non-material realities. Levi's structural approach reframes projective activity as indicative of an ontological penetration within a layered framework.

Similarly, Roy Bhaskar's *Transcendental Realism* posits an intransitive domain that is *out of phase* with actual events and our perceptions of them. This means that we cannot fully explain reality through our observations (Bhaskar, 1975, pp. 35,112-113). This model supports the rationality of experimentation, where orchestrated observation produces successive discoveries that adds to our inexhaustive understanding of real forces (Bhaskar, 1975, pp. 47,169,211,235). Our fallible descriptions of reality cannot produce laws, only hypothesized, non-empirical, and normic descriptions (Bhaskar, 1975, pp. 101-102,124,158,179). An independent and obscured reality is philosophically necessary for comprehensible experimentation, meaning that real natural forces are also transcendent (Bhaskar, 1975, pp. 52,146). This led me to refine the working structure and replace the supernatural with super-ontologies. I further considered how the inability of naturalism to escape transcendence is reinforced in Zilberman's science of philosophy, which argues that all modalities of thought include an absolute truth claim, regardless of its content. His model presents a layered ontology with a mystified term that is insoluble in his formula, relegating other terms to conventional or inconceivable realms of reality. Like Bhaskar's model, an immutable force implies blindness, sight, and a behavioural orientation for the actor, or delegation of work.

Through this tracing process, I distilled a final structure of mystification that involves the deployment of an independent and opaque reality accompanied by a delegation of work. The classical structure's emphasis on the supernatural reflected a materialist philosophy, which contemporary theorists stripped away by contemplating a layered model of reality. By exchanging the supernatural with the super-ontological, non-religious entities or forces can be mystified, including nature itself. Likewise, the classical structure's emphasis on control was substituted with the concept of work, as a more neutral and encompassing outcome of the posited ontology. As a structure, this final form encompasses the preceding forms, as theorists developed them, without the materialist bias that I observed in classical theory. Therefore, the final structure does not assess error or present solutions but captures the essential elements of mystification.

Finally, just as I considered how charisma incorporated mystification, I reviewed the concepts of myth and ritual in relation to our structure. While both concepts are distinct from mystification in various ways, they appear to incorporate ontological depth and opacity, including a delegation of labour. This depth appears in Barthes and Bloor, who observe that myth is an effective strategy for anchoring knowledge or conditions in the transcendent, rendering it immune from causal investigation and construction (Bloor, 1991, pp. 46-47). Bloch argued that ritualistic activity connects the actor with a symbolic entity, which anchors participants and separates understanding from truth claims. Because these claims are distantly located it is also authoritative for participants, even if undefined (Bloch, 2005, pp. 126-129, 131, 135-136). Similarly, Lincoln argued that myth makes paradigmatic and ahistorical truth claims while answering critical identity and kinship questions (Lincoln B. , pp. 14-18). This truth imbues life with purpose and is therefore more than a conservative strategy, but also an

effective counterhegemonic instrument (Lincoln B. , 2014, pp. 4-5,9,18-19). Myth as a destabilizing tool also appears in Asad, who examined secularization as a revolutionary force that deploys the formula of myth to transcendentalize new ideas (Asad, 2003, pp. 22-23,29-30). Mythical activity may even appear in interactional settings and through the work of Goffman, who describes our obligation to nomic, sacred, and ritualized communication (Goffman, 1967, p. 43; Goffman, 1976, pp. 8,18).

My examination of mythology and ritual did not produce changes in the structure of mystification, but I argued that it remains an essential ingredient for supporting the posited truth of myth. Moreover, although mythology may be assigned to religious territory and derided as false, myth remains a powerful, common, and even necessary discourse. This led Asad and Lincoln to conclude that liberalism mythicized history in support of human rights (Asad) and euro-centred taxonomies (Lincoln), even when ‘nature’ seems opposed to these ideas (Lincoln B. , 2014, pp. 6-7,22-23; Asad, 2003, pp. 59,62-63). Likewise, Lyotard argued that an “epic” tale accompanies modern science, incorporating ancient origins, historical mission, and legendary figures, to anchor and legitimate its ontological position (Lyotard, 1979, pp. 27-28,37). In these ways, mystification is broadened to support a multitude of positions, because it separates truth from understanding as a precondition of stability and purpose.

4. The Language of Mystification

Through analyzing the classical and contemporary development of mystification, I arrived at a basic form or structure of mystification that incorporates an independent ontology with the effect of delegating work $((O+) \rightarrow -W \approx W)$. As a structure, it incorporates variation, including religious and non-religious uses, and differences in the type of delegated work. Stripped of its naturalistic assumptions, the structural form functions as a single organization or transfactual form that becomes a mobile device useful for analyzing speech and text. However, because structure implies that empirical phenomena will express the underlying structure, we



Figure 24 - L. Christensen (2024)

require an understanding of the structural *manifestations* of mystification in language, or its *signals*. In other words, if the structure is real, how do we experience its super-ontological and work-related language? Discourse in a structural context is a *pattern* of speech or way of speaking that signals this underlying organization. These signals

within the language of theory suggest or imply ontological foundations and forces that may otherwise be elided from the text. Therefore, we are validating the structure of mystification by working backwards, as an *a posteriori* and *hermeneutical* investigation. Moreover, if the

structure of mystification constitutes a discourse, these signals should be broadly apparent.

Again, just as I surveyed social theory to build our working structure, I will survey social theory for its signals of mystification through metaphoricity, the constitution of subjects and objects, telos, rationality, and the nomos. While these signals broadly appear, they also overlap or appear in combination. Therefore, the reader will see specific metaphors associated with a type of teleo-rational or nomic language. In this way, while these types of signals are separated below for discussion purposes, they are interrelated.

Metaphoricity

Social theory is not directly concerned with a formalized examination of ontology or metaphysics, but all theorists attempt to develop a picture of reality. These claims are often embedded or interlaced within the subject matter proper, particularly through the deployment of metaphor, which signals ontological, axiological, and teleological claims. These images tell the reader where reality exists, how it moves and exerts pressure, its direction, and keys to its discovery. Implied in this description is the opaque nature of reality to which metaphor is uniquely suited, like an ideogram that points toward something that is not yet fully understood or cannot be expressed with precision. Nevertheless, metaphors appear with solidity and are carefully selected to align with other known realities, like the physical sciences, to borrow from their strength and posit an essential parity. The most benign interpretation of metaphor suggests that authors use them carelessly or subconsciously as an epiphenomenon, where the image arises as a by-product of concrete realities flowing through the mind. However, most theorists who turn their attention to metaphor suggest that these reflect strategic objectives and essential tools for the active construction or perception of reality. Metaphorical choices reflect “deep cultural

cosmologies and historical influences”, and reinforce or undermine cultural norms, ideologies, and beliefs (Taylor & Dewsbury, 2018, p. 3). For example, if history is moving from *opus alienum* to *opus proprium*, from theodicy to anthropodicy, as various authors suggest, metaphors will validate and support this movement (Asad, 2003, p. 5; Berger P. L., 1969, p. 86; Becker, 1968, p. 32). Images of infancy, gravitation, escalation, and hardness all constitute metaphorical substitutions for transcendental language, or a new discourse. For example, a speaker can reframe something that is constructed as something externally or distantly natural, bestowed, and therefore mystified (Asad, 2003, pp. 47-48,51). Culler describes these as *foils* on which concepts are built, or contingent features of a philosophical discourse. However, these metaphorical foundations are forgotten, meaning that the contingent and poetic operate at the heart of the conceptual order (Culler, 1982, p. 148). This journey of the metaphor may reflect the *successive phases of the image* that Baudrillard describes, where something began as a profound reality, but later came to mask it, then to cover its absence, and eventually separates from it entirely as a pure *simulacrum*, or a copy without an original (Baudrillard, p. 6). Therefore, despite the sturdy appearance of these images, “we must attend seriously to myths, metaphors, images and the other...apparatus of thought surrounding the official doctrines” (Midgley, 1992, p. 15).

Various metaphors will signal the structure of mystification by suggesting or implying other realities and the delegation of work. These metaphors operate indirectly but within a typified framework or schedule of “natural indexical signs”, labeling an infinite number of occurrences across physical, psychological, and social territories as guided activity (Goffman, 1974, pp. 21-23; Goffman, 1976, pp. 3,8). In addition to metaphors that signal a layered reality itself, theorists also deploy a wide variety of images that describe the relationship between an opaque causal force and human experience, including our misapprehension of these forces. For

example, materialist assumptions will shift responsibilities previously residing with the divine onto the natural world and organics, which are imbued with purpose. Alternatively, mechanization and ghostly images can be used to describe the world, pointing to rigid causes or nebulous historical forces. Finally, I will consider the use of fluid metaphors that emphasize a universe imbued with creativity, but within a given framework.

The idea that reality is layered is a persistent feature in many disciplines and posits an over-arching and non-empirical model that stands opposed to sense perception, meaning that rational intuition is privileged (Levi, 2009, p. 974). A layered reality also implies that the casual observer is likely to be deceived in this framework, and this is often highlighted across theoretical traditions. For example, Durkheim notes the problem of rising above the vulgarity that permeates the general conscience, which is plagued by *illusions* and *darkness* (Durkheim, 1995, p. 25). When we contemplate the social origins of morality, we can only guess as to the nature of “the original type” through the “reflexes and echoes” that conceal material realities (Durkheim, 1951, p. 318; Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 42). The task of the researcher is to navigate the space between reality and immediate experience, through the shadows and echoes, to reach the truth. Similar language appears in a structuralist context. Levi describes our struggle to perceive the hidden symmetry of the underlying object, when “the mind thus passes from empirical diversity to conceptual simplicity” and uniform structure (Levi, 2009, p. 934). The universe is thereby pieced back together through mental constructions and contortions, based on the pieces we perceive, before finding the singular truth within (Midgley, 1992, p. 96). This leads structuralists like Levi and Lévi-Strauss to discover common rationalities that were once invisible, demonstrating that a rigorous analysis of discarded ancient forms (i.e., myth) can “enlarge the realm of the real” (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 444; Levi, 2009, p. 978).

Therefore, Levi describes an “imbricate ontology wherein deeper, subterranean cores are encrusted or covered over by other layers at the surface” (Levi, 2009, p. 940). He frames reality through the images of *core* and *crust*, which is also akin to shingles on a roof, with each layer supporting the one above, simultaneously hiding one layer while exposing another. Taken together, these layers provide a nearly impermeable barrier for the deepest structures, which support and inform the layers above. Levi also linked his structuralist argument to Jewish mysticism to argue that reality is in a state of “existential separation”, where a unitary structure is fragmented at the empirical level (Levi, 2009, pp. 934-939,943,974-975,977). This image suggests that proximate structures are readily apparent but mere refractions of the non-proximate, undifferentiated, opaque, and deeper reality (Levi, 2009, pp. 933,937,942). Therefore, the phenomenological fragments we interact with carry the *residue* of other realities hidden from view, prompting new metaphors.

Like beads of olive oil that adhere to the sides of jar after the vessel has been broken, tumbling through the void into the lower worlds, these spread throughout matter in the universe. (Levi, 2009, p. 943)

Similar descriptions are also exportable to various fields of research and across multiple levels of reality. For example, Aas moves to a garden metaphor by describing underlying transnational security structures as a “rhizome”, or networks of seemingly disconnected and horizontal arrangements that are integrated or linked to a common root. On the surface, *rhizomatic assemblages* incorporate territory, authority, and state institutions that inevitably coordinate their activity (Aas, 2012, pp. 239,247).⁴⁴ In this way, objects of study may seem hierarchical and compartmentalized, but are rhizomatic phenomena, like the suckers generated from a lilac.

⁴⁴ Aas speaks to the ‘de-bounding’ of risk due to globalizing processes, where distance and ‘flow’ is analyzed rather than the geographically proximate, or ‘place’.

A layered conception of the universe produces a multitude of other metaphors, depending on how a theorist imagines the relationship between these layers. For some, reality was best described as a *machine*, which attributes great rigidity to these layers and their causal relations that also frame human existence. The most extreme descriptions appeared in the 18th century through Julian La Mettrie, who argued that the axiological distinction between animals and humans, creatures and plants, rested on the failure to understand their descendancy from a single substance (La Mettrie, 1912, pp. 117,145). Therefore, humans are walking plants, just as plants contain winding springs, like a *clock* (La Mettrie, 1912, pp. 93,97). Human thought, imagination, and behaviour are similarly framed as complex manifestations of strict mechanization, which is often mistaken for the soul (La Mettrie, 1912, pp. 107,283). In part, the machinery metaphor reflected the initial advances in scientific knowledge and an unshakeable confidence in its capacity to locate a single and simple explanatory system for everything (Midgley, 1992, pp. 76, 84). But an ultimately mechanistic reality also defines the nature of our work. As Durkheim explained, “a mechanistic theory of progress, then, not only does not deprive us of an ideal, but allows us to have faith that we shall never be without one” (Durkheim, 2014, p. 269). In this way, the seemingly certain and comprehensive explanations replaced mysterious forces with a physical eschatology, where machinery is translated into regularity and stability (Midgley, 1992, p. 173).

But the machinery metaphor can present a cold and indifferent image, leading to the most persistent image of the *natural*. Through the Enlightenment and its materialism, there was a growing perception of the natural world as *the* defining reality (Asad, 2003, p. 57). The convergence of the natural and social worlds that developed in the 18th century was based on a presumed resonance between human faculties and the universe at large (Midgley, 1992, p. 121;

Asad, 2003, p. 57). In this regard, Durkheim granted our rational capacities a particular authority, because the “natural is also rational” and “it is a fundamental postulate of sociology that a human institution cannot rest upon error and falsehood...if it did, it could not endure” (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 2,16,24). Toward a rational truth, nature produces empiricism and apriorism as two types of contemplation, but without empiricism the rationality in apriorism will produce a projective impulse and error because “they have not yet grasped the real obscurity...not yet grasped the painstaking methods of the natural sciences in order to sweep away the darkness” (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 12,16-18,25). But where there is darkness, there is light.

The natural man remains at home because he finds it agreeable, because he is perfectly satisfied, God...is...compensation for the poverty of life, which the true life of rational contemplation presents in unending fullness. (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 150, 162)

In this way, the rational was aligned with the natural, and the natural was aligned with *unending fullness*. Once the subject accepts nature as the ultimate reality, it supplies both the object and methods for its discovery and truth.

Nature would come to embody not just strict causal mechanisms, but characteristics and purpose that was interested in human survival and flourishing. Early theoretical development was strongly influenced by an ontologically distinct nature that was *also* benevolent in its guidance of history, events, and action (Derrida, p. 195; Giddens, 1984, pp. 25-26). In short, the natural world was sacralized, as a “foundation in itself” that is responsible for the qualities of the species and the social world that “can do nothing without nature”, just as “nature needs man” (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 225-227). For example, Durkheim believed that nature supplies the psychological and physical constitution of the human organism, which becomes foundational to

social solidarity in its various forms within social theory (Durkheim, 2014, p. 54). Simmel agreed and employed *natural instincts* extensively. Even sentiments of freedom, morality, and hostility were attributed to a naturally transcendent foundation. He observed that nature imbues the subject with these behaviours but also the mechanisms for balancing them, meaning that self-abasement offsets the ethic of self-assertion, just as the mercilessness of competition is tempered by feelings of justice (Simmel, 1955, pp. 28,84-85).⁴⁵ Moreover, as an instinctual and naturally social animal, individuality and production develop through stages of association with others, so “society arises from the individual and...the individual arises out of association” (Marx, 1998, p. 2; Simmel, 1955, pp. 162-163; Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 450). Here, nature can integrate predatory behaviour and struggle. Like the evolution of any biological *organism*, the homogenous “natural community” contains *organic* connections that support the association of heterogeneous elements, sometimes through competition with hegemonic forces that can facilitate their disintegration (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 99; Marx, 1998, p. 22; Simmel, 1955, pp. 89,194-195). For instance, the act of fighting merely translates from the “first instinct” of self-affirmation by negating others, which then translates into the more complex phenomenon of competition, which only multiplies social interactions (Simmel, 1955, pp. 28-29,34,64). Even when the work of the subject appears destructive, nature incorporates it into its broader objectives.

The apparent sophistication of nature and its power also led theorists to use more sophisticated *organic* metaphors. For Simmel, mechanical forces appear to weld things together

⁴⁵ This partnership with the natural world would lend credibility and a sense of inevitable progress to sociology as a discipline, generating funding and extension into other fields (Steinmetz, pp. 117-118,125).

in a crude and external fashion, but rational bonds are “no longer rigid, but elastic”, like the limbs of body (Simmel, 1955, p. 191). Social reality may still follow physiological principles and rules, but represents a complex organism replicated from simple forms, like a *cellular* composition. “In physiology the division of labor is itself subject to this law; it never occurs save with polycellular masses that are already endowed with a certain cohesion” (Durkheim, 2014, pp. 34-35,217). Cooperation at the cellular level, when people are first drawn together by mechanical forces, leads to a highly differentiated and complex social organism. If an animal is produced after organs are combined and colonies of animals eventually form, our social world passes through similar phases, from primitive to sophisticated (Durkheim, 2014, p. 149). In these ways, organic metaphors can replace the cold machine and elaborate the natural, but without compromising the force of necessity.

A sophisticated necessity may apply to the stages of history. History and consciousness continue to possess a telos and pass through stages, from immaturity to *maturity*, from *infancy* to adulthood. The image of the infant functions as ground zero or *gravitational force* that is inadequate, but through which everything must pass as it grows (Midgley, 1992, pp. 142,157-170). For example, classical theorists aligned religious activity with a *childish* form of contemplation, as an early and projective phase when obscured yet intimate social relations are misapprehended (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 97; Durkheim, 1995, p. 227). In time, once mature, the religious mind would leave this childishness behind. Initially, Marx & Engels appear critical of this transitional metaphor. For example, they were critical of economists for their adherence to metaphors of children, youth, and men, or an inherent spiritual history where transformation from one layer to the next happened swiftly, simply, or automatically (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 157). Marx & Engels were similarly critical of Feuerbach’s *embryonic* belief in essence, thereby

failing to see the world as purely sensuous and systematically created through the succession of generations. But Marx & Engels do not abandon the metaphor entirely, because they describe generational advance as “each standing on the shoulder of the preceding one” in their particular and material relations, “such is the case with every organic body” (Marx & Engels, 1998, pp. 44-45; Marx, p. 15).

Weber also relies heavily on “concrete genetic sets of relations” that gave Western capitalism its peculiar “spirit”, albeit through complex historical circumstances and inimical forces (Weber, 2003, pp. 47-48,51-52,91). “Thus, even at the earliest stage of religious evolution there are already present in *nuce* all the forms of religious grace”, and this *seed* would play a significant role (Weber, 1963, p. 2; Weber, 1946, p. 274). Sacred qualities like concentration, loyalty, discipline, and frugality were all necessary to Western capitalism and originated in religious instruction and self-regulation (Weber, 2003, pp. 62-63). From a religious *cradle*, the modern bourgeois economic life develops until the temptations of riches usurp the religious mind, providing the *germ* with a viral quality that eventually destroys the host. The parent may not recognize the child and what may appear as modern and autonomous also contains “residues of ancient conditions” or the “root of an idea...in its highest expression” (Weber, 1946, pp. 79,355,423). Similarly, Zilberman examines “integrative dynamics” of modern soviet society and how Marxism was “grafted to the stock of Russian social life”, which was imbued with Byzantine religiosity (Zilberman, 1977, pp. 356-357). This peculiar combination meant that self-determination was realized not through notions of personal freedom, as it was in the West, but through power and subordination (Zilberman, 1978, pp. 311-312,356-357). The image of the germ that is grafted onto existing stocks implies development and

complex interactions, emphasizing multi-causality and uncertainty that comes with interbreeding different species.

Similarly, the directionality of history assumes complex connections between events or stages. Like Simmel's cellular analogy, some theorists argue that microorganisms or the seeds of future development exist as latent forces that eventually connect these stages together. For example, Durkheim argued that the future is made possible because the elementary qualities or germs of social facts exist in the present consciousness (Durkheim, 1951, pp. 310,363,365). Likewise, this organism may appear as a *nucleus* for seemingly diverse expressions, such as the essential linkage between the division of labour and the family that functions as an *incubator* for slavery (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 52). Alternatively, the same germ may carry a program for his own death, or decomposition. For example, Simmel argues that the most strenuous animosity will contain its own attenuation through the "realization of its futility", and within every conflict are the seeds of peace (Simmel, 1955, pp. 24,26-27).

From the mechanistic, to the natural, to the organic and micro-organic, metaphors signal realities and their effects. Mechanization threatens determinism, just as an overarching and all-encompassing nature presses our incorporation and compliance, but also blesses us through truth and survival. In either case, nature places us on a path, complete with stages and germs that direct future development. As I noted earlier, metaphors constitute an indirect approach to the *real* forces at work by positing an essential parity between them, but an ambiguity remains. More importantly, an alliance with nature and natural forces provides objectivated reality to any naturalized phenomena, granting it truth and even a sense of inevitable progress.⁴⁶ As Derrida

⁴⁶ Within a naturalistic worldview, truth is coded as nature.

argued, classical theorists simply used imagery that “objectivizes by naturalizing”, thereby locating all phenomena within natural origins and control (Derrida, 1994, p. 195). Therefore, I argue that these metaphors signal mystification, or the presence of a distinct ontology, albeit a natural versus a supernatural one. This reality produces a constellation of work of discovering and maintaining, or if the current state is unpleasant, of waiting or pushing toward the *next* stage.

Experience may not reveal nature as a purely benevolent force. Different answers appear in the classical context, contrasted by the conservative approach of Durkheim and the critique of



Figure 25 - Nature as varied meaning (CBC News, 2017)

Marx & Engels regarding the current situation. But other theorists observe that nature holds varied meaning and may be read as benevolent or a “vast mass of meaninglessness...dark, always ominous jungle” that produces a multiplicity of destabilizing experiences (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 23; Becker, 1968, p. 18). For example, Berger & Luckmann state that the “solitary human being is being on the

animal level”, who lacks an ordered and full existence (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 51).

Likewise, Foucault argues that because of the natural connection between truth and power, this is manifested through the “meticulous calculations” of overseers (Foucault, 1977, pp. 55,92). The reforming power of discipline and “bio-power” appears naturally good within modernity, but exists in contested space and a pending war (Foucault, 1977, pp. 20,177,252; Foucault, 1990, pp.

16,140,143). But even if the terror of experience does not align with the naturally benevolent, this discontinuity engenders other metaphors associated with causality, latency, and



Figure 26 - Canadian Museum for Human Rights (open source)

interpretation (Asad, 2003, p. 57; Foucault, 1990, pp. 65-66). For example, the solitary terror that Berger describes has a silver lining, because our biological properties place fewer limitations on the human condition, permitting “man to engage in different activities” in an open world (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 47).⁴⁷ As an “unfinished” and unique product, only a naturalized productive capacity remains and “man’s self-production is always, and of necessity, a social enterprise”

(Berger & Luckmann, 1967, pp. 49,51; Berger P. L., 1972, p. 157). In other words, nature may be acutely anomic, but it also compels constructive sociality within a sufficiently open world to accommodate this work. The nebulous metaphor of the natural and its adaptations also appear in the discourse of human rights, where natural equality and freedom battles persistent inequality and oppression (Asad, 2003, pp. 57,133). Therefore, an atrocity may be reinterpreted as a momentary lapse of inherent goodness, which will eventually penetrate our confusion and rise from the ashes, transcending our horrific present and past. This complex deployment of metaphor becomes explicit in the architecture of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (*Figure 26 - Canadian Museum for Human Rights*).

⁴⁷ This is contrasted with the life of an animal, which is born into a species-specific environment aligned with the instincts necessary for survival.

In addition to organic and inorganic metaphors, *ghosts* are also plentiful in social theory, but in different forms. For example, Durkheim targeted supernatural thinking and the ghosts that distort empirical things, shrouding the world in mystery and making it incomprehensible (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 22-25; Durkheim, 1982, p. 62). Supernatural thinking exists beyond nature and its laws, beyond reason and logic, yet Durkheim used ‘sacredness’ to represent the enduring fragment of the totality or what is consecrated by society (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 24,215,230-233,262,271). This double use of religious imagery first discredits that religious image before recycling it in relation to something truly holy and immutable that remains present in the consciousness, social ritual, and ceremony (Goffman, 1967, p. 94; Mauss, 1985, p. 22). This led to Malinowski’s critique of Durkheim’s approach, for simultaneously recognizing ghosts as distortions while deploying other spectres in the form of the “Collective Soul” (Malinowski, 1948, p. 27). Durkheim’s own collective ghost later haunts the religious mind, which projects yet another. Berger also deploys a ghost metaphor when referring to the projection of objectivated reality, which then haunts its producer through self-abasement. Unlike Durkheim, the haunted also constructs the reality that later visits them (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 73-74, 101). Alternatively, ghosts may also reside in something less tangible than collectives and constructions. Marx & Engels describe the ghost that was haunting Europe in the form of unrealized communism, or a power in its infancy (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 14). Here, historical forces can haunt. This similarly informs Derrida’s *hauntology*, through which he argues that Marx attempts to exercise one ghost for another, like a counter *magic* (Derrida, 1994, pp. 57-58). He states that “haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony”, even when the haunted powers deploy their own apparitions in the form of exchange value (Derrida, 1994, pp. 45-46). In this framework, the ghost appears in the persistence of critique and is never fixed by notions

of presence or absence, actual or inactual, sensuous or supersensitive, living or dead. The ghost is a merely a moment of this spirit or its phenomenal body (Derrida, 1994, pp. 63,171,204). The worry and anxiousness of existing powers bears witness to these ghosts and this was also articulated by Du Bois, who described the haunting of “untrue dreams” upon oppressors after the US Civil War (Derrida, 1994, p. 62; Du Bois, 1903, pp. 36,50). In these ways, ghosts represent a metaphorical turn, representing real historical forces that are presently “out of joint” but seeking fulfillment (Derrida, 1994, pp. 15, 20-21).

Alternatively, some theorists reject the idea of real externalities, whether in the form of gods, nature, or other forces. In a postmodern context, these structures are discarded in favor of proximate phenomena and meanings. As such, theorists will adopt fluid, highly contextualized, and conflicted metaphors. Some describe this as the modern struggle against the “snowball” of “accretional universalism” and a corresponding “loss of hardness” (Bassiouni, 2018, pp. 4,37; Midgley, 1995, pp. 13,173). With a deteriorating belief in the communication between inanimate objects, agency and persons transition from “personifications” of external forces to “something that can be made; out of formless clay” (Marx, 1967, p. 89; Foucault, 1977, p. 135).⁴⁸ For example, in *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that the idea of sexuality is entirely constructed, but we are “fastened to the deployment” like a *mirage*, as if it were always present in the nature of things (Foucault, 1990, pp. 156-157). The illusory nature of the human world receives greater emphasis by these theorists, who argue that we are engaged in

⁴⁸ Foucault observes a paradoxical outcome, where humanity was conceived as a mechanized entity that could be understood and ‘known’, and therefore manipulated. Mechanization and manipulation of its parts appear together. Therefore, methods and tools were also supplied to facilitate this understanding and to measure the smallest of movements (Foucault, 1977, pp. 136-139).

reanimating what was previously liquidated through a process of *neofiguration*. Baudrillard makes the following observation regarding modern cinema:

Today cinema can place all its talent, all its technology in the service of reanimating what it itself contributed to liquidating. It only resurrects ghosts, and it itself is lost therein. (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 48)

The ghost reappears in the postmodern context not as an historical force, but a *simulacrum*, or copy without an original. Like any ghost, these past events are *cold* because their resurrected and invented appearance is purely tactile and emotionally shallow (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 50). But although this approach appears to repudiate an objective reality, it erects the *immediate* through a mathematical metaphor.

When everything is taken away, nothing is left. This is false. The equation of everything and nothing, the subtraction of the remainder, is totally false. It is not that there is no remainder. But this remainder never has an autonomous reality, nor its own place. (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 143)

When proximate and situational experience is elevated to the position of ultimate reality, and “all of the real is residual”, the delegated work in this formula is the *game* and *play*, where the “game is to control the frame” (Tolmach-Lakoff, 2000, p. 197; Baudrillard, 1981, p. 146). In the transition from given to made realities, Lyotard describes the legitimation of any truth as merely the consequence of a language *wars* that grand narratives are gradually losing (Culler, 1982, pp. 133,145-148,150-153; Lyotard, 1979, pp. 16,27). Recycling old metaphors, Lyotard argues that the *seeds* of delegitimization and nihilism were planted within these narratives, which cannot survive a latent and reflexive discourse.

A science that has not legitimated itself is not a true science; if the discourse that was meant to legitimate it seems to belong to a prescientific form of knowledge, like a ‘vulgar’ narrative, it is demoted to the lowest rank, that of an ideology or instrument of power. (Lyotard, 1979, p. 38)

Within this postmodern turn, constructive activity focuses on destabilizing the “truth requirement(s)” that legitimate and simulate the real, thereby producing a “‘lack of reality’ of reality, together with the invention of other realities” (Lyotard, 1979, pp. 39,74,77).

Even in a structural context, some authors will place emphasis on the fluid characteristics of social life and our capacity for invention and innovation. For example, Goffman’s sacred structure of talk is balanced by highly permeable *frames*, each with its own *key*, that present ever expanding possibilities for the actor (Goffman, 1961, p. 87; Goffman, 1959, pp. 1,6,12). He therefore describes people who act as their “own priest” or “jailer” who carefully restrain themselves while constantly building an image, as if on a *stage* (Goffman, 1967, pp. 95,10). In this way, the problem for social interactants is fundamentally *dramaturgical*, or how the *front* is presented through practiced stagecraft (Goffman, 1959, p. 15). Affirming information is carefully presented, while discrediting information is reserved for the profanated *backstage*, where misaligned activities, characters, and equipment are quarantined (Goffman, 1959, pp. 112-114,123-124). Each moment becomes a situated cosmos with the associated perils of theatre, where participants use available resources to generate new meanings and events while under scrutiny, moment by moment (Goffman, 1961, pp. 24-25). But this creativity still occurs on a preestablished stage operating within sacred rules, not of the actor’s making. Even the actor’s paramount concern for the preservation of *face* is inherited and compelled, as Goffman acknowledges.

This secular world is not so irreligious as we might think. Many gods have been done away with, but the individual himself stubbornly remains as a deity of considerable importance. (Goffman, 1967, p. 95)

This blending of structure and creative agency appears in yet other metaphors. Like any drama, events may also take an unexpected turn, leading Giddens to observe that outcomes may only be

indirectly caused by someone's actions within an "accordion effect" (Giddens, 1984, pp. 9-10). Similarly, individual actors may perform in the aggregate but apart from their intentions, meaning that the outcomes are "everyone's doing and no one's", like a "composition effect" (Giddens, 1984, pp. 10-11).

In sum, the natural world, organic and inorganic mechanisms, historical forces, and our creative capacities all supply diverse and rich metaphors to social theorists. These images signal realities, meaning the image suggests or implies how reality is structured and functions, without necessarily speaking directly about the precise nature or origins of this reality. Likewise, the posited reality translates into activity or work. Just as actors are subdued beneath an overarching and dominate natural world, these actors become thespians under the pressure of face and the sacred order. These and other metaphors will also resurface in the coming sections on the constitution of subjects and objects, and the appearance of telos, rationality, and the nomos in social theory.

Subjects and Objects

Like metaphors, the constitution of *subjects* and *objects* in social theory signal what is real, relative, or ambiguous, including a delegation of work (Perakyla & Ruusuvuori, 2011, p. 1118). Describing something as an object implies a stable reality external to the subject, while subjects act in relation to these objects, or find themselves acted upon. Simple material objects, like a chair, do not intersect with the structure of mystification, but other objects may when they come to possess independence and opacity. Likewise, the subject can be imbued with a mystified quality as a constructive force wholly outside of the material universe, even becoming "a god for men" (Durkheim, 1951, pp. 313,334-335). In some cases, the complex relationship

between objects and subjects can also be mystified, where an independent mechanism, rule, or force blends or separates these worlds. In part, this is what Giddens describes as the oscillating emphasis in the social sciences between the *imperialism of the object* and the *imperialism of the subject*, with each position attempting to answer epistemological and ontological questions (Giddens, 1984, p. 2). Moreover, subjects and objects may not be clearly delineated by a given theorist, who may simply place more emphasis on one over the other, thereby suggesting or implying our place in an ontological order. For example, a writer can indirectly obfuscate and diminish the subject through a reified *process*, like Durkheim's emphasis on facticities or Feuerbach's argument that nature (not subjects) supplies *fullness*. Therefore, subjects and objects may be constituted indirectly and/or through techniques of elision, where something is simply left out of the story (Perakyla & Ruusuvuori, 2011, p. 672). Because discourse analysis examines coherence in units larger than the sentence, the challenge is to uncover the way theorists develop these roles and describe their relationship. I will begin with a short discussion of how subjects and objects can be delineated in language and form, before exploring how they develop in the context of various theorists.

A reified process or force objectifies by granting these *things* independence and even human characteristics like creativity, adaptability, and authority (Fairclough, 2003, p. 13). When described in this way, they also directly and indirectly diminish, pacify, and relieve the actor of responsibility (i.e., work). In ordinary language, these forces can be nebulous and appear merely as a reified *something*. For example, external forces can appear in the context of a passive sentence structure, where hikers are 'forced off the mountain'. Or you can actively describe your car as a 'she' who 'looks after you' on a long trip but has a 'finicky' personality. It may be false to say that the car is mystified in this instance, but when applied to something like the forces of

nature, the speaker begins to signal ontological depth, like Feuerbach's description of nature as "infinite" (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 2). Dawkins also observed that a "quasi-mystical response to nature and the universe is common among scientists and rationalists", including Darwin who described the "powers" that were "breathed into a few forms" according to the laws governing the universe (Dawkins, 2006, p. 32; Darwin, 2020, p. 410). Similarly, daily conversation is punctuated with tautologies, common sense, and proverbs, which function as deferrals to an inherent truth that effectively absolves the actor (Barthes, 1957, pp. 120-121,270). Statements like 'it's good to wear a helmet' or 'do the right thing', introduce objective imperatives within an assumed, ordinate, and unexplained structure. Objective forces and the subjective delegation of work can appear simultaneously in statements such as 'karma is a bitch', blending a form of ruthless cosmic justice with unmitigated subjective responsibility.

O'Reilly observed that even textual format can signal independent authority, like chapter and heading breaks, which are used at times by scholars to implicitly convey conceptual frameworks without explicit explanation or cause. These headings appear as objects given to or discovered by the writer, as if natural, and therefore mystified. Such formatting may combine with strategic omissions and selection bias to smuggle realities and values into published work, while appearing naturally within narrative construction (O'Reilly, 2005, p. 221). But just as these objects can signal mystification, the subject can be similarly elevated. By transitioning to first person pronouns, detailed descriptions, and the present tense, the subject can insert themselves into the story through the "ethnographic present". The reader is led to believe that the writer is conveying a firsthand, objective, and live account, without distortion (O'Reilly, 2005, pp. 214-217). Like informal fallacies, these common and sometimes subtle features of language may be more accidental than sinister, stylistic rather than ontological, but we cannot

ignore them in the context of discourse. When combined with other features in the text, the treatment of subjects and objects can reveal an implicit and foundational message that signals mystified forces and our relationship to them.

The imperialism of the object takes shape in classical theory and through embodied naturalist principles, including evolutionary laws, material uniformity, mono-causality, and the assumed unity of the natural and rational. Despite some differences between them, classical theorists generally conveyed objective forces that actors are ignorant of and subject to. We observed this in the projective hypothesis, when the religious or generally uninformed mind confronts dominating forces and then forms “wrong ideas about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to be” (Durkheim, 1982, p. 143; Marx & Engels, 1998, pp. 29,42,50,61-62). Mental contortion and self-deception fool the mind into believing that there is something “other than consciousness of existing practice” (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 50). For Durkheim, the representations prevalent in any society are the product of limited consciousness in response to something *real*, overwhelming, or seemingly perfect. We misinterpret a “superficial envelope” surrounding these real forces, which makes them appear animated (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 15,227,266; Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 19,97-98,129; Durkheim, 1951, p. 315; Durkheim, 1982, p. 37). This problematizes the subject and consciousness as passively formed and confused, like an overloaded circuit that produces something wholly unreal, leading to posited transcendency and the metaphysical, “thus we have been forced to imagine a world...with realities of a different order” (Durkheim, 1951, pp. 334-335). Moreover, the penetration of these forces into psychical life is so thorough that “they dominate us from within, for they are wholly within each one of us” (Durkheim, 1982, pp. 44,128).

Therefore, consciousness can produce imposters in the form of the supernatural, and these figures will appear independent and mystified, as abstractions that guide the movement of things and persons (Ilyenkov, 1960, pp. 56-57). As we noted, mystification within classical theory is framed by naturalism, wherein reference to any immaterial force *must* be obscurantist. However, if the ‘natural is rational’, why does nature impart this obscurantist impulse? And if all subjects are products of natural forces that also impart irrationality, how can we be sure that the *rational* position is, in fact, rational at all. As Durkheim observed, “facts show only too clearly the incompetence of consciousness”, so how does the subject escape material production of a flawed consciousness (Durkheim, 1951, pp. 311-312)? The subject/object language in theoretical work reflects an ongoing and unresolved struggle with these questions, but also reveals a shift away from the inherent benevolence of nature to a uniquely positioned subject. Here, the subject increasingly occupies a separate ontological and mystified domain, or something wholly different from the natural world.

Even Durkheim appears to understand the problem of a deterministic nature that produces false consciousness, and so he proceeds to distance himself from it:

We should even hesitate to term it naturalistic...we reject the word if it is assigned a doctrinal meaning...if, for instance, it is meant that they (social things) are reducible to the other cosmic forces. Sociology has no need to take sides...nor has it to affirm free will rather than determinism. (Durkheim, 1982, p. 159)

Nonetheless, the functionalist approach generally produces a passive and submissive posture to external structural forces as objectivities and fact, which Becker later described as the helplessness of modernity or the “age of terror” (Becker, 1968, pp. 16-17,33). The loss of the medieval cosmology repudiates a providential object, leaving us subject to the whims of the natural world. Even if the subject is elevated through revolutionary activity, the problem of

determinism reappears. Marx argues that only revolt will hasten the collapse of the creations we worship, but even revolutions are always “the necessary consequence of conditions which were wholly independent of the will and direction of individual parties and entire classes” (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 48; Marx & Engels, 1998, pp. 29,50). Moreover, the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the *ruling ideas*, where material force becomes intellectual force, expressed as “eternal law” (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 67). This type of instrumentalism is in tension with agency and imperatives, with the intoxicating “real world” of commodity exchange on one hand and the call to change it on the other (Marx, 1967, p. 83; Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 571).

For some theorists, an over-objectivated and deterministic ontology can be mitigated through a conceptual separation of realms or domains. For Descartes, the separation of the subject and object takes form in *the real distinction*, or the principle by which the material world is separated from a spiritual one. “It is certain that this *I*, that is to say my soul, which makes me what I am, is entirely and truly distinct from my body” (Williams, 1978, p. 105). Durkheim also advocated for the separation of psychological and social domains, refusing to use the former to explain the latter (Durkheim, 1982, pp. 32-33). The dualism applied to the objective and subjective worlds would inform structural and post-structural theoretical development alike, where objective structures are imagined as a type of skeleton or girders of a building that *constrains* (but does not determine) subjective conduct. Reality is therefore split in two, as seen and unseen worlds that inform one another. Authors like Sire point to this dualism as the foundation of existentialism, where materialist assumptions are denied as an absurdity in favor of a subjective “ensemble of values distinct from the material realm” (Sartre, 1966, p. 289). Here, the objectivity of an infinite material nature exists alongside the infinite reality of the subject,

whose “existence precedes essence” and who “himself will have made him what he will be” (Sartre, 1966, p. 278).

But does splitting reality in two resolve the problem of agency within a naturalistic worldview by freeing the subject from necessity? Perhaps, but only by adding *another* reality, or the mystified subject, who exists outside of nature and is self-determining. While this shift does not necessarily resolve the “incompetence of consciousness”, an imperialistic subject prompts or allows for other explanations for the world as we experience it (Durkheim, 1951, pp. 311-312). But elevating the subject can have other unwanted consequences. For example, another approach is to reconceptualize how these objects and structures form, as either subordinating (preceding) concrete phenomena or subordinated to (following) them. The concrete generally references objects and things, while the abstract refers to properties of these objects, meaning that the latter could only be imagined or rationalized (Ilyenkov, 1960, pp. 9-12). Ilyenkov argued that even if structures can only be inferred from surface phenomena, the ability to synthesize the properties of these phenomena must exist *a priori* and originate in the transcendental unity of the consciousness (Ilyenkov, 1960, pp. 25-27). If I also distrust sensual perception, I am also more likely to attribute greater value to abstractions, as the higher genus (Ilyenkov, 1960, pp. 14-20,38). As an extreme, abstractions may be purely detached from the concrete altogether. These *pure* abstractions can yield strategic benefits, because the mind can impose *anything* upon concrete reality. Ilyenkov argues that this characterized bourgeois philosophy, which maintained strict separation between the abstract and the concrete and left objects devoid of essential form, leaving abstraction as a field of *play* for the subject's goals and aspirations, having no immediate equivalence in experience (Ilyenkov, 1960, p. 51). In other words, this field of play permits the tactical use of mystification as Marx described it, as

“premiseless” thinking (Marx & Engels, 1998, pp. 34,460). Moreover, this practice was unable to clearly navigate the connection between empirical forms of cognition to the rational one, and so it remained confused through the Enlightenment (Ilyenkov, 1960, p. 39). Concepts revealed essence and these unfolded through a system of definitions expressing separate moments of this essence, which were then linked through logical connection. In sum, “the concrete is in the final analysis interpreted as the product of thought” (Ilyenkov, 1960, p. 28). As such, concepts divorced from concrete experience can be weaponized in the hands of subjects, who can impose any meaning they wish.

The primordial property of thinking as a divine gift and the concrete as a product of thought is foundational to idealism (Ilyenkov, 1960, p. 28). The mind participates in thinking and discovering reality, manifested in the undifferentiated infinite and differentiated finite realms, with the former taking the latter as its content.

Finitude consists therefore in this, that what something is in itself or in accordance with its concept is one phenomena or exists in one way, while what it is for itself is a different phenomena or exists in another way. (Hegel, 1967, p. 25)

For example, the infinite and abstract free will remains purely negative unless it takes an object for itself. Only in choosing or grasping something physically is the free will particularized and present in this possession, “and therefore my will is recognizable in it” (Hegel, 1967, p. 46).

However, when the will is arbitrarily exercised in this way, the inevitable result is a misalignment between the infinite and the finite, preventing the will from becoming *for* itself what it is *in* itself. This misalignment will persist until the will takes freedom (itself) as its object, making explicit what it already is implicitly, or willing the infinite free will (Hegel, 1967, pp. 38-41,60).

It first puts itself in the opposition between implicit universal will and the single explicitly independent will; and then, through the supersession of this opposition, it determines itself in its existence as a will, so that it is free...for itself. (Hegel, 1967, p. 74)

The objective is to strive toward the actualization of potentialities by seeking satisfaction in that which is aligned with the universal, resulting in an *infinite subjectivity*. The subordination of the concrete to the abstract is at the root of Hegelian thought and Marx targeted this as a form of mystification (Ilyenkov, 1960, p. 58). “This imaginary rising above the world is the ideological expression of the impotence of philosophers in the face of the world” (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 401). The tendency to rely on abstractions rests in projective activity, because the most general abstractions appear when confronted with the highest concrete development, when a single feature appears to be common to all and is magically transformed into essence (Marx, 1998, p. 19; Marx & Engels, 1998, pp. 323-333). This is like the imaginative activity of consciousness when confronted with rich accumulations of intelligence in complex society, but Marx shifts away from dependence on the abstract. Rather than resorting to an immense construction of a “realm of spirits”, Marx argues that facts and things should be examined in their overall cohesion and concrete relations (Marx & Engels, 1998, pp. 156-157, 160-161; Ilyenkov, 1960, p. 61). The only bridge leading from the abstract to the concrete and back again is the practical activity involving objects or the objective being of things and persons (Ilyenkov, 1960, p. 53). Here, the abstract is subordinated to the concrete through activity. In this way, Marx rejects traditional philosophy that granted thought independence and its own content, as if life could be solved through terms and language (Ilyenkov, 1960, p. 54). Unity is observed in the *real* connections and interactions of diverse phenomena within a system, not through abstract likeness or evolving cognition, but in their oppositional and concrete form (Ilyenkov, 1960, pp. 32-34). To resolve

the problem of the “incompetence of consciousness”, Marx suggests empiricism, or thought rooted in the concrete (Durkheim, 1951, pp. 311-312).

Although Marx provides a potential link between the object and subject through praxis, he does not depart from a materialist framework, or the ‘orthodox consensus’ that Giddens described (Giddens, 1984, pp. xv-xvi,xxviii,1). As such, the actor remains subject to necessary conditions of material laws and forces within a homogeneous or mono-causal doctrine, which includes an irrational impulse. Again, Marx may have exchanged the mystified objects of idealism for another, or the necessity of an infinite and guiding material universe. But what if the mono-causal doctrine is exchanged for a multi-causal framework, where structural forces interact with subjective meaning? In this context, theorists describe ‘context bound’ and ‘dynamic’ constellations of culture, while other guiding forces appear as objective. For example, Weber attempts to link ideological phenomena with material interests, but he posits multiple systems that are functionally related to each other and to the economic order. Although society remains subject to lawful regularity within a causative framework, Weber places greater emphasis on complex relations and psychic reactions to the physical world (Weber, 1946, pp. 48, 60-62). Therefore, to understand the emergence of the capitalist spirit in the West, he points to the mental and spiritual peculiarities that appeared during the Reformation. These new forms of self-regulated conduct, spanning public and private life, aligned the “most intensive forms of piety” with “extraordinary capitalist business sense” in the individual (Weber, 2003, pp. 36-37,39-40,43). While he frames religion as a fictive phenomenon, it is nonetheless causative and contributes ascetic and pneumatic principles essential to unchecked accumulation (Weber, 1946, p. 321; Weber, 2003, p. 145). Therefore, multiple historical motives can have far reaching and unintended effects on practical life, just as the latter may influence motives (Weber, 1946, pp.

286-287). Weber embeds this process in his concept of *sublimation*, where the *ideal type* or a *rational* ingredient in one phenomenon appears to jump species. For example, magic appears to be separate from religion and each possess stylistic peculiarities, but they share a fundamental orientation to the world and should “not be set apart from the range of everyday purposive conduct” (Weber, 1963, p. 1). Both share a rationality, meaning that religion will sublimate ritual and knowledge will sublimate ethics, “adapting them to the customs of life” (Weber, 1946, pp. 330,327-328; Weber, 1963, pp. 8,69). It is not that religion marks a fundamental departure from magic, but it rationalizes the orgy and maintains a discourse that is oriented to something actual in the world (Weber, 1946, pp. 278,281). Likewise, this rationalistic form will reach its “formalistic perfection” in culture, appearing as an “immense cosmos” and “unalterable order” that educates and selects the subjects it needs “though a process of economic survival of the fittest” (Weber, 2003, pp. 25,54-55,70,73,181). Although Weber outlines complex “types, forms, and directions” that delineate what was is uniquely Western, the religious ritual still corresponds to the bureaucratic realm and bestows providential blessing upon it (Weber, 2003, pp. 20,159-160,163; Weber, 1946, p. 283). In these ways, Weber outlines complex alignments and interactions between the subject’s orientation to the world and the prevailing structures, blurring the lines between object and subject. But beneath this interaction is a *process* of rationalization that aligns, sublimates, and perfects. Rather than trying to explain an irrational religious impulse within a naturalistic framework, the religious are equally engaged in rationalization, as the higher and objective impulse.

Zilberman provided an independent case of these rational alignments in an eastern context by exploring the contribution of Eastern Orthodoxy to Russian political and social life, or its “material continuity” beyond the religious sphere proper (Zilberman, 1977, pp. 343,345). In

the Russian context, the rationality of the Old Believers⁴⁹ helped to moderate a communist obsession (i.e., pro-accumulation), but the same rationality contributed to the ultimate victory of



Figure 27 - Putin on horseback (ABC News, 2018)

political power (i.e., pro-authoritarian) over economy (Zilberman, 1977, p. 350). The survival of religious substance in extra-religious social activity is also evident through the correspondence between Soviet communism and Byzantine-Russian Orthodoxy (Zilberman, 1977, pp. 344,354). In these ways, Russia exists as a type of capitalist development and a transformed religious consciousness or retained ritual (Zilberman, 1977, p. 346). This correspondence does not rest on the reduction of religious forms in the negative sense, where a social or economic form fills the vacuum left by retreating religion, but on a positive religious stimulus that produces a *material continuity* between religious and secular counterparts (Zilberman, 1977, p. 345). Unlike the passive mysticism of the West,⁵⁰ the Eastern mystic focused on self-activation, involving action in relation to real events. This activity requires a *special subject* that had a “strong and even portly constitution”, like a religious “sportsman” (Zilberman, 1977, pp. 370-373) (Figure 27 - Putin on horseback (ABC News, 2018)). The spiritual hero is fundamentally opposed to esthetic spectatorship, but dynamically plans for and achieves holiness *through* activity, “which means to be co-energetic with God” or an apotheosis (Zilberman, 1977,

⁴⁹ Old Believers are Eastern Orthodox Christians who maintained practices as they were before reforms in the mid-17th Century, which instituted the state church and condemned the ‘old’ practices.

⁵⁰ Zilberman argues that passivity in relation to the objective world produces a fascination with science in the West that could never be duplicated in Russia (Zilberman, 1978, pp. 302-304,314).

pp. 383-384,386). Collaboration with God brings this victory and immunizes the actor against judgement, which persists only if the separation between spiritual and material realms is maintained (Zilberman, 1977, p. 399).⁵¹ This shifts focus away from a future glory to the present, because “only the present is real....(and) deserves our love” (Zilberman, 1977, p. 399). This also represents a shift from personalized Christocentrism in the West to a cosmocratic form in Eastern Orthodoxy that would be foundational for Communist statism and appropriate to a Russian society already “pregnant with resentment and revolt” (Zilberman, 1977, p. 410; Zilberman, 1978, p. 277). Within this ideological framework, all anomalies within Russian society could be functionalized if they did not challenge political power in its absolutist form (Zilberman, 1978, pp. 297-298,351).

In these ways, Zilberman and Weber represent a transitional theoretical form, moving away from orthodox and homogeneous doctrines by integrating psychical and regional phenomena in a multi-causal order. An idea is subjectively posited, objectified, and blended with other elements to create these localized forms and types. As Zilberman observed, continuities and alignments explain the victory of *political power* in Russia, just as Protestantism contributed principles necessary for *unchecked accumulation*. In both cases, work is delegated, but the object is less clear in their models. Kalberg, in examining the concept of rationality within Weber, documented its complexity but also its universality in Weber’s theory (*Figure 28 - Kalberg's summary of Weber's concept of rationality*). The *rational* appears to be a constant historical force in Weber’s thought and appears mystified, or what Kalberg describes as a universal feature of social life (Kalberg, 1980, pp. 1146-1148). Rationality appears in

⁵¹ Zilberman also notes that cooperation is the essence of trinitarian action (Zilberman, 1977, p. 390).

Zilberman’s analysis as well and likely informs the *material continuity* of movements as they

Type of Rationality	Mental Process	Relation to Action	Reference for mental processes
Theoretical	Various abstract procedures	Indirect	Values or purely theoretical problems
Practical	Means-end calculation	Direct	Interests
Formal	Means-end calculation	Direct	Rules, laws, regulations
Substantive	Subordination of realities to values	Direct	Values

Figure 28 - Kalberg's summary of Weber's concept of rationality

interact and blend.

As I noted earlier,

these authors deploy

organic metaphors

to signal and

elucidate this

process, as *genetic*

units or sets of relations (Weber, 2003, pp. 47-48,51-52,91; Zilberman, 1988, p. 6). In both, the imperialism of the subject also increases as an active contributor to the development of cultural forms, but under the guidance of rational forces.

Hermeneutical and phenomenological traditions often maintain that natural and social worlds are discrepant, further asserting the imperialism of the subject and rejecting causal or genetic hypotheses (Giddens, 1984, p. 1; Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 20). In their generative phenomenology, Berger & Luckmann argue that *reality* is the quality of any phenomena that gives it independence from our own volition, and *knowledge* is the certainty that the phenomena is real (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 1). Based on this, they theorize that an objective reality and the knowledge of it are generated, transmitted, and maintained through social construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 3). In short, our sociality is the foundation of knowledge and the source of the *plausibility structures* that support our world. Unlike the historical development of the sociology of knowledge, which sought to understand intellectual history on a theoretical level, Berger & Luckmann develop their sociology empirically by examining the production of reality in “everyday life” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, pp. 13,15). Furthermore, this production

is founded on a dialectic process that consists of three, non-sequential moments (Berger P. L., 1972, p. 155; Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 129). *Externalization* is the biologically rooted and therefore objective production of order and stability through the social outpouring of physical and mental activity, the product of which achieves a character *sui generis* (Berger P. L., 1972, pp. 155,158; Berger & Luckmann, 1967, pp. 51-52). *Objectivation* is the process by which externalized products attain objectivity and are apprehended as if they were immutable things (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, pp. 60,89; Berger P. L., 1972, p. 159). Finally, *internalization* is the process of *primary* and *secondary socialization* that results in the reappropriation of reality into the subjective consciousness (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 130; Berger P. L., 1972, p. 163). Therefore, “society is a human product, society is an objective reality, man is a social product” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 61).

Berger & Luckman argue that the reality of everyday life is that the world appears through objects that are ordered and patterned (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, pp. 19, 21). Although the individual consciousness can move between *spheres* of reality (e.g., *finite provinces of meaning*, or *enclaves*), only the reality of *everyday life* appears urgent and massive, a reality *par excellence* (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 20). This primary reality is further segmented into *zones*, or those realities that are physically proximate in the ‘here and now’ versus those that are remote. More importantly, while one zone may be proximate to me but remote to another, there is a world in common where my immediate reality intersects with those of others both spatially and temporally (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 22). Interaction and communication become inevitable, making reality an *intersubjective* production that is *real because it appears real* to the collective (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, pp. 23,26-27). The irony of this manufacturing activity is that its origins are forgotten, appearing as an immutability and

alienated to “something other than a human product” that exerts force back upon the producer in consciousness (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 61). Therefore, the subject and inter-subjectivity is primary, but the consciousness remains problematic by falsely and masochistically positing non-human facticities (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 86). “It expresses a very basic psychological constellation...this is the attitude of masochism...it transforms the self into nothingness, the other into absolute reality” (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 55-56).⁵² These external objectivities or realities have no independence and are therefore mythical, persisting only through subjectively constructed and supported objects. In this framework, the subject becomes objective through an intersubjectivity that produces and frames the social world, thereby inverting the classical vision of the object and subject. Berger still locates the origin of this intersubjective power in the natural world, but it also exists apart from it as a uniquely human capacity. Again, this approach to the subject signals a domain distinct from the material one, or an infinite subjectivity, and a potential mystification in his model. Moreover, an emphasis on subjective forces does not resolve the problem of mystification or a pathway for transcending a flawed consciousness. In fact, multiple enclaves of meaning may simply pit one consciousness against another.

The intersubjective production of reality may help to explain how objectivities are constructed and internalized, just as complex multi-causal systems can show how ideas graft onto daily life, but these can also undermine the stability of mono-causal doctrines. Because intersubjective productions are guided by the interactions of the group, the loss of homogeneity produces *enclaves* whose realities may be in conflict. This conflict only increases when each

⁵² In Berger’s description of mimetic reiterations (roles), he connects the sacred to whatever functions as an ultimate reality, or an externalized point of reference that imposes behaviour (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 37-39). “One of the essential qualities of the sacred...is otherness...awe...numinous dread, of the adoration of what totally transcends all dimensions” (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 87).

enclave holds to a different object, and then mystifies it and wields it over another. For example, in Du Bois' description of race relations in the South, the shadow of a "veil" structures "a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world" (Du Bois, 1903, pp. 2,30,32). Morrison similarly argues that realities deploy images of the opposite as a useful receptacle.

All of these self-contradictory features of the self... without an alienated Africanism, whiteness alone is mute, meaningless, unfathomable, pointless, frozen, veiled, curtailed, dreaded, senseless, implacable. (Morrison, 1992, pp. 59,73)

The effects of multiple and independent realities resemble the mechanism of secrecy that Simmel articulated through secret societies, which secures another world alongside the immediate reality, creating feelings of belonging and exclusion (Simmel, 1955, pp. 30-31). Although Simmel and Berger may disagree about the intentions behind the produced reality, they concur that invisibility enhances perceptions of unlimited power and security, accentuates value and feelings of possession, while fostering fantasy and seduction among those who are excluded (Simmel, 1955, pp. 32-33,35,71). Therefore, the formation of elites and the aristocracy-building motive may depend on these exclusive realities to grow a perception of what is special and separate. Just enough exclusivity can support this imaginarium and blind obedience to a principle, while too much will foster enmity, and too little will cripple it (Simmel, 1955, pp. 28,30,61,71). Regardless, Simmel argues that "secrecy is a universal sociological form, which, as such, has nothing to do with the moral valuations of its content" (Simmel, 1955, p. 32). In these ways, intersubjectively produced realities can increase fragmentation because a common anchor is lacking.

Symbolic Interactionist perspectives blend the dynamic and intersubjective construction of reality with structural limitations. Blumer assumes that people act based on meaning, which is

derived from social interaction and our interpretative capacity. He opposes the *realist* position that objects hold intrinsic meaning and suggests that the object becomes substantive through the psychical accretion in the subject (Blumer, 1998, pp. 2-4). However, reality is also not the mere product of imagery and conception because the empirical world *talks back* to us and retains “its obdurate character”, which means that the subject engages in a testing process to validate perceptions (Blumer, 1998, p. 22). This mixture appears in Goffman as well. If the reader considers his concepts of impression management and the *front* that interactants deploy, it may appear that Goffman is presenting the *real* as belonging to the realm of “make believe” (Goffman, 1974, pp. 562,565,573). However, the images present to others are not invented, but *discovered* as representations, or *used* equipment. Because these fronts are collective representations, they are selected by the performer, duplicated, and remixed as part of the dramatization (Goffman, 1959, pp. 28,30). As such, the face we present is really a *social face*, “on loan...from society” and a portion of the “collective mana” (Goffman, 1967, pp. 10,47). Moreover, the rules of interaction are the *normative regulations* that transcend situated activity, and are *merely situated* for the purpose of the occasion, and the mode through which the participant can safely pursue objectives (Goffman, 1963, pp. 8,21-22). The interrelationship between structural code and our adaptation to situated rules, scripts, and roles becomes highly complex, laden with interpretation and transcription (Goffman, 1974, pp. 44-45). The codified ritual of interaction presses us into creating a nomic and safe environment, within which we act “a little like agents” (Goffman, 1974, pp. 53,150-151; Goffman, 1969, p. 81). “The terms ‘real’, ‘actual’, and ‘literal’ ought merely to be taken to imply that the activity under consideration is no more transformed than is felt to be usual and typical for such doings” (Goffman, 1974, p. 47). Uniquely, Goffman is one of the few who treats time-space relations as fundamental to the

reproduction of social life, including his emphasis on trust, tact, routinization, and reflexive monitoring during the flux of localized encounters (Giddens, 1984, pp. xxiv-xxv,36). The subject is creative, but also limited by an objective and nomic order that appears unconstructed, potentially mystified, but also reproduced through situated activity.

Giddens and Bhaskar also contemplate subjective activity as reproducing structural constraint, through *structuration* and *transformational* models respectively (Figure 29 -

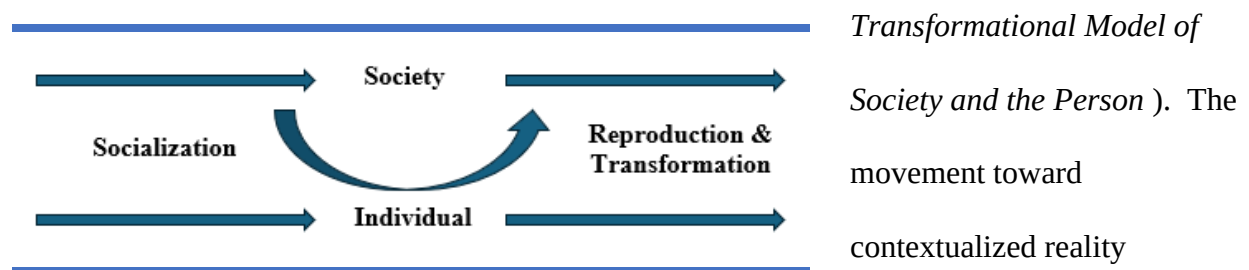


Figure 29 - Transformational Model of Society and the Person (Bhaskar, 1998, p. 36)

increasingly incorporates the subject, action, and meaning as the centre of experience, with objectivated reality at a distance but never abandoned. Subjects act but also *reenact* social objects. As Giddens observes:

I acknowledge the call for a decentring of the subject and regard this as basic to structuration. But I do not accept that this implies the evaporation of subjectivity into an empty universe of signs. Rather, social practices, biting into space and time, are considered to be at the root of the constitution of both subject and social object. (Giddens, 1984, p. xxii)

Only *contextualized* activity renders these realities proximate, but these ‘realities’ remain social productions in these models. However, like Goffman, these models also signal a *nomie* order, or stabilizing predisposition beneath these constructed structures.

But what if the structural limitation is anomic? For example, Foucault grants importance to the social and historical lines between enclosure and exposure, confinement and display, in the production of reality (Giddens, 1984, p. xxvi). Power-sovereignty no longer applies within a concrete and historical framework, nor is the law a model and code of power. Rather, Foucault

proposes a different reality, without institutions, rulers, laws, or general system of domination (Foucault, 1990, pp. 90-93). Conceived as an independent and *polyvalent strategy*, the use of *power* and the deployment of its techniques should be evident in every age, across various institutions and movements, and regardless of claims that the exercise of power has been disavowed (Foucault, 1977, pp. 205-207). This multiplicity of *force relations* constitutes their own organization and process of continuous struggle and confrontation, which transforms, strengthens, or reverses the relation (Foucault, 1990, pp. 90-93). Foucault also demonstrates that the techniques of power are fundamentally productive in nature. It may pressure and seek to master, but it only maintains this capability through the production of knowledge and reality (Foucault, 1977, p. 194).

Power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who ‘do not have it’, it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them, it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them. (Foucault, 1977, p. 27)

The Enlightenment, which introduced certain liberties, also developed disciplines and a ruthless authoritarian search for truth. This production of knowledge is so entrenched in the techniques of power that these concepts become synonymous, “power and knowledge directly imply one another” (Foucault, 1977, p. 27). This intellectual growth and the establishment of centralized bodies of codified knowledge were realized through the refinement these power relations.

“These sciences, which have so delighted our ‘humanity’ for over a century, have their technical matrix in the petty, malicious minutiae of the disciplines and their investigations” (Foucault, 1977, p. 226). As a polyvalent and knowledge producing strategy, power operates within a discourse that moves beyond imperatives and merely repressive strategies (Foucault, 1990, pp. 5-6). In fact, Foucault argues that this repressive hypothesis is ahistorical, nor can power be

effective unless it *masks* a substantial part of itself (Foucault, 1990, pp. 10,83-86). Therefore, secrecy is indispensable to its operation and renders it benign as a “as a pure limit set on freedom...the general form of its acceptability” (Foucault, 1990, p. 86). Because these relations may shift or become unstable, no power, including that embodied by a sovereign, is absolute, despite appearances to the contrary. Foucault abandons orthodox structural forces and reifies power as the “great anonymous” and unconstructed strategic reality that contributes to the plasticity of society (Foucault, 1990, pp. 94-95).

Plasticity seems to imperialize the subject to its maximum limit, or the subject without structural limits of any kind. While existentialism divided reality in two and posited an infinite subjectivity over an absurd material world, postmodernism discards the material and objective half altogether. In this vein, Lyotard questions the very structures that support the knowledge of objectivities. Truth, or the “grand narratives of legitimation – the life of the spirit and/or the emancipation of humanity...are already no longer the principle driving force behind interest in acquiring knowledge” (Lyotard, 1979, p. 51). Knowledge itself is under scrutiny, but also the metanarratives of legitimization and ontological pretension that naturalizes truth (Lyotard, 1979, p. 37; Asad, 2003, pp. 73-74). Moreover, a high price is paid because of “the whole and the one”, as consensus does violence to heterogeneity, just as reason introduces new fantasies and transcendentalizations (Asad, 2003, p. 36; Lyotard, 1979, pp. xxv,82). Baudrillard identifies this violence as proof through negation, where everything is transformed into its opposite in order to condemn it, thereby affirming itself (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 19). The forms we perceive are only copies of a non-existent original, or copies upon copies of something invented (Baudrillard, 1981, pp. 45,47). Therefore, society does not fit within a Newtonian anthropology or coherent system, nor is there infinite subjectivity within structural limits, but only the “pragmatics of

language particles” where “determinism itself is a type of functioning that is itself determined” (Lyotard, 1979, pp. xxiv,59). Reality is made, moment by moment, and *everything* fits because the subject need not be concerned about fitting into a broader nomic order. This re-examination of metanarratives and the orthodox consensus marks another theoretical transition to the full contextualization of reality where only subjectivity remains.

This challenge to objective forces or entities is formalized in deconstruction and the Strong Programme,⁵³ which seeks to undermine grand narratives and traditional ontological hierarchies. If what is *inherent* with meaning is revealed to be constructed, or a term occupies both fields of the binary formula, traditional hierarchies may be destabilized, reversed, and even displaced. Deconstruction assumes that discourse, meaning, and readings are historically produced through a process of *contextualization*, *decontextualization*, and *recontextualization*. If history is polyvocal, meaning is contextual, and context is infinite, then no description is exhaustive or masterable (Culler, 1982, pp. 122-123,128-129). Likewise, David Bloor argues that *all* knowledge is socially constructed and does not form spontaneously, nor is it a product of revelation. Logically, the notion of truth and falsity is contextualized and reduced to mean “how the world stands” and the “schema with which we think” at a particular time (Bloor, 1991, pp. 5,7,41). A *symmetrical* sociology of knowledge challenges the notion that truth rests on asocial (unconstructed) causes by exposing its social (constructed) origins. According to Bloor, resistance to a symmetrical examination comes through imagery, or *mystified* elements that appear hidden from causal examination and immune to its effects (Bloor, 1991, pp. 46-47).

⁵³ The Strong Programme in the sociology of knowledge argues that true and false beliefs are both produced on the basis of social and personal interests, not facts per se. Prominent supporters include Sociologists David Bloor, Harry Collins, and Donald MacKenzie.

The threat posed by the sociology of knowledge is precisely this: it appears to reverse or interfere with the outward flow of energy and inspiration which derives from contact with the basic truths and principles of science and methodology. Science is sacred, so it must be kept apart. (Bloor, 1991, p. 49)

If an objective or ultimate reality exists, it remains hidden or missing. The work of the sociologist is not to supply reality, but to “invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented”, like a work of art (Lyotard, 1979, pp. 78,81). Therefore, postmodern knowledge refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces tolerance for the incommensurable, relying on the reality of invention over the homology of experts (Lyotard, 1979, p. xxv). Lyotard argues that the loss of metanarratives does not reduce people to barbarity but equips them with the knowledge that legitimation springs from linguistic practice and interaction (Lyotard, 1979, p. 41). What develops from this model is a conceptualization of language as the ultimate arbiter of reality in a contested field, usually expressed through metaphors of *games*, *play*, and *war*. Words are selected, politicized, and deployed in a multi-vocal space with a view to control narratives (Tolmach-Lakoff, 2000, p. 20). “The answer is: Let us wage war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name” (Lyotard, 1979, p. 82).⁵⁴ Interestingly, references to games within postmodern discourse parallels Berger’s arguments from play and humor, which signal a temporary and organized suspension of the serious world in favor of a bracketed reality. In doing so, participants signal another transcendent reality apart from the prevailing one (*Figure 5 - Berger's Signals of Transcendence*). In this light, the notion of play may be less of a denial than a suspension of reality.

⁵⁴ Post-modern theory applied to economics takes the form of Local Economic Development, which attempts to remedy problems of *psychic scarcity* through decentralization and meaningful self-determination in labour. This is the localization and invention of new economic relations (Benello, 1992).

In summary, the constitution of subjects and objects can function as signals of mystification in social theory, where one or the other is posited as an opaque and independent reality. Giddens correctly observes that in each theoretical tradition, a scholar's emphasis on subjects or objects is accompanied by blindness toward the other's ontological claims. "For those schools of thought which tend towards naturalism subjectivity has been regarded as something of mystery...for hermeneutics it is the world of nature which is opaque" (Giddens, 1984, p. 2). This produces a circular problem that oscillates between a) a flawed consciousness or b) a society perceived as the "plastic creation of human subjects" (Giddens, 1984, p. 26). For naturalists like Durkheim, subjectivity remains a flawed product of an objective reality, while nature is opaque for the hermeneutician and phenomenologists like Berger, as a realm governed by impersonal relations and necessity. Blended models, like structuration, attempt to "put an end to each of these empire-building endeavors" through an ordered and recursive universe that is *both* a field for expression and sustained by social actors (Giddens, 1984, pp. xviii,2). Subjective creativity collaborates with structure, which is the medium *and* outcome of the practices they organize, existing in memory and instantiated in practice (Giddens, 1984, pp. 25-26). The social fixity or physical milieux of life manifests as routinized behaviour to facilitate institutional reproduction, where agents and structure operate within a dialectic or duality rather than a dualism (Giddens, 1984, pp. xxv,xxiii,25-26). However, Giddens still maintains that structures are not externalities, but outcomes of bounded, sometimes unintentional, and knowledgeable activity that produces history (Giddens, 1984, pp. 25-27). Like Berger & Luckmann's typifications or the ritualization of interaction in Goffman, Giddens maintains a subjectively driven nomos, or the "ontological security" of daily life (Giddens, 1984, p. xxiii). In this way, blended models tend to posit other guiding and nomic *forces*, like rationalization, that guide

constructive activity. This nomos or inherent elevation of security in Giddens, like the *argument from order* as one of Berger's signals of transcendence, appears sacred and signals mystification in these models. Eventually, the object recedes entirely through post-modernism, and the subject occupies the centre of reality and creatively generates meanings in vacuity. Here, a different type of universe is envisioned that lacks any objectivity, leaving the fluidity of power relations and the subject in a state of struggle.

Telos, Rationality, and the Nomos

To this point, I have outlined how the use of metaphor and the constitution of subjects and objects in social theory signal other and obscured realities, or the structure of mystification. These features of theoretical language will resurface in the coming section that explores the signals of teleology, rationality and the nomos. Teleology within social theory speaks to humanity's purpose and direction, instructing subjects what to do in relation to this purpose, and therefore roughly aligning with the delegation of work and the effects of mystification. In a classical context, our telos is closely aligned with social progression or the stages that these theorists described. The solution to religious projection was a *progressive* (evolutionary) rationality, culminating in the scientific mind. The former is associated with enslavement to wishful and senseless imagination, while the mature mind is presumed to be intellectual, serious, and noble. Likewise, this culmination aligns society with its true nature and purpose, or a coming nomos. These ideas developed in the context of the Classical Liberalism that reigned in the 19th and early 20th century, "marked by a profound confidence in the rationality and perfectibility of man...the progressive course of man's history" (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 53). Embedded as a cultural value over time, we now comfortably refer to ourselves as a

‘scientifically minded’ people living in a scientific age (Midgley, 1992, pp. 3,133,157-170,182).

David Martin traced the persistence of progressive rationalization in classical theory, primarily through Weber, Comte, and Marx, where religion is displaced as a “fundamental unreality”.

An increasing emphasis over time on strictly mundane objectives, and the universal triumph of the positive method, not merely as a means for achieving these mundane objectives but as a universal state of mind – a new social ethos. (Martin, 1966, p. 355)

Rationality as the remedy becomes the womb from which new eschatologies⁵⁵ are born, leading even the most sober and scientific perspectives to postulate new and fantastical visions of the future (Midgley, 1992, pp. 142,184).

However, while a presumed direction is clear, defining rationality remains problematic. Kippenberg observes that debates in the late 19th Century did not dispute the alignment of rationality with non-scientific thought, but the reasonable limits of rational thought (Kippenberg, 2002, pp. 60-62). Rationality was also attributed to philosophers, scientists, and theologians alike during the Enlightenment, and only the narrowest usage of the term excluded experience, emotion, and belief. Likewise, other theorists note that rationality was not necessarily descriptive of particular methods and techniques, but more so a general resistance to error and/or a critical posture of unbelief (Midgley, 1992, pp. 133-134; Richter, 2006, p. 27). These fluid definitions of rationality mean that it can describe the specific methods of science, or mere soberness and opposition to silliness. This variance leads Richter to conclude that it is “almost impossible to find a general definition of this term” (Richter, 2006, pp. 24-35). Nonetheless, I

⁵⁵ Eschatology (ἔσχατος) refers to an account of the last or final stages, the death of the current form, and/or the culmination of events.

will explore the development of progressive rationality as theorists use it, which appears as a cosmology, productive force, and a posture, or emotive state.

Cosmos and Rationality

First, in a classical context, rationality appears as a cosmological property and ontological claim insofar as the foundation of celestial mechanics and the general harmony of the universe became a necessary premise for all scientific and rational inquiry (Odom, 1966, pp. 536,540; Robinson, 2007, pp. 615-616). For Feuerbach and Durkheim, the “natural is...rational” and the universe is imbued with this quality as an absolute principle that germinates the mind (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 33-35, 220; Durkheim, 1995, pp. 2,16,24). A rational cosmos is expressed through cause and effect, which only the scientific mind grasps to achieve objectives. Therefore, rationality is bound to the principle of determinism that “only a few minds” understand, but which holds the potential for explaining all natural phenomena, including the mysteries of human and social behaviour (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 102,114; Durkheim, 1995, pp. 25-26; Durkheim, 1982, p. 33). If scientific inquiry uniquely embodies rationality and this capacity is supplied through nature, it appears that nature has supplied the tools for its necessary and inevitable discovery. However, because classical theorists held that our understanding of causal relationships emerges only within recent history, they also held that nature doles out rationality in stages. For Comte and Feuerbach, this culminates in the *social physics* of the scientific phase or the rational redemption of the *second movement* respectively (Comte, 2000, pp. 77-84; Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 4-5,29).⁵⁶ Durkheim held that primitive forms and representations contain a rational impulse in response to a genuine reality, but these are flawed and unable to match the

⁵⁶ The *first movement* was the religious alienation of humanity’s infinite qualities to a supernatural ‘other’.

factual conclusions of science (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 25,273,420; Durkheim, 1982, p. 143).

Likewise, Marx argued that the dominion of capital was “partly concealed” within ancient and transitional forms but culminates in modern industry. Within these periods of “everlasting uncertainty and agitation” exist the weapons that hasten their death, or a latent rationality, calling forth an army at a “decisive hour” of rational revolutionary practice (Marx & Engels, 1848, pp. 16,19-20; Marx, 1967, p. 428; Marx & Engels, 1998, pp. 570-571). Labour in different parts of the world may attain this realization sooner than others, but the progression remains a mathematical certainty (Marx, 1967, p. 327; Marx & Engels, 1848, pp. 26-27,34). Within a multi-causal framework, Weber acknowledged that the modern Western age has progressed largely toward practical and formal rationalization. This movement enshrines the *means-end* calculations oriented to the world in rules, laws, and regulations that culminate in *bureaucratic* domination (Kalberg, 1980, pp. 1155,1158). Decisions become increasingly systematic and fixed, purged of their arbitrary, expressive, and subjective nature (Weber, 1946, pp. 155,207,245; Weber, 2012, pp. 122,185).

So prevalent are these developmental claims among classical theorists that Simmel attributes them to an innate condition of the mind. He argued that we tend to discriminate stages in these ways and bestow a *telos*, articulating periods “by means of such accents” and interpreting them as “domination and submission, or preparation and fulfillment, or transitory and definitive states” (Simmel, 1955, p. 108).

From a simple masquerade to the mask, from a 'role' to a 'person', to a name, to an individual; from the latter to a being possessing metaphysical and moral value; from a moral consciousness to a sacred being; from the latter to a fundamental form of thought and action - the course is accomplished. (Mauss, 1985, p. 22)

The problem with rooting rationality in a natural and progressive order is that previous generations are infantilized and engaged in a fool's errand. Barnes and Caplan maintain that every event in the universe occurs within a "network of natural causes" that is penetrable only through the *recent* and privileged production of rational examination (Barnes, 1997, pp. 380,384; Caplan, 2001, p. 16). This means that the historic ignorance and misunderstood causes equates to something *irrational*. Or, through an intersubjective lens, Berger held that civilization, naturally derived, is moving toward a de-alienated consciousness and the rational standpoint. In this case, rationality is the realization that we are *co-producers* of our world, possessing the pre-requisite and growing capacity for complex thought and goal orientation (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 67-68,85,92). The pre-modern mind was an alienated consciousness that perceived itself not as *producer* but as the *product* of the world, thereby hampering complex planning and development. In these ways, developmental schemas attempt to explain how previous stages produce a present or coming perfection, leading to a rationality that was *partially* revealed in the past, or what Günter Thomas described as the "rightly wrong" conception (Thomas, 2006, p. 103).

Alternatively, rationality can be separated from a naturalistic worldview and reconceptualized as a contextual response. Weber's complex model of rationality is progressive but allows for a "radical perspectivism" within *substantive* and *theoretical* forms of rational thought. The former implies a configuration of values or point of reference that establishes a direction for rationalization and its validity. The latter includes logical thought, induction, and deduction, developed into an internally consistent worldview to provide exhaustive explanations (Kalberg, 1980, pp. 1152-1157). From this perspective, people from vastly different spheres of life can defend their own postulates as *rational*, and those of others as irrational, subject to their

standpoint. Applying a more universalist perspective, Malinowski asserts that even primitive peoples applied a “scientific attitude” because they possessed expertise and detailed knowledge in specific areas, like fishing, agriculture, manufacturing, transportation, and trade (Malinowski, 1948, pp. 21,28,35-36). “They have, in fact, a whole system of principles of sailing, embodied in a complex and rich terminology, traditionally handed on and obeyed as rationally and consistently as is modern science by modern sailors” (Malinowski, 1948, p. 32). In this way, Malinowski disassociates rationality from progressive models and roots this activity to the human condition, as naturally present and unstaged. Rationality becomes a universality, though it may be applied differently and with varying effect in relation to the environment. Similarly, Lévi-Strauss takes this approach to his analysis of myth, which contains logical coherence and complex properties, maintaining a qualitative equivalence with science (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 428). “The kind of logic which is used by mythical thought is as rigorous as that of modern science...the difference lies not in the quality of the intellectual process, but in the nature of the things to which it is applied” (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 444).

This marks a transition from a cosmological and progressive (staged) conceptualization of rationality to a that of a merely situated type, or the reasonable activity of actors in response to the environment and their respective bodies of knowledge. Durkheim and Berger appear to accept this moderated form by recognizing that religion “does not differ in nature from...science” and that “intermediate theodicies” foster rational thought (Durkheim, 1995, p. 431; Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 60-70,112). Actors who behave rationally merely search for causes, patterns, taxonomies, complexities, and so on, meaning that it is difficult or impossible to restrict rationalism to a particular epoch (Durkheim, 1995, p. 431; Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 60-70,112). This leads authors like Otto to suggest that belief in the miraculous is entirely rational if the

absolute belief in the causal nexus is rejected (Otto, 1923, p. 3). Barnes ultimately applies a similar principle within his theory, where the causal explanations of mythopoeic traditions were rational because their conclusions were simply *plausible* in the circumstances (Barnes, 1997, pp. 380-381). Therefore, rationality is not inextricably linked to a stage of development, but merely describes a subject's reasonable and situated response to the environment. The rational actor is not necessarily scientific, but engages in classifications, investigates complex phenomena, posits coherence, and so on. A situated rational actor discards the progressive or staged rationality outlined above but retains the *rational* as principle or natural characteristic of humanity. In short, theorists maintain that we are endowed with rational disposition that is *either* always present *or* progressively revealed in stages. But is the natural world rational at all? As I discussed earlier, nature conveys varied meaning, which suggests that rationality as a guiding principle may be flawed. This flaw becomes especially apparent when the universe is viewed mechanistically.

The metaphor of mechanization was rooted in the “innumerable circular motions or whirlpools in the continuous fluid of the universe”, which are embedded in Cartesian physics (Williams, 1978, p. 254). These causal mechanisms rendered scientific work sensical and productive, but its overextension also produces incoherence and capriciousness. For example, accidental and anomalous phenomena support a measure of randomness, where the expected course of nature may be inexplicably interrupted at any moment (Midgley, 1992, p. 95; Robinson, 2007, pp. 613-614). Feuerbach and Durkheim acknowledged that the confrontation with this type of reality is oppressive, even horrifying, as a force mitigated through chance (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 155; Durkheim, 1995, p. 25). As I noted during my discussion of subjects and objects, one of the frightening consequences of strict causation is that a pre-supposed

rational universe can produce irrationality, including the religious forms in classical theory.

Either all is determined, or nothing may be expected, including the undertaking of rational scientific inquiry itself. Even if we maintain a naïve trust in a particular rational form, its uneven distribution injects an element of luck. Midgley describes the presence of chance as the “casino fantasy” or an assumed deep randomization of the cosmos, which Feuerbach also described as the *independent* and *sovereign decisions* of the universe (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 155; Midgley, 2002, pp. 101-103). But the potential for naturally occurring error becomes increasingly problematic if mechanization is simply unsupportable through observation.

It was Colin Maclaurin, one of Newton’s followers, who acknowledged that the physical universe was significantly more complex than Newton had imagined, and that the pursuit of *causes* would only yield partial results (Odom, 1966, p. 542). Likewise, in examining causality as a historical macroscopic concept, Physicist Derek Lovejoy agrees that it has become a “slippery” idea because properties of the microscopic world have not yielded strictly causal explanations, raising speculation that “quantum mechanics only predicts sets of probabilities” at best (Lovejoy, 1999-2000, p. 447). Durkheim also acknowledged that discovery was fragmentary, incomplete, and endless, which only contributes to a loss of hard or definitive conclusions (Durkheim, 1995, p. 432; Midgley, 1995, p. 173). Therefore, scientific work, including supporting theories and discovery, is in a constant state of change, contingent, and often wrought with error. “Only in patches is the order and beauty of the world directly visible. To believe in it as a whole requires faith” (Midgley, 1995, pp. 116,180,190). In these ways, if the natural world incorporates chance, irrational outcomes, or whose causal mechanisms are less rigid than imagined, can this sustain a conception of rationality as a natural and guiding principle?

For some, scientific rationalism reveals a threatening and ambiguous universe that supports ‘non-rational’ contemplation, including malaise, new mythologies, dualisms, secular soteriologies, nihilism, or physical eschatologies (Barnes, 1997, p. 385; Berger P. L., 1969, p. 124; Sire, 1988, p. 85; Midgley, 1992, p. 184). For others, this can lead to general tentativeness concerning knowledge, skepticism, and even forms of rejection and escape (Barnes, 1997, p. 385; Lovejoy, 1999-2000, pp. 433, 441). In a theoretical context, if nature fails to supply stable ground for inherent or growing rationality, theorists may still express belief in a rationalistic principle regardless, including its progression and/or necessity. Lovejoy observed that even those who believe in strict causation can irrationally reject “fatalistic determinism...since it denies dialectics and the emergence of novelty” (Lovejoy, 1999-2000, p. 436). This irrationality allowed Durkheim to acknowledge causal laws while leaving open the possibility that we can be insubordinate to them. Philosopher Guy Robinson similarly stated that the “spectre of determinism and the problem of ‘the uniformity of nature’” represent “kinks” in our thinking that do not constitute “real worries” for the scientists that apply these laws (Robinson, 2007, pp. 611-612). In other words, if rationalism cannot be derived from a mystified nature as a “secular stand-in for God”, it can remain a ‘true’ (perhaps subjectively based) force outside of this causal and naturalistic schema (Robinson, 2007, p. 607). Within theoretical development, many authors still present rationality as a guiding and necessary force that appears to be maturing, whatever its source. Moreover, they maintain an unwavering belief that this maturity brings good things, and this leads them to discuss rationality as a productive and stabilizing force.

Production and Rationality

Even if the natural world provides an unstable foundation for rationality and despite the challenges in defining the term, many theorists still maintain that it is a cosmic force. As such, it

constitutes a signal of mystification. Moreover, the inevitable advance of rationality brings us to one of its central characteristics, or rationality as a *productive* force. Even within a moderately closed universe, it seems logical to direct our work toward the material world and its manipulation. For Durkheim, this involves a clarity of understanding that reveals the true nature of things, surpassing our muddled representations (Durkheim, 1982, p. 36). The rational mind “does not pray, he only works, he transforms”, and this begins with systematic sense perception and data (Durkheim, 1982, p. 81; Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 102,165). Berger frames this orientation as our externalization in the production of the socio-cultural world (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 85, 90, 95, 113). The orientation to immediate surroundings and the testing of knowledge through scientific method provides the necessary evidence for truth, that ultimately manifests in “practical success” (Barnes, 1997, pp. 380, 385; Caplan, 2001, pp. 16-17). This “results driven” orientation continually elaborates, theoretically and bureaucratically, and produces increasingly complex and detailed explanations and products (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 60,69,88,139; Durkheim, 1982, pp. 36,67,75). In other words, rational production is work orientated to *this* material world, which is consistent with a naturalistic worldview. As explanatory power grows and a “fully naturalistic model of the universe” matures into certainty, this will eventually displace other seemingly plausible models (Barnes, 1997, p. 382; Caplan, 2001, pp. 4,13,16). In these ways, rationality is the pathway to truth and clarity.

As soon as the authority of science is established, science must be reckoned with; under pressure of need, one can go beyond science, but it is from science that one must start out. One can affirm nothing that science denies, deny nothing that science affirms, and establish nothing that does not directly or indirectly rest on principles taken from science. (Durkheim, 1995, p. 433)

Once the truth of the external world is known, actors can efficiently establish their *dominion* through growing efficiency, investment, and “progressive conquest” (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 127;

Caplan, 2001, p. 20; Durkheim, 1982, p. 46; Berger P. L., 1969, p. 68; Barnes, 1997, p. 386-387). Therefore, rationality represents an orientation to the world, with mastery as its goal.

From this perspective, rationality as a productive force assumes that irrational perspectives are unproductive because they are oriented to supernatural things. This leads Feuerbach to claim that religious groups are not oriented to this world and therefore produce no art “because they felt no need of it” in the light of an eternal (and non-material) glory (Feuerbach, 1881, p. 178). Alternatively, by arguing that the rational perspective is naturally oriented to the physical world and remains grounded, it presumably repudiates any orientation to ethereal realities. However, as we have observed, theorists can imbue nature with God-like qualities. Even a subdued glory is envisioned in the form of a nomic and unified order consistent with the essential *equilibrium* evident in nature, to which the actor gracefully submits.

There is no longer a need to pursue desperately an end which recedes as we move forward: we need only to work steadily and persistently to maintain the normal state, to reestablish it if it is disturbed, and to rediscover the conditions of normality. (Durkheim, 1982, p. 104)

For Durkheim, social evolution from mechanical to organic solidarity demonstrates this movement toward greater interdependence and stability based on a complex division of labour. Harmony is inherently connected with this progression and is embodied in the moral order, culminating in the rationalization of the collective consciousness and the unity of personalized and collective forces (Durkheim, 2014, pp. 51,102,130,202-203). The ultimate destination is the elevation of latent humanity, which achieves dominion and liberty “from physical forces (through) collective forces” (Durkheim, 1982, p. 46; Durkheim, 1995, p. 274; Durkheim, 2014, p. 265). This movement appears inevitable because organic unity increases in direct proportion to the moral and dynamic density of society. As societies grow, the organic nature of our bonds increases as interpersonal contact increases (Durkheim, 2014, p. 307). Hegel likewise imagined

the future unification of the abstract with the particular will, resulting in the good and free will in the *Idea*, “the absolute end and aim of the world” (Hegel, 1967, p. 86). Comte also traced this steady advance and the general revolution of the mind through the centuries, leading to a full comprehension of social phenomena in their *unity* (Comte, 1975, p. 84). In these various forms, the ideal of unification will resolve passing divisiveness and crises, whether in the form of reclaiming predicates alienated to God, or the restoration of productive forces to freely associated individuals (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 127,149,203,207; Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 95; Marx, 1967, p. 336). Even when cycles of revolution and reconstruction appear, as in Marx, a restoration is expected as a latency within the conflict (Marx, 1967, p. 86; Simmel, 1955, p. 101). Marx visualized “the future Communist society as a kind of return...a coming back to the state of the primitive commune, mysteriously...restored at the highest possible level of material and technological advancement” (Zilberman, 1977, p. 367). This material messianism and the emancipatory promise within “an inevitable totalizing horizon” remains a central characteristic of Marx’s legacy (Derrida, 1994, pp. 33-34,74,77).

In these ways, several theorists present a telos of a restored order or equilibrium based on rationalistic forces that properly orient the subject to this world. The force of rationality, whether rooted in the natural world or not, also leads its followers to better conditions. Themes of restoration also appear in a phenomenological context, where Berger & Luckmann connect our progressive rationality to our hermeneutical capacity, where we eventually *understand* our place as producers of the world (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 68,86). They argue that in archaic societies, people believe that they are products, expressing meanings inherent in the universe. But this is eventually displaced when we perceive ourselves as producers (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 25). The subject’s consciousness shifts from a dependence on grace to an active position,

discarding intermediaries that it previously erected between itself and the universal order (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 68,79,92,100). This productive (externalizing) capacity is an anthropological necessity because we must make a world in common because all of “human existence takes place in the context of order, direction, stability” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 51; Berger P. L., 1969, p. 4). The *nomos* becomes a transcendent ontology in this formula, driving rationalistic development and overcoming inimical forces (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 51). Even when the mind submits to chaotic instincts, or projects a symbolic universe, a *nomos* or underlying order remains the ultimate objective and is therefore compatible with an irrational and false consciousness (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, pp. 112-114). If the mind posits a generalized *other*, it is because knowledge has become extensively typified and sedimented in aggregate memory, or a common biography (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, pp. 43,53,67,69-70). This process stabilizes, even if the ‘other’ is unreal.

The theories may again be said to be convincing because they work – work, that is, in the sense of having become standard, taken-for-granted knowledge in the society in question. (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, pp. 119-120)

Therefore, ideologies are vacuous and any definition of reality is possible when individuals congregate in durable groups, because beneath it all *order* is made, and this work of constructing order remains necessary within a directional universe (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 166).

As discussed, the underlying structure of order appears within interactionist perspectives as well. Goffman’s description of ceremonial life and ritualized communication reveals what he refers to as our “sacred centre” and devotion to nomic structure and “ultimate doctrines” (Goffman E. , 1976, pp. 1,8,10; Goffman E. , 1967, p. 11.12.15.147; Goffman E. , 1981, pp. 12,18; Goffman E. , 1961, p. 37). Goffman’s framework revolves around the world building activity of subjects, guided by the avoidance of all that is destabilizing (Goffman, 1961, pp. 78-

79,92). We express nomic and ordering ideals in our photographs, the defensive and protective devices we deploy, and the supplies we import into encounters. Our personal front, including body idiom, limb discipline, hygiene, glances, gestures, and facial expressions are staged to create the impression that we are *safe* interactants, thereby imbuing situations with a nomic and stable character (Goffman, 1963, pp. 22,24,26-28). Our involvement with others confirms our reality and a disorganized encounter introduces feelings of being “unruled, unreal, and anomic” (Goffman, 1967, p. 135). So important are these stable interactions that participants will seek out *safe regions* to permit preparation and rehearsals in the “stage located in his head”, just as they conceal all discrediting behaviour (Goffman, 1974, pp. 550-551; Goffman, 1963, p. 160; Goffman, 1959, pp. 116,118,123,128). Blumer acknowledged that despite the compromise and duress associated with collaborative activity, productive, orderly, and workable relations are dependent on self-control. The nomos is forged in our experience over time, and thoroughly internalized (Blumer, 1998, pp. 76-77,110).

Posture and Rationality

This far, I have surveyed a variety of theorists who conceptualize rationality as a cosmic and directional force that aligns with an underlying and stabilizing order, equilibrium, or a nomos. If rationality as a force signals mystification, this signal increases when rationality is imbued with a telos or direction. In other words, these theorists appear to develop rationality as an *independent* force or reality that requires our work to be orientated to *this* world. Our proper orientation is also tied to the production of truth, unity, and order. But in addition to the productive characteristics of rationality are its emotive qualities, or a posture of rationality. As rationality advances, it also discards superfluous emotions. For many theorists, rationality was linked to epistemologically directed action, or activity guided by calculation, not feeling. When

combined with directionality and purpose, emerging society is increasingly technical, purposeful, efficient, and distant, or what some describe as the *rationalist prejudice* born in classical theory (Fitzi, 2022, p. 69). Located within this developing world, theoretical work presumably abandons the pre-rational “wish of the heart” and replaces this with “neutral, impassible...pure, passionless light of the intelligence” (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 101,225). Berger and Durkheim deploy metaphors of “coolness” and detachment, or the “cold, dry” approach to the material world that leads to accurate results (Berger P. L., 1969, p. 68; Durkheim, 1982, p. 73). Although a shallow happiness may cling to irrational thought, this depends on simplicity, illogicality, and hope in a non-causal nexus, consistent with wishfulness (Caplan, 2001, pp. 9, 17-18; Barnes, 1997, pp. 378, 381). The remedy to this falsity is a “hygienic view of truth”, which reflects the historical cleft between reason and feeling, where reality emerges apart from fanciful imagination, distraction, and bias (Midgley, 1992, p. 135).

But other theorists challenge this categorical vision by suggesting greater complexity and mitigated forms. If emotions are hardwired, they cannot be easily subdued and must coexist *with* the rational. At best, we may be able to tame our emotions, or bring them under limited rational control (Longo, 2022, p. 129; Alba-Juez & Mackenzie, 2019, pp. 14-15). But this separation between emotions and the rational continues to rely on a conceptual divide. Some theorists believe that emotions exist “as a system of language which interacts with the system of evaluation”, or an axiological dimension beyond its expressive attributes (Alba-Juez & Mackenzie, 2019, p. 18). A speaker’s feeling, mood, or affect appear in relation to a phenomenon *and* orders it as important or unimportant, valid or invalid, real or unreal, in relation to that speaker’s ontological position (Alba-Juez & Mackenzie, 2019, pp. 5-6,8-9). As I discussed, the traditional use of mystification as a pejorative in relation to the religious mind also

reveals the assumed primacy of a material reality. Moreover, emotions are not unidimensional but appear as bundles or mixtures in discourse (Alba-Juez & Mackenzie, 2019, pp. 16-17). Because “the entire life of intellect is embedded in affect” there is an *emotional turn* in the social sciences that attempts to explore and understand the emotive characteristics of text and talk (Alba-Juez & Mackenzie, 2019, p. 4).

Scheff is among those who attempts to expose the emotional content of language that belies the claims of sanitary truth (Scheff, 2006, pp. 18,52,84). Using Goffman’s use of embarrassment as a foundation, Scheff argues for a new theoretical and methodological model of the emotional/relational world (ERW). Understanding emotional cues, innuendo, and labels within discourse can lead to a new sociology of emotion that accounts for rational and non-rational modalities, including purposive and value-led research (Scheff, 2006, pp. 99-106; Fitzi, 2022, p. 70). “Different historical periods and cultural regions generated very different forms of rationality”, each blended with emotive characteristics (Fitzi, 2022, p. 70). Some classical theorists considered the amalgamation of cognitive and affective, such as Harriet Martineau who examined the songs associated with political movements (De Sena, 2022, p. 14), Or Gabriel Tarde’s *emotional-rational* interpretation, where the “emotional and rational are nothing more than two sides of the same coin”, where “the mind and heart of each individual simultaneously draws his own existential oxygen” (Cerulo, 2022, pp. 41,51).

A more complex description of emotionality appears in Weber, where modern development is the progressive dominance of instrumental rationality and control, to the detriment of tradition and the subversion of anthropological constants. *Routine* guarantees resilience and is embodied in complex administration and the *non-emotional* bureaucrat (Fitzi, 2022, pp. 78-79). Bureaucratization is the natural outcome of modern state expansion, which

requires depersonalized mechanisms to accommodate diverse needs that were previously unknown or privately satisfied (Weber, 1946, pp. 212-213). This formalized discipline introduces consistency, precision, method, and uniform conduct that requires uniform obedience (Weber, 1946, p. 253). While other pure types of domination may possess honorific, charismatic, and personalized attributes, the rationalized and perfected form is *bureaucratic officialdom* (Weber, 1946, pp. 214,244). Here, the educated professional consistently and *impartially* administers the rules (Weber, 1946, pp. 297-299). However, Weber recognizes this as a regionalized form of rationality, each with its own emotive characteristics, or a localized telos that only reached fulfillment in the West. Alternatively, Zilberman observed that an emphasis on fitness, watchfulness, communalism, and the concentration of power uniquely support despotic domination in the East (Zilberman, 1977, pp. 365,413-417). Each of these divergent forms and types of societies contain nomic forces through their respective legitimations (Weber, 1946, pp. 78-79). In the West, feelings of honour and dignity may be divorced from the monopolization of force or class membership, thereby attaching to any group that maintains a sense of distance and exclusivity (Weber, 1946, pp. 186-187). For example, a privileged or status group may glorify manual labour, stigmatize overt economic gain, or retreat into a commune. Even pariah groups can maintain *feelings* of privilege through their own exclusion and participation in a providential mission, where ‘the last shall be first’ (Weber, 1946, pp. 189-193). Likewise, those possessing clear privilege can be instantly humbled and rendered helpless before the professional bureaucrat who holds the keys to another world, or at least a velvet rope (Weber, 1946, pp. 232-234). The malleability of nomic enclaves is particularly apparent in Zilberman’s observation that the anxiety of the Russian masses in response to Stalin’s leadership was unrelated to his atrocities, which class struggle was expected to produce,

but to the potential destabilization of daily life (Zilberman, 1978, p. 291). This was the normalized and “structural code of the Soviet public mind” that would gravitate to adaptation and maintenance within an inevitable universe (Zilberman, 1978, pp. 292,296,306).

Parsons also introduces the concept of emotion in his complex theoretical model and taxonomy. He identifies three modes of motivational orientation in social systems, including the *cognitive*, *cathetic*, and *evaluative*. Cognitive motivation seeks to understand the problem and optional courses of action, while the cathetic describes the actor’s *assessment* of potential *gratification* balanced against deprivation, or cost. Finally, the evaluative motive brings an ordinate character or standardized values to the process (Parsons, 1951, pp. 57-58). Culture may define the order and primacy of one motivation over another. For example, if a cognitive orientation is primary, gratification will consist in the solution to the problem, just as valuations becomes secondary. If a cathetic orientation is primary, the actor adjusts to maximize gratification in relation to an object, while cognitive and evaluative motivations are instrumental to this end. More importantly, while the cathetic orientation to “gratification is measured in affective or emotional terms”, its expressive characteristics will be systemically regulated based on the primary mode of orientation (Parsons, 1951, pp. 47-48). In industrial societies, the subordination of gratification to evaluative motives means that we maintain “affective neutrality” in relation to the objects of our action (Parsons, 1951, p. 60). Cathetic societies will be more expressive, while evaluative societies will suppress or balance expression against other sources of gratification, like universalized roles and achievement-based reward systems. Evaluative motivations are universal because they establish a standardized mode of action that transcends situations, thereby providing greater stability (Parsons, 1951, pp. 57-58,173-177).

Therefore, the dominance of instrumental rationality and control can produce an emotionless bureaucracy and quarantine feelings to other enclaves, while the inherent legitimacy of despotic leadership may be accompanied by the glorification of fitness and the maintenance of minimal order. Likewise, the highly expressive or sterile characteristics of a culture can reflect other value orientations within that culture. In other words, emotional characteristics can signal the prevailing order of things. This does not mean that emotions signal other ontologies and mystification in every case, but they often do.

Based on these perspectives, emotive characteristics likely bleed into theoretical work, not just through a sociology of emotion, but in theoretical language itself. Theorists may study emotion, but also deploy it in the body of theoretical work, thereby signalling an ontological order. If theoretical work makes truth claims, and language is an emotionally laden and intersubjective expression of correlational truth, then emotion and truth claims are linked (Alba-Juez & Mackenzie, 2019, p. 4). In sum, “all our thinking involves emotional factors as well as rational ones” (Midgley, 1992, p. 129). Through inference, emotive language will relay respect, support, rejection, indignation, and other feelings linked to an author’s appraisals and motivations (Alba-Juez & Mackenzie, 2019, pp. 10-13). If I assess that something is unfair or aggressive, this is likely to activate angry, dismissive, or vengeful language, just as the appearance of anger infers the presence of something aggressive or unfair. This appears in Berger’s arguments from hope and damnation, which assert a transcendence in response to chaos and monstrous evil. Expression of hope imagines a fulfillment, while imprecation calls out “to heaven and hell”, or anticipatory judgement that corrects a profound error (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 60-68). In addition, while anger is likely to produce connotations about ‘the Other’ through polarizing speech, this can incorporate resignation as well, particularly when large forces are

involved (Koschut, 2018, p. 286). For example, belief in institutions as powerful, inherent, and naturally occurring externalities that restrain behaviour is likely to incorporate their conservative defense, or at least a suppression of disruptive forces. When confronted with large and dense bureaucracies, a common response is that fighting the system ‘will get you no where’, or ‘it’s not worth it, just let it go’. As Durkheim noted, facticities bid a submissive posture, where we “rediscover the conditions of normality” (Durkheim, 1982, p. 104). The maintenance of order is accompanied by rational emotive characteristics that reflect an immutable and nomic reality. But when confronted with what we believe to be unnatural external restraint or arbitrary control, helplessness, anger, and jealousy appear.

So a god has snatched from me my all
In the curse and rack of Destiny.
All his worlds are gone beyond recall!
Nothing but revenge is left to me!
(Marx, 1975, p. Invocation of One in Despair)

Authors also deploy emotional language in the context of polemic, where the speaker assigns rationality to the oppressed and irrationality to the oppressor.

The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully. (Dawkins, 2006, p. 51)

Through name calling or labelling, an assumed rightness or just position fuels the attack, or what Scheff and Goffman describe as a constructed moral judgement (Scheff, 2006, p. 74; Goffman, 1961, pp. 365-366). Through emotion, the speaker signals an independent order against which a measurement is made. The attack makes no sense and appears irrational if the speaker places no faith in an opposing, superior, but unacknowledged morality whose source remains unclear.

These signals can explicitly reference mystified realities in other contexts, including the divergent perspectives of ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ constraint within social theory. When restraint is natural, an assumed natural order carries inevitability and a telos of developing unity, giving way to hopeful language and even eschatological predictions. Guy Robinson describes a tendency within scientific rationalism to explain unknown forces using quasi-theological imagery, where nature is portrayed as “something transcendental”, communicating laws that guide world events (Robinson, 2007, p. 608). Ironically, this powerful externality, or essence, pulls thought away from the physical world and into imaginative indulgence and speculation (Robinson, 2007, p. 608). These departures from the material world also take the explicit form of physical eschatologies, and Midgley traces these tendencies within ‘scientific’ writings, particularly in *Theophysics*. The following is one excerpt from Freeman J. Dyson:

Green technology pushes in the right direction, outward from the sun, to the asteroids and the giant planets and beyond, where space is limitless and the frontier forever open...We adapt our plants and animals and ourselves to live wild in the universe as we find it...if our grandchildren are born with an even tougher skin and an even narrower eye, they may walk bare-faced in the winds of mars. (Midgley, 1992, p. 187)

Or consider the following quote from John D. Barrow and Frank Tipler citing the emergence of the “Omega Point”:

Life will have spread into all spatial regions in all universes which could logically exist, and will have stored an infinite amount of information, including all bits of knowledge which is logically possible to know. And this is the end. (Midgley, 1992, p. 66)

Other authors have suggested the transference of human essence to computer hardware in order to free ourselves from organic limitations, or a transformation away from flesh and blood to a virtual reality (Midgley, 1992, pp. 153, 164, 184).⁵⁷ Prophetic statements in non-religious

⁵⁷ An example of this would be transhumanism, even in the context of environmental movements.

writings sometimes convey an “all-embracing upward surge of progress” culminating in an evolved species destined for “indefinite vistas of future glory” (Midgley, 1995, p. 21). Even when confronted with the future destruction of earth and the fragility of organic matter, some authors ignore these in favour of the promise of an imagined retreat. This represents an apparent reversion to a religious style of thought that eventually overcomes all physical limitations (Midgley, 1992, pp. 183-190). But even if we lack faith in a pending deliverance, the ongoing discovery of truth invokes an emotional release. Some believed that the highest power of reason produces joy and leads to a path of true “happiness and...virtue”, fulfillment, and an “earthly heaven” (Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 83,162,179,228; La Mettrie, 1912, p. 127; Marx, 2023, p. 21). While the rational investigator brings dispassionate disbelief and hard work to the world, this activity unlocks new frontiers in the form of a “great revolution” and euphoria (Durkheim, 1982, p. 71).

Alternatively, other theoretical streams may see a reality that is more chaotic than hopeful, or a world that is forcefully and unnaturally imposed when “social power becomes the private power of private persons” (Marx, 1967, p. 132). Even if Marx believed in a transitory crisis, our distress is still real if the current consensus is manufactured and sustained by a powerful enclave. Likewise, theorists may conceive of the social world as a plurality of contested spaces and competing forces. In either case, the notion of a *unified* and *natural* order “has become an outmoded and suspect value” for some (Lyotard, 1979, p. 66). This suggests another emotional shift that expresses conflict, struggle, and resistance against a prevailing but unnatural force. But this oppression is rarely overt, or obvious. Lukes examines how in emancipatory theories groups win passivity by suppressing the latent and manifest challenges to power (Lukes, 2005, pp. 16-19,20-23,36). In some cases, oppressive “terror” can be displaced

and hidden, or we can assert an abstract equality between groups “so they have nothing to strive for”, uniting the oppressed with the oppressor (Morrison, 1992, p. 59; de Beauvoir, 1952, p. 15). The concealment of these power relations introduces an insidious character because these tactics can generate a muddled and impenetrable problem, even contaminating the research enterprise itself and rendering it impotent.

So woefully unorganized is sociological knowledge that the meaning of progress, the meaning of ‘swift’ and ‘slow’ in human doing, and the limits of human perfectability, are...unanswered sphinxes on the shore of science. (Du Bois, 1903, p. 122)

But even suppression and notions of abstract equality contain latent forces, suggesting the potential for revolt and justice to supplant the presiding order as the stabilizing principle. Society can be reframed as a battleground and new emotive metaphors appear, such as the *heteromorphous language games* played by local actors (Lyotard, 1979, p. 66). *Cunning* is required because “what presides over all these mechanisms is not the unitary functioning of an apparatus or an institution, but the necessity of combat and the rules of strategy” (Foucault, 1977, p. 308). The polyvalence of the techniques of power implies new localities and applications, making society an “uncertain festival” (Foucault, 1977, p. 63; Foucault, 1990, pp. 97-102). Under the right conditions, even groups who previously held power may engage in de-alienation, relativize social institutions, and reverse course by sanctioning their own rebellion and anarchy (Berger P. L., 1969, pp. 79, 97-100).

When constraint is naturalized, the subject only needs to wait for the coming deliverance and enjoy its evolution, while unnatural constraint calls for struggle. The former elevates a posture of contentment and discovery, while the latter elevates suspicion and action. Both postures convey a telos and purpose that envisions a future condition that *ought* to be, whether

this is *supplied to* us or *won by* us. In other words, both a naturally evolving future glory and the hyper critique of current conditions signal realities on which contentment and suspicion rest. For example, Derrida suggested that Marx's legacy may be radical critique liberated from the ontological totalities of governing and grand narratives, but even this critique constitutes an "epic...of...emancipation from everything that prevents it from governing itself" (Derrida, 1994, pp. 106,109-113). Perhaps the desire for being and feeling *free* from any external force holds across these perspectives, where the only difference between a functionalist and a critical theorist, for instance, is how this freedom comes. The former is prepared to wait, while the latter is not, and each carries its own emotional baggage.

But a faltering belief that we have "made immense strides over the last century" also leads to the rejection of a future unity and nomos in favor of an immediate promise (Mauss, 1985, p. 3; Derrida, 1994, pp. 96,106; Lyotard, 1979, p. 25). This marks another transition from idealized *future* to idealized *localities* that supply this freedom in the here and now. For example, anarchists like Benello have communicated a utopian vision based on the loss of control that accompanies large-scale industrial and centralized development.

Large organizations...are sterile...densely organized at the top...power ridden...discourage innovation. As the big organizations have drawn off life and energies from the communities where people live, a wasteland culture has emerged (Benello, 1992, pp. 17-18).

Although citizens were once able to take part in meaningful decision making within a local setting, centralism has dissociated the individual from space, economy, and other people. In addition, this way of life has negative psychological effects that are solved only through a strategic withdrawal and ascetic posture. Only locally sustainable communities that fully integrate its members can restore health (Benello, 1992, p. 70). This "is the project of

constructing a society that encourages human growth” through personal, intellectual, and manual work (Benello, 1992, p. 72). Over time, the individual is rebuilt and psychologically restructured, where new instincts take hold and old limitations are surpassed.

Genuine psychic transformation is possible, and as the instincts are formed and evolve, a new psychology arises...for one must start the process of transforming infantile reactions into those of an adult. With mastery, the instinctual nature disappears, having been fully transformed into human nature. This dialectical process then continues until human nature itself is transformed into a higher state. (Benello, 1992, pp. 72-73)

Here, *freedom* is eventually attained through our participation in a local community versus a

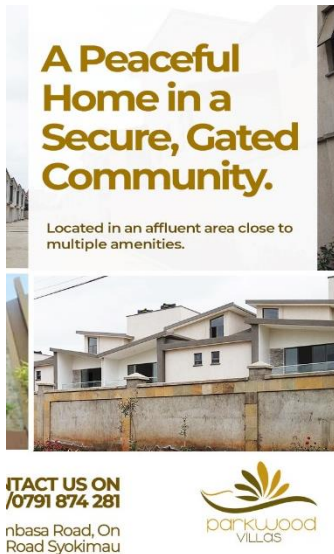


Figure 30 - Gated Community Advertisement (open source)

grand narrative in the form of centralized society. But when psychic transformation is not immediate enough, finding freedom can take an unsophisticated and mundane form, or the more common trend to escape the oppressive world-at-large through gated communities. For example, the expansion of gated communities within the USA and Canada has become a symbol of homogeneous affiliation and the rejection of urbanization. Blakely and Snyder have tracked the rapid growth of secured communities through 1990's.

Americans are electing to live behind walls to prevent intrusion...attempting to secure the value of their houses, reduce or escape from the impact of crime, and find neighbors who share their sense of the good life (Blakely & Snyder, 1997).

The adoption of Homeowner Associations (HOA's) replaces impersonal government and enforces a subculture that excludes and defines. The engagement with and investment in culture at-large is selective, where occupants retain some elements while rejecting others. Feuerbach's

critique of irrational religious escapism from the world reappears in the form of restricted socio-economic association. While these communities fall short of utopian vision, they promise *peace*, restored agency, and freedom from perceived threats and oppressive forces.

Finally, within a battlefield conception and hostile space, emotive characteristics become fluid and mobile, which can complicate their interpretation. Emotions like peacefulness, anger, or contentment are not absolutely fixed to a given movement, but relative to the opposing forces. This fluidity is readily apparent in history. Ironically, while the sterility of the rationalist position is typically inimical to religious thought, the Protestant Reformation “was the first widespread ... agent of demythologization” (Lambert, 1999, pp. 315, 312). Advocates argued for “an attitude of mind founded on independent thought and judgement, free of sovereign, church, or tradition” (Stoker, 2006, p. 2). Reformation was an organized resistance against biased interpretation and subjective interest that distorted sound doctrine and belief. Through rules of observation and interpretation, reformers applied exegesis to separate truth from fiction and systematize their findings through theological elaboration. But just as there are appeals to a sterile rationality from within the religious domain, scientific rationality can be imbued with emotional noise. James D. Watson’s account of the discovery of DNA structure exposed “how science is done” and that “styles of scientific research vary almost as much as human personalities” (Watson, 1968, p. ix). In this case, relationships, personal motives, and conflict significantly affected the pace of discovery. For example, research was impeded because this field was perceived as “the personal property of Maurice Wilkins” and infringement was discouraged based on “fair play” (Watson, 1968, p. 19). Territorialism combined with personality conflicts directly led to allegations of theft, suppression of evidence, and the withholding of results, all to the detriment of discovery (Watson, 1968, pp. 44-

45,52,95,105,107). Watson also describes deception and exaggeration as common within the scientific community, including the publication of “wild” conclusions and charismatic presentations that others lacked the expertise to disprove (Watson, 1968, pp. 27-30). This instinct led Francis Crick to boast that they had “found the secret of life” before the theory was even verified (Watson, 1968, p. 126). Alternatively, some took pleasure in pointing out flaws and errors, particularly when this involved an expert in the field (Watson, 1968, pp. 103,120). But personal greed, ambition, and imagination would also be critical in gaining financial support, even furthering Watson’s discovery of the helix because “it was certainly better to imagine myself becoming famous than maturing into a stifled academic who had never risked a thought” (Watson, 1968, pp. 28,30,35). In this light, it is unclear what world classical theorists imagined where a passionless and cold vision led to the truth and the wishes of the heart to darkness. As such, reading and interpreting the emotive signals in theory requires cross-referencing with the other languages I considered above.

In summary, just as metaphor and the constitution of subjects and objects can signal mystification, I explored the language of teleology, rationality and the nomos in social theory. In a classical context, theorists generally assume that the cosmos supplies a progressive rationality to humanity that culminates in the scientific mind. Alternatively, authors like Weber contemplate a situated rationality as an unstaged but innate principle that we apply to our immediate environment. However, whether mysteriously derived from nature or existing as an independent force, rationality appears mystified within social theory. Moreover, theorists present rationality as a productive force that properly orients the work of subjects to ‘this world’ and not another. This rational work culminates in some form of restored nomic order or equilibrium, further signalling rationality as a guiding force. Finally, I considered the emotive

quality or posture of rationality. Like other languages or signals, emotional expression within theory, whether hopeful or critical, can signal other realities that support these expressions. Therefore, various postures may convey a telos and purpose that envisions a future condition and/or posits what *ought* to be, particularly when taken together with the other languages I explored. In the following section, I will summarize and condense these signals before applying these to a case study.

5. Case Study

Summarizing the Language of Mystification

The structure of mystification represents a distillation of its development or use in theory, but this alone provides limited assistance to the investigator who is looking for ontological claims in theoretical texts. As a structure, mystification is unlikely to appear on the surface of text but is signalled by the author. To identify these signals, I explored the associated language of mystification through metaphoricity, subjects and objects, and teleo-rational language, including its emotive characteristics. From these, we can extract this associated language for use as sensitizing concepts or indicators, which are roughly summarised in *Table 1 - Sensitizing language associated with the structure of mystification*. This overview suggests that the signals of mystification are unlikely to appear in isolation, but in combination. For example, invoking an objective and progressive reality may parallel or accompany cosmological rationality and metaphors associated with telos, including directionality, staged progression, and order. As signals within the language of theory, they direct the reader's attention to these ontological foundations, assumptions, and forces that are otherwise elided from the text. The interrelations of these indicators and the implicit meanings they convey, require an exegetical approach and hermeneutical leap. Moreover, interpretations are always provisional and limited to the selection of text under review, as this reflects the author's understanding in a moment in time. In some cases, the text may be too limited to draw a clear inference.

As a case study, I have selected Foucault's, *Discipline and Punish*, because his theoretical ambiguity provides both a measure of protection and a challenge to the investigator.

Structure of Mystification (O+) → -W ≈ W		
Language of Mystification (signals)		
<i>Metaphoricity</i>	<i>Subjects & Objects</i>	<i>Telos, Rationality & Nomos</i>
Using essential parity to describe: Naturalness – instinct, reflex, staging, origins, inevitability, organic, sacred, evolution, etc. Movement – directionality, stasis, location, progression, causality, rigidity/elasticity, chaotic, ordered, containment, etc. Relations – complex/simple, integration, isolation, constructive, inventive, mechanistic, multi/mono-causal, opacity/clarity, illusory/perceptible, disorientation etc. Layering – depth, shallowness, manifest/latent, local/universal, concealed/revealed, objectivity, etc. Exploitation – power/force, subjugation, equality, fairness, hierarchy, etc.	Constituting subjects and objects through: Elision – passives, nominalization, reification, pronoun confusion, proverbs/tautology, masochism, etc. Imperialism (object) – externalities, abstract, universal, concrete, fixed, inherited, passivity, causation, essence, constraint, logocentric, structure, anonymity, internalization, roles, etc. Imperialism (subject) – active, creative, freedom, ascetic, strategic, games, local, malleable, reform, constructed, mixed, etc. Comprehension – errors, false consciousness, accuracy, presence, objectivity, projection, superficial, penetrating, verisimilitude, etc. Sublimation – equivalences, continuity, complexity, duality/dualism, spheres, zones, internalization/externalization, etc.	Purpose and direction through: Cosmology – nomic/anomic, universal, contextualized, natural, progressive, staged, latency, etc. Production – work, goals, utility, dominion, mastery, refinement, precision, methodical, situated, creative, bureaucratic, etc. Posture – detachment, resilience, discipline, efficiency, technical, hygienic, neutrality, sterile, maturity, anger, valuation/cathetic, expressive, etc. Vision – escapism, destiny, surrender, emancipation, hope, utopian, revolt, contest, coming clarity, restoration, etc.

Table 1 - Sensitizing language associated with the structure of mystification

First, because Foucault appears to operate outside of or across theoretical boundaries, this prevents me from approaching the text as representational of a specific theoretical paradigm. Perhaps more than other theorists, Foucault escapes these definitions because of his mixed methodologies, which incorporates historical, genealogical, discourse, and hermeneutical strategies. Second, this same ambiguity presents hermeneutical challenges for the investigator. Readings of this text often focus on the panopticon and presumed calls for prison and educational reform, or as a general mandate to improve rehabilitation efforts. Foucault's work is

also the subject of multiple and sometimes conflicting commentary, both critical and supportive of his methods and findings. In these ways, any ontological claims in the text are more likely to be obscured, making *Discipline and Punish* a unique entry point for an ontological investigation. Without expecting explicit reality claims in this book, I am filtering this text through the signals summarized above to detect Foucault's use of mystification.

Foucault and Reified Power

Locating ontological claims within Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* begins with an understanding of his development of power. Before we examine several texts, the general transcendence of power is evident through two historical phenomena, the torture of a criminal in the 18th century and the carceral mechanisms of modernity, which only *seem* to be radically different to the reader. First, Foucault exposes power as it appears during the public torture and execution of an offender by a sovereign, which is the most graphic and spectacular public demonstration of the dissymmetry of power (Foucault, 1977, pp. 48-49). But the physical destruction of the body and the demonstration of absolute suppression obscures the production of knowledge and its related calculations, beginning with the rights of the sovereign as a subtext. Beginning with the criminal investigation, a validating or justifying body of knowledge renders this act of power an appropriate and correct response to the offender. Judgement was not casually determined but was governed by specific rules of evidence and measures of legal proof, requiring specialized personnel to manage this complexity (Foucault, 1977, p. 37). Most European countries from the 15th to 17th century carried out criminal investigations in secret, in part because the establishment of truth was the exclusive right of the sovereign and judges (Foucault, 1977, p. 35). In addition, the appropriateness and awe-inspiring response to the offence makes the execution a political ritual, revealing an offence against those who respect the

law, but also an offence against the sovereign. The criminal act presents a direct challenge to the sovereign's authority and responsibility to defend the state against all enemies, internal and external (Foucault, 1977, pp. 47-48). As such, the sovereign has the right to offer a direct reply.

The ceremony of punishment, then, is an exercise of terror...to make everyone aware, through the body of the criminal, of the unrestrained presence of the sovereign. The public execution did not re-establish justice; it reactivated power. (Foucault, 1977, p. 49)

The execution scene itself reflects the determination of truth, but also became a display of might, including the presence of cavalry, archers, and soldiers. This show of force clearly communicates the offender's status as an enemy of the state, but also the absolute victory of the latter through the broken body of the accused (Foucault, 1977, p. 50).

During the execution, the confession of the accused or "moments of truth" before death testify to the sovereign's parallel jurisdiction over knowledge. The accused participates in the ritual of truth production by validating the sovereign's judgement, but also bears no embarrassment or shame because the confession is made before God and carries eternal weight (Foucault, 1977, pp. 34,38,57). The criminal's very soul is at stake, and the sovereign is positioned as a divine agent. As a public confession, witnesses hear and affirm the sovereign's right to extract truth and apply precise justice (Foucault, 1977, pp. 42-47). In this way, "the truth-power connection remains at the heart of all mechanisms of judgement", so the technical expertise that guided the investigation are present in the act of torture as well (Foucault, 1977, pp. 33,43,55,59-60). Torture must produce pain, but in a calculated and graduated way so that life is maintained in a state of pain, a prolonged agony. This calculation is proportionate to the crime itself, so that the punishment 'fits' the crime in a precise way, including the number of lashes and the duration of pain (Foucault, 1977, pp. 33-34). Even after death, this "economy of

power” was so dissymmetrical and carefully administered that corpses were burned, “ashes thrown to the winds, (and) bodies dragged” (Foucault, 1977, pp. 34-35). However, the public mode of execution was unstable and potentially dangerous. Crowds could exact their own vengeance on the accused, just as the accused could transform into a hero and win the crowd’s favor through a stirring gallows speech (Foucault, 1977, pp. 59-61). It was the persistent instability of the public execution as an exercise of power that instigated reform, which leads to the second manifestation of the truth-power relation (Foucault, 1977, p. 73).

Protests in the 18th century appeared to discard barbarity, but merely introduced a new political technology for the mastery of the body. This would not represent a fundamental shift away from the truth-power relation, only “a different form with very different effects” (Foucault, 1977, p. 55). Using ‘humanity’ as the new measure and strategy, this movement would employ its own “dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, (and) functionings” in the exercise of power (Foucault, 1977, pp. 26, 55). Through reason and religious sentiment, the barbarity of the public execution would recede and be replaced by *kindness* and *leniency* (Foucault, 1977, p. 10). Reform introduced new liberties, and punishment would become non-corporal and painless, leaving the body intact (Foucault, 1977, pp. 11,16). However, despite the apparent shift in thought and practice, techniques of power are applied to different objects, such as the offender’s thought, will, and intent (Foucault, 1977, p. 16). The goal of punishment would no longer be the destruction of the body, but the restoration of the offender through meticulous examination and diagnosis, secretly carried out by therapeutic specialists (Foucault, 1977, p. 10). Validated by a corpus of knowledge, these techniques support the advent and longevity of the prison as another observatory, as part of a “whole series of ‘carceral’ mechanisms” (Foucault, 1977, pp. 307-308). Moreover, consistent with Foucault’s conception of power as a *polyvalent* force, these

disciplinary techniques are integrated into other institutions and culminate in a panoptic regime or “punishing universality” (Foucault, 1977, pp. 178,211-212,308). Schools, monasteries, factories, and hospitals all employ this model to analyze, define, and know the body, or the new truth-power relation established in political technology (Foucault, 1977, pp. 141-148,184). These institutions are the manifestations of reformed torture.

Foucault’s use of contrasting images is intended to reveal a superficial rather than fundamental difference in the operation of power. Foucault explicitly states that the truth-power relation lies at the “heart” of “all” of all mechanisms of judgement, suggesting an underlying condition or force that guides or informs diverse phenomena at the surface. Even through this brief claim, truth-power appears *structural* in Foucault’s account. But this alone does not constitute a mystified claim. To develop our understanding of what this ‘truth-power’ relation is, I want to attend to the signals in Foucault’s narrative. In other words, if the truth-power relation is an independent and obscured ontology, I expect this to appear in the language of the text. For example, I can filter Foucault’s narrative using the sensitizing concepts within the teleo-rational category as noted in *Table 1 - Sensitizing language associated with the structure of mystification*. In doing so, Foucault appears to speak about this relation as something that *develops* according to a rationality that is both meticulous and productive. Note the following examples (italics added):

On rationality,

There is an elision of the body as the subject of the punishment, but not necessarily as an element in a spectacle. The rejection of the public execution which, at the threshold of the theory, had found no more than a lyrical expression, *was now offered the possibility of rational articulation*: what must be examined is the representation of the penalty, not its corporal reality. (Foucault, 1977, pp. 94-95)

There is a whole history to be written about such ‘stone-cutting’ – a history of the *utilitarian rationalization of detail* in moral accountability and political control. The classical age did not initiate it; rather it accelerated it, changed its scale, gave it *precise instruments*. (Foucault, 1977, p. 139)

The first of the great *operations of discipline* is...the *constitution of ‘tableaux vivants’*, which *transform* confused, useless or dangerous multitudes into *ordered* multiplicities. The drawing up of ‘tables’ was one of the great problems of the scientific, political and economic *technology* of the eighteenth century: how one was to *arrange* botanical and zoological gardens, and construct at the same time *rational classifications* of living beings...how one was to *inspect* men. (Foucault, 1977, p. 148)

The panoptic schema, without disappearing as such or losing any of its properties, was destined to spread throughout the social body; its vocation was to become a generalized function. (Foucault, 1977, p. 207)

The *power* to punish is *not essentially different* from that of curing or educating. It receives from them, and from their lesser, smaller task, a *sanction from below*; but one that is no less important for that, since it is the sanction of *technique and rationality*. The *carceral ‘naturalizes’* the legal power to punish, as it *‘legalizes’* the *technical* power to discipline. (Foucault, 1977, p. 303)

On meticulousness,

Its ruthlessness, its spectacle, its physical violence, its unbalanced play of forces, its *meticulous ceremonial*, its entire apparatus were inscribed in the political functioning of the penal system. (Foucault, 1977, p. 49)

If the law must now treat in a ‘humane’ way an individual who is ‘outside nature’, it is not on account of some profound humanity that the criminal conceals within him, but because of a *necessary regulation* of the effects of power. It is this ‘economic’ rationality that must *calculate* the penalty and prescribe the appropriate *techniques*. ‘Humanity’ is the *respectable name* given to this economy and to its *meticulous calculations*. (Foucault, 1977, p. 92)

The *meticulousness of the regulations*, the *fussiness* of the inspections, the supervision of the smallest fragment of life and of the body will soon provide, in the context of the school, the barracks, the hospital or the workshop, a laicized content, and economic or *technical rationality* for this *mystical calculus* of the *infinitesimal* and the infinite. (Foucault, 1977, p. 140)

On productivity,

Perhaps...we should abandon a whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where the power relations are suspended and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions...(that) the renunciation of power is one of the conditions of knowledge. We should admit rather that *power produces knowledge*; that power and knowledge *directly imply one another*; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of

knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and *constitute* at the same time power relations. (Foucault, 1977, p. 27)

The *juridico-anthropological functioning* revealed in the whole history of modern penalty did not originate in the super-imposition of the human sciences on criminal justice and in the requirements proper to this *new rationality* or to the *humanism that it appeared to bring with it; it originated in the disciplinary technique* that operated these *mechanisms* of normalizing judgement. (Foucault, 1977, p. 183)

It is not true that it was the *discovery of the delinquent* through a *scientific rationality* that introduced into our old prisons the refinement of penitentiary techniques. Nor is it true that the internal *elaboration* of penitentiary methods has finally brought to light the ‘objective’ existence of a delinquency that the abstraction and rigidity of the law were unable to perceive. They *appeared together*, the one extending from the other, as a *technological ensemble*. (Foucault, 1977, p. 255)

Although Foucault does not speak of a staged development, as classical theorists often do, he does describe a progression and something “destined”. The rational, meticulous, and productive characteristics of truth-power that regulates, calculates, and elaborates different forms, whether manifested through torture or the new techniques of the Enlightenment. Truth-power *develops* in this rational way, through technical development, ever-increasing precision, and mastery, while disguising (obscuring) its appearance as something humane. Power as an independent and reified force is also hinted in the above excerpts, where discipline and carceral mechanisms appear to embody behaviours and conduct “operations”, “constitute”, “transform”, “legalize”, and “naturalize”. In these ways, Foucault uses teleo-rational language in his narrative that suggests and implies a distinct ontology that possesses its own rational development and production, thereby signaling mystification. The classical age did not alter the properties of

power, but merely provided the methodological and ideological techniques for its operationalization and expansion (Foucault, 1977, pp. 136-139).⁵⁸

In addition, it is important to note that Foucault's exploration of power is historical and genealogical, intended to cover the "whole history" of the concept and its continuity or universality. In this context, Giddens and others have observed that he viewed power as a transcendent property of social life to which everything is subordinated, including knowledge and truth (Giddens, 1984, pp. 15,32; Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 257). In this vein, we can apply the subject/object concepts listed in Table 1 to expose other interdependent signals in the text. For example, although subjects are presumably supervising, constructing, and inspecting, subjects appear largely on the periphery, or within an object system of power relations and its associated rationality. Note the following:

This policy required the involvement of definite relations of knowledge in the relations of power; it called for a technique of overlapping subjection and objectification; it brought with it new procedures of individualization. (Foucault, 1977, p. 305)

This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection; the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body...only obtained by the instruments of violence. (Foucault, 1977, p. 26)

The body is subjugated and "bound" or "caught" under policies of domination that require relations, procedures, and ultimately productive or useful service. The prevalent "it" in Foucault's account refers both to anonymous and anonymizing power, as an external force that

⁵⁸ Foucault develops this through two parallel concepts. Before people can be known and transformed, they must be observed in a controlled space and rendered docile through the *principle of partitioning*, whereby people are set apart for systematic analysis and coding. This places subjects within an *anatomo-chronological* schema or the coordinated application of controls as the coercive link to the production apparatus. (Foucault, 1977, pp. 150-153)

acts *upon* bodies, not persons, in a parasitic fashion. This imbues the text with a passive and nebulous tone, that incorporates a dense metaphoricity. For example:

One also sees that this *object relation* is not superimposed, from the outside, on the punitive practice, as would be a prohibition laid on the fury of the public execution by the limits of sensibility, or as would be a rational or 'scientific' interrogation as to what this man that one is punishing really is. The processes of *objectification originates in the very tactics of power* of the *arrangement* of its exercise. (Foucault, 1977, p. 102)

Hierarchized, continuous and functional surveillance may not be one of the great technical 'inventions' of the eighteenth century, but its *insidious* extension owed its importance to the mechanisms of power that it brought with it. By means of such surveillance, disciplinary *power became an 'integrated' system, linked from inside to the economy and to the aims of the mechanism in which it was practised. It was also organized as a multiple, automatic and anonymous power; for although surveillance rests on individuals, its functioning is that of a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally; this network 'holds' the whole together and traverses it in its entirety with effects of power that derive from one another: supervisors, perpetually supervised. The power in the hierarchized surveillance of the disciplines is not possessed as a thing, or transferred as a property; it functions like a piece of machinery.* (Foucault, 1977, pp. 176-177)

The more numerous those *anonymous* and temporary observers are, the greater the risk for the inmate of being surprised and the greater his anxious awareness of being observed. The Panopticon is a *marvellous machine* which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, *produces homogeneous effects* of power. (Foucault, 1977, p. 202)

Now, the study of this micro-physics presupposes that the *power exercised* on the body is conceived not as a property, but *as a strategy*, that *its effects of domination* are attributed not to 'appropriation', but to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a *network of relations*, constantly in tension, *in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess*; that one should take as its model a *perpetual battle* rather than a contract regulating a transaction or the conquest of a territory. In short this *power is exercised rather than possessed*; it is not the 'privilege', acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but *the overall effect of its strategic positions* - an effect that is manifested and sometimes *extended by the position of those who are dominated*. Furthermore, this *power* is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who 'do not have it'; it *invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them*. This means that *these relations* go right *down into the depths of society, that they are not localized* in the relations

between the state and its citizens or on the frontier between classes and that *they do not merely reproduce*, at the level of individuals, bodies, gestures and behaviour, the general form of the law or government; that, although there is continuity (they are indeed articulated on this form through a whole series of complex mechanisms), there is neither analogy nor homology, but a specificity of mechanism and modality. Lastly, *they are not univocal; they define* innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of an at least temporary inversion of the power relations. The *overthrow* of these 'micro-powers' does not, then, obey the law of all or nothing; *it is not acquired once and for all* by a new control of the apparatuses nor by a new functioning or a destruction of the institutions; on the other hand, none of *its localized episodes* may be inscribed in history except by the *effects that it induces on the entire network in which it is caught up*. (Foucault, 1977, pp. 26-27)

In these segments, we see a mysterious association between subject and object, explained through metaphor. If power were mere strategy, it would appear on the surface, where the actor could use or discard its techniques. But power functions as a complex “network of relations” or “ensemble”, existing in the “depths” of society where “they...invest...grip...induce” and exert “pressure” through “mystical” techniques. These descriptions appear to reify power further and support its independence because it works “through” actors and “by them”, possessing non-localized and localized characteristics.

When power is framed in this way, as universal, ahistorical, and rationalistic, the delegation of work is also framed as a rational struggle with multiple “points of confrontation”. The dual nature of power, as both universal and local, structural and fluid, means that Foucault can reinsert the subject as a partisan user, who chooses a side. On one hand, the subject plays an epiphenomenal role as a conduit for power, while the same ubiquitous strategy can land in the wrong hands (Foucault, 1977, p. 26). Therefore, while power relations are a permanent fixture of society, they are never permanently located or univocal, granting them *polyvalent* features (Foucault, 1977, p. 26). Polyvalence suggests that subjects move beyond resistance to the

techniques of power and claim them for themselves, just as they can surveil surveillance system.

As Foucault notes:

The seeing machine was once a sort of dark room into which individuals spied; it has become a transparent building in which the exercise of power may be supervised by society as a whole. (Foucault, 1977, p. 207)

If the “epistemological thaw” of the modern age can displace the ruthlessness of the public execution with another form of cruelty, and the tortured can turn the crowd, this only reveals the versatile nature of power (Foucault, 1977, pp. 223,224).

This struggle appears in Foucault’s posture and the emotive and evaluative signals he uses in his narrative. As I discussed in the section on *Posture and Rationality*, emotions are constitute a language closely aligned with a system of evaluation based on the speaker’s ontological position (Alba-Juez & Mackenzie, 2019, pp. 5-6,8-9,18). Unlike a naturalistic worldview that calls for Durkheim’s “cold, dry” analysis, or Feuerbach’s “passionless light”, Foucault’s world of uncertain power calls for a different kind of work in the form of a decision (Durkheim, 1982, p. 73; Feuerbach, 1881, pp. 101,225). In this way, Foucault is more than a historian, but also an advocate. For example, he notes that the militarization of workshops and the extension of surveillance techniques are “insidious” mechanisms of power (Foucault, 1977, pp. 138,176,308). Also:

These sciences, which have *so delighted* our ‘humanity’ for over a century, have their technical matrix in the *petty, malicious* minutiae of the disciplines and their investigations (Foucault, 1977, p. 226).

The prison also produces delinquents by imposing *violent* constraints on its inmates; it is supposed to apply the law, and to teach respect for it; but all its functioning operates in the form of an *abuse* of power...*exploitation* by penal labour...but are not our prisoners sold, *like the slaves*, by entrepreneurs and bought by manufacturers...*is this how we teach* our prisoners honesty? Are they not still more *demoralized* by these examples of *abominable* exploitation? (Foucault, 1977, pp. 266-267)

Foucault describes the production of delinquency through “violent” constraint as an “abuse”, just as the technical disciplines are “petty” and “malicious”. Unusually, perpetrators are identified in the same text as prison officials masquerading as “entrepreneurs” who engage in an “abominable exploitation”. Foucault’s evaluations also appears in his sarcasm, where “humanity” is the “respectable name” we give to these disciplines, while we “delight” in this “marvellous” machinery that intrusively judges the “soul” (Foucault, 1977, pp. 92,101,177,202,226). Despite the name that obscures this power as the “intent to alleviate pain, to cure, to comfort”, Foucault appears to penetrate this foil to glimpse something “malicious” (Foucault, 1977, p. 308). In doing so, Foucault moves beyond a description of polyvalent power by disparaging the current form of power, revealing a moral position that is presumably genuine, in contrast to the disingenuous conduct of prison employees for example. Therefore, he also implies that alternative and better motivations exist.

In summary, the signals in this text support the ubiquitous and independent nature of power ((O+)) combined with its polyvalent and uncertain content, which further determines a delegation of work (-W $\approx$ W). If power is a property of society and a characteristic of all action, the necessary mandate is struggle, because it is not a question of *whether* knowledge becomes domination but *which* knowledge (Giddens, 1984, pp. 15-16; Foucault, 1977, p. 308). It is the struggle or dialectic of control in society that prompts new metaphors of ensembles in the depths that grip, induce, etc., which we reviewed above. Throughout the book, Foucault describes this dialectic of control in terms of contest or an “uncertain festival” where manifest power is always vulnerable to reversal (Foucault, 1977, p. 63). We surrender to the inevitable contest, where games are played and power is held, traded, and lost, not through institutions, but through the

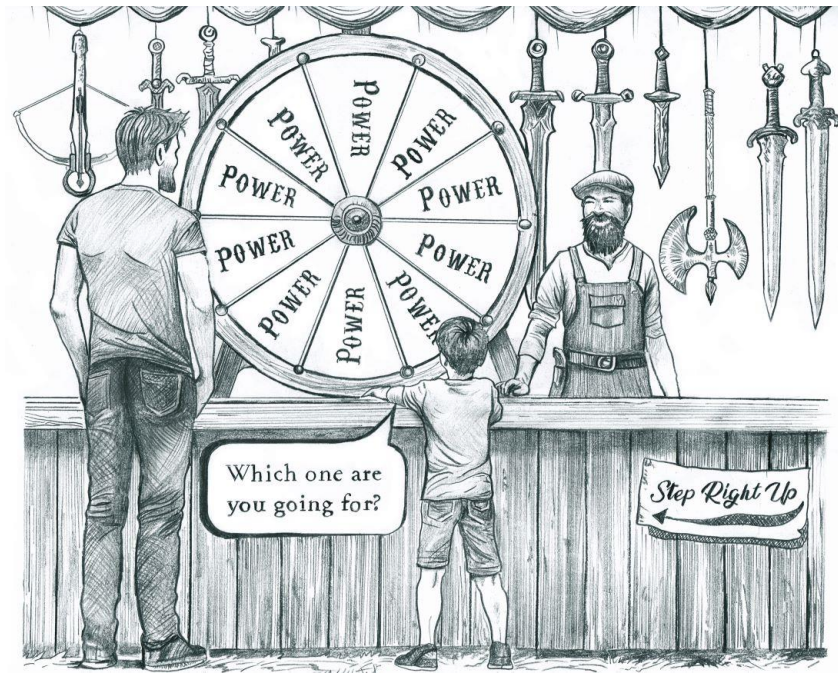


Figure 31 - L. Christensen (2024)

“necessity of combat and
the rules of strategy”

(Foucault, 1977, p. 308).

Our telos appears to be war
and eternalized battle, but
the outcome remains

unclear because all
knowledge becomes a
question of normalized
power. In this way, the

ontology in Discipline and

Punish defines the

necessity of uncertain struggle but does not provide an ontological basis for supporting one combatant over another. Foucault appears to choose a side, as all combatants are required to do, but it is unclear *why* one side is chosen over another.

These ambiguities in Foucault are also noted by external sources, including Alvesson & Skoldberg. They commented that within Foucault’s argument, “everything becomes problematic” and we are unable to delineate an “unproblematic” outcome of the battle (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, pp. 257-258). As such, Foucault’s approach may become deeply pessimistic, suspicious, and arbitrary. Nonetheless, his disapproval of prevailing power may signal another ontology ((O+)) alongside it, or a subjectively based reality that informs his moral position.

Foucault himself maintained that he did not believe that everything he focused on was bad; on the other hand, most things were ‘dangerous’, and so it was important

to observe and put up a resistance to the ‘main danger’ in every given epoch and situation; that is, what mattered was to choose the least dangerous of several dangerous alternatives. (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 258)

The rule of immanence – power selects proximate objects, or local centres of power-knowledge capable of receiving techniques of knowledge and procedure. Investigators do not freely select objects of inquiry based on impartial scientific inquiry, but the “ideological requirements of power”.

The rule of continual variation – subjects who hold power are secondary to force relations and the appropriation of knowledge. Knowledge gatherers are frequently grouped (e.g., mother, child, doctor) and mutually support the mechanism of power and its transformations.

The rule of double conditioning – local centres of power-knowledge must comply with the “strategic envelope”, just as these strategies require precise relations. E.g., family may be incorporated into a broader medical concern over birthrate.

The rule of tactical polyvalence of discourse – because power and knowledge are joined in discourse, it contains discontinuous and unstable segments. Discourse can simultaneously be an instrument of prevailing power, but also a hindrance and opposing strategy.

Figure 32 - Foucault's methodological imperatives

What constitutes danger appears to be linked with scale, where the *main danger* lies in the *prevalent* mechanisms of power. This description is consistent with Foucault’s delineation of discipline through state led carceral networks, or political mechanisms. This is also explicit in *Omnes et Singulatim*, where he aligns the power-knowledge relation with the state, whose goal is to increase its strength in competitive frameworks (Foucault, 1979, p.

242). Therefore, Foucault’s ontology of polyvalent power and the resulting delegation of work directly supported a subjective activism of the “underdog”, or the defense of the least dangerous among an “amorphous mass of...free-floating strategies and power plays” (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, pp. 148,256). This formulation is further corroborated in his development of the four rules or imperatives in *The History of Sexuality (Vol 1)*, where he notes the incorporation of local entities and actors by “prevailing power” and the “ideological requirements of power”

(Figure 32 - Foucault's methodological imperatives). But while this helps to explain why Foucault opposes the main danger, an axiological dilemma remains.

Even if the reader accepts the argument that scale is positively associated with danger, choosing sides remains unsupported by power as a distinct ontology, which is presumably indifferent to combatants. Regardless, there is an additional ambiguity, because a successful challenge to prevailing power would include the inheritance of its scale and the associated danger. This implies that the resistance to the *main danger* needs to be unsuccessful to remain noble, but these questions remain unanswered in the text. Likewise, because this analysis is limited to one volume, it is not necessarily indicative of the author, and we need to be cautious about applying these interpretations too broadly. As others have observed, Foucault's thought regarding reified power relations would evolve and soften, and he would later contemplate the 'self' as something irreducible to power-knowledge (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 256).

6. Applications and Conclusion

By examining classical and contemporary sources, I distilled a structure of mystification that claims an independent and obscured reality. Once claimed, work is alienated to an external entity or force and a variable measure is assigned to or accepted by the actor. The conceptualization of mystification as a structure incorporates the various ways in which theorists develop it but distills these perspectives into an undifferentiated and neutral form. As a structure, ontological claims and the delegation of work is unlikely to be explicit in the text, so I also explored the language or signals of mystification. Through the metaphorical, subject/object, and teleo-rational language in social theory, I extracted various sensitizing concepts that may signal this structure. While tested in a single case, this structure and its associated language has broader implications.

Unlike the naturalistic (materialist) assumptions that framed the development of mystification among classical and other contemporary theorists, its structural form is stripped of these assumptions. As such, mystification is also separated from any valuations of error and the associated solutions to the *problem*. The structure also represents a *discourse* rather than a *polemic*, because the former posits a coherence by exposing the grammar of mystification over its situated usage, or diction. Consequently, if mystification as a structure becomes normalized in discourse, it becomes potentially reflexive. Although sociology is sometimes framed as a demystifying discipline, we should expect to find a mystified discourse within sociology. In this way, a structural form of mystification can be an important addition to programmatic reflexivity, or a theoretical self-examination. By applying a structure and techniques for reading signals, theorists and their students are better equipped to understand and evaluate the foundations of theoretical arguments and polemics.

For example, we can explore the potential utility of applying the structure of mystification to paradigm modeling. Authors like Lincoln, Lynham & Guba develop detailed

Positivism	
<i>Ontology</i>	Naïve Realism – ‘real’ reality and apprehendable.
<i>Epistemology</i>	Dualist/objectivist; findings are true.
<i>Methodology</i>	Experimental/manipulative; verification of hypotheses; chiefly quantitative.
<i>Axiology</i>	Distance from subject, law production.
<i>Inquiry Aim</i>	Explanation, prediction, and control.
<i>Nature of Knowledge</i>	Verified hypotheses established as facts or laws.
<i>Knowledge Accumulation</i>	Accretion, building blocks added to the edifice of knowledge; generalizations and cause & effect linkages.
<i>Goodness or Quality</i>	Conventional benchmarks of rigor; internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity.
<i>Values</i>	Excluded – influence denied, standards-based research, scientific method.
<i>Ethics</i>	Extrinsic: tilt toward deception, data drives side effects of research. Study nature without direct influence on policy.
<i>Voice</i>	Disinterested scientist as informer and decision maker, policy maker, and change agents.
<i>Training</i>	Technical and quantitative, substantive theories.
<i>Accommodation of Other Paradigms</i>	Commensurable
<i>Hegemony</i>	Research may influence through truth production, but non-prescriptive.
<i>Action</i>	Strict objectivity.

Table 2 - Example of the Positivist Paradigm in Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba

tables that trace the philosophical, methodological, thematic, and practical features of major theoretical traditions. These high-level summaries reduce and work through positivist, post-positivist, critical, constructivist, and more recently, participatory streams, by identifying their central characteristics or clusters (*Table 2 - Example of the Positivist Paradigm in Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba*). These models are helpful in that they demonstrate how philosophical or paradigmatic assumptions translate into or inform the characteristics of research activity, such as types of voice, views on hegemony, aims, action, and so on. In this way, the paradigm

resembles our mystification structure that connects ontological claims to the delegation of work. Consequently, paradigmatic models also recognize patterns, in that assumptions tend to produce predictable sets of activities or responses. For example, we expect to find that a positivist researcher uniformly applies objectivity and distance, both toward the *external* object of study

and from the practical application of research findings. However, paradigm models confront several limitations, which their producers readily acknowledge. These models are “controversial” because of the assumed embodiment of the paradigm within a given group of researchers. As noted earlier, theoretical interbreeding combined with individual course corrections render theoretical labels tenuous and fluid (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018, p. 109). As a result, the assignment of a given author to *one* camp can become artificial, even unfair in some cases. This challenge becomes real when the reader is confronted with the theoretical ambiguity of Foucault, Durkheim’s disavowal of naturalism, and Berger’s signals of transcendence alongside his generative phenomenology. Alternatively, a student of these paradigms may be tempted to ignore these subtleties and force the theorist to fit the paradigm. I also noted that this *fitting* is sometimes done in the interest of critique and correction, even when the targets of critique do not assign themselves to a given camp.

The problem of fluidity rests, in part, on the commensurability of paradigmatic elements, and paradigm builders include measures of accommodation in their models.

Are paradigms commensurable? Is it possible to blend elements of one paradigm into another, so that one is engaging in research that represents the best of both worldviews? The answer, from our perspective, has to be a cautious yes. (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018, p. 133)

For example, in *Table 2*, Positivism will “chiefly” use quantitative methods, but the researcher is not precluded from incorporating qualitative measures, just as a constructivist could use quantitative ones. I also observed that emancipation from oppressive forces appears across theoretical positions, including positivist regimes (e.g., freedom from irrational religious ideas), whose proponents sometimes describe our transition from darkness to light and our progressive rationality. Even within the work of a given theorist, the author can display the characteristics of

different paradigms simultaneously and compartmentalize them. As noted, Durkheim works with naturalistic assumptions and tools, but simultaneously denies strict mechanization and its suppression of agency, thereby preserving a measure of subjectivity. The reader may interpret this as incoherence, hypocrisy, or merely a containment strategy, where the theorist uses the necessary tools to accomplish specific research objectives, while denying its philosophical assumptions.

In this way, the commensurability of paradigmatic elements is typically limited to non-philosophical features of the paradigm (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018, p. 132). Therefore,

Ontology		positivist and constructivist
<i>Positivism</i>	Naïve realism – ‘real’ and apprehendable reality.	paradigms may blend methods and
<i>Postpositivism</i>	Critical realism – ‘real’ but imperfectly apprehendable reality.	methodologies, but their worldviews
<i>Critical Theory</i>	Historical realism – virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values; crystalized over time.	are seen as fundamentally
<i>Constructivism</i>	Relative reality – local and specific, co-constructed reality.	incompatible. But this raises
<i>Participatory</i>	Participative reality – subjective-objective reality co-created by mind and cosmos.	another and deeper limitation
		involving the definitions of
		philosophical categories. For

Table 3 - Ontological features across theoretical traditions in Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba

example, within paradigms, theory appears to operate at the level of *worldview*, and ontology is sublimated to theory, or reality at the operational or proximate level (*Table 3 - Ontological features across theoretical traditions in Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba*). This can lead the reader to believe that an assumed reality that guides a researcher’s approach reflects the researcher’s worldview. The result is that the positivist and postpositivist claim a ‘real’ reality or truth, while critical theorists and constructivists do not. The former are often critiqued as postulating and apprehending reality ‘naïvely’, while the latter can emancipate themselves from what Hannah

Arendt described as the “coerciveness of the truth”. Presumably, the latter’s avoidance of ontological truth claims supports prophetic statements that reality claims may eventually disappear from the research landscape altogether (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018, p. 145).

We might predict that, if not in our lifetimes, at some time later, the dualist idea of an objective reality suborned by limited human subjective realities will seem as quaint as flat-earth theories do to us today. (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018, p. 137)

The danger is that this claim omits a deeper layer of reality to support a dichotomous claim at another layer, at the differentiated surface. In other words, depth becomes a missing variable in these paradigms, like claims that chocolate and strawberry ice cream are incongruities by eliding the cream and the ice. By presenting reality claims as potentially discardable or superfluous to ‘human subjective realities’, the reader is confronted by dissimulation or the *apparent* absence of these claims. But it is asymmetrical to speak of the “ghost-like” and distorting creatures of the religious mind without exploring the “gigantic ghost of the Collective Soul”, or to suggest that we destroy the “myths that cloak the exercise of power” without considering the posited immortality of power relations (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 22-25; Durkheim, 1982, p. 62; Malinowski, 1948, p. 47; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 49,51).

If positivists and post-positivists naïvely claim the presence of a grounding reality, conflict theorists and constructivists may naïvely deny it. This was articulated by Midgley and Bhaskar, who defined naïve realism (or empirical realism) as an unqualified belief in our faculties to perceive the universe with accuracy, or the presumed resonance between our knowledge of an object and the object itself (Bhaskar, 1975, pp. 16-18; Midgley, 1992, p. 101). It is unclear how a constructivist, for example, avoids these presumptions by focusing on intersubjectivity as the arbiter of reality. As such, when theoretical perspectives signal a kind of

ontological ‘imperialism’ of subjects or objects, naivety appears *across* these paradigms (Giddens, 1984, p. 2). The need for symmetry was observed by Heron & Reason in their critique of these paradigmatic models that either reduce constructed realities to the “original givenness of the cosmos” or disregard givenness as fictive altogether. In either case, confusion and blindness result. For example, the positivist mind is more likely to deny the constructed nature of their taxonomies, granting this framework a given or immutable status. The behavioural outcome of this error is conservatism, dominating frameworks, and intolerance to change or variance. Alternatively, a constructivist paradigm is more likely to neglect the immutable, leaving only construction. If a paradigm denies any “transcendental ground” then all grounds are equally constructed, and it “confuses relative truth with nihilistic skepticism”. Behaviourally, this moves toward restless anarchy and purposeless power (Heron & Reason, 1997, p. 275). From Heron & Reason’s perspective, the solution to this problem is the blending of perspectives, or the *Participatory Paradigm*, which Lincoln, Lynham & Guba later added to their models.

The participatory worldview allows us as human persons to know that we are part of the whole rather than separated as mind over and against matter, or placed here in the relatively separate creation of a transcendent god. (Heron & Reason, 1997, p. 275)

In sum, they argue that the mind’s conceptual work is ultimately grounded in its experiential participation in what is already given, striking a subjective-objective balance. But this *whole* is nebulous, and it is unclear how this differs from other balancing concepts in social theory, like field-habitus, structuration, frame, mimetic reiteration, and so on. In this way, participatory paradigms do not distinguish themselves from the work of other theorists who examine how structure interacts with agency or the complex interactions between actors and institutions. It does, however, provide another paradigm where these theorists may *fit*.

To summarize the above, the problem is that traditional paradigmatic modeling can present an asymmetrical picture of theoretical streams at the ontological level. Some theories posit an objective reality at the expense of the subject, while others posit a subjective reality at the expense of the object. Some theorists sense this tension and develop concepts and paradigms to correct this imbalance by positing a blended subjective-objective world. However, *adding* a Participatory or other paradigm to the list may be helpful by offering an alternative that relieves this tension, but maintains the paradigmatic assumption that ‘real’ ontological claims can be avoided. As I discussed earlier during my review of classical theorists and the development of mystification, attributing this characteristic to the religious mind assumes the alternative, where nothing is mystified. In other words, only religion posits an obscured and independent reality, which a materialist presumably avoids. In doing so, the mystifying position is effectively quarantined as an error.

To visualize this approach, we can use Bruce Lincoln’s formulation of “sentiment evocation” through feelings of affinity and estrangement (Lincoln B. , 2014, p. 7). In short, Lincoln argued that myth enforces, creates, or redefines cleavages and bonds between social sub-

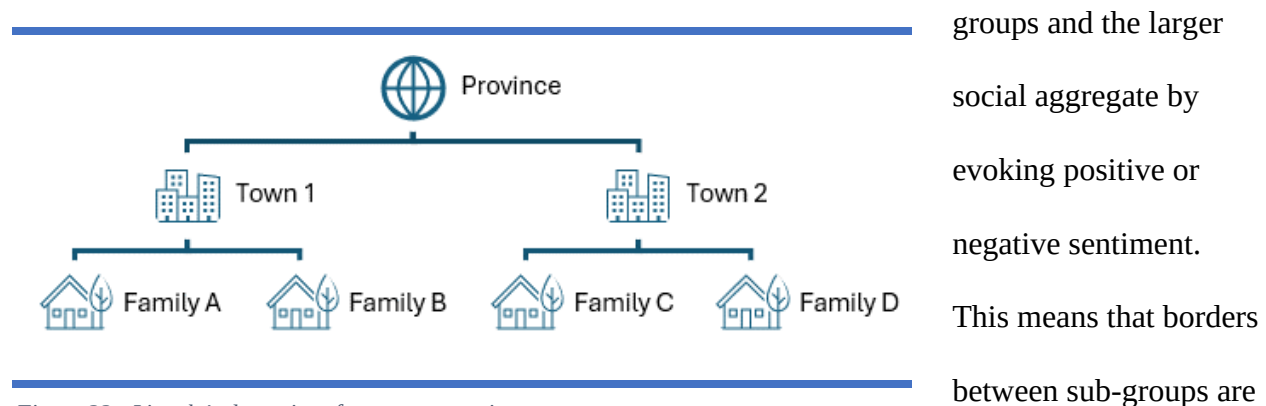


Figure 33 - Lincoln's dynamics of segmentary units

potentially fluid, subject to the framing of their interrelationships. For example, in *Figure 33 - Lincoln's dynamics of segmentary units*, let us assume that Families A-D are all in conflict with

one another. However, these conflicts dissipate if we appeal to their common ancestry, identity, or destiny at the level of Town 1 or 2. A myth can appeal to the level of Town, as a “latent structural possibility” that contextualizes family tensions as transitory. With Families A-B and C-D united under their respective Towns, myth can evoke a broader sentiment of affinity by appealing to the level of Province, thereby unifying both Towns and their respective Families (Lincoln B. , 2014, pp. 14-18). Although Lincoln does not frame social theory or paradigms as mythological, I am arguing that they perform similar labour by evoking sentiment, but often in support of cleavages by limiting comparisons to the *levels* where variance is expected. By applying greater ontological depth to these paradigms and the analysis of theory generally, the question is not *whether* a given theory claims an obscured and independent reality, but *what* is it mystifying? This does not mean that theories are all the same or that the mystified terms are equally reasonable, only that they are there. Only a structure of mystification, stripped of its materialist roots, permits this type of symmetrical and reflexive investigation.

Through our examination of several contemporary theorists, this symmetry came into focus. Jerome Levi argued that *humanity* exists in a state of “existential separation”, where phenomena are refractions of non-empirical realities (Levi, 2009, p. 943). Similarly, Bhaskar argued that a transcendental world is philosophically *necessary* to rationalize scientific inquiry, just as Zilberman posited an absolute and impenetrable truth in the modalities of thought. Practically, this has led other theorists to explore the substratum that connects positions that are at variance with each other. Midgley examined the coopted religious language in scientism, just as Paul Vitz explored that the “disguised” ontological shift toward the ‘self’ as an ultimate reality in clinical psychology (Vitz, 1977, pp. xii,21,25). As this research incorporated ontological depth, book titles like *Science as Salvation* (Midgley) and *Psychology as Religion* (Vitz) emerge.

Perhaps, a leap of faith to the imperialism of *something* is always required. Like myth, social theory may operate within a synchro-diachronic structure with undifferentiated and differentiated features.

A structuralist perspective can supplement paradigm modeling by positing an independent or bracketed ontology, as a trans-theoretical category. Again, the question is not *whether* a theoretical paradigm mystifies, but *what* is mystified as the cognitive anchor for theoretical development.⁵⁹ Adding ontological depth, including techniques for exploring these claims, to the study of theory and paradigms can mitigate false dichotomies, improve transparency, and place theoretical polemics into perspective. In addition, Discourse Analysis (DA) can assist in measuring the scope of paradigmatic commensurability and utility. As summaries, paradigms sometimes lack explicit reference to theoretical sources or sample texts. In other words, it is unclear which theorists or arguments are envisioned within a given paradigm or if a quintessential source exists. Even if one or a few fitting examples are found, these paradigms would not exceed an ideal typical level as heuristic devices. If systematic DA is applied to theoretical products, it may be possible to assess variance against the ideal type and ultimately their utility in capturing a group of theorists.

But a systematic DA of social theory also requires tools. Paradigms effectively provide a list of criteria or categories against which we can measure a theoretical product, but without a clear roadmap. For example, how does the reader assess the categories of values or ethics within an author's theoretical product when these are not explicitly declared by the author? Even if the categories within the paradigm (e.g., values, ethics, hegemony, etc.) are clearly defined, the

⁵⁹ This does not equate to the clear *detection* of mystification in every text, nor does this speak to the transparency of the speaker/writer.

investigator needs to be attuned to their *signals* in theoretical language. I have attempted to make a preliminary entry into this territory by inductively developing both a structure and its corresponding language to explore the ontological claims of theory. As we observed, attention to implicit content and coherence in units larger than the text can expose that which is rarely explicit in theory. But the hermeneutical task is a daunting one.

Because deeper ontologies are increasingly impenetrable, their detection and any description of their characteristics is possible only through “inference to the best explanation” (Peacocke, 1993, p. xxx). This inference moves from the empirical (i.e., language/signals) to the non-empirical and occurs internally through the theorist and externally by the investigator or reader. For example, Bloch searches for an “immutable universal base” or human nature through ethnography, just as Berger posited transcendent forces through their social signals (Bloch, 2005, pp. 17-18). In both cases, the authors argue that their inferences are reasonable, but the reader also assesses whether the inferred structure represents the *best explanation* of the phenomena they record in the text. This form of *a posteriori* reasoning is interpretative, but these inferred structures are also “authenticated intersubjectively” by the harmonized experience of author and reader (Polkinghorne, 2010, p. 18; Peacocke, 1993, pp. xxix-xxx). This density applies to the current project, which began with mystification in social theory to distill a structure, which I then applied reflexively to social theory. Mystified discourse is the structure and language of the mystifying tendency, or a structure of ontological structuring whose language we are still deciphering.

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