Structuralism, Poststructuralism, and Postmodern Social Theory

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Chapter Outline

Structuralism

Poststructuralism

Postmodern Social Theory

Criticisms and Post-Postmodern Social Theory

This book is largely about *modern* social theory. However, in the last several decades, and in many different fields (art, architecture, literature, sociology, and others), there have been developments that scholars now think of as *postmodern*. The implication is not only that these things come after the modern, but that there were problems with the modern that the postmodernists are pointing out and endeavoring to deal with.

In sociological theory, the modern (as well as the classical) theories discussed throughout the preceding pages continue to be important—in fact, preeminent—within the discipline. Yet postmodern social theory is having an increasingly important impact on sociological theory, and it is now possible to identify postmodern developments, theoretical perspectives, and theorists. Furthermore, one would expect sociological theorists, as those closest to the humanities, to be most open to postmodernism. As at least some sociological theorists grow more postmodern in their orientation, we can expect that other, more empirically inclined sociologists will come to be influenced by at least some aspects of postmodern social theory.

In discussing postmodern social theory it is necessary to shift our focus from *sociological* theories to *social* theories. *Sociological* theories tend to reflect developments that have occurred largely within sociology and that are of interest mainly to sociologists. *Social* theories tend to be multidisciplinary. The distinction between the two, however, is not clear-cut. In fact, at least some of the theories discussed earlier in this book, especially the neo-Marxian and agency-structure theories, might be better described as social theories. In any case, it is clear that postmodern theories are best viewed as social theories.

In this chapter, we deal with the emergence of what, in fact, does come after modern social theory by tracing the line of development from structuralism to post-structuralism and ultimately to what has come to be known as postmodern social theory. Following Lash (1991:ix), we take "the structuralism which swept through French social thought in the 1960s" as the starting point for the emergence of post-structuralism and postmodernism.

Structuralism was a reaction against French humanism, especially the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre (Margolis, 2007; Craib and Wernick, 2005). In his early work Sartre focused on the individual, especially individual freedom. At that point he adhered to the view that what people do is determined by them and not by social laws or larger social structures. However, later in his career Sartre was more drawn to Marxian theory, and while he continued to focus on the "free individual," that individual was now "situated in a massive and oppressive social structure which limits and alienates his activities" (Craib, 1976:9).

In her analysis of Sartre's work, Gila Hayim (1980) sees continuity between his early and his late work. In *Being and Nothingness,* published in 1943, Sartre focuses more on the free individual and takes the view that "existence is defined by and through one's acts. . . . *One is what one does*" (Hayim, 1980:3). At the same time, Sartre attacks the structuralist view of "objective structures as completely deterministic of behavior" (Hayim, 1980:5). For Sartre and existentialists in general, actors have the capacity to go beyond the present, to move toward the future. For Sartre, then, people are free; they are responsible for everything they do; they have no excuses. In some senses, these "staggering responsibilities of freedom" (Hayim, 1980:17) are a tremendous source of anguish to people. In other senses, this responsibility is a source of optimism to people—their fates are in their hands. In the *Critique of Dialectical Reason,* published in 1963, Sartre devotes more attention to social structures, but even here he emphasizes the "human prerogative for transcendence—the surpassing of the given" (Hayim, 1980:16). Sartre is critical of various Marxists (structural Marxists) who overemphasize the role and place of social structure. "Dogmatic Marxists have, by Sartre's view, eliminated the humanistic component of Marx's original idea" (Hayim, 1980:72). As an existentialist, Sartre *always* retained this humanism. It is against the backdrop of the humanism of existentialism that one must see the rise of structuralism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism.

Structuralism

Structuralism obviously involves a focus on structures, but they are not in the main the same structures that concern the structural functionalists (see Chapter 7). While the latter and indeed most sociologists are concerned with *social* structures, of primary concern to structuralists are *linguistic* structures. This shift from social to linguistic structures is what has come to be known as the *linguistic turn,* which dramatically altered the nature of the social sciences (Lash, 1991:ix). The focus of a good many social scientists shifted from social structure to language (see, for example, the earlier discussions of Habermas's work on communication [in Chapter 8] and the conversation analyses of some ethnomethodologists [in Chapter 11]) or more generally to signs of various sorts.

Roots in Linguistics

Structuralism emerged from diverse developments in various fields (Dosse, 1998). The source of modern structuralism and its strongest bastion to this day is linguistics. The work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) stands out in the development of structural linguistics and, ultimately, structuralism in various other fields (Culler, 1976; Thibault, 2005a). Of particular interest to us is Saussure's differentiation between *langue* and *parole,* which was to have enormous significance. *Langue* is the formal, grammatical system of language. It is a system of phonic elements whose relationships are governed, Saussure and his followers believed, by determinate laws. Much of linguistics since Saussure's time has been oriented to the discovery of those laws. The existence of *langue* makes *parole* possible (Bakker, 2007b). *Parole* is actual speech, the way speakers use language to express themselves. Although Saussure recognized the significance of people's use of language in subjective and often idiosyncratic ways, he believed that the individual's use of language cannot be the concern of the scientifically oriented linguist. Such a linguist must look at *langue,* the formal system of language, not at the subjective ways in which it is used by actors.

Langue, then, can be viewed as a system of signs—a structure—and the meaning of each sign is produced by the relationship among signs within the system. Especially important here are relations of difference, including binary oppositions. Thus, for example, the meaning of the word *hot* comes not from some intrinsic properties of the word but from the word's relationship with, its binary opposition to, the word *cold.* Meanings, the mind, and ultimately the social world are shaped by the structure of language. Thus, instead of an existential world of people shaping their surroundings, we have here a world in which people, as well as other aspects of the social world, are shaped by the structure of language.

The concern for structure has been extended beyond language to the study of all sign systems. This focus on the structure of sign systems has been labeled "semiotics" and has attracted many followers (Gottdiener, 1994; Hawkes, 1977; Thibault, 2005b). *Semiotics* is broader than structural linguistics because it encompasses not only language but also other sign and symbol systems, such as facial expressions, body language, literary texts, indeed all forms of communication.

Roland Barthes (Perry, 2007) often is seen as the true founder of semiotics. Barthes extended Saussure's ideas to all areas of social life. Not only language but also social behaviors are representations, or signs: "Not just language, but wrestling matches are also signifying practices, as are TV shows, fashions, cooking and just about everything else in everyday life" (Lash, 1991:xi). The "linguistic turn" came to encompass all social phenomena, which, in turn, came to be reinterpreted as signs.

Anthropological Structuralism: Claude Lévi-Strauss

A central figure in French structuralism—Kurzweil (1980:13) calls him "the father of structuralism"—is the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (I. Rossi, 2005). Although structure takes various forms in Lévi-Strauss's work, what is important for our purposes is that he can be seen as extending Saussure's work on language to

anthropological issues—for example, to myths in primitive societies. However, Lévi-Strauss also applied structuralism more broadly to all forms of communication. His major innovation was to reconceptualize a wide array of social phenomena (for instance, kinship systems) as systems of communication, thereby making them amenable to structural analyses. The exchange of spouses, for example, can be analyzed in the same way as the exchange of words; both are social exchanges that can be studied through the use of structural anthropology.

We can illustrate Lévi-Strauss's (1967) thinking with the example of the similarities between linguistic systems and kinship systems. First, terms used to describe kinship, like phonemes in language, are basic units of analysis to the structural anthropologist. Second, neither the kinship terms nor the phonemes have meaning in themselves. Instead, both acquire meaning only when they are integral parts of a larger system. Lévi-Strauss even used a system of binary oppositions in his anthropology (for example, the raw and the cooked) much like those employed by Saussure in linguistics. Third, Lévi-Strauss admitted that there is empirical variation from setting to setting in both phonemic and kinship systems, but even these variations can be traced to the operation of general, although implicit, laws.

All of this is very much in line with the linguistic turn, but Lévi-Strauss ultimately went off in a number of directions that are at odds with that turn. Most important, he argued that both phonemic systems and kinship systems are the products of the structures of the mind. However, they are not the products of a conscious process. Instead, they are the products of the unconscious, logical structure of the mind. These systems, as well as the logical structure of the mind from which they are derived, operate on the basis of general laws. Most of those who have followed the linguistic turn have not followed Lévi-Strauss in the direction of defining the underlying structure of the mind as the most fundamental structure.

Structural Marxism

Another variant of structuralism that enjoyed considerable success in France (and many other parts of the world) was structuralist Marxism (Lechte, 2005), especially the work of Louis Althusser (K. Tucker, 2007), Nicos Poulantzas, and Maurice Godelier.

Although we have presented the case that modern structuralism began with Saussure's work in linguistics, there are those who argue that it started with the work of Karl Marx: "When Marx assumes that structure is not to be confused with visible relations and explains their hidden logic, he inaugurates the modern structuralist tradition" (Godelier, 1972b:336). Although structural Marxism and structuralism in general are both interested in "structures," each field conceptualizes structure differently.

At least some structural Marxists share with structuralists an interest in the study of structure as a prerequisite to the study of history. As Maurice Godelier said, "The study of the internal functioning of a structure must precede and illuminate the study of its genesis and evolution" (1972b:343). In another work, Godelier said, "The inner *logic* of these systems must be analyzed *before* their *origin* is analyzed" (1972a:xxi). Another view shared by structuralists and structural Marxists is that structuralism should be concerned with the structures, or systems, that are formed out of the

interplay of social relations. Both schools see structures as real (albeit invisible), although they differ markedly on the nature of the structure that they consider real. For Lévi-Strauss the focus is on the structure of the mind, whereas for structural Marxists it is on the underlying structure of society.

Perhaps most important, both structuralism and structural Marxism reject empiricism and accept a concern for underlying invisible structures. Godelier argued: "What both structuralists and Marxists reject are the empiricist definitions of what constitutes a social structure" (1972a:xviii). Godelier also made this statement:

> For Marx as for Lévi-Strauss a structure is *not* a reality that is *directly* visible, and so directly observable, but a *level of reality* that exists *beyond* the visible relations between men, and the functioning of which constitutes the underlying logic of the system, the subjacent order by which the apparent order is to be explained.
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> (Godelier, 1972a:xix)

Godelier went even further and argued that such a pursuit defines all science: "What is visible is a *reality* concealing *another,* deeper reality, which is hidden and the discovery of which is the very purpose of scientific cognition" (1972a:xxiv).

In spite of these similarities, structural Marxism did not in the main participate in the linguistic turn then taking place in the social sciences. For example, the focal concern continued to be social and economic, not linguistic, structures. Moreover, structural Marxism continued to be associated with Marxian theory, and many French social thinkers were becoming at least as impatient with Marxian theory as they were with existentialism.

Poststructuralism

Although it is impossible to pinpoint such a transition with any precision, Charles Lemert (1990) traces the beginning of poststructuralism to a 1966 speech by Jacques Derrida, one of the acknowledged leaders of this approach (Lipscomb, 2007; J. Phillips, 2005), in which he proclaimed the dawning of a new poststructuralist age. In contrast to the structuralists, especially those who followed the linguistic turn and who saw people as being constrained by the structure of language, Derrida reduced language to "writing" that does not constrain its subjects. Furthermore, Derrida also saw social institutions as nothing but writing and therefore as unable to constrain people. In contemporary terms, Derrida deconstructed language and social institutions (Trifonas, 1996), and when he had finished, all he found there was writing. While there is still a focus here on language, writing is *not* a structure that constrains people. Furthermore, while the structuralists saw order and stability in the language system, Derrida sees language as disorderly and unstable. Different contexts give words different meanings. As a result, the language system cannot have the constraining power over people that the structuralists think it does. Furthermore, it is impossible for scientists to search for the underlying laws of language. Thus, Derrida offers what is ultimately a subversive, deconstructive perspective. As we will see, subversion and deconstruction become even more important with the emergence of postmodernism, and it is poststructuralism that laid the groundwork for postmodernism.

The object of Derrida's hostility is the *logocentrism* (the search for a universal system of thought that reveals what is true, right, beautiful, and so on) that has dominated Western social thought. This approach has contributed to what Derrida describes as the "historical repression and suppression of writing since Plato" (1978:196). Logocentrism has led to the closure not only of philosophy, but also to that of the human sciences. Derrida is interested in deconstructing, or "dismantling," the sources of this closure—this repression—thereby freeing writing from the things that enslave it. An apt phrase to describe Derrida's focus is "the deconstruction of logocentrism" (1978:230). More generally, *deconstruction* involves the decomposition of unities in order to uncover hidden differences (D. N. Smith, 1996:208).

A good concrete example of Derrida's thinking is his discussion of what he calls the "theatre of cruelty." He contrasts this concept with the traditional theater, which he sees as dominated by a system of thought that he calls representational logic (a similar logic has dominated social theory). That is, what takes place on the stage "represents" what takes place in "real life," as well as the expectations of writers, directors, and so on. This "representationalism" is the theater's god, and it renders the traditional theater theological. A theological theater is a controlled, enslaved theater:

> The stage is theological for as long as its structure, following the entirety of tradition, comports the following elements: an author-creator who, absent and from afar, is armed with a text and keeps watch over, assembles, regulates the time or the meaning of representation. . . . He lets representation represent him through representatives, directors or actors, *enslaved* interpreters . . . who . . . more or less directly represent the thought of the "creator." *Interpretive slaves* who faithfully execute the providential designs of the "master." . . . Finally, the theological stage comports a *passive*, seated public, a public of spectators, of consumers, of enjoyers.
>
> (Derrida, 1978:235; italics added)

Derrida envisions an alternative stage (an alternative society?) in which "speech will cease to govern the stage" (1978:239). That is, the stage no longer will be governed by, for example, authors and texts. The actors will no longer take dictation; the writers will no longer be the dictators of what transpires on the stage. However, this does not mean that the stage will become anarchic. While Derrida is not crystal clear on his alternative stage, we get a hint when he discusses the "construction of a stage whose clamor has not yet been pacified into words" (1978:240). Or, "the theatre of cruelty would be the art of difference and of expenditure without economy, without reserve, without return, without history" (Derrida, 1978:247).

It is clear that Derrida is calling for a radical deconstruction of the traditional theater. More generally, he is implying a critique of society in general, which is in the thrall of logocentrism. Just as he wants to free the theater from the dictatorship of the writer, he wants to see society free of the ideas of all the intellectual authorities who have created the dominant discourse. In other words, Derrida wants to see us all be free to be writers.

Implied here is another well-known concern of the poststructuralists (and post-modernists): *decentering*. In a sense, Derrida wants the theater to move away from its traditional "center," its focus on writers (the authorities) and their expectations, and to give the actors more free play. This point, too, can be generalized to society as a

whole. Derrida associates the center with *the* answer and therefore ultimately with death. The center is linked with the absence of that which is essential to Derrida: "play and difference"[1] (1978:297). Theater or society without play and difference— that is, static theater or society—can be seen as being dead. In contrast, a theater or a world without a center would be infinitely open, ongoing, and self-reflexive. Derrida concludes that the future "is neither to be awaited nor to be refound" (1978:300). His point is that we are not going to find the future in the past, nor should we passively await our fate. Rather, the future is to be found, is being made, is being written, in what we are doing.

Having debunked Western logocentrism and intellectual authority, in the end Derrida leaves us without an answer; in fact, there is *no* single answer (Cadieux, 1995). The search for the answer, the search for Logos, has been destructive and enslaving. All we are left with is the process of writing, of acting, with play and with difference.

The Ideas of Michel Foucault

Although Derrida is an extremely important poststructuralist, the most important thinker associated with this approach is Michel Foucault (Smart, 2000). Foucault's work illustrates yet another difference between poststructuralism and structuralism. While structuralism was overwhelmingly influenced by linguistics, Foucault's approach, and poststructuralism more generally, shows a variety of theoretical inputs (Smart, 1985). This variety makes Foucault's work provocative and difficult to handle. Furthermore, the ideas are not simply adopted from other thinkers but are transformed as they are integrated into Foucault's unusual theoretical orientation. Thus, Weber's theory of rationalization has an impact, but to Foucault it is found only in certain "key sites," and it is not an "iron cage"; there is always resistance. Marxian ideas (Smart, 1983) are found in Foucault's work, but Foucault does not restrict himself to the economy; he focuses on a range of institutions. He is more interested in the "micro-politics of power" than in the traditional Marxian concern with power at the societal level. He practices hermeneutics in order to better understand the social phenomena of concern to him. Moreover, Foucault has no sense of some deep, ultimate truth; there are simply ever more layers to be peeled away. There is a phenomenological influence, but Foucault rejects the idea of an autonomous, meaning-giving subject. There is a strong element of structuralism but no formal rule-governed model of behavior. Finally, and perhaps most important, Foucault adopts Nietzsche's interest in the relationship between power and knowledge, but that link is analyzed much more sociologically by Foucault. This multitude of theoretical inputs is one of the reasons Foucault is thought of as a poststructuralist.

There is yet another sense in which Foucault's work is clearly poststructuralist. That is, in his early work Foucault was heavily influenced by structuralism, but as his work progressed, that influence declined and other inputs moved his theory in a variety of other directions. Let us look at the evolution of Foucault's work.

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[1] Difference, or *différence,* another key concept to Derrida, involves the idea that to understand something we must grasp the way it relates to other things (Ramji, 2007).
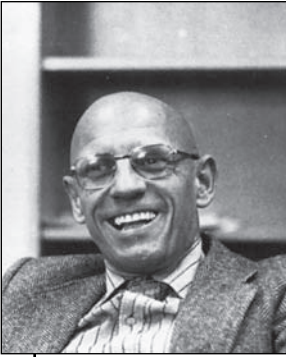
MICHEL FOUCAULT

A Biographical Sketch

When he died of AIDS in 1984 at 57 years of age (Lemert, 2005a), "Michel Foucault was perhaps the single most famous intellectual in the world" (J. Miller, 1993:13). That fame was derived from a fascinating body of work that has influenced thinkers in a number of different fields, including sociology. Foucault also led an extremely interesting life, and the themes that characterized his life tended to define his work as well. In fact, it could be argued that through his work Foucault was seeking to better understand himself and the forces that led him to lead the life that he led.

Among Foucault's last works was a trilogy devoted to sex—*The History of Sexuality* (1980a), *The Care of the Self* (1984), and *The Use of Pleasure* (1985). These works reflected Foucault's lifelong obsession with sex. A good deal of Foucault's life seems to have been defined by this obsession, in particular his homosexuality and his sadomasochism. During a trip to San Francisco in 1975, Foucault visited and was deeply attracted to the city's flourishing gay community. Foucault appears to have been drawn to the impersonal sex that flourished in the infamous bathhouses of that time and place. His interest and participation in these settings and activities were part of a lifelong interest in "'the overwhelming, the unspeakable, the creepy, the stupefying, the ecstatic'" (cited in J. Miller, 1993:27). In other words, in his life (and his work) Foucault was deeply interested in "limit experiences" (where people [including himself] purposely push their minds and bodies to the breaking point) such as the impersonal sadomasochistic activities that took place in and around those bathhouses. It was Foucault's belief that it was during such limit experiences that great personal and intellectual breakthroughs and revelations became possible.

Thus, sex was related to limit experiences, and both, in turn, were related in his view to death: "'I think the kind of pleasure I would consider as the real pleasure would be so deep, so intense, so overwhelming that I couldn't survive

Two ideas are at the core of Foucault's methodology—"archaeology of knowledge" (Foucault, 1966) and "genealogy of power" (Foucault, 1969; Valverde, 2007). Although there is a sense in his work that the latter succeeds the former, Mitchell Dean (1994) has made a convincing case that the two coexist and mutually support one another in his substantive work.

Alan Sheridan (1980:48) contends that Foucault's archaeology of knowledge (Scheurich and McKenzie, 2007) involves a search for "a set of rules that determine the conditions of possibility for all that can be said within the particular discourse at any given time." To put it another way, archaeology is the search for the "general

it. . . . Complete total pleasure . . . for me, it's related to death'" (Foucault, cited in J. Miller, 1993:27). Even in the fall of 1983, when he was well aware of AIDS and the fact that homosexuals were disproportionately likely to contract the disease, he plunged back into the impersonal sex of the bathhouses of San Francisco: *"He took AIDS very seriously. . . . When he went to San Francisco for the last time, he took it as a 'limit-experience'"* (cited in J. Miller, 1993:380).

Foucault also had a limit experience with LSD at Zabriskie Point in Death Valley in the spring of 1975. There Foucault tried LSD for the first time, and the drug pushed his mind to the limit: "'The sky has exploded . . . and the stars are raining down upon me. I know this is not true, but it is the Truth'" (cited in J. Miller, 1993:250). With tears streaming down his face, Foucault said, "'I am very happy. . . . Tonight I have achieved a fresh perspective on myself. . . . I now understand my sexuality. . . . We must go home again'" (cited in J. Miller, 1993:251).

Prior to his experience with LSD, Foucault had been hard at work doing the research for his history of sexuality. He planned to approach that work much as he had approached his previous work on madness and other issues. But after his limit experience with LSD, he totally rethought the project. Among other things, that project came to focus more on the self. It is perhaps that new focus that Foucault anticipated when, during his LSD trip, he spoke of going home (to the self) again.

Foucault pushed himself to the limit not only in his personal life but also in his work. Indeed, it could be argued that the extreme natures of both tended to feed off each other. Whatever else one may say about Foucault's work, it clearly was enormously creative; it pushed up against and perhaps even went beyond the limits of creativity. His work was a limit experience for him, and the study of it can be a "limit experience" for the reader.

Because he was operating at the limit, Foucault's life and work defy simple definition. This incapacity would be just fine with Foucault given the fact that he once wrote, "'Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same. . . . More than one person, doubtless like me, writes in order to have no face'" (Foucault, cited in J. Miller, 1993:19).

system of the formation and transformation of statements [into discursive formations]" (Dean, 1994:16). The search for such a "general system," or such "rules," as well as the focus on *discourse* (Lemert, 2005b)—spoken and written "documents"—reflects the early influence of structuralism on Foucault's work. In analyzing these documents, Foucault does not seek to "understand" them as would a hermeneuticist. Rather, Foucault's archaeology "organises the document, divides it up, distributes it, orders, arranges it in levels, establishes series, distinguishes between what is relevant and what is not, discovers elements, defines unities, describes relations" (Dean, 1994:15). Discourse and the documents it produces are to be analyzed, described, and organized;

they are irreducible and not subject to interpretation seeking some "deeper" level of understanding. Also ruled out by Foucault is the search for origins; it is the documents themselves that are important, not their point of origination.

Foucault is particularly interested in those discourses "that seek to rationalise or systematise themselves in relation to particular ways of 'saying the true'" (Dean, 1994:32). As we will see, this concern leads him in the direction of the study of discourses that relate to the formation of human sciences such as psychology. Archaeology is able to distance and detach itself from "the norms and criteria of validity of established sciences and disciplines in favour of the internal intelligibility of the ensembles so located, their conditions of emergence, existence, and transformation" (Dean, 1994:36).

The concern for "saying the truth" relates directly to Foucault's genealogy of power because, as Foucault comes to see it, knowledge and power are inextricably intertwined (Foucault is here heavily indebted to the philosophy of Nietzsche [Fuller, 2007b; Lemert, 2005a]). Genealogy is a very distinctive type of intellectual history, "a way of linking historical contents into organised and ordered *trajectories* that are neither the simple unfolding of their origins nor the necessary realisation of their ends. It is a way of analysing multiple, open-ended, heterogeneous trajectories of discourses, practices, and events, and of establishing their patterned relationships, without recourse to regimes of truth that claim pseudo-naturalistic laws or global necessities" (Dean, 1994:35–36; italics added). Thus, genealogy is at odds with other types of historical studies that accord centrality to such laws or necessities. Everything is contingent from a genealogical perspective. Genealogy is inherently critical, involving a "tireless interrogation of what is held to be given, necessary, natural or neutral" (Dean, 1994:20).

More specifically, genealogy is concerned with the relationship between knowledge and power within the human sciences and their "practices concerned with the regulation of bodies, the government of conduct, and the formation of self" (Dean, 1994:154). Foucault is interested in the "conditions which hold at any one moment for the 'saying the true'" within the human sciences (Dean, 1994:24). Thus, "where archaeology had earlier addressed the rules of formation of discourse, the new critical and genealogical description addresses both the rarity of statements and the power of the affirmative" (Dean, 1994:33). In terms of the relationship between Foucault's two methods, archaeology performs tasks that are necessary in order to do genealogy. Specifically, archaeology involves empirical analyses of historical discourses, whereas genealogy undertakes a serial and critical analysis of these historical discourses and their relationship to issues of concern in the contemporary world.

Thus, genealogy is to be a "history of the present." However, this is not to be confused with "presentism," which involves the "unwitting projection of a structure of interpretation that arises from the historian's own experience or context onto aspects of the past under study" (Dean, 1994:28). Instead, Foucault seeks to illuminate the present by using "historical resources to reflect upon the contingency, singularity, interconnections, and potentialities of diverse trajectories of those elements which compose present social arrangements as experience" (Dean, 1994:21). There is no determinism here; the present is not a necessary outcome of past developments. Foucault is oriented to the critical use of history to make present possibilities intelligible.

In his genealogy of power, Foucault is concerned with how people govern themselves and others through the production of knowledge. Among other things, he sees knowledge generating power by constituting people as subjects and then governing the subjects with the knowledge. He is critical of the hierarchization of knowledge. Because the highest-ranking forms of knowledge (the sciences) have the greatest power, they are singled out for the most severe critique. Foucault is interested in techniques, the technologies that are derived from knowledge (especially scientific knowledge), and how they are used by various institutions to exert power over people. Although he sees links between knowledge and power, Foucault does not see a conspiracy by elite members of society. Such a conspiracy would imply conscious actors, whereas Foucault is more inclined to see structural relationships, especially between knowledge and power. Looking over the sweep of history, Foucault does not see progress from primitive brutishness to more modern humaneness based on more sophisticated knowledge systems. Instead, Foucault sees history lurching from one system of domination (based on knowledge) to another. Although this is a generally bleak image, on the positive side Foucault believes that knowledge-power is always contested; there is always ongoing resistance to it. Foucault looks at historical examples, but he is interested primarily in the modern world. As he puts it, he is "writing the history of the present" (Foucault, 1979:31).

With this background, let us look at some of Foucault's specific, substantive works. In *Madness and Civilization* (1965; Foucault, 1995), Foucault is doing an archaeology of knowledge, specifically of psychiatry. He begins with the Renaissance, when madness and reason were not separated. However, between 1650 and 1800 (the classical period), distance between them is established, and ultimately reason comes to subjugate madness. In other words Foucault is describing "a broken dialogue" between reason and madness (1965:x). He describes the end result:

> Here reason reigned in the pure state, in a triumph arranged for it in advance over a frenzied unreason. Madness was thus torn from that imaginary freedom which still allowed it to flourish on the Renaissance horizon. Not so long ago, it had floundered about in broad daylight: in *King Lear,* in *Don Quixote.* But in less than a half-century, it had been sequestered and, in the fortress of confinement, bound to Reason, to the rules of morality and to their monotonous nights.
>
> (Foucault, 1965:64)

There is a clear Weberian, iron-cage imagery here—the "monotonous nights" to be spent by the "mad" (the irrational) in the iron cage constructed by those with reason (rationality).

The scientific psychology of the nineteenth century eventually arose out of the separation of the mad from the sane in the eighteenth century (psychiatry is labeled a "monologue of reason about madness" [Foucault, 1965:xi]). At first medicine was in charge of the physical and moral treatment of the mad, but later scientific psychological medicine took over the moral treatment: "A purely psychological medicine was made possible only when madness was alienated in guilt" (Foucault, 1965:182–183). Later, Foucault says, "What we call psychiatric practice is a certain moral tactic contemporary with the end of the eighteenth century, preserved in the rights of asylum

life, and overlaid by the myths of positivism" (1965:276). Thus for Foucault, psychology (and psychiatry) is a moral enterprise, not a scientific endeavor, aimed against the mad, who are progressively unable to protect themselves from this "help." He sees the mad as being sentenced by so-called scientific advancement to a "gigantic moral imprisonment."

Needless to say, Foucault here rejects the idea that over the years we have seen scientific, medical, and humanitarian advances in the treatment of the mad. What he sees, instead, are increases in the ability of the sane and their agents (physicians, psychologists, psychiatrists) to oppress and repress the mad, who, we should not forget, had been on equal footing with the sane in the seventeenth century. The most recent development is that now the mad are less judged by these external agents; "madness is ceaselessly called upon to judge itself" (Foucault, 1965:265). In many senses such internalized control is the most repressive form of control. Clearly, Foucault's archaeology of knowledge leads him to conclusions very different from those of traditional historians about the history and current status of the mad and their relationship to the sane (and their agents). In addition, he is looking at the roots of the human sciences (especially psychology and psychiatry) in the distinction between the mad and the sane and the exertion of moral control over the mad. This is part of his more general thesis about the role of the human sciences in the moral control of people.

As for Foucault's structuralism in this early work, he argues that madness occurs at two "levels," and at "a deeper level madness is a form of discourse" (1965:96). Specifically, madness, at least in the classical age, is not mental or physical changes; instead, "delirious language is the ultimate truth of madness" (Foucault, 1965:97). But there is an even broader structuralism operating in this early work: "Let classical culture formulate, *in its general structure,* the experience it had of madness, an experience which crops up with the same meanings, in the identical order of its inner logic, in both the order of speculation and in the order of institutions, in *both discourse and decree,* in both word and watchword—wherever, in fact, a signifying element can assume for us the value of a language" (Foucault, 1965:116; italics added).

Foucault continues to use a structuralist method in *The Birth of the Clinic,* in which he focuses on medical discourse and its underlying structure: "What counts in the things said by men is not so much what they may have thought or the extent to which these things represent their thoughts, as *that which systematizes them from the outset,* thus making them thereafter endlessly accessible to new discourses and open to the task of transforming them" (1975:xiv; italics added).

In *Madness and Civilization,* medicine was an important precursor of the human sciences, and that is an even more central theme in *The Birth of the Clinic.* (As Foucault said, "The science of man . . . was medically . . . based" [1975:36].) Prior to the nineteenth century, medicine was a classificatory science, and the focus was on a clearly ordered system of diseases. But in the nineteenth century, medicine came to focus on diseases as they existed in individuals and the larger society (epidemics). Medicine came to be extended to healthy people (preventive care), and it adopted a normative posture distinguishing between healthy and unhealthy and, later, normal and pathological states. Medicine had become, again, a forerunner of the human sciences that were to adopt this normal-pathological stance toward people.

As yet, however, there was no clinical structure in medicine. The key was the development of the clinic, where patients were observed in bed. Here Foucault uses a key term, the *gaze,* in this case a "gaze that was at the same time knowledge" (1975:81). In other words, knowledge was derived from what physicians could see in contrast to what they read in books. As a structuralist, Foucault saw the gaze as a kind of language, "a language without words" (1975:68), and he was interested in the deep structure of that "language." The ability to see and touch (especially in autopsies) sick (or dead) people was a crucial change and an important source of knowledge. Foucault says of the autopsy, "The living night is dissipated in the brightness of death" (1975:146). Foucault sees the anatomo-clinical gaze as the "great break" in Western medicine. Thus, there was not an evolution of knowledge but an epistemic change. Doctors were no longer playing the same game; it was a different game with different rules. *The* game was that people (patients) had become the object of scientific knowledge and practice (instead of the disease as an entity). In terms of his structuralist orientation, what had changed was the nature of discourse—names of diseases, groupings, field of objects, and so forth (Foucault, 1975:54).

Once again, medicine takes on for Foucault the role of forerunner to the human sciences. "It is understandable, then, that medicine should have had such importance in the constitution of the sciences of man—an importance that is not only methodological, but ontological, in that it concerns man's becoming an object of positive knowledge" (Foucault, 1975:197). Specifically on the medical autopsy, Foucault says, "Death left its old tragic heaven and became the lyrical core of man: his invisible truth, his visible secret" (1975:172). In fact, for Foucault the broader change is the individual as subject and object of his own knowledge, and the change in medicine is but one "of the more visible witnesses to these changes in the fundamental structures of experience" (1975:199).

Many of the same themes appear in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1979), but now we see more of the genealogy of power and much less on structuralism, discourse, and the like. Here "power and knowledge directly imply one another" (Foucault, 1979:27). In this work Foucault is concerned with the period between 1757 and the 1830s, a period during which the torture of prisoners was replaced by control over them by prison rules. (Characteristically, Foucault sees this change developing in an irregular way; it does not evolve rationally.) The general view is that this shift from torture to rules represented a humanization of the treatment of criminals; it had grown more kind, less painful, and less cruel. The reality, from Foucault's point of view, was that punishment had grown more rationalized ("the executioner [in the guillotine] need be no more than a meticulous watchman" [1979:13]) and in many ways impinged more on prisoners. The early torture of prisoners may have made for good public displays, but it was "a bad economy of power" because it tended to incite unrest among the viewers of the spectacle (Foucault, 1979:79). The link between knowledge and power was clear in the case of torture; with the development of rules, that link became far less clear. The new system of rules was "more regular, more effective, more constant, and more detailed in its effects; in short, which increase its effects while diminishing its economic cost" (Foucault, 1979:80–81). The new system was not designed to be more humane, but "to punish better . . . to insert the power to

punish more deeply into the social body" (Foucault, 1979:82). In contrast to torture, this new technology of the power to punish occurred earlier in the deviance process; was more numerous, more bureaucratized, more efficient, more impersonal, more invariable, and more sober; and involved the surveillance not just of criminals but of the entire society. It is this theory of society that is of paramount interest, and it could be argued that it would continue to be of interest even if everything that Foucault said about prisons was wrong (Alford, 2000).

This new technology, a technology of disciplinary power, was based on the military model. It involved not a single overarching power system, but rather a system of micro powers. Foucault describes a "micro-physics of power" with "innumerable points of confrontation" (1979:26–27) and resistance (Brenner, 1994). He identifies three instruments of disciplinary power. First is *hierarchical observation,* or the ability of officials to oversee all they control with a single *gaze.* Second is the ability to make *normalizing judgments* and to punish those who violate the norms. Thus, one might be negatively judged and punished on the dimensions of time (for being late), activity (for being inattentive), and behavior (for being impolite). Third is the use of *examination* to observe subjects and to make normalizing judgments about people. The third instrument of disciplinary power involves the other two.

Foucault does not simply take a negative view toward the growth of the disciplinary society; he sees that it has positive consequences as well. For example, he sees discipline as functioning well within the military and in industrial factories. However, Foucault communicates a genuine fear of the spread of discipline, especially as it moves into the state-police network for which the entire society becomes a field of perception and an object of discipline.

Foucault does not see discipline sweeping uniformly through society. Instead, he sees it "swarming" through society and affecting bits and pieces of society as it goes. Eventually, however, most major institutions are affected. Foucault asks rhetorically, "Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?" (1979:228). In the end, Foucault sees the development of a carceral system in which discipline is transported "from the penal institution to the entire social body" (1979:298). Although there is an iron-cage image here, as usual Foucault sees the operation of forces in opposition to the carceral system; there is an ongoing structural dialectic in Foucault's work.

Although Foucault's greater emphasis on power in *Discipline and Punish* is evident in the discussion to this point, he also is concerned in this work with his usual theme of the emergence of the human sciences. The transition from torture to prison rules constituted a switch from punishment of the body to punishment of the soul or the will. This change, in turn, brought with it considerations of normality and morality. Prison officials and the police came to judge the normality and morality of the prisoner. Eventually, this ability to judge was extended to other "small-scale judges," such as psychiatrists and educators. From all this adjudication emerged new bodies of scientific penal knowledge, which served as the base of the modern "scientifico-legal complex." The new mode of subjugation was that people were defined as the object of knowledge, of scientific discourse. The key point is that the modern human sciences have their roots here. Foucault bitterly depicts the roots of the human sciences

in the disciplines: "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" (1979:226).

One other point about *Discipline and Punish* is worth mentioning. Foucault is interested in the way that knowledge gives birth to technologies that exert power. In this context, he deals with the Panopticon. A *Panopticon* is a structure that gives officials the possibility of complete surveillance (Lyon, 2007; G. Marx, 2005) of criminals. In fact, officials need not always be present; the mere existence of the structure (and the possibility that officials might be there) constrains criminals. The Panopticon might take the form of a tower in the center of a circular prison from which guards could see into all cells. The Panopticon is a tremendous source of power for prison officials because it gives them the possibility of total surveillance. More important, its power is enhanced because the prisoners come to control themselves; they stop themselves from doing various things because they fear that they *might* be seen by the guards. There is a clear link here among knowledge, technology, and power. Furthermore, Foucault returns to his concern for the human sciences, for he sees the Panopticon as a kind of laboratory for the gathering of information about people. It was the forerunner of the social-scientific laboratory and other social-science techniques for gathering information about people. At still another level, Foucault sees the Panopticon as the base of "a whole type of society" (1979:216), the disciplinary society.[2]

Finally, we can look at the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault, 1980a). Again, the emphasis is on the genealogy of power. To Foucault, sexuality is "an especially dense transfer point for relations of power" (1980a:103). He sees his goal as being to "define the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that *sustains* the discourse on human sexuality in our part of the world" (Foucault, 1980a:11). He examines the way sex is put into discourse and the way power permeates that discourse.

Foucault takes issue with the conventional view that Victorianism led to the repression of sexuality in general and of sexual discourse in particular. In fact, he argues the exact opposite position—that Victorianism led to an explosion in discourses on sexuality. As a result of Victorianism, there was more analysis, stocktaking, classification, specification, and quantitative/causal study of sexuality. Said Foucault, "People will ask themselves why we were so bent on ending the rule of silence regarding what was the noisiest of our preoccupations" (1980a:158). This was especially the case in schools, where instead of repression of sexuality, "the question of sex was a constant preoccupation" (1980a:27). Here is the way Foucault sums up the Victorian hypothesis and his alternative view:

> We must therefore abandon the hypothesis that modern industrial societies ushered in an age of increased sexual repression. We have not only witnessed a visible explosion of unorthodox sexualities . . . never have there existed more centers of power; never more attention manifested and verbalized . . . never more sites where the intensity of pleasures and the persistency of power catch hold, only to spread elsewhere.
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> (Foucault, 1980a:49)

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[2] For an interesting use of this idea, see Zuboff (1988), who views the computer as a modern Panopticon that gives superiors nearly unlimited surveillance over subordinates.

Once again, Foucault accords a special place to medicine and its discourses on sexuality. Whereas to most, medicine is oriented to the scientific analysis of sexuality, Foucault sees more morality than science in the concerns of medicine. (In fact, Foucault is characteristically hard on medicine, seeing the aim of its discourse "not to state the truth, but to prevent its very emergence" [1980a:55].) Also involved in the morality of sexuality is religion, especially Western Christianity, the confession, and the need for the subject to tell the truth about sexuality. All this is related to the human sciences and their interest in gaining knowledge of the subject. Just as people confessed to their priests, they also confessed to their doctors, their psychiatrists, and their sociologists. The confession, especially the sexual confession, came to be cloaked in scientific terms.

In the West, "the project of the science of the subject has gravitated, in ever-narrowing circles, around the question of sex" (Foucault, 1980a:70). Questions aimed at ascertaining who we are increasingly have come to be directed to sex. Foucault sums this all up: "Sex, the explanation of everything" (1980a:78).

Instead of focusing on the repression of sexuality, Foucault argues that the scientific study of sex should focus on the relationship between sex and power. Again, that power does not reside in one central source; it exists in a variety of micro settings. Furthermore, as is always the case with Foucault, there is resistance to the imposition of power over sex. Power and the resistance to power are everywhere.

Prior to the eighteenth century, society sought control over death, but beginning in that century, the focus shifted to control over life, especially sex. Power over life (and sex) took two forms. First, there was the "anatomo-politics of the human body," in which the goal was to discipline the human body (and its sexuality). Second, there was the "bio-politics of population," in which the object was to control and regulate population growth, health, life expectancy, and so forth. In both cases, society came to see "life as a political object" (Foucault, 1980a:145). Sex was central in both cases: "Sex was a means of access both to the life of the body and the life of the species" (Foucault, 1980a:146). In the modern West, sex has become more important than the soul (and we know how important that is in Foucault's work) and almost as important as life itself. Through knowledge of sexuality, society is coming to exercise more power over life itself. Yet despite this increase in control, Foucault holds out the hope of emancipation:

> It is the agency of sex that we must break away from, if we aim—through a tactical reversal of the various mechanisms of sexuality—to counter the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges, in their multiplicity and their possibility of resistance. The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures.
>
> (Foucault, 1980a:157)

Dean (1994) argues that from the late 1970s until his death in 1984, Foucault's work shifted from the micro politics of power in the direction of a concern for *governmentalities,* or the "heterogeneous, non-subjective processes in which practices and techniques of governance have come to depend on discursive representations of their fields of intervention and operation" (Dean, 1994:78; Fejes, 2008; Walter, 2008).

In contrast to other theorists, Foucault's focus is not specifically on the state, but "the practices and rationalities that compose the means of rule and government" (Dean, 1994:153). Thus, in terms of the will to knowledge in the human sciences, Foucault is concerned with the way bodies are regulated, the way conduct is governed, and the ways in which the self is formed. More generally, he was concerned with self-government, the government of others, and the government of the state. In most general terms, government to Foucault is concerned with "the conduct of conduct" (Dean, 1994:176; Lemert, 2005d).

Foucault has been dead for over two decades, and poststructuralism has been overtaken and passed by postmodern theory. It has always been difficult to draw a clear line between poststructuralism and postmodern theory; indeed, there is no such line. Postmodern thinking can be seen as an extension and an exaggeration of poststructuralism. Whether or not one can differentiate clearly between the two, it is abundantly clear that postmodernism has become the most important development not only in sociological theory but in a wide range of academic and nonacademic fields.

The Ideas of Giorgio Agamben

Giorgio Agamben (b. 1942) is an Italian philosopher who in recent years has become increasingly oriented to developing a social theory. Although his primary intellectual debts are to philosophers (e.g., Aristotle, Martin Heidegger) and political thinkers (especially Carl Schmitt,[3] Hannah Arendt[4]), his work also shows the influence of social theorists such as Max Weber,[5] Emile Durkheim,[6] Walter Benjamin,[7] and especially Michel Foucault (see below). His set of ideas resembles many of the major social theories and includes a grand narrative of recent social history as well as an effort to identify a phenomenon that lies at the heart of modern society (much as Weber did with the bureaucracy). It is difficult to classify Agamben's work, but given the strong influence of Foucault's ideas, it is best to think of him as a poststructuralist. In addition, he uses a number of poststructuralist (and structuralist) ideas in his thinking.

To get a preliminary sense of Agamben's thinking before discussing his highly esoteric theoretical ideas, let us look at his thinking on Adolph Hitler and the Nazis. Soon after gaining power, the Nazis suspended the articles of the Weimar Constitution that dealt with civil liberties; a suspension that lasted for the duration of their twelve-year rule. This allowed them to engage in a "legal civil war" against their citizens, especially the Jews. The Nazis had created a "zone of exception" that allowed them to murder Jews and others whom they disliked. However, Agamben is not interested

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[3] He was crucial in his work on sovereignty (see below).
[4] Agamben argues that she saw the link between totalitarianism and the camp (see below), but lacked a biopolitical perspective.
[5] Agamben discusses Weber's concept of charisma, especially as it is associated with Hitler, although he fails to see that charisma is not just a characteristic of the leader but is also created by the disciples.
[6] For example, Agamben uses Durkheim's concept of anomie, but he criticizes the way the concept is used in *Suicide.*
[7] He was important to Agamben for adding the idea of "pure" or "divine" violence—violence that is unrelated to, or outside, the law (e.g., revolutionary violence)—to violence that serves to make law or preserve law. Agamben (2002/2005:54) appreciates Benjamin's pure violence because it is outside the law and involves "wholly anomic human action" (note the use of Durkheim's concept here).

in such zones and the harm that is created in and by them as merely historical phenomena. He sees the creation of such zones, and the dangers associated with them, as contemporary phenomena (one of his favorite examples is the prison camp at Guantanamo Bay). Furthermore, he sees the zones of exception increasing over time, and, controversially and highly questionably, he argues that they pose a greater threat today than they did in Nazi Germany. Further, this greater threat is not restricted to totalitarian regimes but also is found in democratic societies.

Basic Concepts

We need to understand a number of basic concepts before we can get to a substantive discussion of Agamben's theory. He begins with the Greek concepts of *zoe* and *bios*. *Zoe* is our biological bodies (or "the simple fact of living common to all living beings" [Agamben, 1995/1998:1]), and *bios* is our political bodies (Agamben, 1995/1998:184). These are, for classical philosophy and for Agamben, inherently separate and separable phenomena. However, over time, zoe has come to be politicized; that is, the line between zoe and bios has grown less clear or been obliterated completely. As Agamben (1995/1998:188) puts it, there is no longer anything left of the classical distinction between them; that distinction has been "taken from us forever." As we will soon see, this is no mere philosophical or terminological issue but an issue great importance to the modern world.

Very close to the idea of zoe is an idea of *bare life*, "the pure fact of birth" (Agamben, 1995/1998:127), which plays a prominent role in his thinking. In an argument similar to the one above, Agamben contends that bare life, like zoe, has been increasingly politicized and that that "constitutes *the decisive event of modernity* and signals a radical transformation" of classical thought (Agamben, 1995/1998:4; italics added). Bare life has always been political, although it long existed at the margins of the polity. Over time, it has been drawn increasingly into the polity, and this "constitutes the original—if concealed—nucleus of sovereign power" (Agamben, 1995/1998:6).

The Jews of Nazi Germany were an example of bare life. That is, they were Jews simply by the pure fact that they were born Jews. Furthermore, being Jewish was highly politicized by the Nazis. The Nazis created the Jews, or at least a particular symbol of the Jews, and then defined them as a people "whose presence [they] can no longer tolerate in any way" (Agamben, 1995/1998:179).

Bare life is closely related to yet another central concept to Agamben (1995/1998:8) *homo sacer* (or sacred man); bare life is "the life of *homo sacer*." Zoe refers to bare life in general, whereas homo sacer is "bare life insofar as it is included in the political order" (DeCaroli, 2007:52). Thus zoe, at least theoretically and historically, can be and was separated from the polity (it was separated in Aristotle's perfect community), whereas homo sacer is by definition implicated in the political.

Central to the concept of homo sacer is the idea that it involves a person "who *may be killed and yet not sacrificed*" (Agamben, 1995/1998:8). This is the case because homo sacer has been separated politically from the rest of humankind by being defined as lying outside political boundaries. Because homo sacer is outside those limits, many things can be done to this person that cannot be done to other humans, including being killed at will by anyone. Further, whoever does this is not

committing homicide and cannot be convicted of such a crime because homo sacer is outside the law and, more generally, the polity. This brings us back to our example (and Agamben's) of the Jews in Nazi Germany who Agamben sees as a "flagrant case of *homo sacer*." So, we can see the first part of the definition of homo sacer—one who can be killed—but what about the idea that homo sacer cannot be sacrificed? Here, Agamben has a traditional sense of sacrifice, especially the idea that to be sacrificed one must be part of the community. Because homo sacer is by definition not part of the (political) community, he or she cannot be sacrificed in this traditional sense of the term. Why is such a person "sacred"? As Antonio Negri (2007:121) puts it, he is "sacred in the sense of the assumption of a punishment that separated him from the common." It is being set apart and being punished that makes homo sacer sacred.

The *state of exception* is a topological zone; a "space without law" (Agamben, 2002/2005:51). As such, it is space in which homo sacer resides; it was the abstract space in which the Jews of Nazi Germany were placed. Because of the existence of such a space, the sovereign power (e.g., Hitler as the Fuhrer) is able to decide on his own who can and will be killed. Further, because those killed are outside the confines of the law, their murder is *not* a homicide. Thus, in the context of Nazi Germany and its zone of exclusion, the six million Jews could be murdered without it being considered murder, at least by the Nazis. Furthermore, the state of exception is unique not only in terms of death but, more important today, in terms of life. Thus, today the "overly comatose" person on life-support machines is in a zone of exception wherein it is possible to decide whether the person should live (keep the machines running) or die (turn the machines off and in doing so *not* commit homicide). The latter is crucial for Agamben because it represents the fact that not just death, but life, is now within the state of exception; this gives those in authority power not only over death but increasingly of life. As we will see, this thinking owes a major debt to the theories of Michel Foucault, especially on biopolitics.

Although the state of exception is outside the law, it is important, even essential, to the law. The law is able to define itself, and make its validity possible, with reference to that which lies outside it. It is also characteristic of the zone of exception that it is possible to do something in it that is not possible elsewhere in the political realm—that is the "abolition of the distinction among legislative, executive, and judicial powers" (Agamben, 2002/2005:7). This abolition, in turn, permits the executive (e.g., Hitler, as the German Fuhrer) to gain control over the other branches of government; to institute totalitarian rule (see below). Further, the zone of exception has a characteristic of many other aspects of Agamben's thinking in that it is *both* inside and outside the law; it is included in the law merely by the fact that the law excludes it. As Agamben (1995/1998:17–18) puts it: "The exception is a kind of exclusion. . . . But . . . what is excluded in it is not, on account of being excluded, absolutely without relation to the rule. . . . *The rule applies to the exception in no longer applying, in withdrawing from it.*" Thus, there is a dialectical relationship (there are many dialectical aspects of Agamben's thinking; see, for example, Negri, 2007) between the zone in which law resides and the state of exception, which is devoid of law.

Agamben draws his conceptualization of sovereignty from the work of Carl Schmitt (cited in Agamben, 1995/1998:11) who contends: "Sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception." Thus the sovereign and Agamben's core idea of the state of exception are inextricably intertwined; "exception is the structure of sovereignty" (Agamben, 1995/1998:28). The sovereign has (or takes) a variety of legal powers, including the power to create a state of exception; to "suspend the validity of law" (Agamben, 1995/1998:15). More alarmingly, Agamben (1995/1998:32) argues that "the sovereign is the point of indistinction between violence and law, the threshold on which violence passes over into law and law passes over into violence." It was this threshold that the Nazis, with Hitler as sovereign, passed over with great impunity. Although sovereignty is generally discussed in political terms, Agamben extends it to others in the modern world such as physicans and scientists.

Totalitarianism, at least in its modern form, is defined "as the establishment, by means of the state of exception, of a legal civil war that allows for the physical elimination not only of political adversaries but of entire categories of citizens" (Agamben, 2002/2005:2). The Nazis, of course, created a paradigmatic example of a totalitarian regime, and they used their power not only to murder anyone who opposed them politically but to attempt to eliminate the Jews as an entire category of citizens, not just in Germany but in all of Europe. In doing so, the Nazis waged a "legal civil war" against Jews and other selected categories (gypsies, homosexuals) of the German people, and ultimately people throughout Europe.

Auschwitz and the Camp

All of the above are illustrated in the case of the Nazi concentration camp, especially Auschwitz, to which Agamben (2002) devoted an entire book, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. The concentration camp (or more generally the camp; see below) is a zone of irresponsibility within that state of exception. Within it, the guards and others are free to behave irresponsibly and even to kill indiscriminately. It is a "gray zone" where distinctions between good and evil and ethical and legal become unclear, confused. It is also a "limit" situation (Foucault was very much interest in this as well) existing at the limits of the good and the ethical; edging, if not diving headlong, into the evil, the illegal, the unethical. The prisoners exist in a zone of exception and hence can be killed with their murder *not* considered a homicide. They were reduced to their bare life, and then their bare lives were taken from them.

Auschwitz, as a concentration camp, was at the core of Nazism and at the "core of the camp" was the *Musselmann*[8] (Agamben, 2002:81). If the camp was a limit situation, then Musselmann in general were limit people who existed in limit situations. They were the limit of a progression that saw them go from non-Aryans, to Jews, to deportees, to prisoners, and then to Musselmann; the only step remaining for them was death. They existed in a moving threshold between life and death ("walking corpse" [Agamben, 2002:70]); between human and nonhuman (they were dehumanized).

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[8] Literally, 'the Muslim." The Muslim is one who submits unconditionally to God; the Musselmann submitted unconditionally to the concentration camp and its dictates.

Auschwitz in itself was important to Agamben, but it was also the major example of the more general idea of the *camp*. The camp is where the state of exception "acquires a permanent spatial arrangement" (Agamben, in DeCaroli, 2007:52); it is a "materialization of the state of exception" (Agamben, 1995/1998:174); "the pure space of exception" (Agamben, 1995/1998:134). However, the camp did not end with the destruction of Nazism and its concentration camps. It is not merely a historical fact, or even a past anomaly, "but in some ways . . . the hidden matrix and *nomos*[9] of political space in which we are still living" (Agamben, 1995/1998:166). Thus, it is not just that there are still camps; we are increasingly living in camps and in a society that is increasingly camplike. This leads to the conclusion that we are living in a permanent state of exception that is "now given a permanent spatial arrangement" in the camp. Thus the camp can be seen as "the hidden paradigm of the political space of modernity" (Agamben, 1995/1998:123). It is paradigmatic in that it is "the space of this absolute impossibility of deciding between fact and law, rule and application, exception and rule, which nevertheless incessantly decides between them" (Agamben, 1995/1998:173). However, those decisions are arbitrary and no longer guided by law. Rather, they are decided on by the sovereign (e.g., Hitler in the case of Nazi Germany), and the camp, then, is a place where "sovereignty exists but the law does not" (DeCaroli, 2007:53). No act committed by the sovereign, or those who act on his behalf, could be considered a crime. As Adolph Eichmann said, "the words of the Fuhrer have the force of law" (cited in Agamben, 2002/2005:38).

Biopolitics and the Influence of the Work of Michel Foucault

Agamben (1995/1998:122) is interested in the biopolitics (which he defines in his own terms [Foucault had no sense of "bare life"] as the "care, control, and use of bare life") of the Nazi concentration camp, the camp more generally, as well as the larger society that has become a camp. It is in his thinking on biopolitics that Agamben was most influenced by Michel Foucault and his seminal work on that topic. As Agamben saw it (1995/1998:3), biopolitics as the concept was developed by Foucault involved "the species and the individual as a simple living body becom[ing] what is at stake in a society's political strategies." However, while to Foucault this development was relatively recent, to Agamben it is an ancient phenomenon (DeCaroli, 2007:53; for other differences[10] between the two thinkers, see Mills, 2007). To Agamben (1995/1998):

> The decisive fact is that, together with the process by which the exception everywhere becomes the rule, the realm of bare life—which is originally situated at the margins of the political order—gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, *bios* and *zoe,* right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction. At once excluding bare life from and capturing it within the political order, the state of exception actually constituted, in its very separateness, the hidden foundations on which the entire political system

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[9] A form that people take for granted as normal.

[10] For example, Foucault did a genealogical analysis, whereas Agamben was more ontological in his approach (although Agamben [2002/2005:50] did do genealogical analyses of his own, but not on the core issue of biopolitics).

> rested . . . the bare life . . . becomes . . . the one place for the organization of
> State power and emancipation from it.
>
> (Agamben, 1995/1998:9)

In the above, bare life becomes the objective of biopolitics and the linkage between the work of Foucault and Agamben.

Foucault focused on the prison as the key site for the practice of biopolitics, but Agamben (1995/1998:20) argued that that site was the camp, "not the prison." Thus, Agamben (1995/1998:119) critiques Foucault because he "never brought his insights to bear on what could well have appeared to be the exemplary place of modern biopolitics: the politics of the great totalitarian states of the twentieth century." Foucault should have seen, for example, that Nazism and the concentration camps were the "point at which the integration of medicine and politics, which is one of the essential characteristics of modern biopolitics, began to assume its final form . . . the physician and the sovereign seem to exchange roles" (Agamben, 1995/1998:143).

Agamben also differs from Foucault in terms of their outlook for the future. Foucault has a reasonably optimistic outlook involving the future emergence of a "different economy of bodies and liberation" (Agamben, 1995/1998:187). Agamben is more cautious, even pessimistic, about the future because he believes that we will never again be able to integrate our biological and political bodies.

Foucault, of course, was a poststructuralist, and even beyond the impact of Foucault's thinking, there is abundant evidence of the influence of poststructuralism (and structuralism) on his thinking.[11] This is clearest in his concept of "force-of-law," with the word law "under erasure" or crossed out. This procedure is traceable to, and is common in, the work of one of the leading postructuralists, Jacques Derrida. The idea here is that "law" was connected to law at one time, and that connection may still be faintly visible, but the law has been eliminated ("erased"), leaving only force, or the force of law without the law.

Building, at least implicitly, on another key idea in structuralism and poststructuralism—the floating signifier—Agamben (2002/2005:39) argues that "in extreme situations 'force of law' floats as an indeterminate element that can be claimed both by state authorities . . . and by a revolutionary organization. The state of exception is an anomic space in which what is at stake is a force of law without law (which should therefore be written as force-of-law . . . law seeks to annex anomie itself." Because the force of law floats free, there is no internal connection between the law (and norms) and its application. It can be applied freely and differentially by not only various agents of the law (who, like the Nazis, may well have nefarious goals in doing so) but also by revolutionary agents.

Agamben's Grand Narrative and Ultimate Goals

Although Agamben's work shows the influence of poststructuralism, there is no sense that he has been similarly influenced by postmodernism. The result is that he has no compunctions about offering "grand narratives," which may take various forms.

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[11] Among other things, Agamben refers to language, *langue* and *parole*, signification, Derrida, and Lévi-Strauss.

First, he sees the progressive expansion of the state of exception over time: "in our age, the state of exception comes more and more to the foreground as the fundamental political structure and ultimately begins to become the rule (1995/1998:20; see also, Agamben, 2002/2005:2; this view is associated with Benjamin, 1942). Similarly, but in greater detail, he argues: "When life and politics—originally divided, and linked together by means of the no-man's-land of the state of exception that is inhabited by bare life—begin to become one, all life becomes sacred and all politics becomes the exception" (Agamben, 1995/1998:148). Most extremely, Agamben (2002/2005:87) argues that the "state of exception has today reached its maximum worldwide deployment."

Second, he sees the progressive expansion of control over biology by politics; the expansion of biopolitics. Over time, for example, the "state decides to assume directly the care of the nation's biological life as one of its proper tasks" (Agamben, 1995/1998:175). Furthermore, this opens the doors for others to control biological life. In modernity, "the physician and the scientist move in the no-man's-land into which at one point the sovereign alone could penetrate" (Agamben, 1995/1998:159).

Third, the camp has expanded and become more central. "The camp, which is now securely lodged within the city's interior, is the new biopolitical *nomos* of the planet" (Agamben, 1995/1998:176). The camp, linked as it is to the Nazi concentration camp, is also tied to the "system's inability to function without being transformed into a lethal machine" (Agamben, 1995/1998:175). This is related to the "unstoppable progression" of global civil war (Agamben, 2002/2005:2). Even democratic states are involved in this civil war, with the result that there is increasingly little difference between democratic and totalitarian states.

Given these trends, what would Agamben like to see instead? He rejects looking backward to some lost original state or looking forward within "the modern political project, with its patriotic narratives and exhausted antagonisms" (DeCaroli, 2007:44). Rather, he articulates only very abstract or general ideas about the future. For example, he favors "a politics in which bare life is no longer separated and excerpted, either in the state order or in the figure of human rights" (Agamben, 1995/1998:134). Or he seeks to open a space for human action (action that is pure means without ends) and that would allow it to once again claim for itself the name of politics. In other words, he wants to see a reintegration of human action and politics. DeCaroli (2007:45) puts this slightly differently, contending that Agamben's goal is the creation of the " 'coming community'" involving "the inseparability of politics and subjectivity."

Critiques

The most important critiques of Agamben's work relate to his grand narratives, especially some of his outrageous views, his "wild statements" (Laclau, 2007:21) and "rhetoric of histrionic hyperbole" (LaCapra, 2007:136), about the contemporary world. As LaCapra (2007:133) puts it, "He seems constrained to raise the stakes or 'up the ante' (which is clearly astronomically high) in theoretically daring, jarringly disconcerting claims if he is to make a significant mark as a major theorist." Among the claims that fall into this category are that the modern world is worse than the world created by the Nazis, there is little or nothing to choose today between totalitarian

and democratic regimes, the camp is the political space, or the *nomos*, of modernity itself, and "the extreme and absurd paradigm of the concentration camp" (Laclau, 2007:22). Such views are major distortions, if not absurdities, that block "any possible exploration of the emancipatory possibilities opened by our modern heritage" (Laclau, 2007:22).

It certainly does seem as if Agamben is overreaching, especially when he suggests a grand narrative or engages in a critique of the contemporary world. It is hard to accept the idea that the current world, whatever its degree of problems (and there are many), is worse than the world of the Nazis and their concentration camps. The American prison at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba is an abomination, and well reflects ideas such as the state of exception and the camp, but it does not come anywhere close to being the human calamity that was Auschwitz, to say nothing of the many other concentration camps as well as myriad other offenses committed by the Nazis.

Leaving aside such excesses, Agamben has created an interesting, even striking, theory of society based on such ideas as the state of exception and the camp. It is well steeped in philosophy and political theory. It may be that the theory's problems are traceable to the fact that Agamben is attempting to create a social theory without being familiar, or familiar enough, with the major social theories of, for example, Weber, Durkheim, and Georg Simmel. Had he had greater familiarity with these theories, he might have been more alert to the dangers of overreaching. Time will tell whether weaknesses like these scuttle his theory and interest in it, or whether his striking, even startling, ideas attract a still wider audience of scholars interested in amplifying the theory and dealing with its fundamental weaknesses and excesses.

Postmodern Social Theory

Sociology today faces a situation that a number of fields, mainly in the liberal arts, confronted a decade ago:

> The postmodern moment had arrived and perplexed intellectuals, artists, and cultural entrepreneurs wondered whether they should get on the bandwagon and join the carnival, or sit on the sidelines until the new fad disappeared into the whirl of cultural fashion.
>
> (Kellner, 1989b:1–2)

Many sociologists, and some sociological theorists, still consider postmodern social theory to be a fad (and it continues to look to some more like a carnival than a serious scholarly endeavor), but the simple fact is that postmodern social theory no longer can be ignored by sociological theorists (Dandaneau, 2001). In contemporary social theory, it has been "the hottest game in town" (Kellner, 1989b:2). It has been so hot, in fact, that at least one theorist has urged that we stop using the term because it has been "worn frail by overexertion" (Lemert, 1994b:142). That is, it has been abused by both supporters and detractors, as well as in the course of the overheated debate between them.

Given the importance of postmodern social theory and the heat it has generated, the objective here is to offer at least a brief introduction to postmodern thinking

(Antonio, 1998; Ritzer, 1997; Ritzer and Goodman, 2001). However, this is no easy matter. For one thing, there is great diversity among the generally highly idiosyncratic postmodern thinkers, and so it is difficult to offer generalizations on which the majority would agree. Smart (1993), for example, has differentiated among three postmodernist positions.[12] The first, or extreme, postmodernist position is that there has been a radical rupture and modern society has been replaced by a postmodern society. Exponents of this point of view include Jean Baudrillard (Armitage, 2005), Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari (1972/1983; Bogard, 1998; Binkley, 2007c; Genosko, 2007; *Theory, Culture and Society,* 1997). The second position is that although a change has taken place, postmodernism grows out of, and is continuous with, modernism. This orientation is adhered to by Marxian thinkers such as Fredric Jameson, Ernesto Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe and by postmodern feminists such as Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson. Finally, there is the position, adopted by Smart himself, that rather than viewing modernism and postmodernism as epochs, we can see them as engaged in a long-running and ongoing set of relationships, with postmodernism continually pointing out the limitations of modernism. Though useful, Smart's typology probably would be dismissed by postmodernists as greatly simplifying the great diversity of their ideas and distorting them in the process.

Although no term has greater resonance today among scholars in a wide range of disciplines than does *postmodern,* there is enormous ambiguity and controversy over exactly what the term means. For clarity it is useful to distinguish among the terms *postmodernity, postmodernism,* and *postmodern social theory.*[13] *Postmodernity* refers to a historical epoch that generally is seen as following the modern era, *postmodernism* to cultural products (in art, movies, architecture, and so on) that differ from modern cultural products (Taylor, 2007), and *postmodern social theory* to a way of thinking that is distinct from modern social theory. Thus, the postmodern encompasses *a new historical epoch, new cultural products,* and *a new type of theorizing about the social world.* All these, of course, share the perspective that something new and different has happened in recent years that no longer can be described by the term *modern,* and that those new developments are replacing modern realities.

To address the first of these concepts, there is a widespread belief that the modern era is ending, or has ended, and we have entered a new historical epoch of *postmodernity.* Lemert argues that the birth of postmodernism can be traced, at least symbolically, to

> the death of modernist architecture at 3:32 P.M., July 15, 1972—the moment at which the Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis was destroyed. . . . This massive housing project in St. Louis represented modernist architecture's arrogant belief that by building the biggest and best public housing planners and architects could eradicate poverty and human misery. To have recognized, and destroyed the symbol of that idea was to admit the failure of modernist architecture, and by implication modernity itself.
>
> (Lemert, 1990:233; following Jencks, 1977)

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[12] Pauline Rosenau (1992) distinguishes between skeptical and affirmative postmodern thinkers.
[13] Here I follow the distinction made by Best and Kellner (1991:5).

The destruction of Pruitt-Igoe is a reflection of differences between modernists and postmodernists over whether it is possible to find rational solutions to society's problems. To take another example, Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty in the 1960s was typical of the way modern society believed it could discover and implement rational solutions to its problems. It could be argued that in the 1980s the Reagan administration with its general unwillingness to develop massive programs to deal with such problems was representative of a postmodern society and the belief that there is no single rational answer to various problems. Thus, we might conclude that somewhere between the presidential administrations of Kennedy and Johnson and that of Reagan, the United States moved from being a modern to being a postmodern society. In fact, the destruction of Pruitt-Igoe occurred within that time frame.

The second concept, *postmodernism,* relates to the cultural realm in which it is argued that postmodern products have tended to supplant modern products. In art, as we will see shortly, Jameson (1984) contrasts Andy Warhol's postmodern, almost photographic and unemotional painting of Marilyn Monroe to Edvard Munch's modern and highly painful *The Scream.* In the realm of television, the show *Twin Peaks* generally is taken to be a good example of postmodernism, and *Father Knows Best* is a good example of a modern television program. In the movies, *Blade Runner* may be seen as a postmodern work, whereas the *Ten Commandments* would certainly qualify as a modern movie.

Third, and of much more direct relevance to us here, is the emergence of *postmodern social theory* and its differences from modern theory. Modern social theory sought a universal, ahistorical, rational foundation for its analysis and critique of society. For Marx that foundation was species-being, while for Habermas it was communicative reason. Postmodern thinking rejects this "foundationalism" and tends to be relativistic, irrational, and nihilistic. Following Nietzsche and Foucault, among others, postmodernists have come to question such foundations, believing that they tend to privilege some groups and downgrade the significance of others, give some groups power and render other groups powerless.

Similarly, postmodernists reject the ideas of a grand narrative or a metanarrative. It is in the rejection of these ideas that we encounter one of the most important postmodernists, Jean-François Lyotard. Lyotard (1984:xxiii) begins by identifying modern (scientific) knowledge with the kind of single grand synthesis (or "metadiscourse") we have associated with the work of theorists such as Marx and Parsons. The kinds of grand narratives he associates with modern science include "the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth" (Lyotard, 1984:xxiii).

If modern knowledge is identified in Lyotard's view with metanarratives, then postmodern knowledge involves a rejection of such grand narratives. As Lyotard puts it: "Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity to metanarratives" (1984:xxiv). More strongly, he argues: "Let us wage war on totality . . . let us activate the differences" (Lyotard, 1984:82). In fact, postmodern social theory becomes a celebration of a range of different theoretical perspectives: "Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable" (Lyotard, 1984:xxv). In these terms,

sociology has moved beyond the modern period, into the postmodern period, in its search for a range of more specific syntheses. In the view of Fraser and Nicholson, Lyotard prefers "smallish, localized narrative[s]" to the metanarratives, or grand narratives, of modernity (1988:89). The new syntheses discussed throughout this book may be seen as examples of such "smallish," "localized" sociological narratives.

While Lyotard rejects the grand narrative in general, Baudrillard rejects the idea of a grand narrative in sociology. For one thing, Baudrillard rejects the whole idea of the social. For another, rejecting the social leads to a rejection of the metanarrative of sociology that is associated with modernity:

> . . . the great organizing principle, the grand narrative of the Social which found its support and justification in ideas on the rational contract, civil society, progress, power, production—that all this may have pointed to something that once existed, but exists no longer. The age of the perspective of the social (coinciding rightly with that ill-defined period known as modernity) . . . is over.
>
> (Bogard, 1990:10)

Thus, postmodern social theory stands for the rejection of metanarratives in general and of grand narratives within sociology in particular.

Postmodern social theory has, to a large degree, been the product of nonsociologists (Lyotard, Derrida, Jameson, and others). In recent years, a number of sociologists have begun to operate within a postmodern perspective, and postmodern social theory can be seen, at least to some degree, as *part* of the classical sociological tradition. Take, for example, the recent reinterpretation of the work of Georg Simmel entitled *Postmodern(ized) Simmel* (Weinstein and Weinstein, 1993, 1998). Weinstein and Weinstein recognize that there is a strong case to be made for Simmel as a liberal modernist who offers a grand narrative of the historical trend toward the dominance of objective culture—the "tragedy of culture." However, they also argue that an equally strong case can be made for Simmel as a postmodern theorist. Thus, they acknowledge that both alternatives have validity and, in fact, that one is no more true than the other. Weinstein and Weinstein argue: "To our minds 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' are not exclusive alternatives but discursive domains bordering each other" (1993:21). They note that they could be doing a modernist interpretation of Simmel but feel that a postmodernist explication is more useful. Thus, they express a very postmodern view: "There is no essential Simmel, only different Simmels read through the various positions in contemporary discourse formations" (Weinstein and Weinstein, 1993:55).

What sorts of arguments do Weinstein and Weinstein make in defense of a postmodernized Simmel? For one thing, Simmel is seen as being generally opposed to totalizations; indeed, he is inclined to detotalize modernity. In spite of, and aside from, the theory of the "tragedy of culture," Simmel was primarily an essayist and a storyteller, and he dealt mainly with a range of specific issues rather than with the totality of the social world.

Simmel also is described by Weinstein and Weinstein, as he is by others, as a *flaneur,* or someone who is something of an idler. More specifically, Simmel is described as a sociologist who idled away his time analyzing a wide range of social phenomena. He was interested in all of them for their aesthetic qualities; they all existed "to titillate, astonish, please or delight him" (Weinstein and Weinstein,

1993:60). Simmel is described as spending his intellectual life wandering through a wide range of social phenomena, describing one or another as the mood moved him. This approach led Simmel away from a totalized view of the world and toward a concern for a number of discrete, but important, elements of that world.

Bricoleur is another term used to describe Simmel. A *bricoleur* is a kind of intellectual handyman who makes do with whatever happens to be available to him. Available to Simmel are a wide range of fragments of the social world, or "shards of objective culture," as Weinstein and Weinstein (1993:70) describe them in Simmelian terms. As a *bricoleur* Simmel cobbles together whatever ideas he can find in order to shed light on the social world.

There is no need to go too deeply into the details of Weinstein and Weinstein's interpretation of a postmodernized Simmel. The illustrative points already discussed make it clear that such an interpretation is as reasonable as the modernized vision is. It would be far harder to come up with similar postmodern views of the other major classical theorists, although one certainly could find aspects of their work that are consistent with postmodern social theory. Thus, as Seidman (1991) makes clear, most of sociological theory *is* modernist, but as the case of Simmel illustrates, there are postmodern intimations in even that most modernist of traditions (see also the discussion of Weber and postmodernism in Gane, 2002).

Another place to look for intimations of postmodern social theory is among the critics of modern theory *within* sociological theory. As several observers (Antonio, 1991; Best and Kellner, 1991; Smart, 1993) have pointed out, a key position is occupied by C. Wright Mills (1959). First, Mills actually used the term *postmodern* to describe the post-Enlightenment era which we were entering: "We are at the ending of what is called The Modern Age. . . . The Modern Age is being succeeded by a post-modern period" (Mills, 1959:165–166). Second, he was a severe critic of modern grand theory in sociology, especially as it was practiced by Talcott Parsons. Third, Mills favored a socially and morally engaged sociology. In his terms, he wanted a sociology that linked broad public issues to specific private troubles.

While there are intimations of postmodern social theory in the work of Simmel and Mills (and many others), it is not there that we find postmodern theory itself. For example, Best and Kellner contend that Mills "is very much a modernist, given to sweeping sociological generalization, totalizing surveys of sociology and history, and a belief in the power of the sociological imagination to illuminate social reality and to change society" (1991:8).

Given this general background, let us turn to a more concrete discussion of postmodern social theory. We will focus on a few of the ideas associated with two of the most important postmodern social theorists: Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard.

Moderate Postmodern Social Theory: Fredric Jameson

The dominant position on the issue of postmodernity is clearly that there is a radical disjuncture between modernity and postmodernity. However, there are some postmodern theorists who argue that while postmodernity has important differences from modernity, there are also continuities between them. The best known of these arguments is made

by Fredric Jameson (1984; Kellner, 2005b) in an essay entitled "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," as well as later in a book of essays with the same title (Jameson, 1991). That title is clearly indicative of Jameson's Marxian position that capitalism, now in its "late" phase, continues to be the dominant feature in today's world but has spawned a new cultural logic—postmodernism. In other words, although the cultural logic may have changed, the underlying economic structure is continuous with earlier forms of capitalism. Furthermore, capitalism continues to be up to its same old tricks of spawning a cultural logic to help it maintain itself.

In writing in this vein, Jameson is clearly rejecting the claim made by many postmodernists (for example, Lyotard, Baudrillard) that Marxian theory is perhaps the grand narrative par excellence and therefore has no place in, or relevance to, postmodernity. Jameson is not only rescuing Marxian theory, but endeavoring to show that it offers the best theoretical explanation of postmodernity. Interestingly, although Jameson generally is praised for his insights into the culture of postmodernism, he often is criticized, especially by Marxists, for offering an inadequate analysis of the economic base of this new cultural world.

Also consistent with the work of Marx, and unlike most theorists of postmodernism, Jameson (1984:86) sees both positive and negative characteristics, "catastrophe and progress all together," associated with postmodern society. Marx, of course, saw capitalism in this way: productive of liberation and very valuable advancements and *at the same time* the height of exploitation and alienation.

Jameson begins by recognizing that postmodernism usually is associated with a radical break, but then, after discussing a number of things usually associated with postmodernism, he asks, "Does it imply any more fundamental change or break than the periodic style—and fashion—changes determined by an older high modernist imperative of stylistic innovation?" (1984:54). He responds that there certainly have been aesthetic changes, but those changes continue to be a function of underlying economic dynamics:

> What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation. Such economic necessities then find recognition in the institutional support of all kinds available for the newer art, from foundations and grants to museums and other forms of patronage.
>
> (Jameson, 1984:56)

The continuity with the past is even clearer and more dramatic in the following:

> This whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death and horror.
>
> (Jameson, 1984:57)

Jameson (following Ernest Mandel) sees three stages in the history of capitalism. The first stage, analyzed by Marx, is market capitalism, or the emergence of unified

national markets. The second stage, analyzed by Lenin, is the imperialist stage with the emergence of a global capitalist network. The third stage, labeled by Mandel (1975) and Jameson as "late capitalism," involves "a prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas" (Jameson, 1984:78). This expansion, "far from being inconsistent with Marx's great nineteenth-century analysis, constitutes on the contrary the purest form of capital yet to have emerged" (Jameson, 1984:78). Said Jameson, "The Marxist framework is still indispensable for understanding the new historical content, which demands not modification of the Marxist framework, but an expansion of it" (cited in Stephanson, 1989:54). For Jameson, the key to modern capitalism is its multinational character and the fact that it has greatly increased the range of commodification.

These changes in the economic structure have been reflected in cultural changes. Thus, Jameson associates realist culture with market capitalism, modernist culture with monopoly capitalism, and postmodern culture with multinational capitalism. This view seems to be an updated version of Marx's base-superstructure argument, and many have criticized Jameson for adopting such a simplistic perspective. However, Jameson has tried hard to avoid such a "vulgar" position and has described a more complex relationship between the economy and culture. Nonetheless, even a sympathetic critic such as Featherstone concludes, "It is clear that his view of culture largely works within the confines of a base-superstructure model" (1989:119).

Capitalism has gone from a stage in monopoly capitalism in which culture was at least to some degree autonomous to an explosion of culture in multinational capitalism:

> A prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm, to the point at which everything in our social life—from economic value and state power to practices and to the very structure of the psyche itself—can be said to have become "cultural" in some original and as yet untheorized sense. This perhaps startling proposition is, however, substantively quite consistent with the previous diagnosis of a society of the image or the simulacrum [this term will be defined shortly], and a transformation of the "real" into so many pseudo-events.
>
> (Jameson, 1984:87)

Jameson describes this new form as a "cultural dominant." As a cultural dominant, postmodernism is described as a "force field in which very different kinds of cultural impulses . . . must make their way" (Jameson, 1984:57). Thus, while postmodernism is "a new systematic cultural norm," it is made up of a range of quite heterogeneous elements (Jameson, 1984:57). By using the term *cultural dominant,* Jameson also clearly means that while postmodern culture is controlling, there are various other forces that exist within today's culture.

Fredric Jameson offers a comparatively clear image of a postmodern society composed of four basic elements (a fifth, its late capitalistic character, has already been discussed). First, postmodern society is characterized by superficiality and lack of depth. Its cultural products are satisfied with surface images and do not delve deeply into the underlying meanings. A good example is Andy Warhol's famous painting of Campbell soup cans that appear to be nothing more than perfect representations of those cans. To use a key term associated with postmodern theory, a picture is a *simulacrum* in which one cannot distinguish between the original and the copy.

A simulacrum is also a copy of a copy; Warhol was reputed to have painted his soup cans not from the cans themselves but from a photograph of the cans. Jameson describes a simulacrum as "the identical copy for which no original ever existed" (1984:66). A simulacrum is, by definition, superficial, lacking in depth.

Second, postmodernism is characterized by a waning of emotion or affect. As his example, Jameson contrasts another of Warhol's paintings—another near-photographic representation, this time of Marilyn Monroe—to a classic modernist piece of art—Edvard Munch's *The Scream. The Scream* is a surreal painting of a person expressing the depth of despair, or in sociological terms, anomie or alienation. Warhol's painting of Marilyn Monroe is superficial and expresses no genuine emotion. This reflects the fact that to the postmodernists, the alienation and anomie that caused the kind of reaction depicted by Munch is part of the now-past modern world. In the postmodern world alienation has been replaced by fragmentation. Since the world and the people in it have become fragmented, the affect that remains is "free-floating and impersonal" (Jameson, 1984:64). There is a peculiar kind of euphoria associated with these postmodern feelings, or what Jameson prefers to call "intensities." He gives as an example a photorealist cityscape "where even automobile wrecks gleam with some new hallucinatory splendour" (Jameson, 1984:76). Euphoria based on automobile disasters in the midst of urban squalor is, indeed, a peculiar kind of emotion. Postmodern intensity also occurs when "the body is plugged into the new electronic media" (Donougho, 1989:85).

Third, there is a loss of historicity. We cannot know the past. All we have access to are texts about the past, and all we can do is produce yet other texts about that topic. This loss of historicity has led to the "random cannibalization of all styles of the past" (Jameson, 1984:65–66). The result leads us to another key term in postmodern thinking—*pastiche.* Because it is impossible for historians to find the truth about the past, or even to put together a coherent story about it, they are satisfied with creating pastiches, or hodgepodges of ideas, sometimes contradictory and confused, about the past. Further, there is no clear sense of historical development, of time passing. Past and present are inextricably intertwined. For example, in historical novels such as E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime,* we see the "disappearance of the historical referent. This historical novel can no longer set out to represent historical past; it can only 'represent' our ideas and stereotypes about that past" (Jameson, 1984:71). Another example is the movie *Body Heat,* which, while clearly about the present, creates an atmosphere reminiscent of the 1930s. In order to do this,

> the object world of the present-day—artifacts and appliances, even automobiles, whose styling would serve to date the image—is elaborately edited out. Everything in the film, therefore, conspires to blur its official contemporaneity and to make it possible for you to receive the narrative as though it were set in some eternal Thirties, beyond historical time.
>
> (Jameson, 1984:68)

A movie like *Body Heat* or a novel like *Ragtime* is "an elaborated symptom of the waning of our historicity" (Jameson, 1984:68). This loss of temporality, this inability to distinguish between past, present, and future, is manifested at the individual level

in a kind of schizophrenia. For the postmodern individual, events are fragmented and discontinuous.

Fourth, there is a new technology associated with postmodern society. Instead of productive technologies such as the automobile assembly line, we have the dominance of *re*productive technologies, especially electronic media such as the television set and the computer. Rather than the "exciting" technology of the Industrial Revolution, we have technologies such as television, "which articulates nothing but rather implodes, carrying its flattened image surface within itself" (Jameson, 1984:79). The implosive, flattening technologies of the postmodern era give birth to very different cultural products than the explosive, expanding technologies of the modern era did.

In sum, Jameson presents us with an image of postmodernity in which people are adrift and unable to comprehend the multinational capitalist system or the explosively growing culture in which they live. As a paradigm of this world, and of one's place in it, Jameson offers the example of Los Angeles's Hotel Bonaventure, designed by a famous postmodern architect, John Portman. One of the points Jameson makes about the hotel is that one is unable to get one's bearings in the lobby. The lobby is an example of what Jameson means by *hyperspace,* an area where modern conceptions of space are useless in helping us orient ourselves. In this case, the lobby is surrounded by four absolutely symmetrical towers that contain the rooms. In fact, the hotel had to add color coding and directional signals to help people find their way. But the key point is that, as it was designed, people had great difficulty getting their bearings in the hotel lobby.

This situation in the lobby of the Hotel Bonaventure is a metaphor for our inability to get our bearings in the multinational economy and cultural explosion of late capitalism. Unlike many postmodernists, Jameson as a Marxist is unwilling to leave it at that and comes up with at least a partial solution to the problem of living in a postmodern society. What we need, he says, are cognitive maps in order to find our way around (Jagtenberg and McKie, 1997). Yet these are not, cannot be, the maps of old. Thus, Jameson awaits a

> breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing . . . [late capitalism], in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion. The political form of postmodernism, if there ever is any, will have as its vocation the invention and projection of a global cognitive mapping, on a social as well as a spatial scale.
> (Jameson, 1984:92)

These cognitive maps can come from various sources—social theorists (including Jameson himself, who can be seen as providing such a map in his work), novelists, and people on an everyday basis who can map their own spaces. Of course, the maps are not ends in themselves to a Marxist like Jameson but are to be used as the basis for radical political action in postmodern society.

The need for maps is linked to Jameson's view that we have moved from a world that is defined temporally to one that is defined spatially. Indeed, the idea of hyperspace and the example of the lobby of the Hotel Bonaventure reflect the

dominance of space in the postmodern world. Thus, for Jameson, the central problem today is "the loss of our ability to *position ourselves within this space and to cognitively map it*" (Jameson, in Stephanson, 1989:48).

Interestingly, Jameson links the idea of cognitive maps to Marxian theory, specifically the idea of class consciousness: "'Cognitive mapping' was in reality nothing but a code word for 'class consciousness' . . . only it proposed the need for class consciousness of a new and hitherto undreamed of kind, while it also inflected the account in the direction of that new spatiality implicit in the postmodern" (1989:387).

The great strength of Jameson's work is his effort to synthesize Marxian theory and postmodernism. While he should be praised for this effort, the fact is that his work often displeases *both* Marxists and postmodernists. According to Best and Kellner, "His work is an example of the potential hazards of an eclectic, multiperspectival theory which attempts to incorporate a myriad of positions, some of them in tension or contradiction with each other, as when he produces the uneasy alliance between classical Marxism and extreme postmodernism" (1991:192). More specifically, for example, some Marxists object to the degree to which Jameson has accepted postmodernism as a cultural dominant, and some postmodernists criticize his acceptance of a totalizing theory of the world.

Extreme Postmodern Social Theory: Jean Baudrillard

If Jameson is among the more moderate postmodern social theorists, Jean Baudrillard is one of the most radical and outrageous of this genre. Unlike Jameson, Baudrillard was trained as a sociologist (Genosko, 2005; Wernick, 2000), but his work has long since left the confines of that discipline. Indeed, it cannot be contained by any discipline, and Baudrillard would in any case reject the whole idea of disciplinary boundaries.

Following Kellner (1989d, 2000), we offer a brief overview of the twists and turns in Baudrillard's work. His earliest work, going back to the 1960s, was both modernist (Baudrillard did not use the term *postmodernism* until the 1980s) and Marxian in its orientation. His early works involved a Marxian critique of the consumer society. However, this work was already heavily influenced by linguistics and semiotics, with the result that Kellner contends that it is best to see this early work as "a semiological supplement to Marx's theory of political economy." However, it was not long before Baudrillard began to criticize the Marxian approach (as well as structuralism) and ultimately to leave it behind.

In *The Mirror of Production,* Baudrillard (1973/1975) came to view the Marxian perspective as the mirror image of conservative political economy. In other words, Marx (and the Marxists) bought into the same worldview as the conservative supporters of capitalism. In Baudrillard's view, Marx was infected by the "virus of bourgeois thought" (1973/1975:39). Specifically, Marx's approach was infused with conservative ideas such as "work" and "value." What was needed was a new, more radical orientation.

Baudrillard articulated the idea of symbolic exchange as an alternative to—the radical negation of—economic exchange (D. Cook, 1994). Symbolic exchange involved an uninterrupted *cycle* of "taking and returning, giving and receiving," a "*cycle* of gifts and countergifts" (Baudrillard, 1973/1975:83). Here was an idea that did not fall

into the trap that ensnared Marx; symbolic exchange was clearly outside of, and opposed to, the logic of capitalism. The idea of symbolic exchange implied a political program aimed at creating a society characterized by such exchange. For example, Baudrillard is critical of the working class and seems more positive toward the new left or hippies. However, Baudrillard soon gave up on *all* political objectives.

Instead, Baudrillard turned his attention to the analysis of contemporary society, which, as he sees it, is dominated no longer by production, but rather by the "media, cybernetic models and steering systems, computers, information processing, entertainment and knowledge industries, and so forth" (Kellner, 1989d:61). Emanating from these systems is a veritable explosion of signs (D. Harris, 1996). It could be said that we have moved from a society dominated by the mode of production to one controlled by the code of production. The objective has shifted from exploitation and profit to domination by the signs and the systems that produce them. Furthermore, while there was a time when the signs stood for something real, now they refer to little more than themselves and other signs; signs have become self-referential. We can no longer tell what is real; the distinction between signs and reality has *imploded*. More generally, the postmodern world (for now Baudrillard is operating squarely within that world) is a world characterized by such implosion as distinguished from the explosions (of productive systems, of commodities, of technologies, and so on) that characterized modern society. Thus, just as the modern world underwent a process of differentiation, the postmodern world can be seen as undergoing *de-differentiation*.

Another way that Baudrillard, like Jameson, describes the postmodern world is that it is characterized by *simulations;* we live in "the age of simulation" (Baudrillard, 1983:4; Der Derian, 1994). The process of simulation leads to the creation of *simulacra,* or "reproductions of objects or events" (Kellner, 1989d:78). With the distinction between signs and reality imploding, it is increasingly difficult to tell the real from those things that simulate the real. For example, Baudrillard talks of "the dissolution of TV into life, the dissolution of life into TV" (1983:55). Eventually, it is the representations of the real, the simulations, that come to be predominant. We are in the thrall of these simulations, which "form a spiralling, circular system with no beginning or end" (Kellner, 1989d:83).

Baudrillard (1983) describes this world as *hyperreality*. For example, the media cease to be a mirror of reality but become that reality, or even more real than that reality. The tabloid news shows that are so popular on TV these days (for example, *Inside Edition*) are good examples (another is "infomercials") because the falsehoods and distortions they peddle to viewers are more than reality—they are hyperreality. The result is that what is real comes to be subordinated and ultimately dissolved altogether. It becomes impossible to distinguish the real from the spectacle. In fact, "real" events increasingly take on the character of the hyperreal. For example, the trial of former football great O. J. Simpson for the murders of Nicole Simpson and Ronald Goldman seemed hyperreal and perfect fodder for hyperreal TV shows like *Inside Edition*. In the end, there is no more reality, only hyperreality.

In all this, Baudrillard is focusing on culture, which he sees as undergoing a massive and "catastrophic" revolution. That revolution involves the masses becoming increasingly passive, rather than increasingly rebellious, as they were to the Marxists.

Thus, the mass is seen as a "'black hole' [that] absorbs all meaning, information, communication, messages and so on, thereby rendering them meaningless . . . masses go sullenly on their ways, ignoring attempts to manipulate them" (Kellner, 1989d:85). Indifference, apathy, and inertia are all good terms to describe the masses saturated with media signs, simulacra, and hyperreality. The masses are not seen as manipulated by the media, but the media are being forced to supply their escalating demands for objects and spectacles. In a sense, society itself is imploding into the black hole that is the masses. Summing up much of this theory, Kellner concludes,

> Acceleration of inertia, the implosion of meaning in the media, the implosion of the social in the mass, the implosion of the mass in a dark hole of nihilism and meaninglessness; such is the Baudrillardian postmodern vision.
>
> (Kellner, 1989d:118)

As extraordinary as this analysis may seem, Baudrillard was even more bizarre, scandalous, irreverent, promiscuous, and playful, or as Kellner says, "carnivalesque," in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976/1993). Baudrillard sees contemporary society as a death culture, with death being the "paradigm of all social exclusion and discrimination" (Kellner, 1989d:104). The emphasis on death also reflects the binary opposition of life and death. In contrast, societies characterized by symbolic exchange end binary oppositions in general and more specifically the opposition between life and death (and, in the process, the exclusion and discrimination that accompany a death culture). It is anxiety about death and exclusion that leads people to plunge themselves even more deeply into the consumer culture.

Holding up symbolic exchange as the preferred alternative to contemporary society began to seem too primitive to Baudrillard (1979/1990), and he came to regard *seduction* as the preferred alternative, perhaps because it fit better with his emerging sense of postmodernism. Seduction "involves the charms of pure and mere games, superficial rituals" (Kellner, 1989d:149). Baudrillard is extolling the power and virtues of seduction, with its meaninglessness, playfulness, depthlessness, "nonsense," and irrationality, over a world characterized by production.

In the end, Baudrillard is offering a fatal theory. Thus, in one of his later works, *America,* Baudrillard says that in his visit to that country, he "sought the finished form of the future catastrophe" (1986/1989:5). There is no revolutionary hope as there is in Marx's work. Nor is there even the possibility of reforming society as Durkheim hoped. Rather, we seem doomed to a life of simulations, hyperreality, and implosion of everything into an incomprehensible black hole. Although vague alternatives such as symbolic exchange and seduction can be found in Baudrillard's work, he generally shies away from extolling their virtues or articulating a political program aimed at their realization.

Postmodern Social Theory and Sociological Theory

There are those who believe that postmodern social theory, especially in its more radical forms, represents an incommensurable alternative to sociological theory. In one sense, it is seen as not being theory, at least in the sense in which we conventionally use the term. At the beginning of this book, sociological theory was defined as

"the 'big ideas' in sociology that have stood the test of time (or promise to), idea systems that deal with major social issues and are far-reaching in scope." It seems that the radical ideas of a postmodernist such as Baudrillard fit this definition quite well. Baudrillard certainly offers a number of "big ideas" (simulations, hyperreality, symbolic exchange, seduction). They are ideas that show every promise of standing the test of time. And Baudrillard certainly deals with major social issues (for example, the control of the media); his ideas have implications for a substantial part, if not all, of the social world. Thus, we would say that Baudrillard is offering a sociological theory, and if that can be said of Baudrillard, it certainly can be said of Jameson and most other postmodernists.

The real threat of postmodern social theory is more in its form than in its substance. In rejecting grand narratives, postmodernists are rejecting most of what we usually think of as sociological theory. Baudrillard (and other postmodernists) do not offer grand narratives, but rather bits and pieces of ideas that often seem to contradict one another. If the postmodernists win the day, the sociological theory of the future will look very different from today's theory. But even if the form is nearly unrecognizable, the content will still involve important, wide-ranging ideas about social issues.

Whatever the future may hold, at the moment postmodern social theorists are producing an unusually large number of important and exciting ideas. Those ideas cannot be ignored and may, as they are internalized in sociology, push sociological theory in some new and unforeseen directions.

Criticisms and Post-Postmodern Social Theory

Debates about poststructural and postmodern social theory ordinarily generate an enormous amount of heat. Supporters are often gushing in their praise, while detractors frequently are driven into what can only be described as a blind rage. For example, John O'Neill (1995) writes of "the insanity of postmodernism" (p. 16); he describes it as offering "a great black sky of nonsense" (p. 191) and as "an already dead moment of the mind" (p. 199). Leaving aside the extreme rhetoric, what are some of the major criticisms of postmodern social theory (bearing in mind that given the diversity of postmodern social theories, general criticisms of those theories are of questionable validity and utility)?

1. Postmodern theory is criticized for its failure to live up to modern scientific standards, standards that postmodernists eschew. To the scientifically oriented modernist, it is impossible to know whether the contentions of postmodernists are true. To put it in more formal terms, almost everything that the postmodernists have to say is viewed by modernists as not being falsifiable— that is, their ideas cannot be disproved, especially by empirical research (Frow, 1991; Kumar, 1995). Of course, this criticism assumes the existence of a scientific model, of reality, and of a search for and existence of truth. All these assumptions would, naturally, be rejected by postmodernists.

2. Since the knowledge produced by postmodernists cannot be seen as constituting a body of scientific ideas, it might be better to look at

postmodern social theory as ideology (Kumar, 1995). Once we do that, it is no longer a matter of whether the ideas are true, but simply whether we believe in them. Those who believe in one set of ideas have no grounds to argue that their ideas are any better or worse than any other set of ideas.

3.   Because they are unconstrained by the norms of science, postmodernists are free to do as they please, to "play" with a wide range of ideas. Broad generalizations are offered, often without qualification. Furthermore, in expressing their positions, postmodern social theorists are not restricted to the dispassionate rhetoric of the modern scientist. The excessive nature of much of postmodern discourse makes it difficult for most of those outside the perspective to accept its basic tenets.

4.   Postmodern ideas are often so vague and abstract that it is difficult, if not impossible, to connect them to the social world (Calhoun, 1993b). Relatedly, meanings of concepts tend to change over the course of a postmodernist's work, but the reader, unaware of the original meanings, is unclear about any changes.

5.   Despite their propensity to criticize the grand narratives of modern theorists, postmodern social theorists often offer their own varieties of such narratives. For example, Jameson often is accused of employing Marxian grand narratives and totalizations.

6.   In their analyses, postmodern social theorists often offer critiques of modern society, but those critiques are of questionable validity because they generally lack a normative basis from which to make such judgments.

7.   Given their rejection of an interest in the subject and subjectivity, postmodernists often lack a theory of agency.

8.   Postmodern social theorists are best at critiquing society, but they lack any vision of what society ought to be.

9.   Postmodern social theory leads to profound pessimism.

10.   While postmodern social theorists grapple with what they consider major social issues, they often end up ignoring what many consider the key problems of our time.

11.   Although one can find adherents among them, as we saw in Chapter 13, the feminists have been particularly strong critics of postmodern social theory. Feminists have tended to be critical of postmodern social theory's rejection of the subject, of its opposition to universal, cross-cultural categories (such as gender and gender oppression), of its excessive concern with difference, of its rejection of truth, and of its inability to develop a critical political agenda.

Many other criticisms of postmodern social theory in general, to say nothing of many specific criticisms of each postmodern theorist, could be enumerated. However, the list above gives a good sense of the range of those criticisms. Whatever the merits of these critiques, the central issue is whether postmodern theory has produced a set of interesting, insightful, and important ideas that are likely to affect social theory long into the future. It should be clear from this chapter that such ideas exist in profusion within postmodern social theory.

While postmodern social theory is only beginning to have a powerful impact on American sociology, in many areas it is long past its prime and in decline. Interestingly, it is in French social theory, the source of the best in poststructuralism and postmodernism, that we find the most determined efforts to move beyond postmodern theory.

Given their rejection of the human subject, the postmodernists are accused of antihumanism (Ferry and Renaut, 1985/1990:30). Thus, the post-postmodernists are seeking to rescue humanism (and subjectivity) from the postmodern critique that presumably left such an idea for dead. For example, Lilla (1994:20) argues that what is being sought is "a new defense of universal, rational norms in morals and politics, and especially a defense of human rights."

Another strand of "post-postmodern social theory" involves an effort to reinstate the importance of liberalism in the face of the postmodern assault on the liberal grand narrative (Lilla, 1994). The works of the poststructuralists/postmodernists (e.g., Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*), even when they were couched in highly abstract theoretical terms, were read by the French as attacks on structures in general, especially the structure of liberal bourgeois society and its "governmentalities." Not only did postmodern theorists question such a society, this also led to the view that there was no way of escaping the reach of that society's power structure. Issues thought dead during the heyday of postmodern theory—"human rights, constitutional government, representation, class, individualism" (Lilla, 1994:16)—have attracted renewed attention. The nihilism of postmodernism has been replaced by a variety of sympathetic orientations to liberal society. One could say that this revival of interest in liberalism (as well as humanism) indicates a restoration of interest in, and sympathy for, modern society.

Other aspects of post-postmodern social theory are made clear in Gilles Lipovetsky's (1987/1994) *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy*. Lipovetsky takes on, quite explicitly, the poststructuralists and postmodernists. Here is the way he articulates the position taken by them and to which he is opposed, at least to some degree:

> In our societies, fashion is in the driver's seat. In less than half a century, attractiveness and evanescence have become the organizing principles of modern collective life. We live in societies where the trivial predominates. . . . Should we be dismayed by this? Does it announce the slow but inexorable decline of the West? Must we take it as a sign of the decadence of the democratic ideal? Nothing is more commonplace or widespread than the tendency to stigmatize—not without cause, moreover—the consumerist bent of democracies; they are represented as devoid of any great mobilizing collective projects, lulled into a stupor by the private orgies of consumerism, infantilized by "instant" culture, by advertising, by politics-as-theater.
>
> (Lipovetsky, 1987/1994:6)

In contrast, while he recognizes the problems associated with it, Lipovetsky (1987/1994:6) argues that fashion is "the primary agent of the spiraling movement toward individualism and the consolidation of liberal societies." Thus, Lipovetsky does not share the gloomy view of the postmodernists; he sees not only the negative, but also the positive, side of fashion and has a generally optimistic view of the future of society.

While Lipovetsky has much that is positive to say about fashion, consumerism, individualism, democracy, and modern society, he also recognizes the problems associated with each one. He concludes that we live in "neither the best of worlds nor the worst. . . . Fashion is neither angel nor devil. . . . Such is the greatness of fashion, which always refers us, as individuals, back to ourselves; such is the misery of fashion, which renders us increasingly problematic to ourselves and others" (Lipovetsky, 1987/1994:240–241). Intellectuals are warned not to dismiss fashion (and the rest) just because it offends their intellectual sympathies. It is for being dismissive of such important phenomena as fashion (and liberalism, democracy, and so on) that Lipovetsky attacks the poststructuralists/postmodernists and others (e.g., critical theorists). In any case, the assault on fashion (and other aspects of modern society) has led us to lose sight of the fact that "the age of fashion remains the major factor in the process that has drawn men and women collectively away from obscurantism and fanaticism, has instituted an open public space and shaped a more lawful, more mature, more skeptical humanity" (Lipovetsky, 1987/1994:12).

While his paradigm is clothing, Lipovetsky argues that fashion is a form of social change that is a distinctive product of the Occident. In contrast to the postmodernists, who were resistant to the idea of origins, Lipovetsky traces the origins of fashion to the upper classes in the West in the late Middle Ages. Fashion is a form of change characterized by a brief time span, largely fanciful shifts, and the ability to affect a wide variety of sectors of the social world. A number of factors came together in the West to give birth to the fashion form, especially its consecration of both individuality and novelty.

Fashion has been a force in the rise of individuality by allowing people to express themselves and their individuality in their clothing even while they might also be attending to collective changes in fashion. Similarly, it has been a factor in greater equality by allowing those lower in the stratification system to at least dress like those who ranked above them. Fashion also has permitted frivolous self-expression. Most generally, it is linked to increasing individualism and the democratization of society as a whole.

The discussion in this section should not be taken to mean that post- or anti-postmodern social theory exhausts contemporary French theory, but it is clearly one of the dominant themes in that theory. Postmodern social theory is not dead in contemporary France. Jean Baudrillard continues to write, and there are others whose work is not discussed here. There are, for example, the contributions of the French urbanist and architect Paul Virilio. (See the special issue, "Paul Virilio," in *Theory, Culture and Society* [October 1999].) In a fascinating series of books, Virilio (1983, 1986, 1991a, 1991b, 1995) has focused on the study of speed (dromology) in the postmodern world. For example, in *Lost Dimension,* Virilio (1991a) discusses how physical distances and barriers have disappeared in the face of the growing importance of speed; space has been replaced by time; the material has been replaced by the immaterial. Thus, in the case of the city, its physical boundaries have been breached forever by, among other things, high-speed communication. The modern world defined by space has given way to a postmodern world defined by time.

More important for our purposes, postmodern social theory is alive and well in the United States. However, we need to look beyond intellectual fashion in the

United States (or France) and realize that whether or not postmodern/poststructural ideas are in or out of fashion in any given place at any given moment, they will be of continuing significance to social theory in general for some time to come. We eventually will move beyond postmodern social theory, but social theory in general will never quite be the same again.

Summary

This chapter covers a wide range of important and interrelated developments in the recent history of sociological theory. The source of many of these developments is the revolution that took place in linguistics and led to a search for the underlying structures of language. Structuralism, as this revolution came to be called, affected a number of fields, including anthropology (especially the work of Lévi-Strauss) and Marxian theory (structural Marxism in particular).

While structuralism continues to affect the thinking of social theorists, it gave birth to a movement known as poststructuralism. As the name suggests, poststructuralism built on the ideas of structuralism but went well beyond them to create a distinctive mode of thought. The most important of the poststructuralists is Michel Foucault. In a series of important books, Foucault created a number of theoretical ideas that are likely to be influential for many decades to come. Also of importance is the work of Giorgio Agamben, especially his thinking on bare life, state of exception, and the camp.

Emerging, in part, out of poststructuralism is an enormously influential development known as postmodern theory. Many fields have been influenced by postmodern thinking—art, architecture, philosophy, and sociology. There are a wide variety of postmodern social theories, and this chapter examines a moderate version offered by Fredric Jameson and a radical alternative offered by Jean Baudrillard. At the minimum, postmodern social theory represents a challenge to sociological theory. At the maximum, it stands as a rejection of much, if not all, sociological theory. The chapter closes with some of the major criticisms of postmodern social theory and a discussion of the significance of post-postmodern social theory.