Interpreting Culture

RETHINKING METHOD AND TRUTH IN SOCIAL THEORY

Joseph D. Lewandowski

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Contents

List of Illustrations vii
Preface ix
Acknowledgments xi
Chapter 1. The Contemporary Logics of Social Theory 1
1. Textuality and Deconstruction 5
2. Rationality and Reconstruction 26
3. Constructing Constellations 35
Chapter 2. Method and Truth amid the Ruins of the Social 38
1. Image-Construction and the Problem of Truth 39
2. Adorno's Critique and Appropriation of Benjamin 47
3. Interpretive Philosophy as Constructing Constellations 51
Chapter 3. Affect and Evidence in the Logic of Constructing Constellations 70
1. Adorno's Kierkegaard Study 71
2. Truth as Truth Bearers 81
3. Sociological Interpretation and Disenchantment 86
Chapter 4. Method and Truth in French Social Theory 95
1. Archaeology and Genealogy 96
2. Reflexive Sociology 110
Chapter 5. Constructing Urban Constellations 121
1. Ghetto Life in America 123
2. Social Struggle in Chicago 139
Afterword: Constructing Constellations, or Thematizing Embeddedness 161
Notes 165
Bibliography 185
Index 195

Illustrations

1. West Side, Detroit, 1991 128
2. Rosa Parks Boulevard, Detroit, 1987 128
3. 178th and Vyse Avenue, 1980 130
4. 178th and Vyse Avenue, 1982 131
5. 178th and Vyse Avenue, 1983 131
6. 178th and Vyse Avenue, 1986 132
7. 178th and Vyse Avenue, 1988 132
8. 178th and Vyse Avenue, 1991 133
9. 178th and Vyse Avenue, 1993 133
10. 178th and Vyse Avenue, 1996 134
11. East Side, Detroit, 1991 135
12. Central Ward, Newark, 1993 135
13. Highland Park, Michigan, 1993 136
14. West Side, Chicago, 1986 137
15. Harlem, New York, 1992 137
16. Central Ward, Newark, 1994 140

Preface

It is perhaps to point out the obvious to begin by saying that in the past several decades social theorists of various stripes have been increasingly willing to acknowledge the interpretive character of their work. What such an interpretive character in fact means for the methods of social inquiry is rather less obvious and depends largely on how the term *interpretation* is understood and incorporated into the practical study of social life. Indeed, one of the persistent tasks of contemporary social theory appears to be not to conceive of ways to avoid interpretation but rather to develop an adequate account of interpretation and the kinds of truths that define it. This study attempts to make a provisional contribution to such an ongoing and difficult task by examining the inner workings, or logic, of three different modes of interpretive social theory: what I shall call the logic of rationality and reconstruction, the logic of textuality and deconstruction, and, finally, the logic of constructing constellations. While all three of these logics have their relative strengths and merits, I argue that the first is deeply flawed, the second has a rather limited range of application, and the third, once sufficiently developed as a kind of reflexive hermeneutics of retrieval and disenchantment, is the richest and most materialist option for those social theorists who are committed to nonrelativizing and empirically informed interpretations of social life.

The ensuing study thus has a rather narrow focus. The disciplinary giants of social theory such as Karl Mannheim, Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, and C. Wright Mills, for example, do not make an appearance here, nor does the important work of American Pragmatists such as John Dewey or George Herbert Mead; and Karl Marx and Georg Simmel are, for the most part, only subtexts. By and large the study exclusively treats the work of a limited number of hermeneutically informed Continental and American social theorists: Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth (as exemplars of the logic of rationality and reconstruction);

Clifford Geertz, James Clifford, and Stephen Tyler (as exemplars of the logic of textuality and deconstruction); and Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Michel Foucault, and Pierre Bourdieu (as practitioners of the logic of constructing constellations). Moreover, since an analytic development of the logic of constructing constellations is in fact the chief concern of the book, several points of clarification and theoretical emendation are made, and numerous examples drawn from the research projects of Benjamin, Adorno, Foucault, Bourdieu, and other sources are included and elaborated rather extensively throughout. Consequently, it would be misleading to view this study as an attempt to give a comprehensive account of any particular social theorist, school, or tradition of social theory. Instead, the analyses developed here should be seen as a *systematic* attempt to sort out, show the strengths of, and refine the logic of constructing constellations emergent in the investigations of Benjamin, Adorno, Foucault, and Bourdieu. The study is more theoretical argumentation and methodological handbook than intellectual history or philosophical biography. Indeed, the purpose is to make accessible to a wide array of social theorists and cultural critics what, in the hands of Benjamin, Adorno, Foucault, and Bourdieu, is a rich but often arcane form of interpretive social inquiry. It is my sincere hope that such a focused purpose and my attempts at clarity do more to illuminate the methodological contributions of Benjamin, Adorno, Foucault, and Bourdieu than they do to obfuscate other important aspects of each theorist's work.

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Interpreting Culture

1

THE CONTEMPORARY LOGICS OF SOCIAL THEORY

For all their putative differences, the interpretive methods of contemporary social analysis obey, or so I want to suggest, one of three logics. Let us call the first the *logic of rationality and reconstruction*. Such a logic, which starts with the rational character of social life, incorporates elements of a normative hermeneutics of action and communication into a critical theory of modern society and is exemplified in the work of Jürgen Habermas and the contemporary research program of Axel Honneth. The second logic of contemporary social analysis, which we shall call the *logic of textuality and deconstruction*, may in fact be divided into two sublogics: the "deep" model of text and text-reading and the "planar" model of text and text-evocation. The former preserves traditional hermeneutic categories such as intentionality, meaning, and truth, while the radicalized latter seeks to lessen or unburden itself entirely of the weight of such categories. Most generally, the former draws on the model of text in the work of Paul Ricoeur, while the latter takes its inspiration from the linguistically oriented, deconstructive style of Jacques Derrida. In both deep and planar text models the logic of textuality and deconstruction is meant to capture not the rational but the essentially linguistic, textlike character of social life. Whereas the deep logic of textuality and deconstruction is most notably manifest in the "thick description" of Clifford Geertz, the planar logic of textuality and deconstruction emerges most forcefully in post-modern critics of Geertz, such as James Clifford and Stephen Tyler. Regardless of the particular conception of textuality at work, it is nevertheless fair to say that *some*

version of the social text is today one of the dominant paradigms for interpretive social study.

Amid the normative logic of rationality and reconstruction and the pervasive logic of textuality and deconstruction, however, remains an eclectic third approach to interpretive social analysis—a kind of interpretive method that is neither reconstructively hermeneutical nor deconstructively textual. Let us call this approach the *logic of constructing constellations.* Such a logic views social life as a materialist construction of human practices and productions that are not necessarily rational or textual but rather *relational.* Innovative but arcane social theorists such as Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Michel Foucault, and Pierre Bourdieu number among the most prominent practitioners of constructing constellations, and it is one of the chief goals of this study to make their methodological innovations explicit and accessible to a broad range of practicing social and cultural critics and students of social theory.

I want to begin by examining in some detail the logic of textuality and deconstruction in both its deep and planar manifestations. I want to show how text-based conceptions of social reality—be they conceptions of deep meaning or planar linguistic play—and the method of reading or evoking (or writing) they require are problematic models for an interpretively oriented social theory. Indeed, I shall present a rather strong argument against the logic of textuality and deconstruction here for two reasons: because the model of text and the methods of text-reading and text-evocation in social theory are so widespread and because I want to distinguish them sharply from the conception of constructing constellations to be developed in this study. My argument, in short, is that where the conception of deep text has relativizing tendencies, the more radical conception of planar text has a related problem, that of linguistic ontologism. In the end, both sublogics of textuality and deconstruction leave unclarified the role of truth in interpretive social study. Still, such an argument against the logic of textuality and deconstruction should not obscure the positive position this book seeks to advance. Rather than follow either of the sublogics of textuality and deconstruction, more forms of interpretive

social and cultural analysis should consider deploying the logic of constructing constellations I develop here.

After criticizing the logic of textuality and deconstruction, I shall consider the logic of rationality and reconstruction in the work of Habermas. The logic of rationality and reconstruction obviates many of the problems that are symptomatic of the model of deep and planar text, especially those of strong holism or universal hermeneutics (interpretation as the only game in town) and linguistic ontologism (evoking the social other, letting the cultural object or social production "be," etc.). For this reason, the logic of rationality and reconstruction presents one possible alternative to the logic of textuality and deconstruction. Here I shall acknowledge that the logic of rationality and reconstruction is in some ways preferable to the deep text-reading and deconstructive evocation that are the hallmarks of the logic of textuality and deconstruction. When the critic appeals to a *communicative* conception of social life, the logic of rationality and reconstruction is directly relevant. An account of rationality that analytically distinguishes between strategic and communicative action has the conceptual resources to reconstruct the necessary conditions for the possibility of raising validity claims communicatively. This provides it with the explanatory power to distinguish between distorted and nondistorted communications in ways that the logic of textuality and deconstruction obscures or misses entirely. Moreover, the logic of rationality and reconstruction does a better job of describing the enabling conditions of the interpretive social critic as an observer-participant since its emphasis on speech acts allows it to exploit the reflective potential inherent in dialogic interaction among social actors and the critics who study them.

There are, of course, persistent problems with the logic of rationality and reconstruction. I shall not pursue them at any length here since the argument in this chapter seeks only to demonstrate the shortcomings of the logic of textuality and deconstruction. Still, I shall point out at various moments in this study that the logic of rationality and reconstruction often unfairly dehistoricizes the reconstructive task of social criticism and overburdens the empirical distinction between normative and strategic features of

communication and social interaction. In many ways, the logic of rationality and reconstruction entails a kind of context-desensitizing historical reductionism: it views nondistorted communication as the pacesetting, or normative, motor of historical evolution and then translates the interpretive reconstruction of communicative ideals into context-transcending validity claims about practical human emancipation.

As yet another, more materialist alternative to the widely deployed logic of textuality and deconstruction I shall then go on to introduce the logic of constructing constellations. This logic does not entail a normative ideal of communicative rationality. Nor does it hold that the complex, multifaceted, historically fragmented, practically diffuse, and culturally diverse truths of modern material social existence can be adequately captured in deep readings and planar evocations of social texts. Unlike the logic of textuality and deconstruction, the logic of constructing constellations does not reduce social analysis to relativizing text-reading or ontologizing text-evocation. As the logic of constructing constellations I will introduce here and develop in subsequent chapters shows, an analysis of the "real" of social reality and its interpretive truths is not reducible to text-reading or evocation, especially if such truths are to be engaged interpretively *and* empirically. Indeed, the logic of constructing constellations describes in interpretive and empirical terms both the context-sensitive role of the social critic and the context-transforming potential of her interpretations. It is for that reason, I want to argue throughout this study, that materialist-oriented interpretive social critics are better served by adopting the logic of constructing constellations rather than that of textuality and deconstruction.

It should thus be made clear from the outset that, for all of its methodological eclecticism, the logic of constructing constellations does not pretend to shoot beyond hermeneutics altogether. Instead, as we shall see, a constellation is a particular kind of *materialist* interpretation. Constellations are context-sensitive constructions or interpretations of the relational and often reifyingly fragmented character of the sociocultural world. They seek to make visible and connect a broad and often overlooked range of human

practices, actions, and cultural productions in ways that don't merely deconstruct linguistic illusions or reconstruct normative ideals. Indeed, the point of constructing constellations, as we shall see, is not to read deep meanings or deconstruct metaphysical truths, nor is it to reconstruct context-transcending validity claims built into communicative actions. Instead, the logic of constructing constellations has a more practical task: its context-sensitive interpretations are potentially context-transforming. Such a practical task is, as the work of Benjamin, Adorno, Foucault, and Bourdieu suggests, that of *disenchantment.* The logic of constructing constellations interprets evidence that reveals the enchanted fixity of merely existing social relations to be fluid, transformable. In short, the argument of this book about method and truth in interpretive social theory is that unlike the context-transcendent communicative truths, or validity claims, of reconstruction, the deep meanings, or thick descriptions, of social texts, or the linguistic play, or deconstructive untruths, of textual evocation, the construction of constellations is *context-transforming.*

1. TEXTUALITY AND DECONSTRUCTION

In the reconfiguration of social theory and cultural criticism that has marked the past thirty or so years, at least four models of culture have emerged: culture as a symbolic system of meanings, culture as a game, culture as a drama, and, the model that is most widespread today, culture as a text.[1] The first of these understandings of culture is structuralist—it seeks to isolate elements within a system and show their underlying structures and structural interrelations. It then attempts to characterize the general system of symbolic meanings as a coherent whole. The second of these understandings of culture is behavioralist—it seeks to analyze the strategies and rules informing social action. The third is performativist—it seeks to discern cultures as a socially constructed performance where "the play's the thing," where, that is, no underlying structure or rule-governed action can be ascertained. The last of these understandings of culture takes two forms in the logic of textuality and deconstruction that I want to develop here: on the one hand,

the model of culture as a thick, or deep, text to be read and, on the other hand, the model of culture as a planar text, a play of signifiers to be evoked. Whether interpretively deep or dialogically planar, a commitment to the text model in social theory is today commonplace. Of course, whereas the first model is indebted to the hermeneutics of Ricoeur, the second model is indebted to the deconstructionism of Derrida. Though each genre of textually informed social theory rejects the other—indeed, the latter understands itself as a radicalized critique of the former—they share a fundamental methodological commitment to reading and writing, or evoking, that is deeply problematic. I want to argue here that the model of deep text suffers from the relativism endemic to universal hermeneutics, whereas the model of planar text suffers from the linguistic ontologism endemic to objectivist accounts of the poetic being of the social and its participants.

Consequently, in this section I want to examine some of the philosophical underpinnings, theoretical justifications, and practical consequences of the logic of textuality and deconstruction in the cultural anthropology of Clifford Geertz, James Clifford, and Stephen Tyler. Cultural anthropology has proved itself to be a particularly contested area in social theory because its ethnographies must confront directly and in concrete terms the difficult task of connecting the empirical features of social research (the data) to questions of interpretation (how and according to what procedures such data is to be framed, presented, understood, explained, read, and so on). Readers familiar with the deep or planar sublogics of textuality and deconstruction in social theory may want to move directly to the next section, where I take up Habermas's work in some detail.

In his essay, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text," Paul Ricoeur poses two questions that in many ways have still not been adequately answered in social inquiry: "To what extent may we consider the notion of text as a good paradigm for the so-called object of the social sciences?" and "To what extent may we use the methodology of text-interpretation as a paradigm for interpretations in general in the field of the human sciences?"[2] Ricoeur answers that we may indeed consider text as the object

of social study insofar as the objects of social inquiry (actions, events, practices) display the very features that are constitutive of texts—they are fixed, have a social dimension, are context-transcendentally relevant, and open-ended and readable. Further, he says that we may use the methodology of text-interpretation in the human sciences insofar as the text model productively reframes the problem of explanation versus understanding with the methodological strategies of deep reading and the art of guessing at meanings peculiar to literary criticism. Hence, Ricoeur wants both to justify the use of the text model in the study of social action and symbolic practices more generally and to set out the methodological strategies deployed in deep-text analysis.[3]

What Ricoeur contributes to social theory and method is thus a kind of hermeneutics of actions as social texts—a theory of textual depth and character-readability of human action. The social texts of action that Ricoeur has in mind have four intertwined aspects that, as we shall see, have been widely adopted in social and cultural study. The first of these is an insistence on depth: "The non-ostensive reference of the text is the kind of world opened up by the depth semantics of the text" ("Text," 218). Ricoeur takes pains to point out that such depth does not commit the reader of a text to a search for an original meaning or authorial intent: "What we want to understand is not something hidden behind the text, but something disclosed in front of it" ("Text," 218). However, he does argue that there is a *semantic depth* to texts that can be discerned. Such a depth semantics of the model of text means that the social critic goes from surface interpretations (the appearance of the text) to critical interpretations (the depth of the text). This movement from surface to depth is the chief characteristic, Ricoeur thinks, of social inquiry. In fact, he goes so far as to say that it is "depth interpretation which gives meaning to the whole process" ("Text," 220).

The second aspect of Ricoeur's text model is its linguistic constitution. For Ricoeur, texts are fundamentally discourses or language events. The depth semantics of Ricoeur's text means that texts are referentially deep; they are discourses *about* something. Ricoeur anticipates and rejects the post-structuralist radicalization

of textuality quite explicitly, arguing against any ideology of an absolute text and defending the necessity of referentiality: "If you suppress this referential function, only an absurd game of errant signifiers remains" ("Text," 201, 202). Texts are not a play of superficial signifiers but rather semiologically deep and always in reference to something. According to Ricoeur, such a linguistically deep constitution means that the model of the text is not limited to linguistics but may be extended to the study of human actions and social reality, where an analogous depth obtains. Social reality is referentially deep and has an "aboutness" in the same way that texts are and have: "It is this depth semantics which constitutes the genuine object of understanding and which requires a specific affinity between the reader and the kind of things the text is *about*" ("Text," 218).

This notion of the reader and the readability of deeply referential social texts introduces the third aspect of Ricoeur's text model: that of the method of reading as paradigmatic of social analysis. Ricoeur suggests a kind of universality of the method of text-reading, indicating "the possible extension of the paradigm of reading to the whole sphere of the human sciences" ("Text," 210). Reading a social text in Ricoeur's sense turns out to be a lot like reading an aesthetic or literary text. Ricoeur emphasizes the construal of meaning and the art of guessing in social analysis—a text is "like an animal or a work of art" ("Text," 211). Texts thus require not a science of explanation but rather an "art of deciphering," which unfolds several layers of meaning ("Text," 211). The link between the reading of literary criticism and the reading of social analysis is made explicit when Ricoeur suggests that the virtue of the text model is the defeasibility and open-endedness of interpretations: "[A]ll interpretations in the field of literary criticism and in the social sciences may be challenged, and the question 'what can defeat a claim' is common to all argumentative situations. Only in the tribunal is there a moment when the procedures of appeal are exhausted; . . . neither in literary criticism, nor in the social sciences, is there such a last word" ("Text," 215).

The method of text-reading Ricoeur advocates is in fact borrowed from structuralist schools of literary criticism ("Text,"

216 ff). The social critic is a reader in the same way that the literary critic is a reader: she practices the art of deciphering and guessing at inexhaustibly indeterminate deep texts.

This discussion of the art of social criticism, that of reading, and the art of social reality, its linguistic constitution as a work of art, leads Ricoeur to introduce the fourth aspect of the text model: the relation between deep semantic text and world. Taking a page out of Heideggerean hermeneutics, Ricoeur characterizes the world as "the ensemble of references opened up by the texts" ("Text," 202). What social critics discern in the reading of a social text is not referential truths but disclosures—radical innovation, newness, potentialities, "the outline of a new being-in-the-world," or "possible modes of being" ("Text," 202). Such disclosive ensembles of references emerge in the depths of the text but extend far beyond those depths, freeing up "visibility and limitation of situations by opening up a world for us, that is, new dimensions of our being-in-the-world" ("Text," 202). In Ricoeur's hermeneutics, social texts inaugurate new references, constitute new possibilities, and disclose ontological potentialities that shatter existing frames of reference. Hence, the model of the text as deep, semantic, and readable has as its truth the "power of disclosing a world" ("Text," 220).

It could be argued that one or more of these four aspects of Ricoeur's text model—depth, linguistic constitution, readability, and "worlding" possibilities—is operative in most contemporary modes of interpretive social theory. Certainly, the first three are realized, to varying degrees and at different moments, in the thick description of Clifford Geertz. As an exemplar of the model of deep text in the logic of textuality and deconstruction, I want next to sketch Geertz's conception of culture as a text and then examine the problem of truth that arises in his version of text-reading, or thick description. Geertz often alludes to the dangers of aestheticism in his blurring of the text-reading methods of literary criticism and the tasks of cultural analysis—he frets about the risks of "anthropology as a good read" or "sociological aestheticism."[4] But he does not solve the problem of relativism that is peculiar to the model of deep text. Indeed, his version of text-reading

lends itself to even more skeptical positions once deep textuality is rejected in a Derridean-inspired version of planar, textual play.[5] Although the model of deep text weakens strong claims to objective anthropological authority, in its Geertzian form it has little recourse to charges of relativism.

Consider, for example, Geertz's own attempt to theorize his method of thick description in ethnographic interpretation. Connecting Ricoeur's model of the deep-text of human action to a conception of thickness found in Gilbert Ryle, Geertz advances a theory of the depth, or thickness, of culture as a semantically deep reservoir of meanings. The bottom of such a reservoir can never be reached. Geertz subscribes to a powerfully holistic universal hermeneutics in which all the world is a text: "Such, indeed," asserts Geertz, "is the condition of things" (*Cultures*, 29). For Geertz, the social text is a "stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures in terms of which twitches, winks, false-winks, parodies . . . are produced, perceived, and interpreted" (*Cultures*, 7). Hence, thick description, or social text-reading, is the only game in town.

From Geertz's perspective of universal hermeneutics, the ineluctable thickness or depth of culture means that analysts of culture are best understood as literary critics. Since thick description or interpretation is always "explicating explications. . . . [w]inks upon winks upon winks," analysis must be "sorting out structures of signification . . . [an enterprise] much more like that of a literary critic" (*Cultures*, 9). Cultures are deep but referential and readable texts—ensembles and structures of significations—and thus for Geertz the methodological conclusion follows: "Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of 'construct a reading of') a manuscript" (*Cultures*, 10).

To be sure, however, Geertz anticipates the need to stave off the relativism of sociological aestheticism or a poetics of culture in his work.[6] Though he does not develop an explicit account of true thick descriptions, Geertz nevertheless wants to reject the possibility that there is no such thing as a better or worse reading of the social or cultural text. Indeed, for Geertz a good reading of a deep text is a deep reading of that text: "A good interpretation

of anything—a poem, a person, a history, a ritual, an institution, a society—takes us to the heart of that which it is the interpretation" (*Cultures*, 18). Returning to Ricoeur, Geertz suggests that it is not truth but the *art* of guessing at meaning that governs cultural analysis: "Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape" (*Cultures*, 20).

But here we see how the weight Geertz places on the model of text and text-reading tends to confuse and conflate more issues than it clarifies while also opening up a kind of Pandora's box for interpretive social analysis. For Geertz, good readings of texts (better guesses) must be distinguishable from bad readings of texts (worse guesses), yet the only criterion for such a distinction is thickness, or depth. Yet since the model of the text is already one of depth, *all* readings—if they are in fact readings and not thin, behavioralistic observations of surface phenomena—are necessarily or inherently deep (good, true). A deep reading, one that takes us to the heart of the cultural matter and penetrates the social text, might be a good reading, but on Geertz's own account all readings are by definition *relatively* deep. The problem is this: in Geertz, appeals to textual depth or thickness stand in what is at best an unclarified and at worst relativizing relation to the truths of interpretation.

The overburdened and circular account of deep text and text-reading crystallizes in Geertz's own widely read interpretation of deep play in a Balinese cockfight. Here Geertz treats the cockfight as a cultural text to be read. "The culture of a people," Geertz writes, "is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong" (*Cultures*, 452). While the apparent nature of this text might lend itself to the strategizing principles of game theory or the performative aspects of culture as play, Geertz opts instead for an explicitly literary sensibility. A deep reading of this cultural practice shows that it is not cocks but men that are fighting. But such a fight, Geertz maintains, is itself an allegorical fiction, a literary text:

> Like any art form—for that, finally, is what we are dealing with—the cockfight renders ordinary, everyday experience comprehensible by presenting it in terms of acts and objects which have had their practical consequences removed and been reduced (or, if you prefer, raised) to the level of sheer appearances, where their meaning can be more powerfully articulated and more exactly perceived. The cockfight is "really real" only to the cocks—it does not kill anyone, castrate anyone, reduce anyone to animal status, alter the hierarchical relations among people, or refashion the hierarchy; it does not even redistribute income in any significant way. What it does is what, for other peoples with other temperaments and other conventions, *Lear* and *Crime and Punishment* do; it catches up these themes—death, masculinity, rage, pride, loss, beneficence, chance—and, ordering them into an encompassing structure, presents them in such a way as to throw into relief a particular view of their essential nature. (*Cultures*, 443)

Geertz's reading of a Balinese cockfight—*over the shoulders of the Balinese*—ostensibly penetrates this cultural text's depth and discovers the really real, or true, themes of tragedy (death, masculinity, rage, pride, loss, beneficence, chance). Further, Geertz goes on to link his cultural analysis of the cockfight to the literary criticism of Northrop Frye and Frye's reading of *Macbeth* (*Cultures*, 450). Such a reading may not be "the truth" or, as Geertz says, provide "the master key to Balinese life" (*Cultures*, 452). But it does claim to be a good reading—a deep reading—of Balinese culture. Yet even here one cannot be sure whether Geertz's reading is deep (and therefore good) or particular (and therefore neither good nor bad, merely perspectival, local). And in many ways Geertz himself is uncertain about the truth of his deep text-reading. "Ethnographic findings," Geertz says, "are not privileged, just particular: another country heard from" (*Cultures*, 23).

The hermeneutic predicament Geertz finds himself in is twofold. On the one side, the model of deep text and text-reading obscures the dialogic and unstable historical, epistemological, and political interplay between critics and their objects and subjects. Cultures

are not merely read over the shoulders of those human actors who produce, partake in, and are produced by them.[7] Geertz's method of text-reading is *in his own characterization* one-way—we only hear from him. In this way, the role of the social critic as an observer-participant is not adequately captured. This first counterpoint to Geertz, then, is that cultures are not so much deep texts or manuscripts as *contexts* in which the social critic and social practices are embedded in various ways. On the other side, Geertz's struggle with relativism—his circular discussion of good/deep readings—could imply that interpretive social analysis, like a literary criticism informed by a more radical notion of textual play or planarity, has no viable or workable or even desirable truth orientation. In short, a reader of Geertz's elaboration of the model of text and text-reading is forced to consider the conclusion that the study of culture and society might be better off if it were to drop the question of truth altogether and give itself over to what it seems to fear most: a relativizing evocation of the social text in all of its linguistic planarity and signifying play.

It is precisely such a conclusion that informs the work of James Clifford and Stephen Tyler, two exemplars of the more radicalized logic of textuality and deconstruction. Each advocates a theory and method of social inquiry that is textually planar and unburdened by the problem of truth. Geertz, they argue, has not followed the logic of textuality far enough. He still preserves notions of interpretive authority and thick, deep, true readings. From Clifford's and Tyler's perspective, the question of relativism or sociological aestheticism poses not a problem to be solved but a position to be welcomed and occupied as social critics focus their attention on the participatory dimensions of text writing and evoking. Indeed, Clifford argues that "cultural studies can no longer know the whole truth, or even claim to approach it."[8] Meanwhile, Tyler develops a notion of evocation and argues that the point of cultural analysis "is not how to make a better interpretation, but how to avoid representation."[9]

But before going on to sketch out Clifford's and Tyler's positions and their relation to Geertz, it will serve as an important clarification to describe the theory of text assumed in their own

work. For in the same way that Ricoeur's model of text framed our consideration of Geertz, so too must Derrida's critique of structuralism and sense of text frame our consideration of Clifford and Tyler. While Geertz, Clifford, and Tyler all start from the notion that the cultural analyst is a kind of literary critic, each thinker's position is informed by related but different notions of text, and thus each has a different sense of what methodological conclusions follow. We have seen how Geertz ambiguously tries to read the thick truths of ostensibly deep social texts. Tyler, by contrast, commits himself to evoking the linguistic play of planar texts, while Clifford moves between deconstructive reading and polyphonic evoking. And though the notions of Bakhtinian heteroglossia and dialogism occasionally manifest themselves in Clifford's work as well, his own planar sense of the social text and his evocative account of the social critic effectively seal off any appeal to the role of dialogic understanding in interpretation.[10] Further, Clifford at times offers a more promising description of social study as a kind of ethnographic surrealism—a description that has affinities with the logic of constructing constellations in its Benjaminian manifestation, as we shall see in the next chapter. However, it is difficult to reconcile such descriptions with Clifford's embrace of relativism and insistence on the role of linguistic evocation in the radical logic of textuality and deconstruction.

In his "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Derrida takes up the question of structure—or what he calls "the structurality of structure"—in the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss.[11] As a rejection of empiricism, Lévi-Strauss's work presents itself as a kind of deep reading of the underlying organizing structures of social relations and human behaviors. One of the well-known distinctions central to structuralist analyses is the opposition between nature and culture. While nature lays claim to universality, culture remains particular. It is the role of the cultural analyst to discern the deep universal structures that inform cultural particulars. In Derrida's reading, however, Lévi-Strauss's structuring distinction of nature and culture reveals itself to be an organizing principle that limits the play of the very linguistic signs that ostensibly maintain or structure it. Indeed, the scandal of

the incest prohibition in Lévi-Strauss's *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* is not that what should be a local (cultural) prohibition shows itself to be universal (natural). Rather, it is that the nature/culture opposition gets liquidated: there is nature always already in culture; there is culture always already in nature. When the status of such structuring terms as *nature* and *culture* is shown to operate on the axis of *linguistic* reflexivity rather than referentiality, the conception of linguistic play emerges in all its radicality. It is this understanding of the play of linguistic signifiers that characterizes both Derrida's sense of text and his style of deconstructive reading.

As is well known, Derrida describes play not merely as a destructured concept but primarily as a linguistic event or happening involving infinite substitutions or supplements: "This movement of play . . . is the movement of supplementarity" ("Structure," 289). The hallmark of the play of supplementarity is an "overabundance of the signifier" and a "disruption of presence" ("Structure," 290, 292). Play without structure cannot be interpreted as thick, for there is no depth to such play; instead, play is one-dimensionally or nonreferentially signifying. Taking a page out of Nietzsche, Derrida says that rather than interpret deeply—or seek out—the lost structure that was to structure the discourse of the human sciences, play must be given *affirmation*: "That is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation. This affirmation then determines the noncenter otherwise than the loss of center. And it plays without security" ("Structure," 292). The emergence of play in Derrida is thus cast not as a loss of structure but as an emancipation from structure's burdensome interpretive limits. Active interpretation affirms play without truth, without security. Hence, Derrida concludes, there are in fact two options, "two interpretations of interpretation" ("Structure," 292). The first has defined the human sciences since Friedrich Schleiermacher and is a kind of depth hermeneutics that "seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or origin which escapes play and the order of the sign" ("Structure," 292). The second understands itself precisely as a rejection of such a humanistic tradition of interpretation.

It does not decipher original truths and meanings but affirms the superficial play of signifiers: "The other [sense of interpretation], which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of the being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology—in other words, throughout history—has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play. The second interpretation of interpretation, to which Nietzsche pointed the way, does not seek in ethnography, as Lévi-Strauss does, the 'inspiration of a new humanism' " ("Structure," 292). When there is nothing outside of or below play, the task of social inquiry is freed of its deep methodological concerns with truth, meaning, presence, reference, and similar conceptions whose functions are only to limit play. Truth is, as Nietzsche points out, merely a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms, an illusion that we have forgotten is an illusion. The logic of the supplement is never "true," but that mobile army of metaphors and metonyms can be followed, playfully evoked, and affirmed.

Derrida's notions of supplementarity, linguistic play, and affirmative text-reading are perhaps most succinctly formulated in a well-known section of *Of Grammatology*, where Derrida considers the question of method. Here, in the context of a reading of the supplement in Rousseau, Derrida characterizes deconstruction's strategic method, or task, of reading:

> The reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of language that he uses. This relationship is not a certain quantitative distribution of shadow and light, of weakness or of force, but a signifying structure that critical reading should *produce*.
>
> To produce this signifying structure obviously cannot consist of reproducing, by the effaced and respectful doubling of commentary, the conscious, voluntary, intentional relationship that the writer institutes in his exchanges with the history to which he belongs thanks to the element of language. This

> moment of doubling commentary should no doubt have its place in critical reading. . . . But this indispensable guardrail has always only *protected*, it has never *opened*, a reading.
>
> Yet if reading must not be content with doubling the text, it cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than it, toward a referent (a reality that is metaphysical, historical, psychobiological, etc.) or toward a signified outside of language, that is to say, in the sense that we give here to that word, outside of writing in general. That is why the methodological considerations we risk applying here to an example are closely dependent on general propositions that we have elaborated above; as regards the absence of the referent . . . *There is nothing outside of the text* [there is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*]. And that is neither because Jean-Jacques's life, or the existence of mamma or Therese *themselves*, is not of prime interest to us, nor because we have access to their so-called "real" existence only in the text and we have neither any means of altering this, nor any right to neglect this limitation. All reasons of this type would already be sufficient, to be sure, but there are more radical reasons. What we have tried to show by following the guiding line of the "dangerous supplement," is that in what one calls the real life of these existences of "flesh and bone," beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed in Rousseau's text, there has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations.[12]

With this Derrida positions himself squarely against the hermeneutic tradition and introduces the more radical notion of textuality that informs the readings of deconstruction and many contemporary Derridean-inspired text-based social analyses. Such a radicalization of the notion of text means that interpretation neither doubles the text nor penetrates it, but extends it in a chain of significations. Inasmuch as there is no outside text—no stable reference outside of the all-encompassing play of signifiers—all appeals to reality or truth are based on dubious and readily

destructured metaphysical presuppositions of surface/depth, inside/outside, appearance/reality. The point is not merely that deconstructive interpreters are immanent readers and producers of planar texts but that textuality presents a horizon beyond which there are only more texts. To repeat the core thesis of Derrida's linguistic ontology: "In what one calls the real life of these existences of 'flesh and bone,' beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed in Rousseau's text, *there has never been anything but writing.*" The Derridean account of textuality amounts to a hyperfocus on the play of language and the self-generating production of writing *itself.* It is precisely this kind of linguistic ontologization of the social, as we shall see in what follows, that poses the most serious practical problem for the radicalized logic of textuality and deconstruction in the study of culture and social life.

Whether or not Derrida's critique of metaphysics in the guise of text represents a productive interruption in the discourse of Western philosophy or merely another manifestation of that discourse is of course open to question and need not be pursued in any detail here. One could make the rather obvious point against Derrida that there is no more profound a metaphysical statement than "there is no outside text." Further, one could make the Ricoeurean point that there is an ideology of an absolute text at work here. One might also reject Derrida's caricature of hermeneutics as the "dream of deciphering a truth or origin which escapes play and the order of the sign." Moreover, one could object to the merely immanent character of deconstruction. Derrida himself repeatedly and eagerly points out that deconstruction always falls prey to the structures and forms it inhabits. Finally, Derrida's textuality occurs only at the level of *linguistic* participation: when writing discloses itself as a totalizing horizon of frenzied signifiers, the *concrete* role of the social critic simply drops out of the equation. And it is precisely such a self-erasing linguistic ontologism that finds its way into the research of those social theorists and cultural critics who adopt a more Derridean notion of text. Indeed, when social analysis explicitly or implicitly adopts the radical logic of textuality and deconstruction, cultures are no longer deep texts to be read over the shoulders of cultural participants, as they are in Geertz.

Instead, they are sites of textual play into which the social critic is always already written. Texts beget texts. Cultures beget cultures. Writings beget writings. In the radicalized logic of textuality and deconstruction, writing itself stands as the antidote to Geertzian deep readings and thick descriptions. It is the relative merits of such an antidote that we must now explore in some detail.

Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography is a collection of essays that announces its argument in the very features of its title. It is devoted to exploring a brand of cultural study freed of the burdens of deep reading but nevertheless committed to the poetics and politics of cultural analysis in a global culture where "there has never been anything but writing." In many ways, this collection represents what social theory looks like when it follows the logic of textuality to its radical conclusions, where texts are no longer deep manuscripts but sites of the play of signifiers, writing, voices, evocations. When culture is conceived not as deep and referential but as planar and linguistic, a very different task from the one outlined by Geertz presents itself to the social critic. Since cultures are scenes of writing into which an author is written and which he writes or evokes, what is needed is not better or worse interpretations but a linguistic reflexivity where gaze meets gaze, text meets text. In this way, a poetics of culture promises to unburden social theory of its traditional hermeneutical baggage and make it political.

Or so the story goes. In his introduction to *Writing Culture*, entitled "Partial Truths," James Clifford labors to illuminate the rather awkward corner into which the written/writing text model of culture forces him and many of his contributors. On the one hand, Clifford raises the problem of truth and verification in order to celebrate its liquidation:

> How are the truths of cultural accounts evaluated? Who has authority to separate science form art? realism from fantasy? knowledge from ideology? Of course such separations will continue to be maintained, and redrawn; but their changing poetic and political grounds will be less easily ignored. In cultural studies at least, we can no longer know the whole

> truth, or even claim to approach it. The rigorous partiality I have been stressing here may be a source of pessimism for some readers. But is there not a liberation, too, in recognizing that no one can write about others any longer as if they were discrete objects or texts?[13]

But and on the other hand, this liberation from the question of truth in the radical logic of textuality and deconstruction is not supposed to signal the onset of sheer relativism, since, as Clifford says, "The authors in this volume do not suggest that one cultural account is as good as any other. If they espoused so trivial and self-refuting a relativism, they would not have gone to the trouble of writing detailed, committed, critical studies" (*WC*, 24). What then might be the conception of truth at work in the commitment to write culture? Rigorous partiality and objective poetry, Clifford maintains. For "to recognize the poetic dimensions of ethnography does not require that one give up facts and accurate accounting for the supposed free play of poetry. 'Poetry' is not limited to romantic or modernist subjectivism: it can be historical, precise, objective" (*WC*, 25–26). Aside from catching Clifford's elaboration of his own position on the horns of a dilemma—namely, that cultural studies can no longer even claim to approach truth *and* that partial truths, or rigorous partiality, are not precisely such a non-self-refuting, nonrelativist approach—one wants to know what cultural analysis as objective poetry in fact looks like and what concrete positions its theoretical justifications may entail. For poetics and politics have historically proven themselves to be rather *problematic* bedfellows, especially in the context of cross-cultural interpretation. Indeed, was it not the poetically aestheticized ethnographic version of the cultural other in, say, the colonialist texts of many British modernists that served to help justify all kinds of concrete political injustices, social inequalities, and cultural imperialisms?[14]

Such questions are not answered here. But a telling presentation of cultural poetics does emerge in Stephen Tyler's contribution to *Writing Culture*, entitled "Post-Modern Ethnography." Tyler's sense of emergent textualization could be described as the "play" (in Derrida's sense) of evocation, where "evocation is neither

presentation nor representation. It presents no objects and represents none, yet it makes available through absence what can be conceived but not presented. It is thus beyond truth" (*PE*, 123). Such a play of evocation is beyond truth because, as we saw in Derrida's essay on Lévi-Strauss, it takes place in the facticity, or "being," of language and independent of the social critic and social actors. Evocative cultural criticism, like deconstruction, merely participates in and extends the metaphoric and metonymic chains of textuality. It is, as Tyler says, a "discourse on the discourse" (*PE*, 126).

Evocation, then, is objective in the positivistic sense that it is uncoupled from the social critic and her representations and authority—it lets social beings be, we might say, paraphrasing Tyler. Evocation is not, Tyler argues, "a presence that calls into being something that was absent; it is a coming to be of what was neither there present nor absent" (*PE*, 130). Alluding then to Heidegger in his discussion of evocation, Tyler says that "perhaps the best we can do, short of inventing some new logograph, is a Heideggerean 'evoking' " (*PE*, 130). What Tyler has in mind is something not unlike the play or occurrence of truth evoked in the Heideggerean account of the "Being" of the work of art. Evoking lets the other be in the same way that in Heidegger the ontological charge of art lets truth occur.

To be sure, Tyler is aware of the difficult predicament of his methodological claims about evocation, as the final section of his essay makes clear: "No origin outside the text—just literature, then, or an odd kind of lit. crit.? Yes, literature, but not in the sense of total self-reflexivity, or literature about itself and nothing else. An ethnography does not invite movement from text to text alone. It is not just a collection of clever allusions to other texts, though it can obviously do that as well as any other text. It evokes what can never be put into a text by any writer, and that is the common-sense understanding of the reader" (*PE*, 138). Yet when Tyler links his conception of evocation to "what can never be put into a text by any writer"—that is, "the common-sense understanding of the reader"—he simply reintroduces the interpretive role of the social critic. Cultural study as objective

poetry may evoke poetic truths, but it also begs the questions of understanding and, by extension, depth (political, normative, dialogic, historical, and so on). When Tyler finds it necessary to consider actual dialogue ("the mutuality of 'talking with'" [*PE*, 140]) and common-sense understanding, he admits through the backdoor what his linguistic ontology of evocation is supposed to guard against. All the familiar methodological problems regarding interpretation and truth come rushing in. In this way, despite its protests against a total self-reflexivity of navel-gazing, Tyler's essay is emblematic of the unclarified sense of objective poetry that is to stand as the partial truth of the radical logic of textuality and deconstruction.

Further, Tyler's position typifies that problematic brand of evocative reflexivity endemic to such a logic, in which the social critic, like a mirror, evokes *himself* rather than his object of study. Of course, many of the contributors to *Writing Culture* maintain that their version of culture and its study has deconstructed precisely that strong distinction between analyst and object or social practice. Indeed, the radicalization of the logic of textuality and deconstruction is meant to accomplish precisely that. But when there is *nothing* outside of the ontologically puffed-up linguistic text and *nothing* below it, crucial methodological distinctions get liquidated as well. The pseudo-reflexivity of the Derridean-inspired version of text in social theory means, in practical terms, that social theory and method is reduced to a universal text or scene of writing in which evocative critics rather than cultural texts and social contexts are more often than not the central participants.

While Tyler and other contributors to *Writing Culture*, including Clifford, opt for a liberating poetics of culture and reflexivity of linguistic evocation, Clifford himself is not always so theoretically and methodologically reductive. In fact, the work collected in Clifford's *The Predicament of Culture* warrants a brief examination here since it is in this text that Clifford sharpens the criticisms of Geertz. It is also where he turns to a Bakhtinian account of novelistic heteroglossia and polyphony to make his version of the logic of textuality and deconstruction dialogic and introduces an account of cultural analysis as ethnographic surrealism. I want

to consider each of these in turn. Then we shall be in a better position to reject even the more theoretically nuanced radical logic of textuality and deconstruction before turning to the logic of rationality and reconstruction in the work of Habermas.

From the vantage point of a historian of cultural criticism, and in contradistinction to the deep model of text and text-reading in Geertz, Clifford advances the logic of textuality and deconstruction in terms of "serious fictions."[15] Clifford raises the most obvious and crucial objection to Geertz's strategy of deep text-reading in the context of the Balinese cockfight, that is, the nondialogic, nonintersubjective nature of Geertz's thick description. Geertz may think that he is penetrating the deep play of the Balinese sport, but his own model of text as a literary manuscript prevents him from realizing the contingent, unruly, and dialogically reciprocal character of cultural texts:

> This interpreter [Geertz] situates the ritual sport as a text in a contextual world and brilliantly reads its cultural meanings. Geertz's abrupt disappearance into his rapport—his quasi-invisibility of participant observer—is paradigmatic. Here he makes use of an established convention for staging the attainment of ethnographic authority. As a result, we are seldom made aware of the fact that an essential part of the cockfight's construction as a text is dialogical—the author's talking face to face with particular Balinese rather than reading culture over their shoulders. (*PC*, 40–41)

Clifford's valid point here is that text-reading is an inadequate characterization not only of the give-and-take of dialog and intersubjective dimensions of cultural study but also of the social critic's role in such dialogic analyses. What is needed, according to Clifford, is a text modeled on intersubjective dialog, for "the model of dialogue brings to prominence precisely those discursive—circumstantial and intersubjective—elements that Ricoeur had to exclude from his model of the text" (*PC*, 43). Geertzian textuality (like Ricoeur's model of text) does precisely what its structuralist forerunners did: transform an unstable, contested, and unruly dialog into an integrated, readable text. According to Clifford, Geertz's deployment

of the text model misses how cultures are more like language events than deep manuscripts (*PC*, 41). From Clifford's perspective, then, Geertz's model of text and text-reading simply misses the dialogic character, the linguistic event, of social study.

This dialogic critique of Geertz is by now well known and does not need to be developed further here. Surely the give-and-take of dialog is a central element in *some* forms of social inquiry. Social texts often write back. Sometimes there is another voice to be heard. The conversation is open ended and often public in ways that deep and over-the-shoulder readings obscure. Moreover, if in fact dialog is the explicit focus of social analysis, then the logic of rationality and reconstruction is probably better equipped to undertake such an analysis—we shall pursue precisely this point in the next section. But the version of the social text presented by Clifford as the dialogic alternative to Geertz does not share the *rational* dimension of the logic of rationality and reconstruction. Instead, Clifford adds what amounts to a dialogic aesthetic—that of Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of the polyphonic—to the radical logic of textuality and deconstruction. Social life may indeed be dialogic in ways that Geertz's text-reading or thick description fails to capture, but Clifford does not present a genuine dialogic account of *social* life and its interpretation. Instead, he merely filters the logic of textuality and deconstruction through an alternative *aesthetic theory*. According to Clifford, the polyphonic novel is "a carnivalesque arena of diversity"; "ethnography is invaded by heteroglossia" (*PC*, 46, 51). Social texts are for Clifford thus still like literature: not manuscripts to be read but linguistic events that speak—as intersecting counter-voices, multiple discourses, heteroglot arenas of discursive activity. Indeed, Clifford reads Joseph Conrad and Bronislaw Malinowski side by side in precisely this register, as exemplars of the linguistic overdetermination of culture (*PC*, 101).[16]

But interestingly enough for our purposes here, Clifford does not limit his elaboration of the logic of textuality and deconstruction to a dialogic aesthetics. In the fourth chapter of *The Predicament of Culture*, he temporarily shifts his emphasis from dialog to image-construction in an account of ethnographic surrealism.

Such a move resonates in some ways with the logic of constructing constellations and the truth of evidence that distinguishes that logic, as we shall see in the next chapter when we consider the image-constructions of Walter Benjamin, to whom Clifford himself refers. Yet rather than pursue the logic of constructing constellations, Clifford's discussion of the link between surrealism and ethnography again reduces the task of social analysis to a semiological one of evoking voices.[17] In Clifford's aesthetic version of ethnographic surrealism, cultural others, social practices, historical evidence, and capitalist commodities are all serious fictions, or voices. But, as we shall see, the logic of constructing constellations does not aestheticize the role of the social critic or the realistic worlds she interprets. Indeed, according to the logic of constructing constellations, interpretations of culture are not serious fictions but social facts *made* from the context-sensitive standpoint of the social critic. In them, it is not merely abstract voices but potentially context-transforming evidence that is interpreted. Put another way, the predicament of culture Clifford outlines in his book is the predicament of the radical logic of textuality and deconstruction, a logic that de-differentiates social life and its study, reducing both to a linguistic ontology of serious fictions.[18]

Perhaps the shortcomings of the more radical logic of textuality and deconstruction are best captured in Clifford's own anecdotal ethnographic account of a Native American in *Writing Culture*. It is with that anecdote that I want to conclude this section's critique of the logic of textuality and deconstruction: "Ethnographers are more and more like the Cree hunter who (the story goes) came to Montreal to testify in court concerning the fate of his hunting lands in the new James Bay hydroelectric scheme. He would describe his way of life. But when administered the oath he hesitated: 'I'm not sure I can tell the truth . . . I can only tell what I know' " (*WC*, 8). The analogy is badly misleading and gives no theoretical or practical justification for following the radical logic of textuality and deconstruction. On the contrary. When social critics fail or refuse to see that they are, like every social actor in a given context, *already* observers, they fall prey to the worst kind of ontological reductionism in the methods of their empirical

research. The burden is on the social critic to make the embedded predicament of participant-observer part of his interpretation, and not to wish it away in the guise of evocation or writing. *Social critics are thus in fact like the Cree hunter*, but not for the reasons Clifford suggests. Neither is ever merely inside the courtroom of textuality. The mere fact that this social actor can distinguish between what he knows and the truth undermines the radical logic of textuality and deconstruction Clifford wants to defend. The crucial distinction this Native American draws depends not on the linguistic constitution or play of some ontologized social text but on his context-sensitive ability to thematize his own embeddedness in two overlapping contexts (the institutional one of a court of law and the indigenous one of the Cree's hunting lands).

In Clifford's example, then, it is *Clifford* who misses the crucial point. In fact, from the perspective of the logic of constructing constellations I will develop in this book, the social critic's embeddedness, like the embeddedness of social actors themselves, is an enabling interpretive predicament of empirical social analysis inasmuch as it allows him context-sensitive access to reflexively context-transforming truths. It allows the critic, that is, to be not simply a reader but also a *disenchanter* of the lies of the merely given. But the logic of textuality and deconstruction—in both of its manifestations—loses purchase on precisely the disenchanting potential of interpretation. Indeed, by succumbing to the relativism of the model of deep text-reading (as in Geertz) or to the linguistic ontologisms of textual evocation (as in Clifford), cultural study excuses itself from what according to the logic of constructing constellations is one of its core interpretive tasks: transforming those social and cultural contexts in which what one knows is only lies.

2. RATIONALITY AND RECONSTRUCTION

The logic of rationality and reconstruction moves within the horizon of the tradition of hermeneutics first articulated by Wilhelm Dilthey and carried on by Hans-Georg Gadamer. Such a logic proposes to think of the hermeneutic character of social life in

communicatively rational rather than deep or planar textual terms. Habermas, whom I take here to be the exemplar of the logic of rationality and reconstruction, tames the relativism of universal hermeneutics by introducing a theory of communicative rationality and a reconstructive method for distinguishing between communicative and strategic action.[19] Put rather crudely, the logic of rationality and reconstruction promises to redeem what the logic of textuality and deconstruction mortgages—a *normative critique,* or critical theory, of social life. The two-pronged thesis that underlies such a logic in Habermas's work is that "[c]ommunicative actions always require an interpretation that is rational in approach" and that "[t]o the extent that rational reconstructions explicate the conditions of validity for particular classes of expressions and performances, they can explain deviant cases and, therewith, gain a type of indirect legislative authority or *critical* stance."[20] In other words, the logic of rationality and reconstruction is a theory and method of social analysis that is meant to be both interpretive *and critical.* It seeks to reconstruct the context-transcending validity of particular classes of expressions and performances built into but often distorted or suppressed in everyday communication.

Yet for all its normative advantages over the logic of textuality and deconstruction, I want to suggest that the logic of rationality and reconstruction tends to overburden the communicatively rational character of interpretive social study. The logic of rationality and reconstruction is normatively critical to the extent that it tends to reduce culture and society—in their complex and vastly divergent forms—to communicative interaction and evolution. One sees this especially in Habermas's foundational early work, where history often amounts to communicative history. In such a history, the emergence of a form of rationality called communicative action and analytically distinguished from instrumental action sets the pace for a kind of progressive historical-moral evolution of modern society.[21]

What I want to suggest here is that interpretive social theory should not limit its empirical investigations to communicative actions (or norms) and their instrumental distortions: social history and cultural practice are not merely the history and practice of

suppressed or distorted speech acts.[22] The historically insensitive character of the logic of rationality and reconstruction must, at the very least, be acknowledged. The interpretive tasks of social theory need not be reduced to reconstructing the dialogic norms of communicative actions. For social life is embedded in structured and structuring contexts of relations that are never merely rational relations of communicative actions. Put another way, insofar as it focuses exclusively on the context-transcending universal norms of communicative actions, the normative interpretations generated by the logic of rationality and reconstruction tend to be historico-culturally (or context) desensitizing. Of course, the logic of rationality and reconstruction serves social critics better than the deep or planar versions of textuality insofar as it incorporates the normative depth of communication with the play or give-and-take of dialog. But the reconstruction of deformed speech acts is only *part* of the task of social inquiry.[23]

Nevertheless, in the remainder of this section I want to examine an admittedly small portion of Habermas's early work on the role of interpretation in social theory, namely, his account of the link between communicative reconstruction and ideology critique. The goals of such an examination are to illustrate the origins and chief features of the logic of rationality and reconstruction, to show how that logic is in many ways preferable to the logic of textuality and deconstruction, and to complete the contemporary framework in which the logic of constructing constellations shall be developed in the remainder of this book. As in my treatment of the logic of textuality and deconstruction in the previous section, I shall once again be parsimonious in my handling of the logic of rationality and reconstruction. Readers familiar with Habermas's brand of normative hermeneutics may want to move directly to the next section, where the logic of constructing constellations is introduced.

In *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (1967), an extended essay that grows out of Habermas's involvement in what is known as the "Positivist Dispute in German sociology" (a dispute I shall revisit in chapter 3), Habermas considers the role of interpretation in social theory and method.[24] Specifically, what Habermas realizes is that the hermeneutical tradition in general, and Gadamerian

hermeneutics in particular, pose problems of relativism and universalism that any *critical* theory of society must take seriously. In Gadamer, such problems crystallize, and it is in response to and via appropriation of Gadamer that the logic of rationality and reconstruction can be productively understood. According to Habermas, Gadamer's hermeneutics effectively seal off truth from method. In Gadamer, the former, if it is to happen at all, has nothing to do with the latter but rather with the authority of tradition. Further, from Habermas's perspective Gadamer universalizes *a particular linguistic aspect* of understanding and human experience, suggesting that such an aspect is the ineluctable domain of *all* human inquiry. Thus, Gadamer merely redraws—in absolutizing terms—the hermeneutic circle. Interpretations are *never* true or better, only different.[25]

Habermas's response is to (a) deuniversalize Gadamer's linguistification of social life, (b) reconnect the methods of sociological interpretation to truth, and (c) thereby show how interpretive social theory is not relativizing but *critical*. I want to take up in turn each of these three core aspects of the emergent logic of rationality and reconstruction in Habermas's work.

a) Gadamer's universalizing ontological account of language, Habermas argues, fails to differentiate among properly linguistic and nonlinguistic forms of social practice (such an objection may also be raised against the logic of textuality and deconstruction, as we have already seen in the previous section). A fusion of horizons is supposed to be an ineluctably linguistic event that happens to human agents. Radicalizing the early Heidegger, Gadamer claims that language is the determining and limiting horizon of *all* understanding. Habermas rejects Gadamer's linguistic ontologism as a version of linguistic idealism and draws stern conclusions for any interpretive sociology that, inspired by Gadamer, would commit itself to the notion that language as such is the determiner of social practice:

> An interpretive sociology that hypostatizes language as the subject of life-forms and of traditions binds itself to the idealist presupposition that linguistically articulated consciousness

> determines the material being of life practice. . . . The linguistic infrastructure of society is a moment in a complex that, however symbolically mediated, is also constituted by the constraints of reality. . . . These two categories of constraint [external nature and inner nature] are not only the object of interpretations; behind the back of language, so to speak, they affect the very grammatical rules in accordance with which we interpret the world. *The objective context in terms of which alone social actions can be understood is constituted conjointly by language, labor, and domination.*[26]

Habermas's first point, then, is that Gadamer's universal linguistification of the social practice of understanding fails to account for the empirical and nonlinguistic realities that constitute it: language is as much a medium of power and coercion, labor and domination, as it is a historical medium of understanding. Indeed, behind the back of any language game lies nonlinguistically constituted constraints or norms that determine *in advance of any specific language game* "the very grammatical rules in accordance with which we interpret the world." Gadamer's de-differentiating and ontologized sense of language—a sense of language that reaches all the way down to the very material practices that in fact determine and constrain it—reintroduces the idealizing notion that social reality is determined by linguistic consciousness. Language, Habermas rightly maintains, can be the medium of *ideological distortion* as well as understanding. I shall return to this point later.

> b) Habermas readily acknowledges that hermeneutic "methods" are an unavoidable part of social inquiry. Hermeneutic procedures, he argues, are "inevitable when data are collected on the level of communicative experience" and are a valuable framework if social inquiry does not want its "relationship to the unavoidable content of even the most general categories to be a naive one" (*Logic*, 166, 167). But whereas Gadamer opposes hermeneutics to methodological knowledge, thereby discharging himself of the questions of method, Habermas argues,
>
> The confrontation of "truth" and "method" should not have lead Gadamer to an abstract opposition between hermeneutic

> experience and methodical knowledge as a whole. It is the basis of the hermeneutic sciences; and even if it were a question of completely removing the humanities from the sphere of science, the sciences of action would not be able to avoid joining empirical-analytic methods and hermeneutic ones. The claim that hermeneutics legitimately brings to bear on the absolutism of a general methodology of the empirical sciences, which has practical consequences as well, does not relieve it of the business of methodology as such. (*Logic*, 167)

The reason, in other words, that Gadamer is wrong to jettison methodological considerations in his hermeneutics is that he poses a false antinomy between methodologically gained knowledge and the ontological authority of hermeneutical experience. Though it has an attenuating effect on any notion of a unified science, hermeneutics has a strong methodological component. Indeed, according to Habermas, Gadamer is right to characterize hermeneutics as a *practice* precisely because it is not an autonomous preservation of authoritative traditions but a reflectively critical appropriation of them:

> The hermeneutic insight is correct that understanding, however controlled, cannot simply leap over the traditional contexts of the interpreter. This structural affiliation of understanding with the traditions it continues to develop through appropriation does not, however, justify the conclusion that the medium of tradition has not been profoundly transformed as a result of scientific reflection. Even in a tradition that has never lost its effectiveness what is at work is not simply an authority detached from insight, making its way blindly. For every tradition must be woven with a broad enough mesh to permit its application, that is, its judicious transformation in consideration of altered circumstances. But the methodological cultivation of such judiciousness in the hermeneutic sciences shifts the balance of authority and reason. Gadamer fails to recognize the power of reflection that unfolds in *Verstehen*. There reflection is no longer blinded by the illusion of an absolute, self-grounded autonomy, and it does not detach

> itself from the ground of the contingent on which it finds itself. But when reflection understands the genesis of tradition from which it proceeds and to which it returns, the dogmatism of life-praxis is shaken. (*Logic*, 168)

For Habermas, when Gadamer conflates authority and knowledge he loses purchase on the potential to criticize traditions *built into* interpretation. Put another way, the logic of rationality and reconstruction promises to recouple interpretation to the *reflective* appropriation of traditions, to the *knowing* rejection of authority, and to forms of possible communicative action oriented toward understanding. Inasmuch as it accomplishes such a recoupling, it demonstrates that interpretive understanding must be seen not merely as authoritative but as *critical*: "When reflection understands the genesis of tradition from which it proceeds and to which it returns, the dogmatism of life-praxis is shaken." In short, the logic of rationality and reconstruction promises to put the authority of tradition under the knife of interpretively critical reflection.

c) The fact that for Habermas "reflection does not wear itself out on the facticity of traditional norms without leaving a trace" means that hermeneutics—once properly methodologically tamed—can be enlisted in the service of an interpretation of modern society; in particular, it can be enlisted in the service of ideology critique (*Logic*, 170). The universality of the hermeneutic predicament is not, according to the logic of rationality and reconstruction, a limit condition for social inquiry—it does not lock reflection in the confines of rigidly authoritative traditions. Indeed, for Habermas,

> By its very structure, hermeneutic understanding aims at gaining from traditions a possible action-oriented self-understanding for social groups and clarifying it. It makes possible a form of consensus on which communicative action depends. It dispels the dangers of a communication breakdown in two directions: in the vertical direction of one's own tradition and in the horizontal direction of the mediation between the traditions of different cultures and groups. If these flows

> of communication are interrupted and the intersubjectivity process of understanding either becomes rigid or falls apart, an elementary condition of survival is destroyed: the possibility of unconstrained agreement and recognition. (*Logic*, 164)

The relevance of the logic of rationality and reconstruction for social theory's critique of ideology is thus clear. When flows of communication are interrupted or at a standstill; when the communicative bases of unconstrained agreement and mutual recognition are threatened or break down; when traditions assert themselves dogmatically and appear uncriticizable or immutable; when, that is, communication is distorted or ideological, interpretation and understanding can unleash their critical force in ways Gadamer misses. "As reflection recalls that path of authority through which the grammars of language games were learned dogmatically as rules of worldview and action," Habermas writes, "authority can be stripped of that in it that was mere domination and dissolved in the less coercive force of insight and rational decision" (*Logic*, 170). And in his discussion of language, Habermas completes his criticisms of Gadamer and develops most fully the logic of rationality and reconstruction in the context of an account of the critique of ideology: "Language is *also* a medium of domination and social power. It serves to legitimate relationships of organized force. Insofar as the legitimations do not articulate the power relationship whose institutionalization they make possible, insofar as that relationship is merely manifested in the legitimations, language is *also* ideological. In that case it is not so much a matter of deceptions in language as of deception with language as such. Hermeneutic experience, encountering this dependence of symbolic context on actual relationships, becomes a critique of ideology" (*Logic*, 172).

For Habermas, then, hermeneutic experience is critical because it is not merely understanding differently but rather *evaluative*. For normatively reconstructive hermeneutic social theory, understanding means understanding the difference and distinguishing between consensus emergent in unconstrained agreement and mutual recognition (true consensus) on the one hand and "deception with language as such" (false consensus) on the other. The enabling

communicative conditions of the former serve as the interpretive yardstick by which to measure the *instrumental* deformations of the latter.

The logic of rationality and reconstruction thus stands in stark normative contrast to the logic of textuality and deconstruction. The task of the social critic is not reduced to deep readings or evocations. Unlike the logic of textuality and deconstruction, which falls prey to relativism or linguistic ontologism, the social critic who obeys the logic of rationality and reconstruction may—by discerning and engaging the rational structures of communication as a virtual participant in the practical contexts of everyday action—exploit the potential for critique built into them, push *beyond a given context* or de facto consensus, make revisions and corrections, and reach not merely different but rather normatively better understandings. Such reconstructions are not doomed to merely repeat the existing given or deconstruct it but to burst it open from within and *transcend* it.[27]

In this way, the logic of rationality and reconstruction can accomplish much of what the logic of textuality and deconstruction cannot. At the very least, the logic of rationality and reconstruction allows social inquiry to reinvent itself along the lines of a new ideology critique or, better, communicative ideology critique. As Habermas argues in *Toward a Rational Society* (1970), such a form of ideology critique could reconnect in hermeneutical terms what a reifying instrumental reason had severed: the criteria for justifying the organization of social life to the normative regulation of communicative interactions.[28]

But it must be pointed out here that the strengths of the logic of rationality and reconstruction as a normative form of ideology critique also reveal its weaknesses. The logic of rationality and reconstruction implies that the interpretive sorting of distorted and nondistorted communicative actions is a moment of social emancipation and is part of the historical *evolutionary* advancement of communicatively rationalized societies. Such an implication is then taken to be an empirical fact. Even if this can be shown, the context-transcending logic of rationality and reconstruction has context-desensitizing tendencies. Only the *analytically distinguished form*

of communication (distorted and instrumental, nondistorted and communicative) shows up on the social critic's radar screen. Put another way, communicative reconstructions don't do enough to capture the complexities of historically concrete, *context-dependent* forms of culture and social life. In this study, I want to suggest that what is needed is another, more broad-based and historically informed logic of interpretive social theory and method—one that presents both a viable alternative to the logic of textuality and deconstruction and supplements the context-desensitizing logic of rationality and reconstruction.

3. CONSTRUCTING CONSTELLATIONS

The logic of constructing constellations does not entail a text-based conception of social life and an interpretive method of text-reading or text-evocation. Nor does it commit itself to the rational character of social practice and the normative reconstruction of such practices. Instead it begins with the premise that societies are relational constructions of disparate elements and social practices—rather more like empirical contexts or fields than linguistic texts or communicative actions. Indeed, according to the logic of constructing constellations, the relational character of human existence and practices is precisely what makes them *social*. The logic of constructing constellations takes seriously the relational and constructed nature of social life without lapsing into the relativism and linguistic ontology endemic to the logic of textuality and deconstruction. In fact, its conception of social reality and the task of social inquiry sets the logic of constructing constellations apart from the other two logics examined in this chapter. This is because the context-transforming force of the logic of constructing constellations seeks not to evoke the poetics or reconstruct the norms of a given social context but to alter *the practical constitution of that context*. It is for this reason that the context-sensitive logic of constructing constellations is potentially disenchanting: its interpretations insist that the merely existing construction of society is never a necessary one.

The remainder of this study is given over to examining and working through the method and truth that inform such a logic. I shall begin with a consideration of the work of Walter Benjamin, whose work on image-construction, especially in his unfinished Arcades Project, marks the first articulation of the logic of constructing constellations in the social theory and cultural critique of the Frankfurt School. Remaining within the tradition of the Frankfurt School, I then go on to discuss Theodor Adorno's critique and appropriation of Benjamin's methodological insights and Adorno's own theoretical development of the logic of constructing constellations as "interpretive philosophy." From there I shall examine Adorno's most thorough attempt to deploy the logic of constructing constellations in his study of Kierkegaard. The extended treatment of Adorno's work also affords me the occasion to work out a conception of context-transforming truth as evidence, or "truth bearers." I end my discussion of the logic of constructing constellations in Adorno with an attempt to show how, even in his late work, he never abandons that logic in his attempt to develop a disenchanting interpretation of modern society.

The logic of constructing constellations may have had its origins in German social theory, but it certainly is not limited to that field. In fact, the logic also appears in the work of two of the most prominent French social theorists, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. I examine these two articulations of the logic of constructing constellations in chapter 4 in order to provide another vocabulary for and expand the contemporary relevance of that logic and show how the logic of constructing constellations is quite distinct from the logic of textuality and deconstruction. For despite their interests in language, both Foucault and Bourdieu provide non-text-based accounts of social life. In Foucault and Bourdieu, social life is an arrangement of relational practices and structures rather than an assembly of linguistic texts. Consequently, both understand the social critic as something more than a reader or deconstructive writer or evoker of social texts.

To be sure, Foucault and Bourdieu do not fit comfortably within the hermeneutic tradition in social theory—but then neither do Benjamin and Adorno, as we shall see. It is for precisely such

reasons that a discussion of the logic of constructing constellations in social theory will make it possible for us to discern important methodological affinities (and differences) among the four theorists. Finally, drawing on the empirical social research of Camilo José Vergara and Loïc Wacquant, I want to show the logic of constructing constellations at work in a study of urban American life. In both studies, such a logic captures what textuality and deconstruction typically reduce to language and rationality and reconstruction all too easily overlook: evidence or truth bearers that, when made visible, have potentially disenchanting, context-transforming effects.

2

METHOD AND TRUTH AMID THE RUINS OF THE SOCIAL

The logic of constructing constellations emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the tradition of German social theory as a response to the increasing fragmentation, discontinuity, and anomie of modern urban existence in capitalist societies. What social theory had come to realize is that, pace Marx, in capitalism all that is solid *does not* melt into air but rather decays and tumbles into ruins. The forms of social life that had appeared in previous epochs as structured, organized, and meaningful webs of shared practices, traditions, and beliefs now disclosed themselves only in images of juxtaposed technologies, unexpected encounters among social agents from disparate classes, emergent and forgotten practices and commodity forms, irreconcilable anticipations of future utopias, the broken promises of past longings, and so on. Put simply, the inchoate logic of constructing constellations can be viewed as German social theory's methodological attempt to confront the structural transformation in modern social life from weblike organization to puzzlelike montage construction. The phrase "ruins of the social" is meant to capture metaphorically what the logic of constructing constellations was meant to capture empirically: those persistent but unassimilated elements, practices, and productions of modern society, what Benjamin calls the "trash" of history. It was thought that such elements, practices, and productions must be retrieved and interpreted in ways that disenchantingly transform the seemingly frozen, labyrinthine contexts in which they are reifyingly embedded. This chapter examines the historical and

conceptual emergence of the logic of constructing constellations in the tradition of critical social theory known as the Frankfurt School, focusing especially on the work of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno.[1] As we shall see in the discussion of Benjamin's work on image-construction, the unique, context-sensitive logic of constructing constellations proves to be quite adept at interpreting or, better, retrieving and constructing the ruins or trash of modern social life. Nonetheless, it has a rather difficult time articulating a conception of truth that might orient such constructions. In that regard, Adorno's attempt to develop an account of interpretive philosophy remains the crucial historical and conceptual moment in the emergence of the logic of constructing constellations in the social theory and cultural critique of the Frankfurt School.

1. IMAGE-CONSTRUCTION AND THE PROBLEM OF TRUTH

Walter Benjamin first develops the logic of constructing constellations, not in a study of urban social life, but rather in the prologue to his notoriously arcane study of the German baroque *Der Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (*The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 1925). There he introduces the analogy of the constellation as a methodological principle of constructing the disparate fragments of various German mourning plays in such a way that their truth-content can be rescued.[2] "Ideas," Benjamin writes, "are the eternal constellations, and the elements, seen as points in such constellations, are at the same time rescued and divided."[3] Developing and deploying the logic of constructing constellations is, according to Benjamin, dictated by the object domain of his inquiry, that of the fragmented ruins of baroque poetry:

> That which lays there, as ruins, the most significant fragment, the fragile piece—that is the most precious material of Baroque creation. For in poems it is common to heap fragile pieces upon fragile pieces continually, without any strict telos, and in the unremitting expectation of a miracle. . . . As a miracle in this sense the Baroque authors must have regarded the artwork. And when, on the other hand, it appeared to them as the calculable result of such a heaping, the two [methods of

> creating] are no less compatible than it was for the alchemist in his consciousness to make the yearned for miraculous work compatible with subtle theoretical recipes. The practice of the adepts resembles the experiments of the Baroque poets. What the ancients have left behind are for them [baroque poets] the elements out of which—piece by piece—a new whole is mixed. No, more precisely: built. Because the completed vision of this New was: ruin. (*Origin*, 178)

It is not to our purpose here to work through the complexities of Benjamin's tantalizing and often tortured image-construction of German mourning plays. Instead, it is enough to note that his study of the origins of the German baroque marks the origins of the logic of constructing constellations in the social theory of the Frankfurt School.[4] Inasmuch as that origin finds itself in a work of literary historiography—and not in a study of modern society—I want to bracket a discussion of it. Instead, I want to focus on the development and deployment of the logic of constructing constellations in Benjamin's more sociological analyses of modern urban life and on the problem of truth that accompanies such analyses.[5] Hence, what interests us here is not merely the aesthetic or the theological but rather the sociological Benjamin. For it is precisely the *sociological* Benjamin who most innovatively fuses aesthetic insights into the power of images with theological insights into the rescuing task of social criticism, as we shall see in what follows. The crucial question that underlies this discussion of the sociological Benjamin is quite simply: In what sense can sociological image-constructions be thought of as true?

The logic of constructing constellations appears in its most expansive form in critical theory in Benjamin's unfinished study of Parisian Arcades—a study of the first modern shopping malls of capitalist social life. In this distinct and innovative analysis of social existence Benjamin develops and deploys the logic of constructing constellations as a form of image-construction. He wants to present shocking images in which disparate elements of material culture and social life awaken social actors to transform the life-world context in which they find themselves.[6] Put simply, the

truth of Benjamin's theory and method of image-construction is supposed to be the *direct* translation of an experience of shock. In this section, such a conception of truth shall be considered but ultimately rejected for its aestheticizing tendencies. For, as we shall see, Benjamin also thinks of the truth of his method of image-construction in less emphatic terms, as the rescuing and presenting of context-transforming evidence in rigidified social contexts. It is this second conception of truth (as context-transforming evidence) that, following Adorno's critique and appropriation of Benjamin's work on image-construction, I shall favor here and in ensuing chapters clarify and develop.

In elaborating a theoretical account of his method of image-construction Benjamin turns to the two vocabularies with which he seems most comfortable in the 1930s: the lexicon of marxist social theory and the aesthetics of surrealism. Despite Benjamin's well-known criticisms of its political shortcomings, the latter provides him with the resources necessary to articulate the methodological relationist form of the Arcades Project: literary montage. The former provides him with the resources necessary to theorize its historical content, that is, materialism. In the logic of constructing constellations, image-constructions are to be shocking and made visible *historically* and not according to the immutable logic of beauty or an ideal of truth. In Benjamin, the logic of constructing constellations makes the historically relational character of social life *graphic*. Or, as Benjamin himself sets out the problematic: "Must the Marxist understanding of history necessarily come at the cost of graphicness? Or: by what route is it possible to attain a heightened graphicness combined with a realization of the Marxist method? The first stage in this voyage will be to carry the montage principle over into history. That is, to build up the large structures out of the smallest, precisely fashioned structural elements. Indeed, to detect the crystal of the total event in the analysis of the simple, individual moment. To break, then, with historical vulgar naturalism. To grasp the construction of history as such. In the structure of commentary. Trash of history."[7]

Rather than tell the story of modern social and cultural history in a study of Parisian shopping malls, Benjamin wants to construct

montages of them in which overlooked evidence—the trash of history—can be made graphic, explicit, and politically relevant. Perhaps we might best translate Benjamin's sense of heightened graphicness as viewability, the making explicit of the overlooked or implicit. What is made graphic, or explicit, through the construction are the disintegrated elements, or ruins, of an anomic social existence. It is precisely for that reason that surrealism appeals to Benjamin: the technique of montage responds to the empirical conditions of social disintegration and at the same time seeks to shock social actors out of their bourgeois slumber and into political action. With montage as a methodologically guiding principle of construction, and with empirical reality as the constitutive elements of those image-constructions, Benjamin thinks he has productively connected the technical innovations of surrealism to the materialist goals of social criticism. Traditional marxist social theories and methods may prove themselves in their ability to relate a large economic base to various epiphenomenal superstructures, but what they are unable to do is to make explicit and connect the ruins or trash or epiphenomena of social practices to one another. The vulgarity of marxist social theory and method is, from Benjamin's perspective, that its materialism is not sufficiently *context-sensitive*. In Benjamin's account, it is in the actual and fragmented and smallest and most unusual material of culture and history—that material of existence other marxisms always overlook or forget—that the direct impetus to political transformation is to be found. In Benjamin's articulation of the logic of constructing constellations as a kind of image-construction, "carrying the montage principle over into history" means the de-aestheticization of that method. Put another way, conceiving of the logic of constructing constellations as image-construction turns historical materialism into context-sensitive historical montage.

For Benjamin, then, the overarching justification for enlisting montage to study empirical social life is twofold. From the vantage point of the ruins of the social, history is pictorially relational, not narratorial. Its relational character must be presented in montages of juxtaposed and cross-referenced elements. The logic of constructing constellations as montage images is supposed to capture

the very fragmented stuff of historical practice and social life. In more Hegelian terms, Benjamin senses that the disintegrating network of modern urban existence means that spirit or totality is lost. What remains of social life is fragments, ruins, outworn commodities, forgotten practices—in short, trash. Yet such trash is the repository of truth. The method of montage image-construction appeals to Benjamin because it offers a historically context-sensitive mode of social inquiry that can retrieve and make graphic or explicit the minutiae or ruins of the social.

But to what extent does making visible the trash of history have an explicit or necessary relation to truth? What is the relation between the graphic and the true? The first major theoretical challenge to the logic of constructing constellations as image-construction thus confronts Benjamin, that is, to develop an account of what he sees as the necessary relation between the graphic and the truth of shock or awakening. Benjamin senses the theoretical weight of this question, but unlike Adorno, as we shall see, he is not at all able to unburden himself of it. Indeed, Benjamin's aesthetic sensibilities more often than not prevail in his description of the outcome or awakening truth event of his image-construction. He writes: "An image is that in which the past and the now join together, flashlike, in a constellation. In other words: image is the dialectic at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, that of the past to the now is dialectical—isn't development but image, capable of leaping out. Only dialectical images are actual (i.e., not archaic) images" (*Arcades*, 576–77). Or again:

> These images must be thoroughly marked off from the categories of the "humanities." . . . For the historical index of the images doesn't simply say that they belong to a specific time; it says primarily that they only came to legibility at a specific time. And indeed, this "coming to legibility" marks a specific critical point of the movement within them. Every present is determined by those images which are synchronic with it: every now is the moment of a specific recognition. In it, truth is loaded to the bursting point with time. (This bursting

> point is nothing other than the death of the intentio, which accordingly coincides with the birth of authentic historical time, the time of truth). (*Arcades*, 577–78)

And finally: "The dialectical image is one that flashes up. In such a manner, the past must be held like an image flashing in the now moment of recognition" (*Arcades*, 591–92).

In each of these passages we see how Benjamin tries to carry the montage principle over into the theory and method of social inquiry *without a trace*. Image-constructions are loaded to the bursting point with time (rescued trash of the past and the pregnant force of the now). Such images flash in the "nowness of recognition" and shock social participants into political activity. Oftentimes for Benjamin the standstill moment of viewability, the lightning flash of a graphic image or constructed constellation, is true simply because it is shocking. In Benjamin, it frequently appears that true image-constructions really are like aestheticized bolts of lightning: they simply leap up, happen, show themselves as true.[8]

Yet Benjamin's overly surrealist account of the truth of the logic of constructing constellations as shocking or awakening is not the only conception of truth in his Arcades Project. The other, less emphatic conception, as we have already intimated, is that of context-transforming *evidence*. The context-sensitive logic of constructing constellations in Benjamin is true to the extent that it is able to make explicit and connect typically overlooked elements of social life. In fact, Benjamin elaborates this crucial point about the nonaesthetic, context-transforming evidentiary truths of social inquiry in his study of the Paris Arcades. He argues: "The fore- and after-history of historical evidence/matter of fact is made manifest in it by dialectical presentation. Further: every historical state of affairs presented dialectically polarizes and becomes a force-field in which the conflict between fore- and after-history plays itself out. The historical evidence/matter of fact becomes that field as it is suffused by actuality. And thus historical evidence/matter of fact always polarizes into fore- and after-history in a new way, never in the same way" (*Arcades*, 587–88). It is important to note

here Benjamin's focus on the transformative character of *historical evidence*. Evidence in Benjamin's dialectical presentation is the historical *actualization* of the facts of the matter. The context-sensitive logic of constructing constellations—when it works—changes both the apparent quality of social facts and the kinds and quantity of conclusions that might be drawn from them. It is in that sense that image-construction is potentially context transforming.

Further, this nonaesthetic conception of truth as context-transforming evidence allows Benjamin to think of the social critic as something more than an aesthetic author of shocking images. Indeed, Benjamin argues that the task of gathering potentially context-transforming evidence turns the social critic into a kind of rescuer of history: "Those who are alive at any given time see themselves in the midday of history. They are obliged to prepare a meal for the past. The historian is the herald who invites those who are departed to the table" (*Arcades*, 603). Put another way, Benjamin wants to say that when social critics follow the context-sensitive logic of constructing constellations their work does not merely collect dead history but rather rescues evidence that, when presented at the table of existing life-world conversations and traditions, has the potential to transform such conversations and traditions and the empirical context in which they occur. When the social critic deploys the logic of constructing constellations she becomes, we might say in a rather Benjaminian formulation, the rescuing herald of interpretive retrieval and disenchantment.

As is well known, Jürgen Habermas calls Benjamin's innovative brand of social theory and method "rescuing-critique."[9] The phrase is apt but only if it is not taken as the reduction of the logic of constructing constellations to onto-theology. For Benjamin, social criticism reconceived as image-construction involves an ongoing attempt to retrieve the ruins of the social, and this indeed intimates something like a metaphysical belief in the incompleteness or unfinished nature of matters of fact. But such an open-ended conception of historico-social practice and its study does not imply that there must be a day of final judgment where previous wrongs would be made right. Rather, it means that for the critic who deploys

the context-sensitive logic of constructing constellations every day contains the *potential* for context transformation.

Benjamin makes precisely such a point in his response to Max Horkheimer, who argues that the rescuing-critique of Benjamin's image-construction is not tolerable in social-scientific analysis. When Horkheimer writes to Benjamin that "past injustice has occurred and is done with . . . . [t]he murdered are truly murdered," Benjamin includes the quotation in his Arcades Study and adds the following: "The corrective to this line of thought lies in the reflection that history is not just a science but a form of mindfulness as well. What the science has 'established' mindfulness can modify. Mindfulness can make the incomplete (happiness) into something complete, and the complete (suffering) into something incomplete. This is theology, but in mindfulness we experience something which prevents us from comprehending history as a-theological in principle, although we would not attempt to write history in immediately theological concepts" (*Arcades*, 588–89).

To paraphrase Benjamin's response here, yes, of course, the murdered are truly murdered; matters of fact are scientifically established and always in some sense incontrovertible. Nothing—and certainly no image-construction—is going to bring them back. The logic of constructing constellations cannot be defended on the strict grounds of scientific, even social scientific, inquiry. But its own peculiar context-sensitive logic allows it to modify the existing *social facts* upon which the past and present rest. Benjamin's image-constructions make visible the kinds of social facts that science cannot precisely because of its extreme context-sensitivity, because it is mindful of, or *minds,* the ruins of the social and understands its task in terms of retrieval and disenchantment. It can bring to legibility the incomplete (happiness) when all seems complete, over, in ruins. And it can bring to legibility the complete (suffering) when all seems incomplete, possible, yet to be.

There is an oft-cited section in the Arcades Project that perhaps best illustrates the practical interpretive merits of the method and truth of the logic of constructing constellations in Benjamin's social research. "Bomber planes," Benjamin writes, citing Pierre-Maxime Schuhl, "make us remember what Leonardo Da Vinci

expected of the flight of man; he was to have raised himself into the air in order to look for snow on the mountain summits, and then return to scatter it over city streets shimmering with the heat of summer" (*Arcades*, 609). The point here is not that the image is shocking or awakening and therefore true. For the truth of this image does not prove itself solely in the shocking potential of its own self-justifying structure. The making legible of utopian promises and their betrayal in images, shocking and awakening though the images might be, *cannot* be trusted de facto as true. What the juxtaposition of bomber planes and Da Vinci does accomplish, however, is to disenchant and transform matters of fact (B-52s and Da Vinci sketches) into potentially context-transforming evidence. This image presents evidence for an alternative construction of the present, a present in which a technologized society increasingly threatens its creators and participants with elimination. To develop more precisely how the truths of context-transforming evidence differ from the aesthetic shock of surrealistic images, we must now briefly turn to Adorno's critique and appropriation of Benjamin's image-construction. From there we shall be in a position to clarify the issues raised in Benjamin's work and to discuss Adorno's own development and deployment of the logic of constructing constellations as interpretive philosophy.

2. ADORNO'S CRITIQUE AND APPROPRIATION OF BENJAMIN

In Benjamin's method of image-construction, the logic of constructing constellations shows its strengths and weaknesses for the first time as a kind of constructivist analysis of modern urban society. On the one hand, Benjamin's methodological innovations are well suited to the relational but ruined character of modern urban life since his montage approach is sufficiently context-sensitive to capture unassimilated and reified, or in contemporary parlance "marginalized," elements, actors, and practices. In this way, as we have seen, the logic of constructing constellations is suggestive for its ability to retrieve potentially context-transforming evidence. But, and on the other hand, the precise status and function of that context-transforming evidence remains vague, even a bit

naïve, in Benjamin's work. He seems to think context-sensitive image-constructions will suffice to shock social actors into context-transforming actions. That is, at times Benjamin suggests that the aesthetic link between dialectical interpretation and truth will have a necessary emancipatory effect.

Indeed, in "Paris, Capital of the 19th Century," one of several proposals for the Arcades Project, the unclarified role of truth in Benjamin's thinking emerges rather starkly:

> Balzac was the first to speak of the ruins of the bourgeoisie. But only Surrealism exposed them to view. The development of the forces of production reduced the wish symbols of the previous century to rubble even before the monuments representing them had crumbled. In the nineteenth century this development emancipated constructive forms of art, as the sciences freed themselves from philosophy in the sixteenth. Architecture makes a start as constructional engineering. The reproduction of nature in photography follows. Fantasy creation prepares itself to become practical as commercial art. Literature is subjected to montage in the *feuilleton*. All these products are on the point of going to market as wares. But they hesitate on the brink. From this epoch stem the arcades and interiors, the exhibitions and panoramas. They are residues of a dream world. The realization of the dream elements in waking is the textbook example of dialectical thinking. For this reason, dialectical thinking is the organ of historical awakening. Each epoch not only dreams the next but also, in dreaming, strives toward the moment of waking. It bears its end in itself and unfolds—as Hegel already saw—with ruse. In the convulsions of the commodity economy we begin to recognize the monuments of the bourgeois as ruins even before they have crumbled.[10]

It is for just such vague allusions to awakening that Adorno criticizes Benjamin in the 1930s. Adorno is, of course, attracted to the historico-materially context-sensitive character of Benjamin's image-constructions. Surrealist techniques may indeed expose the ruins of the bourgeoisie; they may, that is, generate an awakening

of *some* kind. But from Adorno's perspective the "realization of the dream elements in waking" has no necessary emancipatory effect—social transformation does not simply flow out of a moment of awakening.[11] In fact, such a critique forms one of the cornerstones of Adorno's appropriation and deployment of the logic of constructing constellations in his own study of modern social life. On the one hand, Adorno objects to the undertheorized connection between graphic images and truth as awakening: "I could conceive of the appropriate pattern [of your work] as a constellation of various urban and commodity materials," Adorno writes to Benjamin, "a pattern that, in the latter section, would be decoded simultaneously as the dialectical image and its theory. . . . [But] the concept of construction is left to stand without any explanation whatsoever" (*Correspondence*, 499). On the other hand, Adorno objects to Benjamin's concomitant failure to thematize the role of the social critic in image-construction: "The individual [critic] is consequently a dialectical channel, which may not be mythologized away" (*Correspondence*, 502).

Even in this greatly condensed version of the Benjamin-Adorno dispute, it is clear that in the end Adorno is the more *sociologically* nuanced theorist of the logic of constructing constellations.[12] Whereas Benjamin often places a heavy burden on the aesthetic dimension of image-construction—all the while underburdening the complex role of the constructor of such images—Adorno senses the crucial need to be more precise about the context-transforming truths of interpretation and the role of the critic in interpretation. Adorno seems to be saying that shocking truths that mythologize away rather than thematize the individual critic belong to metaphysics, not social theory.

By focusing on these two unresolved features of Benjamin's work, Adorno begins to differentiate between Benjaminian images and constellations of the real. From Adorno's perspective, Benjamin's image-construction often remains trapped in a kind of self-justifying ontology in which the event of awakening and the situatedness of the social critic cannot be explained. In other words, Adorno begins to see that, without further theoretical clarification, the methodological strength of the logic of constructing

constellations becomes its greatest weakness: the context-sensitive logic of constructing constellations might merely *duplicate*—piece by broken piece—the anomic social context it seeks to transform. The "ragpicker" of the ruins of the social, as Benjamin describes Siegfried Kracauer, must do more than construct anonymously authored, mosaiclike images. Against Benjamin, Adorno argues that the extreme context-sensitive logic of constructing constellations demands a fuller account of its methodology, a richer account of truth, and an explicit account of the role of the social critic. Such criticisms are at least partially answered in Adorno's own early elaboration of the interpretive methods of social analysis, as we shall see in the next section.

The brief discussion in this section has sought to create a conceptual bridge between the emergence of the logic of constructing constellations in Benjamin's image-construction and the appropriation and expansion of that logic in the early work of Adorno. It is important to note here as well what Adorno does *not* criticize: the relational character of Benjamin's method, the extreme historical context-sensitivity of that method, and the conception of rescue that Benjamin uses to describe the context-sensitive quality of historiography. From the perspective of a methodologically attuned social theorist, Adorno realizes that there is something uniquely *right* about Benjamin's method of image-construction. In Benjamin, images do not merely describe, reflect, or interpret the meaning of the world behind or beyond them. Instead, image-constructions promise to retrieve evidence that just might transform social existence from *within*.

That is to say that in Adorno's account image-constructions are in some sense potentially context-transforming. But the change-causing force of Benjamin's graphic, or explicit, image-construction is from Adorno's perspective too closely wedded to an undertheorized account of truth as surrealist shock or awakening. Of course, such core issues of method and truth in an analysis of social life are not peculiar to social theory in the tradition of the Frankfurt School, but they are perhaps most acute in the early work of Benjamin and Adorno. For it is there that critical theory first realizes that social research is in fact something other than

an aesthetic enterprise *or* an objective science. Interpreting social facts is neither an art nor a science. The truths of art are too weak, whereas the truths of science are too strong. In between, however, lies another alternative, as we have seen Benjamin intimate in his discussion of historical evidence and as Adorno suggests in his early work, as we shall see next.

3. INTERPRETIVE PHILOSOPHY AS CONSTRUCTING CONSTELLATIONS

In the decade that follows Walter Benjamin's suicide and the concomitant abandonment of his planned image-construction of the Paris Arcades, Adorno writes what was then and arguably remains his most theoretically demanding, methodologically exact, and saddest book. *Minima Moralia* (1951) announces itself as "reflections from damaged life," but even such an aphoristic subtitle does not capture the extreme context-sensitive disposition to actions, practices, and things odd, out of the way, and historically discarded that animates its construction. In its final form the book is dedicated to Max Horkheimer. "There is," Adorno writes, "not a motif in it that does not belong as much to Horkheimer as to him who found the time to formulate it."[13]

In this regard, Adorno considers *Minima Moralia* as an attempt to present aspects of his and Horkheimer's shared philosophy. But for attuned readers (and surely Horkheimer and Adorno were among these), the context-sensitive logic of *Minima Moralia* ensures that, however much Adorno views that text as a dialogue interieur with Horkheimer, it is unmistakably the continuation of a critical engagement with and appropriation of Benjamin's methodological innovations. It is thus not merely the specter of a lost friend that moves through *Minima Moralia* but also the difficult and *still shared* leitmotifs of that friend's work, as the following passage makes abundantly clear:

> If Benjamin said that history had hitherto been written from the standpoint of the victor, and needed to be written from that of the vanquished, we might add that knowledge must indeed present the fatally rectilinear succession of victory

> and defeat, but should also address itself to those things which were not embraced by this dynamic, which fell by the wayside—what might be called the waste products and blind spots that have escaped the dialectic. It is in the nature of the defeated to appear, in their impotence, irrelevant, eccentric, derisory. What transcends the ruling society is not only the potentiality it develops but also all that which did not fit properly into the laws of historical movement. Theory must needs deal with cross-gained, opaque, unassimilated material. (*MM*, 151)

This particular corrective to Benjamin is not necessary. For as we have seen in the previous sections, it is Benjamin who develops a method by which to make relevant the trash stuff of modern social life seemingly lost to the laws of historical movement. In Benjamin it is precisely the trash of urban modernity that is to be made graphic or explicit in such a way as to alter existing social facts and forms. There is, nevertheless, another corrective Adorno wants to develop vis-à-vis Benjamin, as we saw in the last section. Put simply, Adorno wants to address the most difficult question Benjamin's work on image-construction raises: Just what *is* the potential—the context-transforming truth, as we have been calling it—of a construction of the cross-gained, opaque, unassimilated material of modern social life?

The beginnings of an answer to such a question are not, I want to suggest, to be found in Adorno's later reflections on mimesis, aesthetic semblance, negative dialectics, or the nonidentical. Though to be sure, and as contemporary critics have realized to various degrees, all are in some sense radicalizations of elements of the logic of constructing constellations.[14] Instead, one must turn to some of Adorno's earliest and least examined writings of the 1930s, where he specifically argues that the task of social philosophy is the construction of constellations. Though Adorno describes the construction of constellations as interpretive philosophy, interpretation here must be distinguished sharply from the logic of textuality and deconstruction as well as the logic of rationality and reconstruction examined in chapter 1. Like Benjamin, Adorno thinks of interpretive philosophy neither as deep reading or planar

evocation nor as normative reconstruction, but as context-sensitive construction with context-transforming potential. Yet unlike Benjamin, Adorno cashes out the question of context-transformation not in terms of shock and awakening but in terms of one of the core functions of social criticism, that of *disenchantment*. It is one of the overarching objectives of this chapter to demonstrate not only Adorno's development of the logic of constructing constellations but also to illustrate the continued and untapped relevance of Adorno's methodological innovations for contemporary interpretive social theory.[15]

The logic of constructing constellations in Adorno (though such a formulation is itself not used in the literature) is typically characterized in one of three ways. The first characterization may be broadly construed as conceptual history: the constellation is one of the origins of negative dialectics, as Susan Buck-Morss argues.[16] In Buck-Morss's reconstructive narrative of influences and developments in early critical theory, the constellation serves as a conceptual bridge, spanning the distance between Benjamin's image-constructions and Adorno's final formulation of negative dialectics. The second characterization of the constellation is metaphoric: the constellation, Martin Jay argues, is one of Adorno's favorite metaphors.[17] Such a metaphoric usage finds its way into Jay's own intellectual biography of Adorno, where he asserts that the "stars" of Adorno's intellectual map are marxism, aesthetic modernism, mandarin cultural conservatism, Judaism, and the category of nonidentity.[18] The third characterization of the constellation—as a method of *aesthetic* construction—is not surprising, especially when the logic of constructing constellations is viewed through the prism of Benjamin's methodological rehabilitation of surrealism. "Constellations," Lambert Zuidervaart argues, "let concepts interrelate in such a way that both the sociohistorical essence of phenomena and their unique identities can emerge."[19] Placing Adorno in a German philosophical context, Zuidervaart suggests that the construction of constellations is a methodological principle that governs Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* and reflects "Adorno's ambivalent attitudes toward Hegelian and Husserlian phenomenology" (*AAT*, 61).

It would be as misleading to dismiss such characterizations as it would be wrong to accept them as sufficient. Constructing constellations is, at least in some conceptual sense, the origin of negative dialectics. It is deployed metaphorically in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School; and it is a dialectical technique of presenting the aesthetic in historical relations where the particularity of mimetic experience is not subsumed under some phenomenologically ontologized and generalized essence of modern art.[20]

Yet the distinct *interpretive* character of constructing constellations in Adorno cannot be reduced to any of these, or even to an amalgamation of the three. In its development and deployment, the logic of constructing constellations is a core feature of Adorno's eclectic brand of cultural critique. Hence, it is much more than originary, metaphoric, or technical. Indeed, as Adorno's 1931 lecture entitled "The Actuality of Philosophy" illustrates, we need to adequately understand the interpretive dimensions of constructing constellations to grasp Adorno's approach to the study of social existence. Though clearly influenced by the literary historiography of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* study—and perhaps seeking to vindicate that work's forced withdrawal by the Frankfurt faculty in 1925—this lecture contains what Benjamin is never quite able to manage and what remains the centerpiece of Adorno's contribution to the interpretive methods of social theory: a context-sensitive interpretive philosophy that seeks to present potentially context-transforming evidence.

Still, the term *interpretive* is a rather unorthodox description of the logic of constructing constellations. Adorno's formulation of interpretive philosophy shares little with the contemporary articulations of interpretation we examined briefly in chapter 1. In his account of interpretive philosophy, Adorno does not draw upon an already rich hermeneutic tradition in German philosophy, nor does he develop a normative account of interpretively communicative actions, as the logic of rationality and reconstruction eventually does. Further, Adorno's version of interpretive philosophy finds no direct correlate in the contemporary logic of textuality and reconstruction, in either its Ricoeurean or Derridean manifestations. In interpretive philosophy there is no textual depth to be penetrated

or superficial linguistic play to be evoked. The logic of constructing constellations does not thickly describe or thinly deconstruct the textual metaphysical meaningfulness of social life. Adorno's sense of interpretation is in many ways as eclectic as Benjamin's account of image-construction.

By *interpretation* Adorno means something like context-sensitive construction or configuration. But he means quite a bit more as well. In fact, there are at least six crucial, intertwined features of Adorno's formulation of the logic of constructing constellations: interpretive motion, riddle-image, unintentional truth, micrological materialism (context-sensitivity), interdisciplinarity, and practical (or context) transformation. I want to take up each of these in turn before going on to examine some of Adorno's other pertinent early works.

Interpretive Motion

In Adorno's account, the features of culture and society do not stand still for their interpretation. Sociation, ceaseless interaction, serendipitous encounters—in short, relations—are the hallmark of social life. Hence, the concept of culture as a manuscript is inadequate to the task of material social analysis. The social field is in motion, and so the study of culture and society requires a flexible and dynamic approach. Indeed, Adorno argues that the interpretive motion of philosophy distinguishes it from science: "Plainly put: the idea of science is research; that of philosophy is interpretation. In this remains the great, perhaps everlasting paradox: philosophy persistently and with the claim of truth, must proceed interpretively without ever possessing a sure key to interpretation; nothing more is given to it than fleeting, disappearing traces within the riddle figures of that which exists and their astonishing entwinings."[21]

Here Adorno alludes to the apparently relativizing tendencies of the movement of interpretation. With no preestablished principles or universal criteria to guide it, one could conclude, as the radical logic of textuality and deconstruction does, that interpretive truths are more or less a chimera. Yet according to Adorno, the fact that there is no sure key or static, context-independent criterion

for the interpretation of social life is not limiting or relativizing so much as it is methodologically enabling. Interpretive motion allows the methods of social inquiry to keep up, as it were, with the relational flux of its sociological object domain.[22] Put another way, the interpretive movement of philosophy is guided not by ideal truths but rather by the social facts and forms it encounters.

Riddle-image

The conception of *riddle* at work here allows Adorno to make two crucial moves in his formulation of interpretive philosophy. First, it allows him to unburden interpretation of the metaphysical presuppositions of deep meaning that are traditionally associated with hermeneutics and with idealist philosophy more generally. The idea of interpretation, Adorno maintains, "in no way coincides with the problem of 'meaning.' . . . It is just not the task of philosophy to present such a meaning positively, to portray reality as 'meaningful' and thereby justify it" ("Actuality," 126). Deep interpretation sees the empirical world as an apparent one that cloaks or imitates an inherently meaningful reality, and thus has as its task deep readings or thick descriptions. Riddle-images on the other hand presuppose only a certain puzzling relationality to social existence. Such an antimetaphysical presupposition is more tenable for an interpretive social theory since, according to Adorno, "authentic philosophic interpretation does not meet up with a fixed meaning which already lies behind the question" ("Actuality," 127).

Adorno's conception of riddle-image is in fact a critique of the metaphysics of interpretive meaning that is the very hallmark of the hermeneutic tradition.[23] By refiguring interpretation as relational riddling rather than the probing of deep meaning, Adorno wants to obviate the traditional problem of meaning in interpretation and reject the metaphysical dualism of a hermeneutic idealism that, in a context-*desensitizing* gesture, denigrates the mere appearance of social life. Or, as Adorno himself says: "The idea of interpretation does not mean to suggest a second, a secret world which is to be opened up through an analysis of appearances. . . . He who interprets by searching behind the phenomenal world for a

world-in-itself which forms its foundation and support, acts mistakenly like someone who wants to find in the riddle the reflection of a being which lies behind it, a being mirrored in the riddle, in which it is contained. Instead, the function of riddle-solving is to light up the riddle-Gestalt like lightning and to negate it, not to persist behind the riddle and imitate it" ("Actuality," 127).

Second, Adorno's conception of riddle-image, as we see in the passage just quoted, need not be reduced to a linguistic conception. Riddles are not manuscripts where deep meanings mysteriously reside beneath mere appearances or where such deep meanings can be deconstructed in the superficial play of apparent signifiers without referents. The deep or superficial play of language does not constitute the riddlelike character of social reality but rather the *imagistic* quality, the "riddle-*Gestalten*," or context-specific arrangement of a given social reality. That is to say that Adorno's riddle analogy does not reduce a conception of riddle to some metaphysic of absolute textuality—the social as a text to be endlessly read as meaningful or ceaselessly deconstructed as indeterminate. Rather it is meant to suggest that the intractably dense and complex relational character of social reality must be seen for what it is—a contradictory and fragmented puzzle—and rearranged in new ways. Hence, Adorno argues that

> Just as riddle-solving is constituted, in that the singular and dispersed elements of the question are brought into various groupings long enough for them to close together in a figure out of which the solution springs forth, while the question disappears—so philosophy has to bring its elements, which it receives from the sciences, into changing constellations, or, to say it with less astrological and scientifically more current expression, into changing trial combinations, until they fall into a figure which can be read as an answer, while at the same time the question disappears. The task of philosophy is not to search for concealed and manifest intentions of reality, but to interpret unintentional reality, in that, by the power of constructing figures, or images, out of the isolated elements of reality, it negates questions. ("Actuality," 127)

In short, Adorno holds the view that the interpretation of unintentional reality—of a reality that is not deeply meaningful but relationally riddled or puzzled—generates not static answers but changing constellations or the imagistic negation of certain questions. And chief among such questions is the question of a meaningful reality beyond the merely apparent of everyday social life.

Unintentional Truth

In an attempt to distance himself even further from the problem of meaning in traditional interpretation, Adorno goes on to argue that the only truth claim of interpretive philosophy is an unintentional one. The logic of constructing constellations discloses neither the linguistic untruths of the logic of textuality and deconstruction nor the normative truths of the logic of rationality and reconstruction but rather "unintentional truths" ("Actuality," 128). Though this account of truth, which Adorno also borrows from Benjamin, shall be sufficiently clarified in the next chapter in terms of evidence or truth bearers, already in his 1931 lecture Adorno provides an example of how unintentional truth might orient the logic of constructing constellations in a nonrelativizing way.[24] "Suppose it were possible," Adorno says,

> to group elements of a social analysis in such a manner that the way they came together made a figure which certainly does not lie before us organically, but which must first be posited: the commodity structure. This would hardly solve the thing-in-itself problem, not even in the sense that somehow the social conditions might be revealed under which the thing-in-itself problem came into existence . . . for the truth content of a problem is in principle different from the historical and psychological conditions out of which it grows. But it might be possible that, from a sufficient construction of the commodity structure, the thing-in-itself problem absolutely disappeared. Like a source of light, the historical figure of commodity and of exchange value may free the form of a reality, the hidden meaning of which remained closed to investigation of the thing-in-itself problem, because there is no hidden meaning

> which could be redeemable from its one-time and first-time historical appearance. ("Actuality," 128)

Put another way, in a "sufficient construction of the commodity structure," in, that is, a constellation or interpretation that is adequately sensitive to empirical social elements, it is not intentional or organic meanings that are presented. Instead, like a source of light, a construction of commodity and exchange value disenchants the magical fixity of the field of reality in which both emerge.

To elaborate Adorno's own example, a constellation of the commodity frees up a form of social organization in which human agents come to view commodities not as magically autonomous and self-endowed entities but as the reified social productions that they in fact are. From Adorno's perspective, only a bad metaphysics of interpretation would seek the deep meaning or hidden intention of commodities themselves. What Adorno wants to do, by contrast, is deploy the logic of constructing constellations to capture those truths of the social world that are invisible to meaning- and intention-oriented accounts of interpretation. Indeed, by setting the unassimilated elements of material social life in various relations to one another, "the function which the traditional philosophic inquiry expected from meta-historical, symbolically meaningful ideas is [thus] accomplished by inner-historically constituted, non-symbolic ones" ("Actuality," 128). The unintentional truth of the logic of constructing constellations is supposed to show that the context-transforming potential of commodity culture resides precisely in the seemingly random, overlooked, and unintentional relations of human practices and productions. For Adorno, "Interpretation of the unintentional through a juxtaposition of the analytically isolated elements and illumination of the real by the power of such interpretation is the program of every authentically materialist knowledge" precisely because it accesses what other hermeneutic approaches cannot ("Actuality," 127).

Mircrological Materialism

Interpretive philosophy is thus nonrelativizing interpretive social theory on a small scale. Turning a context-sensitive eye to the

unintentional truths of the ruins of the social means that interpretive philosophy must renounce the possibility of apprehending an already given totality in some synthetic grand narrative. Adorno admits that "[interpretive philosophy] must give up the great problems, the size of which once hoped to guarantee the totality, whereas today between the wide meshes of big questions, interpretation slips away. If true interpretation succeeds only through a juxtaposition of the smallest elements, then it no longer has a role in the great problems in a traditional sense, or only in the sense that it deposits within a concrete finding the total question which that finding previously seemed to represent symbolically. Construction out of small and unintentional elements thus counts among the basic assumptions of philosophic interpretation" ("Actuality," 127–28).

Such a description is as close as Adorno comes to a programmatic statement regarding the interpretive method of the construction of constellations. The interpretation of social reality is not a project of understanding totality. It does not read the deep or symbolic meaningfulness of social relations and cultural phenomena but rather makes visible and juxtaposes the micrological elements of an existing social world. In this way, the *micrological logic* of constructing constellations expands the range of interpretation since it is sufficiently context-sensitive to ensnare the socially *non*symbolic and the *non*meaningful.

Interdisciplinarity

But if interpretation now means something like micrological construction of isolated elements of social existence, then where and how are such elements to be collected? Adorno turns directly to the discipline of sociology to address this question. The logic of constructing constellations is interdisciplinary in the sense that the elements of its juxtapositions are to be provided by other research programs, chiefly that of sociology. "Interpretive philosophy," Adorno in fact suggests, "*will have to take its specific material preponderantly from sociology*" ("Actuality," 130, my emphasis). Adorno argues that not only the relationship between ontology

and history but also the relationship between philosophy and sociology must be rethought. Contra Heidegger, who casts the relationship between philosophy and sociology as that between an architect and an intrusive cat burglar, Adorno maintains that sociological research does not rob philosophy but supplies it with much needed conceptual and empirical material: "The house, this big house [philosophy], has long since decayed in its foundations and threatens not only to destroy all those inside it, but to cause all the things to vanish which are stored within it, much of which is irreplaceable. If the cat burglar steals these things, these singular, indeed often half-forgotten things, he does a good deed, provided that they are only rescued; he will scarcely hold onto them for long, since they are for him only of scant worth" ("Actuality," 130).

Hence, Heidegger's fundamental ontology has the right metaphor but the wrong methodological assumptions and thus draws the wrong conclusions. From the perspective of interpretive philosophy, that fundamental philosophical house and its primordial questioning of Being are irreparably decayed. Only its ruined contents—those "singular, indeed often half-forgotten things"—may be retrieved. Sociology accomplishes an important task—does a good deed—when it loots failed philosophical projects and threatened social existences for small things ruined and forgotten.

Yet Adorno also wants to avoid positing a purely descriptive sociological account of interpretive philosophy. In a thinly veiled critique of Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, Adorno distinguishes his version of interpretive philosophy from that of Mannheim's sociology. For Adorno, Mannheimean sociology, not unlike Heideggerean ontology, calls everything into question but transforms nothing.[25] Interpretive philosophy, by contrast, does not simply describe micrological patterns of thought and action but seeks to transform them as well.

Practical Transformation

Indeed, as we have already seen in our brief consideration of Benjamin, the virtue of the practical and context-sensitive logic of

constructing constellations is that it is potentially context-*transforming*. Recall that Adorno views social reality as a kind of puzzle or riddle whose pieces or elements can be arranged, juxtaposed, and constructed in potentially disenchanting ways. Interpretive philosophy is thus cashed out not in the aesthetic terms of a surrealist awakening but in the practical demand for the transformation of existing social conditions. Inasmuch as interpretive philosophy takes seriously the impossibility of claiming to grasp or produce the totality of the real it has a micrologically materialist task: "To penetrate the detail, to explode in miniature the mass of the merely existing" ("Actuality," 133).

In its "strict exclusion of all ontological questions in the traditional sense" the logic of constructing constellations in Adorno is directly tied to the actions of social agents engaged in transforming the world in which they live ("Actuality," 129). Adorno argues that there is a "change-causing gesture of the riddle process"; that "out of the construction of a configuration of reality the demand for its real change always follows promptly"; and that interpretive philosophy presents evidence that enables those who make history to "better learn to recognize the demonic forces and banish them" ("Actuality," 129, 129, 126). Taking aim at Heidegger's conception of *Dasein*, which according to Adorno tends to focus on how history makes agents, Adorno summarizes his account of interpretive philosophy as follows:

> In regard to the manipulation of conceptual material by philosophy, I speak purposely of grouping and trial arrangement, of constellation and construction. The historical images, which do not constitute the meaning of *Dasein* but dissolve and resolve its questions are not simply self-given. They do not lie organically ready in history; neither showing nor intuition is required to become aware of them. They are not magically sent by the gods to be taken in and venerated. Rather, they must be produced by human beings and are legitimated in the last analysis alone by the fact that reality crystallizes about them in striking evidence. ("Actuality," 131)

In short, "The Actuality of Philosophy" outlines a unique account of interpretive social analysis that Adorno calls interpretive philosophy. Such an unusual hermeneutical method has, or so I have tried to show, six intertwined features: (1) it is marked by interpretive motion, (2) it conceives of social reality in terms of relational contexts of riddle-images, (3) its nonrelativizing orientation is unintentional truth, (4) it operates at an extremely micrological level of context-sensitivity, (5) it is interdisciplinary insofar as it collaborates with sociology, and (6) its goal is practical social transformation. These six features, I have been arguing, constitute Adorno's early methodological contribution to the interpretive character, or actuality, of social theory and method.

Yet with regard to Adorno's "Actuality" lecture, two questions remain. First, what sense of history informs interpretive philosophy? Clearly, the extreme context-sensitive, or micrological, character of the logic of constructing constellations means that Adorno wants to reject the Hegelian option. So too is it clear that Adorno is suspect of the historicity of Heideggerean ontology. But what remains? What kind of history underlies interpretive philosophy? Second, while Adorno claims that constellations are not given to an abstract *Dasein* but *made* or constructed, Adorno's lecture skirts the question of the role of the critic in the logic of constructing constellations: "I will not decide whether a particular conception of man and being lies at the base of my theory" ("Actuality," 132).

It is in fact only in his 1933 construction of Kierkegaard that Adorno begins to sketch the role of the critic in interpretive philosophy. But before turning to that text in the next chapter, I want to address the question of history as it emerges in Adorno's 1932 lecture, "The Idea of Natural History." For it is there that Adorno again seeks to avoid the hermeneutic idealism of deep meaning and attempts to supply interpretive philosophy with an alternative account of historical processes. When viewed in the context of Adorno's lecture on the interpretive actuality of social theory, we can see how Adorno's development of a conception of natural history is intimately connected to his methodological elaboration

of the logic of constructing constellations. Put rather crudely, for Adorno natural history is the history social actors appear *not* to make; it is what seems to produce the refuse of the social world; it is the history that interpretive philosophy makes visible and disenchants.

Adorno borrows the concept of natural history directly from Benjamin's thinking on allegory.[26] Natural history in Benjamin is meant to capture the way in which history as the transient penetrates nature as the static and vice versa. Yet in borrowing this conception of history from Benjamin, Adorno immediately begs the question he intends to criticize: Is not the naturalization of historical forces in fact a historical ontology that undermines one of the fundamental tenets of historical materialism, namely, that human actors *make* history?[27]

Hence it is not surprising to hear Adorno admit that "the natural character of history is disconcerting."[28] On the one hand, the conception of natural history, he says, threatens to isolate a group of historical elements and hypostatize them ontologically ("Natural History," 122). Natural history endows particular and concrete social phenomena with an existence that appears to unfold behind the backs or independent of social actors and engaged critics. On the other hand, in natural history the contingencies of history become frozen in their being and thus appear to take on an enchantedly natural character: natural history is a reifying sort of "bewitchment of history," as Adorno himself acknowledges ("Natural History," 122). Yet it is important to note that the concept of natural history, however disconcerting, is meant to be a rejection of historical ontology and an *explanation* of the process of reification and how that process may be interpreted. To repeat, for Adorno, natural history is an account of *reified* history; it explains and allows critics to interpret or dis-enchant the history social actors don't make. Two key elements constitute Adorno's development of the concept of natural history. First, natural history is an antidote to Heideggerean ontology's historicity. Second, natural history is a kind of Benjaminian elaboration of Lukacs's account of the "thingification" (*Verdinglichung*) of second nature. I want to examine both of these briefly.

According to Adorno, Heideggerean ontology is right to try to formulate a notion of practical existence in its most extreme historical determinacy. Adorno shares the Heideggerean insight that human being's mode of being in the world is radically or naturally historical. But from Adorno's perspective when Heidegger reduces *Dasein*'s essence to an ontologized conception of history as a projected historicity within a totality of social reality, he loses purchase on the chief insight of fundamental ontology, namely, that natural and historical elements must be seen in their practical entwinement. Put differently, Adorno thinks that Heidegger insufficiently develops his own insight but instead preserves a false antithesis between the everyday real or ontic being of *Dasein* and its ontological projected historicity. In contrast, Adorno argues that "[a] *concrete* unity [of nature and history], however, is not one modeled on an antithesis of possible and real being, but a unity developed from the elements of real being itself. The neo-ontological project of history only has a chance of winning ontological dignity, of achieving an actual interpretation of being, if it is directed not at possibilities of being, but radically at the existing itself in its concrete inner-historical definition. . . . The achievement of the neo-ontological formulation is that it has radically demonstrated the insuperable interwovenness of natural and historical elements" ("Natural History," 117).

Echoing the critique of the depth metaphysics of interpretive meaning that we saw in "The Actuality of Philosophy," Adorno distinguishes natural history from fundamental ontology vis-à-vis the latter's attempt to read deep Being—a fundamental category beneath or behind everyday beings. Fundamental ontology directs its attention to this deeper possibility or project of human being—the futural possibilities of the being of *Dasein*—and not to the "existing itself in its concrete inner-historical definition." For that reason, it is not a concrete unity of natural history but rather the deep naturalization of the ontological projection or Being of history. But in natural history there can be no being-question beyond the factive being of concrete social phenomena: "No being underlying or residing within historical being itself is to be understood as ontological" ("Natural History," 117). Rather,

interpretive philosophy takes aim at the existing itself. It takes aim, that is, at the puzzlelike empirical relations of the ruins and traces, of the unintentional and isolated elements, of a given social world at the estranging historical moment when nature flows into history and history flows into nature. Put another way, one might say that for Adorno entering the hermeneutic circle the right way means constructing riddle-images of the marginalized of *what is. That*, and not asking the primordial question of the Being of what is, constitutes the proper interpretive task of social theory.

Adorno's conception of natural history is also informed by Lukacs. Indeed, from Lukacs Adorno appropriates (with Benjaminian modifications) the concept of reified second nature. The framework of the concept of second nature in Lukacs, Adorno argues, "is modeled on a general historico-philosophical image of a meaningful and meaningless world (an immediate world and an alienated world of commodities) and he attempts to present this alienated world. He calls this world of things created by man, yet lost to him, the world of convention. . . . This fact of a world of convention as it is historically produced, this world of estranged things that cannot be decoded but encounters us as ciphers, is the starting point of the question with which I am concerned here" ("Natural History," 117–18). For Adorno, Lukacs correctly perceives that in commodity culture there is an emergent and transient order of things that escapes the laws of progressive history: a world of phenomena seemingly "created by man, yet lost to him." But, Adorno argues, Lukacs is wrong to link the persistence of such alienated commodities to the metaphysical question of interpretive meaning. The question is not whether second nature is meaningless or deeply meaningful, but rather *how* it is possible to access and interpret this "world of estranged things that cannot be decoded but encounters us as ciphers."

In other words, Lukacs helps to supply Adorno with the empirical motivation for an account of natural history—the "fact of a world of convention as it is historically produced" in puzzling ciphers—and the justification for its development in the context of a discussion of interpretation. Lukacs's Hegelianism forces him to conceive of second nature as a surface phenomenon

of estranged social meanings that can be uncovered only in an act of the reawakening of spirit; for Lukacs second nature is merely a "charnel house of rotted interiorities"—a theologized repository of encrypted meanings that shows itself in moments of eschatological revelation. In contrast, Adorno rejects the metaphysical meaningful/meaningless distinction upon which Lukacs's account of second nature depends. Lukacs, not unlike Heidegger, is unable to pursue his own insight because he perceives second nature in traditional hermeneutic terms as merely an alienated and unknowable sign of a deeper, more meaningful nature (or Being in Heidegger's sense).

As a corrective to Lukacs's metaphysics of meaning in his account of second nature, Adorno draws on Benjamin's early work on allegorical expression as the intersection of two transient forces: nature and history.[29] In this way, Benjamin supplies the counterpoint to Lukacs (and Heidegger). Adorno argues that whereas Lukacs demonstrates "the retransformation of the historical, as that which has been, into nature, then here [in Benjamin] is the other side of the phenomenon: nature itself is seen as transitory nature, as history" ("Natural History," 119). Allegory is not alienated and unknowable second nature in the sense of a symbolic sign for an underlying, fixed, meaningful content but rather a fluid riddle in the sense that Adorno suggests in his "Actuality" lecture ("Natural History," 119). Allegory as historical expression manifests the passing away and return of a concrete particular or ruin of social reality in all of its estranging character, as a riddle-image or encrypted script. In allegory, the context-sensitive critic is confronted, as Benjamin argues in his *Trauerspiel* study, with the petrified, primordial landscape of discontinuous history.[30] This is, according to Adorno, the "most extreme subjugation to nature, in the form of a riddle" because allegorical transience is relentless in its peculiarly historical motion—it never stops, but it never progresses either ("Natural History," 120).

Such appeals to the natural motion of riddle and script must be understood not as another version of historical ontology but rather as Adorno's attempt to uncouple the questions of interpretation and history from that of a metaphysic of hermeneutical meaning.

Riddles and scripts may indeed designate a dynamic of possible significations. But for Adorno they do not therefore also suggest transcendental meanings. On the contrary, " 'Signification' means that the elements of nature and history are not fused with each other, rather they break apart and interweave at the same time in such a fashion that the natural appears as a sign for history and history, where it seems to be most historical, appears as a sign for nature" ("Natural History," 121).

In short, when Adorno articulates his conception of natural history in contradistinction to Heideggerean historicity and through the twin prisms of Lukacs and Benjamin, he is trying to provide his method of interpretive philosophy with a sufficiently context-sensitive theory of history. Natural history explains how, despite reification, second nature is sufficiently dynamic to be encountered not merely as dead matter of fact but also, from the context-sensitive logic of constructing constellations, as legible social facts: "For Lukacs it [the charnel house of social reality] is something simply puzzling; for Benjamin it is a cipher to be read" ("Natural History," 121). But readability, as we now know, has little to do with a logic of textuality and deconstruction. On the contrary. To say that social reality is a jumble of ciphers to be read is not to say that it is a text of deep meanings or linguistic signifiers. Rather, it is to say that the refuse of social reality must be made to *count* in ways that present evidence for the ongoing appropriation and transformation of a given social arrangement. Thus, the conception of natural history allows the logic of constructing constellations to explain how the alienated, estranging, and discontinuous waste products of the commodity world may be made explicit without appeals to a teleological conception of history, a Heideggerean form of fundamental ontology, a hermeneutically idealizing account of deep meaning, or a deconstructive account of text-reading/writing.

The analysis in this chapter has, however coarsely, sought to introduce the logic of constructing constellations in its earliest formulations in the tradition of critical theory. It has also attempted to intimate how that logic differs from the logic of textuality and deconstruction on the one hand and rationality and reconstruction

on the other hand. Further, the analysis has sought to demonstrate that since Benjamin and Adorno focus on the empirical elements and context-dependent practices of social life rather than the linguistic or textual constitution of those features and practices, their work presents a more materialist alternative to the logic of textuality and deconstruction. Such an interpretive and materialist alternative, however, has thus far left unresolved the question of the precise role of the context-sensitive critic in the logic of constructing constellations. Further, as we saw in Adorno's 1931 elaboration of unintentional truth, it has at best only partially resolved the problem of truth in interpretive method.

It is the task of the next chapter to address both questions. I shall take up the question of the role of the critic in the context of a discussion of Adorno's study of Kierkegaard, while I shall consider the problem of truth in the context of an account of truth as truth bearers. The point of introducing a term such as *truth bearers* is to reformulate the truth orientation of the logic of constructing constellations in a clear and decidedly *unemphatic* way: what Adorno calls the unintentional truth of interpretive philosophy can be translated rather modestly as evidence. The truths of the logic of constructing constellations emerge when the critic's context-sensitivity is able to make visible and relevant elements of material social life that may then be viewed as evidence for the potential transformation of the often reified and rigid contexts in which social life takes place. The discussion of truth in the next chapter should thus be seen as an attempt to provide the conceptual resources necessary to clarify the question Benjamin raises and Adorno only partly answers: In what sense can a context-sensitive, interpretive method of construction be true?

3

AFFECT AND EVIDENCE IN THE LOGIC OF CONSTRUCTING CONSTELLATIONS

We saw in the last chapter that Adorno's critique and appropriation of Benjamin's image-construction turns on a refusal to mythologize away the role of the social critic and on an attempt to think through the kind of truths that might distinguish interpretive philosophy, or what I have alternatively been calling the logic of constructing constellations. It is no accident that these two aspects—the role of the critic and the problem of truth—appear together in a discussion of Adorno's interpretive philosophy. For it is the context-sensitivity of the social critic who deploys the logic of constructing constellations that in fact allows her, as we have already seen in Benjamin's account of image-construction, to carry out an interpretive task that sets her apart from other interpreters of culture and modern society. Rather than read the social text for hidden intentions or deep meanings—or deconstruct or reconstruct those meanings—the logic of constructing constellations presents the critic with the task of thematizing and making visible precisely those social elements and empirical relations that intention- and meaning-oriented modes of interpretive analysis denigrate as mere appearance or overlook entirely. As we now know, in interpretive philosophy the point of context-sensitive analysis is not to unmask the meaning of the ruins of the social but to make explicit the meaningless, the marginalized, the unintentional truths of the social world. The context-sensitivity of the social critic is thus an enabling feature of disenchanting social analysis; the context-sensitive role of the critic makes possible the retrieval of potentially context-transforming

evidence or truth bearers inaccessible to other modes of interpretive social inquiry. Paraphrasing Benjamin, we might say that context-sensitivity affords the critic the disposition needed to collect the trash of history. Paraphrasing Adorno, we might in turn say that what makes possible context-sensitivity on the part of the social critic is affect—an *engaged* disposition or contextually attuned standpoint. For Adorno, affects such as hopefulness and melancholy are the motors, as it were, of social study. Put another way, according to the logic of constructing constellations, it is affect that provides the context-sensitivity needed to thematize potentially context-transforming truths. Affect and evidence, critic and truth, are thus intimately linked as we shall see in this chapter. Moreover, we shall see how the logic of constructing constellations deployed in Adorno's early study of Kierkegaard—*Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*—persists even in his late work in sociology.

1. ADORNO'S KIERKEGAARD STUDY

Adorno's attempt to deploy the logic of constructing constellations in an analysis of Kierkegaard's work remains one of his most challenging texts.[1] Early readers of Adorno's 1933 study of Kierkegaard, including Benjamin, find the text unnecessarily demanding. And contemporary readers of Adorno tend—and not without some justification—to gloss the study rather than engage it directly.[2] Even Horkheimer, who is one of Adorno's *Habilitation* examiners, finds the text exceedingly difficult. Indeed, Adorno writes to Kracauer—his former tutor and the man to whom the Kierkegaard study is dedicated—that Horkheimer "has read the whole fourth chapter and is delighted, but finds it extraordinarily difficult; more difficult than the book on the Baroque [Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* study]. I can't do anything about it, it is in the nature of the subject. I have demonstrated the mythical-demonic character of Kierkegaard's concept of existence, and if that can't be translated into Swabian Marxism, I can't help it."[3]

Whether or not Adorno's construction of Kierkegaard can today be translated into "Swabian Marxism" is perhaps beside the point.

What is clear is that the analysis therein is in at least two respects crucial to our purposes here. First, its interpretation of bourgeois existence stands as Adorno's most fully developed deployment of the logic of constructing constellations. And, second, it best exemplifies the importance of affect in the context-sensitive disposition of the social critic in such an interpretive construction. Though it must be pointed out that Adorno's deployment of the logic of constructing constellations does not follow up on his 1931 claim that interpretive philosophy must be draw on the resources of sociology, his study of Kierkegaard nevertheless actualizes the other chief features of the logic of constructing constellations that we elaborated in the last chapter.

Indeed, the thesis of *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* is that "the real has entered into concepts, manifests itself in concepts, and comprehensibly justifies them."[4] Put another way, Adorno deploys the logic of constructing constellations at the conceptual—rather than empirical—level to show how the latter penetrates the former, and to make visible the unintentional truth of Kierkegaard's work. Or, in Adorno's own words, to show how "the force of the material goes beyond the intention of the metaphor" in Kierkegaard's writings (*Kierkegaard*, 43). In this section, I want first to consider Adorno's construction of the constellation of bourgeois space, or the *interieur,* in Kierkegaard. Second, I want to demonstrate the link between that constellation and the context-sensitive critic who constructs it. For, as we shall see, it is the affect of the constellation-constructing social critic—and not the deep meaning or the signifying play of the social text itself—that gives interpretive philosophy access to the context-transforming unintentional truths of Kierkegaard's work.

In the opening section of this study, Adorno reiterates the task of interpretive philosophy: "Philosophy is distinguished from science not so much as the supreme science that systematically unifies the most universal propositions of subordinated sciences; rather, it constructs ideas that illuminate and apportion the mass of the simply existing; ideas around which the elements of the existing crystallize as knowledge" (*Kierkegaard*, 4). Interpretive philosophy's construction of a constellation of Kierkegaard focuses on

the bourgeois apartment. From Adorno's perspective, a standard hermeneutic reading of the meaning of such a social space might view it as a retreat and safe house, a kind of castle for the existentialist subject and his world of objects. In such a reading, the apartment is seen as a domain untouched by the long arm of capital and the deprivations of history. Its objective contents and subjects, drawn from all corners of the earth, are ostensibly sheltered from transient social realities, from the perpetual storm of modern progress. Further, in this apartment all international boundaries and geopolitical divisions are happily liquidated: Persian carpets line the floors, French paintings cover the walls, and Chinese vases decorate the mantels. But for Adorno this safe bourgeois *interieur* is the space in which an order of human actors perishes while an enchanted order of things persists. The *interieur*, Adorno wants to claim, "defines an image in which—against Kierkegaard's intention—social and historical material is sedimented" or *embedded* (*Kierkegaard*, 42).

Adorno's interpretation of that unintentionally embedded social and historical material entails two aspects. First, Adorno wants to show the dominating and confining aspects of this free and sheltered space of bourgeois existence. To that end, he directs his attention to the contents of the *interieur*, especially the oddity of a window mirror. In many bourgeois apartments, such mirrors afford agents moments of reflection and surveillance. The mirror presents the agent to himself as an object of reflective contemplation, while the window makes it possible for that same agent to look through the mirror and survey the bourgeois public. Adorno constructs the dual functions of this window mirror in the following way:

> Kierkegaard may have introduced the "window mirror" as a "symbol" for the reflected seducer with intentional casualness. But it defines an image in which—against Kierkegaard's intention—social and historical material is sedimented. The window mirror is a characteristic furnishing of the spacious nineteenth-century apartment; that such an apartment is under discussion is evident from the notion of the "bell-rope

from the third story" that must be occupied by another family for him to have a separate bell-rope. The function of the window mirror is to project the endless row of apartment buildings into the isolated bourgeois living room; by the mirror, the living room dominates the reflected row at the same time that it is delimited by it. . . . In their time, the nineteenth century, window mirrors were commonly called "spies"—which is how Kierkegaard refers to himself in his final self-account: "I am, that is, like a spy in a higher service, in the service of the idea and as such must keep watch on the intellectual and the religious and spy out how 'existence' matches up with knowledge and 'Christendom' with Christianity." He who looks into the window mirror, however, is the private person, solitary, inactive, and separated from the economic process of production. The window mirror testifies to objectlessness—it casts into the apartment only the semblance of things—and isolated privacy. Mirror and mourning hence belong together. It is thus that Kierkegaard used the metaphor of the mirror in the *Stages*: "There was once a father and a son. A son is like a mirror in which the father beholds himself, and for the son the father too is like a mirror in which he beholds himself as he will someday be. However, they rarely regarded one another in this way, for their daily intercourse was characterized by the cheerfulness of gay and lively conversation. It happened only a few times that the father came to a stop, stood before the son with a sorrowful countenance, looked at him steadily and said: 'Poor child, you live in silent despair.' Melancholy appears in the symbol of the mirror, in the archaic and the modern, as the imprisonment of mere spirit in itself. This imprisonment is, however, at the same time imprisonment in a natural relation; in the ambiguous bond between father and son. The image of the *interieur* therefore draws all of Kierkegaard's philosophy into its perspective, because in this image the doctrine's elements of ancient and unchanging nature present themselves directly as elements of the historical constellation that governs the image. (*Kierkegaard*, 42)

The window mirror of the apartment interior is thus interpreted not as a meaningful symbol of a seducer or as the locus of the enchanted safety of inwardness but rather as a historical constellation. From the context-sensitive standpoint of the logic of constructing constellations, the easily overlooked everydayness of a window mirror captures the very antinomy of bourgeois life. On the one hand, the window mirror functions as an opening of infinitude, it projects "the endless row of apartment buildings into the isolated bourgeois living room; by the mirror, the living room dominates the reflected row at the same time that it is delimited by it." In this way, the phantom bourgeois public sphere appears as a shared collective for the very subject that is detached from it and yet still wants to spy it out. From the safe haven of the apartment, the reflective subject surveys and classifies and orders the world outside.

On the other hand, that world outside has entered into the very privacy of the bourgeois *interieur*: every time this spy looks through the window-mirror he sees "a private person, solitary, inactive, and separated from the economic process of production." The bourgeois spy sees, that is, the objectification and reification of her own mirrored self as a dead or estranged object. For Adorno, the civilized shelter of the apartment hardens the bourgeois subject into an eviscerated state of second nature—it makes her *less* human. The more the solitary subject longingly spies through the glass, the more estranged and isolated her own reflected existence becomes. Or, as Adorno himself says, "The harder subjectivity rebounds back into itself from the heteronomous, indeterminate, or simply mean world, the more clearly the external world expresses itself, mediatedly, in subjectivity" (*Kierkegaard*, 38).

Yet at the same time Adorno wants to direct what is at one level simply another reified moment of bourgeois existence away from a Lukacsian account of dead matter or second nature in need of spiritual awakening and toward the historical truths that distinguish and orient the logic of constructing constellations. Adorno maintains that in the bourgeois *interieur*, the subject may be "overwhelmed in its own domain by commodities and their historical essence . . . but in the interieur things do not remain alien" (*Kierkegaard*,

44). And he goes on—in a most Benjaminian paraphrase—to claim that "the *interieur* . . . draws meaning out of [things]. Foreignness transforms itself from alienated things into expression; mute things speak as 'symbols.' The ordering of things in the apartment is called arrangement. Historically illusory objects are arranged in it as the semblance of unchangeable nature. In the *interieur* archaic images unfold: the image of the flower as that of organic life; the image of the orient as specifically the homeland of yearning; the image of the sea as that of eternity itself" (*Kierkegaard*, 44). In the apartment, "*foreignness transforms itself from alienated things into expression*." Interpretive philosophy's point here is that reified nature *can* be interpreted but not according to hermeneutic approaches that emphasize intention or symbolic meaning in any traditional senses of these terms. For in Adorno's construction, it is the *nonsymbolic*, the meaningless—mute things or dead matters of fact—that are thematized and made to speak. In Adorno's context-sensitive interpretation of the *interieur* nature returns not as intentional or symbolically meaningful but to be thematized and made explicit in the embedded archaic images, or proto-history, of the "antediluvian fossils" of the bourgeois apartment (*Kierkegaard*, 54).[5]

Clearly this is not a deep textual reading of a Kierkegaardian metaphor; it is not an attempt to grasp what Kierkegaard intended or an original meaning beyond or behind Kierkegaard's work. Perhaps we might paraphrase Adorno's interpretation of the window mirror in the following way: The construction of a constellation here is meant to light up the unintentional truths of certain empirical elements of modern life as those emerge in an interpretation of bourgeois living space. Adorno's unusually context-sensitive composition of the everyday features of a bourgeois apartment and the free and safe bourgeois subject who resides there seeks to make explicit the structures and commodities that are an empirical but often taken-for-granted part of bourgeois existence. And yet, in making visible such a dominating context the context-sensitive logic of constructing constellations seeks to present evidence for its practical transformation. For while separation from the thing-world of capitalism is isolating and reifying, it is also one of the historical conditions for the possibility of an emancipated existence.

Hence, interpretive philosophy maintains that "*in the interieur archaic images unfold: the image of the flower as that of organic life; the image of the orient as specifically the homeland of yearning; the image of the sea as that of eternity itself.*"

Described yet another way, we could say that Adorno's deployment of the logic of constructing constellations shows that even in the most enchantedly reified of situations—that of the bourgeois living space—potentially context-transforming evidence can be retrieved from *within* that context. Indeed, that Adorno is able to thematize evidence of an abundant and emancipated form of existence in the most reified and seemingly irrelevant of social locations—that of the bourgeois *interieur*—without an appeal to intention or deep, symbolic meanings or signifying play illustrates the material strengths of his interpretive philosophy.

Yet it illustrates something else as well. The sensitivity of Adorno's context-sensitive construction of Kierkegaard is marked throughout by a profound feel for its object domain. Such affect is derived from Kierkegaard's own lexicon. In fact, Adorno derives his account of the role of melancholy in interpretive philosophy directly from Kierkegaardian conceptions. But unlike Kierkegaard and existentialism more generally, melancholy for Adorno is not reducible to a self-affirming confirmation of solitary existence. In Adorno, melancholy is not a reifying psychologism that pines for a meaningful or authentic existence in a modern world of anomie. Instead, Adorno develops melancholy as a particular feel or *sensitivity*—an affect—that distinguishes and enables the context-sensitive and engaged disposition of the social critic. Melancholy makes it possible for the social critic to access the unassimilated elements or trash of modern social life. Melancholy—and its counterpart, hopefulness, as we shall see—outfit the social critic who deploys the logic of constructing constellations with the pre-perceptions, anticipations, and material keenness needed to interpret what traditional hermeneutic social analyses ignore.[6] In fact, Adorno argues that hope-infused melancholy is peculiarly able to retrieve, or bring home, what modern existence destroys (*Kierkegaard*, 125). If we are to become clear about the innovative way in which Adorno incorporates melancholy and hope into the role of the interpretive

social critic, then we must briefly examine two passages found in the closing sections of his construction of Kierkegaard.

Drawing on his 1931 account of the encrypted riddle character of social relations, Adorno writes: "No truer image of hope can be imagined than that of ciphers, readable as traces, dissolving in history, disappearing in front of overflowing eyes, indeed confirmed in lamentation. In these tears of despair the ciphers appear as incandescent figures, dialectically, as compassion, comfort, and hope. Dialectical melancholy does not mourn vanished happiness. It knows that it is unreachable" (*Kierkegaard*, 126). Hope, then, is some sense built into ciphers or ruins of social reality, even the conceptual reality of Kierkegaard's existentialism. It is the task of the social critic who follows the logic of constructing constellations to retrieve such threatened, vanishing, or dissolving ciphers, to interpret them. Indeed, the social critic here is not dispassionately interpreting the meaning of hope in Kierkegaard or the world beyond his texts; nor is he merely evoking voices. The ciphers of the social can only be made visible through the tear-filled haze of context-sensitive, over-flowing eyes. Hopeful tears of despair are, for Adorno, the interpretive liquid through which the social critic constructs constellations. In the extremity of its context-sensitivity, interpretive philosophy is a kind of painful optics of sociological construction. From the engaged disposition of melancholic hopefulness, it is not the meaning of vanished happiness that is made visible but rather its persistence despite its *unreachability*.[7] The context-sensitivity of the social critic enables Adorno's interpretive philosophy to show that, while "an eternal happiness without sacrifice" is unattainable in the merely existing relations of modern social life, a disenchanting construction or interpretation of those relations might make visible evidence for the possibility of *another* social composition (*Kierkegaard*, 126). In fact, it is in a construction of a constellation of the bourgeois *interieur* that interpretive philosophy thematizes the hope-filled wish of happiness without economic sacrifice among the claustrophobic material trappings of a reified existence.

The disposition of the social critic who deploys the logic of constructing constellations is made even more explicit in the final

page of Adorno's Kierkegaard study. There, Adorno considers a passage from *Fear and Trembling* where Kierkegaard writes:

> "What is the happiest existence? It is that of a young girl of sixteen years when she, pure and innocent, possesses nothing, not a chest of drawers or a pedestal, but has to make use of the lowest drawer of her mother's escritoire to keep all her magnificence: the confirmation dress and prayer-book." In such sentences, whose simplicity is exposed to every ideological hazard, poverty and despair call up comfort and reconciliation, as in this draft of Kierkegaard's letter to his fiancee: "In my mournfulness I have had only one wish: to make her happy; right now, I am unable; now I go to her side and like a master of ceremonies I lead her triumphantly and say: make room for her, give the best spot for our beloved, our dearest little Regina.' " The inconspicuous hope of this image tempers even the violent image of death: "What is death? Only a brief stop along the once traveled road." The banality of reconciliation is sublime: "This is how it is in time. As for eternity, it is my hope that we shall be comprehensible to one another, and that there she will forgive me." For the step from mourning to comfort is not the largest, but the smallest. (*Kierkegaard*, 141)

In the quiet desperation of a poor young girl, in the mournfulness of a separated lover, in the familiarity of the once-traveled road of death—there, where the marginal and unassimilated elements of social life are embedded most concretely and banally in the very features of Kierkegaard's conceptual reality, the anticipation of a happiness without sacrifice discloses itself interpretively. Poverty and despair call up comfort and reconciliation, and only by way of the engaged disposition or context-sensitive affect of melancholic hopefulness can the critic interpret that the happiness of a reconciled existence is unreachable. An archaic image only tempers death, it cannot outwit it. But it is the construction of a constellation—and not a deep interpretation or superficial deconstruction of meaning—that retrieves what modern existence ruins: the hope of happiness without sacrifice. For the social critic who

deploys the context-sensitive logic of constructing constellations the way home is indeed short. It is only a small step from mourning to comfort—but that means that it is a small step from comfort back to mourning. Such a context-transforming truth is only accessible from the context-sensitive disposition of a social critic whose interpretations do not follow the meaningful logic of traditional hermeneutic approaches.

As a way of summarizing the disposition of the critic in Adorno's interpretive philosophy one could do worse than link the passages of Adorno's *Kierkegaard* considered earlier to the finale of *Minima Moralia*. For that oft-cited closing fragment of reflections from damaged life stands as a kind of extreme summation of interpretive philosophy and the affect, engaged disposition, or standpoint of the social critic who practices it. Adorno writes:

> The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence, entirely from felt contact with its objects—this alone is the task of thought. It is the simplest of all things, because the situation calls imperatively for such knowledge, indeed because consummate negativity, once squarely faced, delineates the mirror-image of its opposite. But it is also the utterly impossible thing, because it presupposes a standpoint removed, even though by a hair's breadth, from the scope of existence, whereas we all know that any possible knowledge must not only be first wrested from what is, if it shall hold good, but is also marked, for this very reason, by the same distortion and indigence which it seeks to escape. (*MM*, 247)

When viewed within the context of a discussion of Adorno's (and Benjamin's) interpretive social theory, it is not difficult to see

how Adorno's insistence that philosophy must make explicit the rifts and crevices of social reality by way of felt contact with its objects is an appeal to the context-sensitive logic of constructing constellations. Further, when Adorno invokes the "standpoint of redemption," it is similarly plausible to suggest that he is talking about the kind of affect that enables social critics to deploy such a context-sensitive logic. To be sure, the standpoint of redemption is affect in the extreme.[8] But as we saw in our discussion of Benjamin, the logic of constructing constellations can avoid the metaphysics of theology so long as it acknowledges, as Benjamin did in his response to Horkheimer, that, of course, the murdered and lost are truly murdered and lost. Nothing, and surely not an interpretation, is going to bring them or their historical contexts back. Historical injustices, failed urban plans, ruined capitalist arcades, forgotten cultural rituals and social practices—all are indeed past. But they are never merely past, dead, over, as Benjamin knew so well. For when the social critic deploys the context-sensitive logic of constructing constellations, he brings home what existence has destroyed and what traditional hermeneutics misses. In such a retrieval, the interpretations of the social critic may disenchant the naturalness of existing injustices, the inexorability of current urban sprawl, the meaninglessness of forgotten cultural rituals, and the everyday but often invisible reifications of social life. Such disenchantments need not cast a messianic light, only a knowing one. It is for that reason that Adorno's interpretive philosophy connects the context-sensitive critic not to some deity but to knowledge of those empirical elements of the ruins of social existence that bear context-transforming truths. It is for that reason as well that we must clarify the precise nature of such truths in the next section.

2. TRUTH AS TRUTH BEARERS

In chapter 1 we considered the kinds of truths that inform the logic of textuality and deconstruction on the one hand and the logic of rationality and reconstruction on the other. The predominant interpretive truth of the model of text and text-reading is that of semantic depth or thickness. An interpretation of the social text

guesses at deep meanings, as Geertz, drawing on Ricoeur, argues, while a more deconstructively informed account of the model of text simply trades reading for deep meanings for evoking the superficial play or untruths of linguistic signifiers. By contrast, the interpretive truth of the logic of rationality and reconstruction—which wants to preserve a conception of the universally rational character of social life—shoots beyond a given historical context in order to capture the context-transcendent force of the validity claims raised in nondistorted communicative actions.

In chapter 2 we saw how the logic of constructing constellations in its Benjaminian form connects image-construction to what are in fact two accounts of truth—the emphatic truth of surrealist awakening or shock and the less emphatic truth of historical evidence. It was this second account of truth as evidence that we then pursued in a discussion of theory and method in Adorno's early work. For Adorno, truth is not textually deep and thick or linguistically planar, nor is it rational. Instead, it is the unintentional, striking evidence retrieved in a context-sensitive interpretation of social life. Since truth as evidence plays such an important role in the logic of constructing constellations—in both the German and French versions of that logic, as we shall see—I want here to amplify Adorno's early conception of the unintentional truth of striking evidence in three ways. From there, I want briefly to show how the role of evidence in the logic of constructing constellations may be further clarified in terms of truth bearers.

First, truth as evidence here is, as Adorno emphasizes, unintentional. Even the everyday sense of the term *evidence* suggests that evidence is precisely what is *unintended*, overlooked, neglected, inadvertently forgotten, left behind. The term *evidence* designates what remains independent of or despite the intentional actions of agents. It is for that reason that the context-sensitive logic of constructing constellations does not focus on intentionality—to do so would be to look in the wrong place, as it were. For the practical truths of evidence are not readily tied to an account of intentionality; indeed, the notion of intended evidence typically undermines the very truth of evidence. In such undermining cases we speak of planted evidence, and in fact we mean that the material we once

viewed as genuine evidence was intentionally designed to mislead us or distort the empirical facts of the matter. We mean, that is, that such material is not truly evidence. Thus, the logic of constructing constellations maintains that interpreting unintentional truths is in fact not conceptually hypostatizing but material and practical, inasmuch as such truths are thought of not in emphatic surrealist but in more everyday evidentiary terms.

Second, the truth of evidence is not deeply meaningful but *context-relevant*. Yet it is not therefore *relativizing*. On the contrary, to say that evidence can be true relevant to a specific context is to say only that the truth of the logic of constructing constellations does not come flying in from the outside or transcend a context from within. The context-relevant character of the truth of evidence in the logic of constructing constellations should be seen as a materialist strength rather than as a relativizing weakness. The truth of evidence is what context-sensitive social analysis gets when hitherto unthematized or dead matters of sociohistorical fact are made to *count* relative to a context, when, that is, what had been overlooked, taken for granted, or marginalized in a specific context is made visible and explicit from within that same context. It makes little sense to speak of the truth of evidence independent of a context, but such context-dependency means only that the truth orientation of the logic of constructing constellations is as materialist as its interpretive methods.

Third, the truth of evidence is indeed potentially context-transforming. When dead matters of historical fact are interpreted according to the logic of constructing constellations, as we saw in our discussion of Benjamin, evidence does not only make visible additional empirical elements of a social context—make them count or *matter*. It also changes the way in which social actors relate to an existing context and the empirical elements that inform it. Put another way, the truth of evidence is striking not only because it forces social actors to see specific things they had previously missed or taken for granted in their everyday context, but also because it forces them to see existing *relations*—those everyday contexts in which they find themselves—in a different way. The logic of constructing constellations is context-transforming in the

sense that it interprets evidence that disenchants present-day social constructions and historical relations by making *new* ones possible. The evidence interpreted in constructing constellations makes fluid the fixity of a frozen context. It disenchants what is by thematizing what was and has hitherto remained embedded. Its unintentional truths bear weight that just might alter a given context.[9]

All three features of truth as evidence—unintentionality, context-relevance, and context-transforming potential—may also be fleshed out in terms of truth bearers. In that case, the argument would simply be that the evidence interpreted by the critic who follows the context-sensitive logic of constructing constellations *bears* truth. A conception of truth as truth bearers is designed, as Richard L. Kirkham points out in his *Theories of Truth*, to resist the dogmatic assertion that only certain kinds of entities or propositions can be true. Against such an assertion, Kirkham argues that "it is a mistake to think that there is only one kind of entity or only a very small class of kinds of entities that can bear truth values, for there are no restrictions *in principle* on what kinds of entities can possess truth or falsity."[10] And he goes on to say that "[w]e should never find ourselves rejecting a proposed truth bearer on the grounds that it is impossible for the kind of entity in question to ever be true or false. There is no sort of entity that cannot in principle bear truth values (*Theories of Truth*, 59).

The virtue of an account of truth as truth bearers is thus its materiality and historical inclusivity—"there is no sort of entity that cannot in principle bear truth." Put in Benjaminian and Adornian terms, we can say that for the context-sensitive social critic even the unintentional trash of history might bear truth, might, that is, prove to be context-transforming evidence. Put less metaphorically, we can say that according to the logic of constructing constellations interpretations are true to the extent that they present *truth bearers*, and they are transforming to the extent that such bearers of truth alter a given context.

Such an account of truth as truth bearers or evidence finds a rough counterpart in the work of Ian Hacking. In his essay "Language, Truth and Reason," Hacking distinguishes between propositional truth as either true or false and phenomena that

are truth bearers or, as Hacking calls them, "truth candidates."[11] Like the conception of truth bearers, Hacking's account of truth candidacy need not be linked to a strong account of intentionality or deep meaning.[12] Indeed, candidates for truth are in some sense materially independent of intentionality and meaning since before the intention or meaning of an empirical entity or practice can be discerned, it must first be interpreted or made explicit as a candidate for such intention or meaning within a specific context.

For example, while it is true that ants exist and are edible, they don't count as truth candidates in the culinary practices of American culture.[13] They are, quite simply, not *evident* as food. They bear no culinary relevance for actors who move within the context-specific eating practices of American culture. They are not visible as truth candidates in our practices that are oriented toward true human sustenance. But for the context-sensitive logic of constructing constellations it is precisely such overlooked or irrelevant candidates for truth that are of interest and potentially context-transforming. Indeed, as we saw in our examination of Benjamin and Adorno, it is the task of the social critic who deploys the logic of constructing constellations to interpret those objects, practices, and histories that carry the candidacy or bear the weight of context-transformation. And the practical effects of such interpretations should not be underestimated, even in our example of the edible ant. For by expanding the rather culturally rigid context-relevancy of what counts as food, social critics don't merely interpret meanings, they also potentially alter human practices and the material conditions in which those practices take place.[14]

The conception of truth as truth bearers (or truth candidates) that I elaborate in this section is thus quite compatible with Adorno's account of the unintentional truth of interpretive philosophy's findings, as we saw in chapter 2. Moreover, as we also saw there, it resonates with Benjamin's less emphatic sense of truth as historical evidence that is presented in image-constructions of the ruins of the social. Of course, within the historical development of the social theory of the Frankfurt School accounts of truth take on an increasingly emphatic, indeed aesthetic, character, especially in Adorno's later formulations of mimesis or the nonidentical, as

Habermas argues from the perspective of the logic of rationality and reconstruction.[15] But when Adorno is engaged directly in addressing the problems of *social* theory and method he never exchanges the context-sensitive logic and disenchanting, potentially context-transforming truths of constructing constellations for the aporias of negative dialectics and mimetic art.

In fact, while the Positivist Dispute in German sociology prompts the emergence of the logic of rationality and reconstruction in Habermas's social theory, as we remarked in chapter 1, it is also true that that dispute manifests the persistence of the logic of constructing constellations in Adorno's interpretive social theory. In his exchange with Karl Popper in the Positivist Dispute, Adorno does not appeal to mimesis, the nonidentical, or traditional hermeneutic conceptions of interpretation and meaning. Instead, he draws on the logic of constructing constellations that he outlined some thirty years earlier in his "Actuality" lecture and his study of Kierkegaard. To conclude this chapter, and to illustrate Adorno's persistent commitment to the logic of constructing constellations and the truths of that logic in interpretive social theory, I want first to summarize the chief features of the method and truth of Popper's critical rationalism and then to examine Adorno's response to Popper.

3. SOCIOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION AND DISENCHANTMENT

The Positivist Dispute in German sociology is a debate about many things, including the differences between the natural and human sciences, the role of explanation and understanding in sociological inquiry, the descriptive and normative levels of social theory, and the analytic and hermeneutical dimensions of social analysis. Nevertheless, one could in general terms characterize it as a dispute about method and truth in the study of society. Though Habermas, Adorno, and Popper all want to reject the scientism of positivism, each does so by focusing on method and truth in a different way.[16] Habermas raises claims about the natural hermeneutics of a communicatively informed life-world and in his work on communication goes on, as we saw in chapter 1, to

develop the normative logic of rationality and reconstruction by way of Gadamer (among others).[17] Adorno too concerns himself with the interpretive dimensions of the study of society. But, as we know from chapter 2, his formulation of interpretive philosophy casts interpretation or construction and its truths rather differently than does Habermas's account of communication and validity claims.

In contrast to these two distinct interpretive turns of the social theory of the Frankfurt School in the 1960s, Popper advances an account of social analysis as a kind of critical rationalism distinguished not by hermeneutics but rather by the scientific logic of the method of problem-solving. For Popper, the task of social inquiry is not to interpret the world but to find tentative solutions to human problems. Indeed, in his "The Logic of the Social Sciences," Popper argues that the starting point of human knowledge is problems, where the term *problem* designates "an inner contradiction between our supposed knowledge and the facts."[18] By characterizing the methods of critical rationalism as problem-solving, Popper is able to preserve the distinctly scientific status of social analysis; like science proper, social theory is marked by its problem-solving mode of inquiry. Or, as Popper clarifies the matter:

> a) The method of the social sciences, like that of the natural sciences, consists in trying out tentative solutions to certain problems: the problems from which our investigations start, and those which turn up during the investigation.
>
> Solutions are proposed and criticized. If a proposed solution is not open to pertinent criticism, then it is excluded as unscientific, although perhaps only temporarily.
>
> b) If the attempted solution is open to pertinent criticism, then we attempt to refute it; for all criticism consists of attempts at refutation.
>
> c) If an attempted solution is refuted through our criticism we make another attempt.
>
> d) If it withstands criticism, we accept it temporarily; and we accept it, above all, as worthy of being further discussed and criticized.

> e) Thus the method of science is one of tentative attempts to solve our problems; by conjectures which are controlled by severe criticism. It is a consciously critical development of the method of trial and error.
>
> f) The so-called objectivity of science lies in the objectivity of the critical method. This means, above all, that no theory is beyond attack by criticism; and further, that the main instrument of logical criticism—the logical contradiction—is objective. (*Positivist*, 89–90)

We could paraphrase this in the following way. The scientific method of social analysis Popper defends here seeks provisional solutions to human problems (a). It tests the veracity of such solutions by attempting to refute them (b–c). When attempts at refutation are withstood, we accept the proposed solution (d). Yet such acceptance does not mean that we no longer discuss *other* solutions to the same problem since attempts at refutation are open ended and ongoing, a matter of trial and error (e). Thus, a new solution might present itself, a current one may be falsified, and all solutions to human problems remain open to further scrutiny (f). And, finally, the scientific method of problem-solving Popper develops is governed by the objective character of the logic of noncontradiction: the true solutions to human problems are the noncontradictory ones, the ones in which facts are in accordance with our *supposed* knowledge of them.

The conception of truth that informs the Popperian method of problem-solving here is thus a regulative one. The objective ideal of noncontradiction guides the social critic as she goes about studying society and culture, identifying problems or contradictions and proposing provisional, logical solutions to those contradictions. Like any other good scientist, the social critic tests out her hypotheses through trial and error: she verifies or falsifies various answers in an ongoing attempt to get it right, to, that is, eliminate false hypotheses and the contradictions that beset them with correct, problem-solving solutions.

Further, like all scientists, the social critic's method of trial and error allows her to learn from her errors. False or bad solutions

(that supposed knowledge that ultimately proves itself to be contradictory or inadequate) may be systematically discarded, while true or good solutions (correct ones, ones that solve the contradiction or problem) may be preserved, built on, modified. It is for this reason that Popper goes on to claim that

> The concept of truth is indispensable for the critical approach developed here. What we criticize is, precisely, the claim that a theory is true. What we attempt to demonstrate as critics of a theory is, clearly, that this claim is unfounded: that it is false.
>
> The important methodological idea that *we can learn from our mistakes* cannot be understood without the regulative ideal of truth: any mistake simply consists in a failure to live up to the standard of objective truth, which is our regulative ideal. We term a proposition true if it corresponds to the facts, or if things are as described by the proposition. This is what is called the absolute or objective concept of truth, which each of us constantly uses. The successful rehabilitation of this absolute concept of truth is one of the most important results of modern logic. (*Positivist*, 99)

What problems are to be solved—and when—Popper leaves open to question, suggesting only that "it is the character and quality of the problem—and also of course the boldness and originality of the suggested solution—which determine the value, or the lack of value, of a scientific achievement" (*Positivist*, 89).

It must be emphasized that Adorno's response to Popper makes no appeal to the conceptions of mimesis or the nonidentical that Adorno's detractors find so problematic and his supporters find so engaging. In fact, an adequate explanation of Adorno's response to the method and truth of Popper's critical rationalism is only to be had when that response is viewed within the context of the logic of constructing constellations developed in this book. For while it is true that Adorno ultimately rejects Popper's method of problem-solving in favor of a more interpretive approach to social analysis, it is also true that Adorno has, as we have seen in previous chapters, a rather eclectic and unorthodox but nevertheless coherent

conception of sociological interpretation. Indeed, it is no accident that, in his introduction to the published edition of the Positivist Dispute, Adorno argues that sociological *interpretation* "acquires its force both from the fact that without reference to totality—to the real total system, untranslatable into any solid immediacy—nothing societal can be conceptualized, and from the fact that it can, however, only be recognized in the extent to which it is apprehended in the factual and the individual. It [interpretation] is the societal physiognomy of appearance. The primary meaning of 'interpret' is to perceive something in the features of totality's social givenness. . . . Physiognomy does better justice to it [totality] since it realizes totality in its dual relationship to the facts which it deciphers—a totality which 'is,' and does not represent a mere synthesis of logical operations" (*Positivist*, 32–33).

Only now are we in a position to understand what Adorno means when he insists that the primary meaning of *interpret* is to "perceive something in the features of totality's givenness," to decipher what is, the factual and the individual, in a "societal physiognomy of appearance." Such descriptions are quite simply striking paraphrases of the context-sensitive logic of constructing constellations that the foregoing chapters of this study have tried to clarify and make accessible.

Yet the point of posing the logic of constructing constellations as an interpretive antidote to the Popperian logic of problem-solving is not simply to vindicate an old idea about the actuality of social philosophy. Instead, by responding to Popper in this way and in this context, Adorno wants to argue that interpretive philosophy presents a viable alternative both to the critical rationalism of Popper and the emergent logic of rationality and reconstruction in Habermas: The logic of constructing constellations (interpretive philosophy) is now the actuality of interpretive sociology. In his account of the interpretive character of social analysis, Adorno makes three specific claims against Popper's critical rationalism—claims that, when taken together, illustrate the materialist and practical character of the logic of constructing constellations.

First, Adorno argues in his "On the Logic of the Social Sciences" that while Popper's method of social analysis is right to

accord a certain primacy to problems, it is wrong to suggest that the contradictions endemic to social existence "can be imputed to the subject alone as a deficiency of judgment" and regulated by an ideal truth of noncontradiction (*Positivist*, 108). Instead, Adorno counters that in the study of society "methods do not rest upon methodological ideals but rather upon reality" and that, pace Popper, "the contradiction can, in very real terms, have its place in reality and can in no way be removed by increased knowledge and clearer formulation" (*Positivist*, 109, 108). Put simply, from the perspective of Adorno's interpretive social theory, the intractable problems of social reality are not solved by expanding forms of knowledge in a world where the historical starting point or first problem of sociological interpretation is the contradictory way in which society "keeps itself and its members alive but simultaneously threatens them with ruin" (*Positivist*, 108).[19]

Second, from the broad-based interpretive scope of the logic of constructing constellations Popper's focus on problems and the logical truths of problem-solving is too narrow. In Popper's critical rationalism, Adorno maintains, only certain social phenomena—logical contradictions between supposed human knowledge and the facts—show up on the radar screen of the social critic. For Adorno, as we have seen in previous chapters, the interpretive or constructive task of the social critic is much broader and more practical: it is to present evidence or what we described earlier in this chapter as truth bearers (or truth candidates). Of course, solving social problems is a crucial component of social analysis. But before such problems—which do not in every case disclose themselves as logical contradictions—can be solved they must be interpreted, *made visible*, be candidates for problem-solving analysis. It is precisely for omitting such an interpretive task that Adorno criticizes Popper from the logic of constructing constellations. Indeed, Popper's problem-solving method, claims Adorno,

> would only have to be qualified by the fact that it is not always possible to judge a priori the relevance of objects. Where the categorical network is so closely woven that much of that which lies beneath is concealed by conventions of opinion,

> including scientific opinion, then eccentric phenomena which have not yet been incorporated by this network, at times take on an unexpected gravity. Insight into their composition also throws light upon what counts as the core domain but which often is not. This scientific-theoretical motive was surely involved in Freud's decision to concern himself with the "fragments of the world of appearance." Similarly, it proved to be fruitful in Simmel's sociology when, mistrustful of systematic totality, he immersed himself in such social specifics as the stranger or the actor. (*Positivist*, 109–10)

The centrality of this passage for our discussion here should not be missed. The attempt to link context-sensitive interpretation not merely to logical conundrums but to the unexpected gravity of eccentric phenomena; the focus on illuminating what counts in a given context or core domain; the appeal by way of Freud to the relevance of empirical fragments of the world of appearance; the allusion to Simmel, whose nineteenth-century methodological relationism is in so many ways the precursor to Benjamin's image-constructions of twentieth-century urban life—all these make clear that even in his late work the logic of constructing constellations is considered by Adorno to be a viable method of interpretive *social* study.

Third, and finally, in his response to Popper Adorno addresses the question of the practical use of his brand of interpretive social inquiry. If the goal of social analysis can not be reduced, à la Popper, to problem-solving in a logical sense, then what precisely can such an analysis hope to attain? Not surprisingly, Adorno cashes out interpretation not at the level of problem-solving solutions but rather at the level of disenchanting evidence or what Adorno calls, in contrast to Popper's critical rationalism, critical demythologization. The focus on human problems, a focus that Adorno shares with Popper, motivates not logical solutions but disenchanting interpretations of existing social life. Such interpretations are, we know now, the very hallmarks of the logic of constructing constellations. In a key section of his response to Popper, Adorno puts the matter in the following way:

> Criticism implies demythologization. This, however, is no mere theoretical concept nor one of indiscriminate iconoclasm which, with the distinction between the true and untrue, would also destroy the distinction between justice and injustice. Whatever enlightenment achieves in the form of disenchantment it must necessarily desire to liberate human beings from such spells—formerly from that of the demons, nowadays from the spell which human relations exert over them. An enlightenment which forgets this, which disinterestedly takes the spell as a given and exhausts itself in the production of utilizable conceptual apparatuses sabotages itself. (*Positivist*, 121–22)

Put in less Adornian terms, one could say that the critical force of context-sensitive interpretation lies not in its logical capacity to solve problems but in its context-sensitive ability to make visible truth bearers that disenchant existing social contexts in which human relations are taken as natural, ineluctable, part of the spellbound order of things.

The analysis in this chapter has sought to clarify both the context-sensitive role of the social critic who deploys the logic of constructing constellations and the potentially context-transforming truths such critics interpret. The chapter has also made it clear that within the Frankfurt School tradition of social theory two distinct versions of interpretive social study emerge: that of the logic of constructing constellations in Benjamin's image-constructions and Adorno's interpretive philosophy and of the logic of rationality and reconstruction in Habermas's communications theoretic.

Further, the discussion of Adorno's work in this chapter was meant to show that from his earliest lectures in social philosophy through to his study of Kierkegaard and reflections from "damaged life" to his latest engagements with interpretive sociology Adorno never relinquishes his account of interpretive philosophy nor collapses it into a relativizing or ontologizing logic of textuality and deconstruction. Indeed, as his response to Popper in the Positivist Dispute makes strikingly clear, the context-sensitive and

disenchanting logic of constructing constellations presents a materialist, practical, yet still untapped alternative to the deep reading or planar evocations of the logic of textuality and deconstruction that are so widespread in contemporary social study.

When viewed in such a way, the hermeneutic eclecticism of the logic of constructing constellations in the social theory of the Frankfurt School, in both its Benjaminian origins and Adornian elaborations, thus shares little with the logic of textuality and deconstruction. Indeed, Benjamin and Adorno's skepticism regarding traditional hermeneutic approaches, their avoidance of accounts of deep meaning and the planar play of linguistic signification, their sense of the ruined and relational character of social life, their insistence on context-sensitive constructions with potentially disenchanting, context-transforming potential—all these already imply a possible connection between the logic of constructing constellations in the interpretive social theory of the Frankfurt School and the materialist methods of Michel Foucault's archaeology and genealogy and Pierre Bourdieu's reflexive sociology. Of course, both the methodological innovations of Foucauldian archaeology-genealogy and Bourdieuean reflexive sociology are in many ways designed to move beyond traditional hermeneutics in non-text-based ways. But so too are the image-constructions of Benjamin and the interpretive philosophy of Adorno, as we have seen in the last two chapters.

To be sure, we must make clear the differences between Benjamin and Adorno on the one hand and Foucault and Bourdieu on the other. This is especially the case in Foucault's reduction of truth to power and his refusal to make explicit the role of the social critic as well as in Bourdieu's rich conception of the relational or fieldlike character of social reality, his more promising account of the reflexivity of the social critic, and his insistence on the disenchanting potential of social analysis. Nevertheless, it is, in most general terms, the attempt to develop alternative interpretive but non-text-based approaches to social study that motivates us to link Benjamin and Adorno to Foucault and Bourdieu in the next chapter.

4

METHOD AND TRUTH IN FRENCH SOCIAL THEORY

Whereas the Positivist Dispute in German sociology marks both the persistence of the logic of constructing constellations and the emergence of the logic of rationality and reconstruction in the social theory of the Frankfurt School, two related but rather different positions regarding social reality and its interpretive study emerge in France. On the one hand, as we saw in the discussion of the logic of textuality and deconstruction in chapter 1, Ricoeur (in the early 1970s) and Derrida (beginning in the late 1960s) develop their respective accounts of text and text-reading, which today inform the logic of textuality and deconstruction in social critics such as Clifford Geertz and James Clifford, among so many others. On the other hand, within the discourse of French social theory, another approach to interpretive social inquiry emerges—a more empirically oriented one that seeks to capture not the textual but rather the practical and relational character of social life. Whereas Derrida is effectively declaring the end of the hermeneutic tradition and whereas Ricoeur is busy rejecting the ideology of text that informs such a declaration, Michel Foucault (in *Les Mots et les Choses* [1966] and *L'Archeologie du Savoir* [1969]) and Pierre Bourdieu (already in *Sociologie de L'Algerie* [1958] and later, especially, in *La Distinction* [1979]) are attempting to move beyond hermeneutics in more empirically sensitive ways—not by way of the deep or planar logic of textuality and deconstruction but by developing nontextual, methodologically relationist approaches to the study of modern social life. In fact, the general contours of both Foucault's

archaeology-genealogy and Bourdieu's reflexive sociology may be best described, as we shall see in this chapter, as versions of the logic of constructing constellations. Put in most general terms, both Foucault and Bourdieu focus on the relational character of social reality and consider the constructions or interpretations of such practical relations to be one of the core tasks of social inquiry. Of course, there is no need to overstate the similarities between the logic of constructing constellations in the social theory of the Frankfurt School and the emergence of a similar logic in the work of Foucault and Bourdieu. Indeed, Foucault's work provides both a point of comparison and several points of contrast, particularly with regard to the way in which he refuses to make explicit the role of the social critic and reduces the evidence or truth bearers of constructing constellations to systemic power or regimes of truth. Moreover, Bourdieu's reflexive sociology, despite its suspicions of the critical sociology of Frankfurt School social theory, offers a rich vocabulary for clarifying several key features of the logic of constructing constellations. These include the need to reject the logic of textuality and deconstruction, the ruined sense of social contexts as relational fields of symbolic struggle, the genuinely reflexive role of the context-sensitive social critic, and the context-transforming force of disenchanting interpretations.

1. ARCHAEOLOGY AND GENEALOGY

From the vantage point of the logic of rationality and reconstruction the work of Michel Foucault has been steadily criticized for its account of instrumental reason and its theory of domination.[1] This is perhaps unsurprising. It is not without some justification that texts such as Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* are presented alongside one another as themselves variations on a Weberian theme of the dominatory outcome of historical processes of rationalization.[2] While Horkheimer and Adorno suggest in the former that the practices of rationality characteristic of an enlightened society introduce ever more insidious and expansive forms of bodily discipline and mutilation, Foucault argues even more explicitly and

concretely in the latter that the enlightenment that invents the liberties also and in point of fact invents the disciplines.[3] According to the logic of rationality and reconstruction, both a social theory of totalitarian societies and a sociological description of modern European practices of rationality as the emergence of systemic power networks find their expression in a negative dialecticization of historical progress. In Horkheimer and Adorno's prehistory of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Odysseus frees himself of the chains of myth only through his own self-depredation and thus emerges as the proto-typical bourgeois subject of the culture industry. In the history of the present that is Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, the enlightened practices of clinical institutionalization and mass incarceration reform the brutal discipline of public torture only through more systematic, quiet, and thus efficient forms of an increasingly anonymous and ever-expanding penal net. In both *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *Discipline and Punish*, the violation of human existence at the level of bodily integrity signals the universal failure or ineluctable dialectical success of reason. As an antidote to the failed rationality of modernity, or so the argument goes, both the social theory of the Frankfurt School and the work of Foucault are forced into a kind of desocialized aesthetics of social inquiry. When Adorno cannot locate a nonviolent form of human interaction in the everyday practices of social existence, he presents mimetic art as the haven of the non-identical. When Foucault describes a network of power relations so infectious that resistance seems impossible, he presents the ancient Greek practice of an ethical aesthetics of self-making and care as a model for strategic bodily resistance.[4]

Yet the persuasiveness of this argument developed within the framework of the logic of rationality and reconstruction can only be maintained at a certain price. The logic of rationality and reconstruction must privilege *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as the proof text in the social theory of the Frankfurt School, undervalue or omit entirely Benjamin's work on image-construction and Adorno's interpretive philosophy, and reduce a consideration of Foucault to a discussion about instrumental rationality.[5] But pursuing the connection between the social theory of the early

Frankfurt School and the work of Foucault at the level of reason-turned-domination obscures what remains at best a hitherto unexamined connection between archaeology-genealogy and the logic of constructing constellations, as that logic has been developed in previous chapters of this study. Pace the argument advanced from the perspective of the logic of rationality and reconstruction, what interests us here is not the critique of reason in Foucault or Adorno and Benjamin but rather the methodological innovations that connect their unique brands of interpretive social inquiry. Put simply, what needs to be demonstrated in this section is *how* Foucault moves beyond hermeneutics, not in his failure to adopt the logic of rationality and reconstruction or in his acceptance of the radical logic of textuality and deconstruction, but instead in his own articulation of the logic of constructing constellations.[6] Foucault's archaeological-genealogical methods are indeed quite remarkable in this regard, for his description of the goal of his work is at times very much in keeping with the logic of constructing constellations and the conception of evidence or truth bearers that informs that logic.[7] It is not the reading of deep meanings or the evocation of planar signifiers that motivates Foucault's method of social inquiry. Instead, archaeology-genealogy is, as we shall see, often meant to do what the logic of constructing constellations does: its disenchanting interpretations make visible, as Foucault himself says, a *breach* of the self-evident nature of existing practices, institutions, cultural norms, and social formations.[8]

But clearly more needs to be said; important distinctions need to be clarified. Indeed, a consideration of the logic of constructing constellations in its Foucauldian form will allow us to see what happens when the role of the social critic who deploys that logic is not made explicit and when the conception of truth that informs that logic is developed not in terms of evidence but rather in the systems-theoretic terms of truth regimes. The central argument here is that the logic of constructing constellations requires both an explicit account of the social critic and a nonsystemic account of truth as truth bearers—neither of which Foucault adequately provides, as we shall see. In other words, when viewed from the perspective of the logic of constructing constellations, Foucault is

right to avoid the deep hermeneutics and planar deconstruction of textuality and focus instead on the empirical and relational character of human practices and their interpretations or constructions. However, he is wrong to think that such a focus excuses social inquiry from reflexively incorporating the role of the social critic and the potentially context-transforming truths that result from a breach of the self-evident. The overarching purpose of this section is thus to develop the method and truth of Foucauldian archaeology-genealogy from *within* the logic of constructing constellations. Such a development both links the social theory of the Frankfurt School to the work of Foucault in a new way and helps to frame an even more promising version of the logic of constructing constellations in the reflexive sociology of Pierre Bourdieu.

The methods of archaeology appeal to Foucault for two reasons. On the one hand, archaeology is about context-sensitive retrieval. It is not the deep meanings of texts or the hidden truths of documents but rather the empirical remains or decaying monuments of a vanished or emergent form of empirical social life that interest the archaeologist. On the other hand, the archaeologist's context-sensitivity makes him potentially something more than a mere value-neutral historiographer or collector of the ruins of the social. His context-sensitive retrievals make visible from within a given social context (epistemological field or episteme, as Foucault says) materials that have hitherto been overlooked, forgotten, neglected, or abandoned.[9] When such materials are brought to light or thematized, they have the potential to transform the existing context in which they were once embedded. They force us to view the past and present differently. For Foucault, the point of archaeological analysis is not to read texts but to show that the natural history of social life may be interpreted without appeals to meaning and intentionality.

Thus, when viewed methodologically, the logic of archaeology in many ways already resonates with the logic of constructing constellations. A context-sensitive social inquirer or archaeologist retrieves, or rescues, what traditional hermeneutic forms of analysis miss and constructs or interprets that material in ways that alter existing contexts. Archaeology, Foucault argues in *The Archaeology*

of Knowledge, is "a method that is neither formalizing nor interpretive" in any familiar sense of the word *interpretive*.[10] Instead, archaeology, Foucault emphasizes, "avoids all interpretation; it does not question things said as to what they are hiding, what they were 'really' saying, in spite of themselves, the unspoken element that they contain, the proliferation of thoughts, images, or fantasies that inhabit them; but, on the contrary, it questions them as to their mode of existence, what it means to them to have come into existence, to have left traces, and perhaps to remain there, awaiting the moment when they might be of use once more; what it means to them to have appeared when and where they did—they and no others" (*AK*, 109).

Foucault's archaeological inquiry, then, wants to resist forms of interpretive social analysis that seek hidden meanings or intentional truths. But it would be misleading to conclude that Foucault's archaeology is therefore beyond hermeneutics altogether. Rather, that archaeology is better understood in the eclectic interpretive terms of Adorno's interpretive philosophy or what we have been calling the logic of constructing constellations. Indeed, the interpretive horizon of archaeology is congruent with that of the logic of constructing constellations: it is "not *a* science, *a* rationality, *a* mentality, *a* culture; it is a tangle of interpositivities whose limits and points of intersection cannot be fixed in a single operation" (*AK*, 159). It divides the diversity of the social world into different *figures*; it is not unifying but diversifying (*AK*, 160). For Foucault, as for Adorno's interpretive philosophy and Benjamin's image-construction, beyond hermeneutics lies not the radical logic of textuality and deconstruction but rather the logic of constructing constellations.[11]

It is thus not surprising to read in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* that an archaeological analysis of discourse formations concerns itself not with deep meanings or linguistic play of signifiers but with

> *the economy of the discursive constellation* to which [a given discourse] belongs. . . . The discourse under study may . . . be in relation of analogy, opposition, or complementarity with

> certain other discourses . . . one may describe between several discourses relations of mutual delimitation, each giving the other the distinctive marks of its singularity by the differentiation of its domain of application. . . . This whole group of relations forms a principle of determination that permits or excludes, within a given discourse, a certain number of statements: these are conceptual systematizations, enunciative series, groups and organizations of objects that might have been possible . . . but which are excluded by a discursive constellation at a higher level and in a broader space. A discursive formation does not occupy therefore all the possible volume that is opened up to it; . . . it is essentially incomplete. . . . Hence the fact that, taken up again, placed, and interpreted in a new constellation, a given discourse formation may reveal new possibilities. (*AK*, 66–67)

This passage—overlooked in contemporary studies of Foucault—should be neither neglected nor overburdened here. What needs to be emphasized is that Foucault is clearly not trying to interpret the deep textual meanings of discourse formations. What interests him is an interpretation or construction—by way of relations of analogy, opposition, and complementarity—of discursive constellations. Further, the goal of such interpretations or constructions of constellations is not mere data collection: archaeology doesn't simply gather dead facts of the matter. Rather, it seeks to show how a given context or discourse formation may be interpretively *transformed*: when "taken up again, placed, and interpreted in a new constellation," Foucault argues, "a given discourse formation may reveal *new* possibilities."[12]

Against those detractors of Foucault who move within the logic of rationality and reconstruction it consequently must be pointed out here that the logic of constructing constellations in Foucault is not always reducible to a mere transcendental descriptivism.[13] That logic, at least as it emerges in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, lays claim to context-transforming potential. In fact, Foucault thinks of the methods of archaeology as a *critique* of traditional hermeneutics and historiography's context-*insensitivities*, their "particular

repugnance to conceiving of difference" (*AK*, 12). Indeed, Foucault conceives of archaeology as a way of presenting the Other in the time of our own thought, as a way of presenting "non-identity through time," as a "decentering that leaves no privilege to any center" (*AK*, 12, 33, 205). Foucault's inflated and metaphoric language aside, it is clear that an archaeology of knowledge is meant to do more than merely describe or traditionally interpret the meaning of the world.[14]

Yet unlike Adorno's account of interpretive philosophy, the logic of constructing constellations in Foucault is not well equipped to answer questions regarding the role of the social critic and the context-transforming truths of her archaeological interpretations. We know from the discussion of Benjamin's image-construction in chapter 2 that the intersection between constructing constellations, social critic, and truth is quite complex and therefore needs to be clarified, as Adorno in fact argues in his critique and appropriation of Benjamin's work. Foucault is also aware of the complex questions raised in his archaeological method, as disclaimers about the role of the social critic and questions about truth in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* make abundantly clear. On the one hand, Foucault raises and then dismisses the need to do something other than mythologize away the role of the social critic: "I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face. Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write" (*AK*, 17). On the other hand, Foucault poses and leaves unanswered the question of truth: "What descriptive efficacy can one afford these new [archaeological] analyses?" (*AK*, 71).[15]

Even more so than in Benjamin's Arcades Project, however, Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* simply leaves undeveloped the role of the social critic who deploys the logic of constructing constellations and the context-transforming truth orientations of those constructions. Of course, Foucault never develops an account of the affect or standpoint of the social critic, but a brief examination of Foucault's genealogy of power/knowledge in *Discipline and Punish* and the conflation of truth with power in an account of

regimes of truth will allow us to clarify by way of contrast the major shortcoming of Foucault's deployment of the logic of constructing constellations. As we shall see in the remainder of this section, one of the chief problems with Foucauldian method is its handling of power/knowledge and conception of truth.[16]

From the vantage point of the logic of constructing constellations Foucault's *Discipline and Punish could* be read as the material interpretation of two different economies of constellations of the social practices of modern power—a context-sensitive construction that juxtaposes the 1757 torture and dismemberment of Damiens the regicide with the humane image of a modern, enlightened prison design. In the former, a constellation of power relations is interpreted in all of its spectacular sovereign, public, inefficient brutality and micrological detail without regard for its deep meanings. The king is violated, and the violator is now subject to the absolute and repressive authority of the head of the state.

In the latter, an interpretation of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon is similarly constructed. Foucault describes how the Panopticon proposal calls for an annular building with a tower at its center. On the periphery are isolated cubicles. The back and front walls of each cubic cell have windows. The back window allows natural light to enter the cell, while the front window makes the contents and activities in each cell visible from the central guard-tower (which itself is opaque and one-directional: an observer may or may not be present at any given moment). Thus interpreted, the latter (which, of course, never really happens) is everything the torture of Damiens (which is documented less than one hundred years earlier) is not: quiet, civilized, private, efficient. Constructing a constellation of these two economies of power—the one subject-centered and the other systemic—breaches or disenchants the ineluctably self-evident nature of morally progressive reforms of modern institutionalization. This interpretation of modes of disciplinary and penal practices tells us nothing about the meaning or linguistic play of such progressive practices. Instead, according to the logic of constructing constellations, it makes explicit and forces us to see how what empirically counts as punishment and power and humanity is transformed in a given social context at a

certain historical juncture in modernity; it makes explicit, that is, how a new physics of power emerges in modern life.

Yet it is apparent in this study that Foucault is not going to develop his insights into the context-transforming truths of concrete power relations in modern life through the methodological prism of the logic of constructing constellations. Rather, Foucault wants to make the unempirical claim that the design for the Panopticon is a general and generalizable systemic feature of modern society and its institutions of power. Such a claim puts him, in very real ways, within the orbit of the problems that emerge in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, as the logic of rationality and reconstruction persistently points out. But a leveling analysis of power/knowledge is not the necessary outcome of *Discipline and Punish.* What could have been a materialist interpretation of two economies of modern power is needlessly reduced to a general historical metaphor for the emergence of a disciplinary society. In fact, in his analysis Foucault goes so far as to assert that "[t]he movement from one project to the other, from a schema of exceptional discipline to one of a generalized surveillance, rests on a historical transformation: the gradual extension of the mechanisms of discipline throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, their spread throughout the whole social body, the formation of what might be called in general the disciplinary society" (*DP*, 209).

Again, when viewed from the logic of constructing constellations, there are two intertwined reasons for such a historical reductionism in Foucault's analysis here. First, Foucault's eagerness to extend his vague and unempirical critique of the modern subject leads him to reduce all concrete forms of human knowledge and practice to power: a genealogy of power, Foucault suggests, would be a genealogy of the modern soul (*DP*, 29). In this way, the context-sensitive, empirical character of his archaeology of discourse formations is dulled by his context-*insensitive* genealogical critique of modern "man." Indeed, Foucault views the modern "technology of power" as "the very principle both of the humanization of the penal system and of the knowledge of man" (*DP*, 23). An interpretation of power thus grows indistinguishable from a general assertion about mankind or the subject of knowledge. Or,

as Foucault himself says, "these power-knowledge relations are to be analysed, therefore, not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system, but, on the contrary, the subject who knows; the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects" (*DP*, 27–28).

Second, just as Foucault reduces knowledge to power, he reduces modern power to systemic relations and then violates the logic of constructing constellations he himself articulates in his archaeology. Rather than interpret modern power mechanisms so as to make visible their context-transforming potential—to determine, as Foucault says in his later work, those "points where change is possible and desirable"—Foucault presents something more akin to *intrinsic descriptions* of power contexts and their effects.[17] In this way, his analysis in *Discipline and Punish* is neither traditionally hermeneutical nor beyond hermeneutics in the rich sense of the logic of constructing constellations. Instead, Foucault simply *describes* modern power as being everywhere, transmitting itself, running throughout the social body, infecting every aspect of individual bodily integrity and human action. Power is strategic and yet gridlike; it is always already there, producing itself in a kind of self-replicating intensification of relations. Power is not ideological distortion or deception. Instead, it is an enabling producer of specific effects and a limiting surveyor of the possible range of those effects. In Foucault's own words, "power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up" (*DP*, 202). In the badly *deformed* logic of constructing constellations that plagues the analysis in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, all social formations, productions, and practices are functionally punched out in a systemic account of power: Human bodies are made docile, societies are "panopticized." The analysis in *Discipline and Punish* thus amounts to a needless descriptivization of power.

In light of the difficulties encountered in *Discipline and Punish*, it is understandable that Foucault is pressed by his supporters

to work out the precise connection between the methodological innovations that define his mode of social inquiry and the truths that such innovations are to present. In a 1977 interview, Foucault tries to sort out the relation between power and truth. Foucault is now using the concept of apparatus or regime to describe power/knowledge networks. Such apparatuses or regimes are supposed to capture how modern power produces not only bodily effects but also true effects. There is, according to Foucault, a "general functioning of an apparatus of truth."[18] From Foucault's perspective, the truth of an archaeological-genealogical interpretation is not to be cashed out at the level of context-transforming evidence, truth bearers, or truth candidates. Instead, truth is simply "a *system* of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements" ("Truth," 133, my emphasis). "Truth," according to Foucault, is "linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it. . . . A 'regime' of truth" ("Truth," 133). "Truth," in short, "is already power" ("Truth," 133).

From the interpretive, materialist-oriented perspective of the logic of constructing constellations, Foucault is right to maintain that "truth is a thing of this world" ("Truth," 131). We could restate such a claim by saying that the truths of the logic of constructing constellations are always context-dependent or context-relevant. Foucault is also right to think that "it's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power . . . but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time" ("Truth," 133). We could restate this point by saying that context-relevant interpretations of power have context-transforming potential—they detach or retrieve evidence that is threatened by social, economic, and cultural forms of hegemony. But Foucault fails to develop how and in what sense such a context-transforming detachment may be understood. In Foucault, a systemic account of power/knowledge is not merely in a circular relation with truth but rather tends to grow indistinguishable from it. Both are generally functioning apparatuses or regimes with specific effects, both are systems, both are productive. But are both true?

Such a question is not a new one in the literature devoted to examining Foucault's work. In fact, the normative logic of rationality and reconstruction has often been eager to criticize Foucault for his crypto-normative account of truth. In a brief exposé Habermas argues that Foucault "contrasts his critique of power with the 'analysis of truth' in such a fashion that the former becomes deprived of the normative yardstick that it would have to borrow from the latter."[19] But when considered from within the logic of constructing constellations, the crucial question is, we know, a rather different one: How can *any* conception of truth be developed in methodologically productive ways when truth is conceived of solely in the terms of a systems theoretic of power? We saw in chapter 2 how the problem of truth persists in Benjamin's image-construction. Yet the most promising conception of truth in Benjamin's methodological innovations is linked not to power but to historical evidence. Indeed, Benjamin argues that a context-sensitive image-construction is potentially context-transforming to the extent that it interprets evidence of *another* image of social relations. Such an interpretation is anything but a mere intrinsic description of a given context of power relations and their true effects. Even Axel Honneth, who moves within the logic of rationality and reconstruction, and whose work we shall consider briefly in chapter 5, acknowledges that in Benjamin's image-constructions "fragments of another image of social integration necessarily emerge: here, the experiential worlds of different groups and collectives represent not so much the mere material of domination but rather the stubborn energies themselves from which the movement of social life emerges."[20] In Benjamin's image-construction, social relations and cultural productions are in no way reducible to the reproductive, functionalizing effects of power relations. Instead, they are charged with context-transforming potential. For Benjamin, material contexts of domination harbor historical evidence that just might alter existing, power-infected social contexts. Put another way, from the perspective of the logic of constructing constellations in Benjamin to say that truth is a "thing of this world" is to say that *the context-dependency of historical evidence is precisely what makes it retrievable and potentially context-transforming.*

Moreover, we saw in chapters 2 and 3 that Adorno's interpretive philosophy does not reduce a conception of unintentional truth or truth bearers to power. To be sure, Adorno is clearly not immune to the seductive thesis of a systems theoretic of power. Repeatedly in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, for example, he casts the culture industry in quasi-Foucauldian terms, as an anonymous system of forces, as a totality of relations, as a mechanism that punches out subjects.[21] But even there, the industrialization of culture is an "open lie," an enchantment or enlightened mythologization of social relations and practices (*DofE*, 144). Hence, the truth orientation of Adorno's interpretive philosophy must be distinguished rather sharply from the power/knowledge focus of Foucault's archaeology-genealogy. For Adorno, it is the task of the social critic who deploys the logic of constructing constellations not merely to describe existing social relations and practices but to interpret them—to produce a change-causing gesture, to disenchant them.[22] In contradistinction to Foucault, Adorno is in no way convinced that social life is reducible to systemic power, as both the analysis in chapters 2 and 3 and this often overlooked passage from Adorno's *Minima Moralia* make abundantly clear: "The world is systematized horror, but therefore it is to do the world too much honor to think of it entirely as a system; for its unifying principle is division, and it reconciles by asserting unimpaired the irreconcilability of the general and the particular" (*MM*, 113).

Unlike Foucault's archaeology-genealogy in *Discipline and Punish*, then, the logic of constructing constellations refuses to cede honor to the thesis of systemic power by merely describing its success. Put another way, according to the logic of constructing constellations in Adorno, a power system is only an empirical fact to the extent that it is also a spell. In a 1968 lecture to German sociologists, Adorno makes precisely this point:

> The increasing autonomy of the system as a whole from those who constitute it, including those in control, has reached its limit. It has become a general fate, which now finds expression, as Freud put it, in an omnipresent free-floating anxiety; free-floating because it is no longer able to attach itself to

> anything that is alive, either people or classes. In the final analysis, however, it is only the relationships between human beings that lie buried beneath the relations of production which have been rendered autonomous. *The omnipotent social order thereby creates its own ideology, and renders it virtually powerless. However powerful a spell it may cast, this nevertheless remains just a spell. If sociology, rather than being a willing purveyor of welcome information for agencies and interest groups, is to achieve something of that purpose for which it was originally conceived, then it must contribute, however modestly, by means which are not themselves subject to universal fetishization, toward breaking the spell.*[23]

Of course, Foucault rejects any possibility of ideology critique in the tradition of consciousness-raising.[24] But as we saw in chapters 2 and 3 and again in the earlier portions of our examination of Foucault's archaeology in this section, the logic of constructing constellations bears more resemblance to *rescuing* critique than it does to consciousness-raising. The crucial difference between the logic of constructing constellations in the social theory of the Frankfurt School and the archaeology-genealogy of Foucault thus turns not on an acceptance or rejection of the terms of ideology critique, for Benjamin's image-construction and Adorno's interpretive philosophy are beyond the traditional hermeneutical presuppositions of the deep readings of ideology critique, as we know. Rather, what distinguishes Benjamin and Adorno's social theory is its ability to perceive the relations of social life not merely as smooth-functioning regimes or apparatuses but also as a reservoir for social *change*. According to the logic of constructing constellations, the spell of a given social context may indeed be a power-ridden social fact. But it is not therefore to be endowed with the unbreakable force of an enchanted system. Like the other empirical elements of the ruins of the social or the trash of history, power is a thing of *this* social world, *this* practical context. For the social critic who deploys the logic of constructing constellations, social power is merely *a part* of the empirical puzzle of human relations—a kind of symbolic capital,

as we shall see in the next section on Bourdieu—and not its all-determining mechanism.[25]

2. REFLEXIVE SOCIOLOGY

In contemporary French social theory the work of Pierre Bourdieu —which focuses on the material economic character of symbolic forms and the struggles social actors engage in to acquire the symbolic capital or social power invested in such forms—has also been steadily criticized from the perspective of the normative logic of rationality and reconstruction. Axel Honneth, for example, argues that Bourdieu's economizing instrumentalization of the struggle for forms of symbolic capital fails to distinguish "between a struggle over distribution and a normative-practical struggle" for recognition in a *moral* sense.[26] Working from within the logic of rationality and reconstruction, Honneth's analysis of Bourdieu's work draws the unsurprising conclusion that "the struggle for the social recognition of moral models clearly obeys a different logic" ("Symbolic," 200).

Yet whatever the normative weaknesses or shortcomings of Bourdieu's account of social struggle, the persuasiveness of the critique of his work that is developed within the framework of the logic of rationality and reconstruction tends to obscure his methodological contributions to social theory. The logic of rationality and reconstruction aside, what interests us here is precisely what interested us in our previous consideration of Foucault: not Bourdieu's "bad" account of the normative features of reason but his interpretive mode of empirically based social inquiry and his reflexive account of the social critic. For Bourdieu, like Foucault, Adorno, and Benjamin, does not try to develop a normative logic of rationality and reconstruction, nor does he seek to move beyond hermeneutics by way of the radical logic of textuality and deconstruction. Rather, as we shall see in this section, his work is perhaps best understood in methodological terms as a rich version of the logic of constructing constellations in which a uniquely *reflexive* hermeneutics of retrieval and disenchantment is developed.[27]

The logic of constructing constellations is perhaps no more apparent than in Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, a sociological study of taste in France that tries to overcome, as Bourdieu himself says, social theory's "inability to think relationally."[28] Put most generally, the methodological relationism that animates Bourdieu's *Distinction* takes aim at Kant but shoots far beyond him. In fact, Bourdieu seeks to relate the symbolic materials of culture—those apparently natural marks of sociocultural distinction, such as a taste for beer and rugby or wine and badminton—to class struggles in which the distinctions and privileges accorded such natural markings are distributed and fought for. Bourdieu's interpretation of taste draws on copious empirical research into the everyday artistic, sporting, dressing, and eating habits of French men and women in the 1970s, including surveys and interviews, interspersed with numerous photographs. In so doing, it seeks to make visible social antagonisms and class conflict not at the level of the struggle for scarce goods and resources but rather at the often overlooked, excluded, or invisible level of the economy of cultural practices in which the struggle for *symbolic* domination takes place.[29] The making visible of such a forgotten economy of symbolic relations and struggles requires an interpretive approach that cannot simply limit itself to discerning the deep meaning of taste since, as Bourdieu points out, "the very meaning and value of a cultural object varies according to the system of objects in which it is placed; detective stories, science fiction or strip cartoons may be entirely prestigious cultural assets or be reduced to their ordinary value" (*Distinction*, 88). Indeed, when viewed from the perspective of the logic of constructing constellations, it is not the deep meanings of symbols that must be interpreted but rather their context-relevant functions as material capital and the status, power, prestige, and distinction accorded to the social actors who possess such symbols.

Once interpreted according to the logic of constructing constellations, the invisibility of taste and the judgments that inform it are shown to be embodied, classifying and classified, and social through and through. The attempt to gain the practical know-how or discriminating power of taste is for Bourdieu not a disinterested

or deep metaphor but a materialist relation, a *struggle*, for social power. Taste is thus "class culture turned into nature, that is, *embodied*"; it "functions as a sort of social orientation, a 'sense of one's place' " (*Distinction*, 190, 466). In the end, taste is one of the practical ways in which social groups express, achieve, and preserve symbolic domination. Put in crudely Foucauldian terms, we might say that Bourdieu's sociological interpretation of taste seeks a breach of the self-evidently disinterested and aesthetic character of that category. Put in abbreviated Benjaminian and Adornian terms, we might say that Bourdieu's study of taste is a kind of sociological montage or social physiognomy that makes visible those taken-for-granted, natural, deeply ingrained empirical practices and struggles that in fact determine taste in all its relational complexity. Put in Bourdieu's own terms, by constructing a constellation of the "forgotten dimension of the class struggle" in a study of taste, not only the limiting but also the enabling conditions of the struggle for symbolic capital are evidenced (*Distinction*, 483). When social agents struggle for control of the symbolic order, they are not engaged in textual activities of reading or evocation but rather *practical* ones of doing. What Bourdieu's construction or interpretation of taste shows is that the struggle for symbolic capital isn't merely a struggle to interpret the world in variously meaningful or evocative ways. It is also an ongoing struggle to transform it from within.[30]

In the light of such a practical emphasis, it is perhaps not surprising that Bourdieu's deployment of the logic of constructing constellations in his study of taste takes pains to distinguish itself from the radical logic of textuality and deconstruction, especially in this instance Derrida's evocative reading of Kant in *La Verite en Peinture* (1978).[31] In a decisive postscript to *Distinction*, Bourdieu rejects the "pure reading" of the radical logic of textuality and deconstruction (*Distinction*, 494). Bourdieu argues that Derrida's style of reading is purely philosophical and thus not well suited to the empirical and practical tasks of social inquiry and cultural study.[32] Indeed, he suggests that the planar version of the text model simply puffs up the empirical social field into linguistic frames to be traced, thereby aestheticizing and de-realizing the

social character of taste (*Distinction*, 495). We have already described this problem as one of linguistic ontologism in our discussion of the radical logic of textuality and deconstruction in chapter 1. Bourdieu's rejection of the pure reading style of the radical logic of textuality and deconstruction in the context of his own more materialist analysis of taste is instructive both of the empirical shortcomings of that style and of the crucial difference between the radical logic of textuality and deconstruction and the logic of constructing constellations. For Bourdieu, "a philosophically distinguished reading of the *Critique of Judgement* cannot be expected to uncover the social relationship of distinction" because it is itself not a sociological interpretation of symbolic struggle but rather a manifestation of that struggle (*Distinction*, 500). In its pure reading, deconstruction simply distinguishes itself as a purveyor of the symbolic capital needed to trace Kant's *Third Critique*. The radical logic of textuality and deconstruction, Bourdieu wants to say, reduces social life to linguistic texts, only to evoke them (or trace their framings) in pure readings. Bourdieu, by contrast, wants to thematize the *social* uses of symbolic capital as an instrument of everyday symbolic domination.

If it is true that the logic of constructing constellations in Bourdieu's work is to be understood in stark contrast to the radical logic of textuality and deconstruction, then what precisely are the crucial points of connection and contrast to the work of Foucault, Benjamin, and Adorno? There are several important aspects to be highlighted in this regard, including Bourdieu's critique of Foucault's systems theoretic of power; Bourdieu's notion of field; his reflexive account of the context-sensitive social critic; and his sense of the context-transforming, disenchanting potential of social inquiry. I want to take up each of them in turn to clarify further Bourdieu's unique contribution to the logic of constructing constellations.

First, in the case of Foucault, Bourdieu avoids the systems theoretic of power that as we saw in the last section undermines much of the potential richness of Foucault's methodological insights. In fact, Bourdieu points out that, unlike Foucault but in keeping with Adorno, he does not conceive of power in terms of regimes, systems, or autonomous apparatuses:

> I am very much against the notion of apparatus . . . an apparatus is an infernal machine, programmed to accomplish certain purposes no matter what, when, or where. . . .
>
> Now, under certain historical conditions, which must be examined empirically, a field may start to function as an apparatus. When the dominant manage to crush and annul the resistance and the reactions of the dominated, when all movements go exclusively from the top down, the effects of domination are such that the struggle and the dialectic that are constitutive of the field cease. There is history only as long as people revolt, resist, act. Total institutions—asylums, prisons, concentration camps—or dictatorial states are attempts to institute an end to history.[33]

As Bourdieu's analyses in *Distinction* make clear, power may indeed be "everywhere," but it is not for that reason ungraspable. Indeed, for Bourdieu the struggle for symbolic domination is a practical conflict over the acquisition of the distinguished and distinguishing poker chips, as it were, of the game of social life. It is the task of the analyses in *Distinction* to make explicit how such a veiled game works in a given field of social relations and not how it functions automatically as a totalizing system.

The introduction of the conception of social reality as a *field* of empirical relations of struggle rather than one of systemic power or texts marks still another way in which Bourdieu avoids the pitfalls of Foucault and in his own way advances the relational character of social life shared by Benjamin and Adorno as well. Whereas Foucault thinks of social life as disciplinary and regimelike, Benjamin and Adorno, as we have seen, think of social life in terms of ruins, trash, or puzzles. Like Benjamin and Adorno, and unlike Foucault, Bourdieu thinks of social life in empirical terms as contexts or fields of relations in which systemic power is not the determining feature. Indeed, Bourdieu claims that his conception of the field of social life sharply divides his work on power and domination from Foucault: "I would like to stress everything that separates Foucault's theory of domination as discipline or 'drilling,' or, in another order, the metaphor of the open and capillary network

from such a concept as that of field" (*RS*, 167). Fields are perhaps best understood in general terms as empirical-relational sites where social life—in all of its complex and fragmentary antagonisms—is (re)produced. Material social relations are for Bourdieu the force field, as it were, of society. For Bourdieu, the real is not systemic power but the relational character of *social* power.[34] The concept of field is meant to capture the dense facticity of the symbolic realm and its struggles—the context-dependent and relational character of all social life—independent of intentionality and textual meaning in much the same way that expressions such as the trash of history in Benjamin or riddle-image in Adorno are intended. Bourdieu says that "[i]n analytic terms, a field may be defined as a network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.)" (*RS*, 97).

To be sure, Bourdieu's conception of field, like similar conceptions in the social theory of the Frankfurt School, does not pretend to solve once and for all the complexity of social relations. Rather, it seeks to do a better job of capturing the empirical character of such relations. Indeed, the chief point of conceiving of social relations in terms of fields rather than texts is to link practical and empirical insights to a micrological mode of construction or interpretation that is beyond traditional hermeneutics. It is the field of social life that, according to Bourdieu, must be the focus of research operations in social analysis (*RS*, 107). Of course, Bourdieu admits that "[t]he notion of field does not provide ready-made answers to all possible queries, in the manner of the grand concepts of 'theoreticist theory' which claims to explain everything and in the right order. Rather, its major virtue, at least in my eyes, is that it promotes a mode of construction that has to be rethought anew every time" (*RS*, 110). Yet to say that an interpretive mode of construction must be rethought anew every time is—when understood

according to the logic of constructing constellations—only to say that sociological interpretation is in motion and dynamic, that it does not rest on methodological ideals, as we saw Adorno remind Popper in the previous chapter. It is to say that there is no sure key or regulative truth to the logic of constructing constellations, as Adorno points out.

Bourdieu's account of the social as dense, conflictual, and field-like rather than systemic (or textual) means that the social critic must have an extreme context-sensitivity to embedded practices and things overlooked in a given social field. In a wonderful reflection on the interpretive task of the context-sensitive social critic, Bourdieu says, "It goes without saying that in daily life I do not constantly do sociology but, unwittingly, I take something like social 'snapshots' that I will develop later. I believe that part of what is called 'intuition,' which undergirds many research hypotheses or analyses, originates in those snapshots, often very old ones. From this angle, the work of the sociologist is akin to that of the writer or novelist (I think in particular of Proust): like the latter, our task is to provide access to and to explicate experiences, generic or specific, that are ordinarily overlooked or unformulated" (*RS*, 205–6).

It would not be an overstatement to suggest that such a passage could have been written by Benjamin or by Adorno himself. The emphasis on the imagistic character of historical practice, the idea of aging social snapshots, the insistence on the peculiarly context-sensitive task, informed by Proustian intuition, of accessing and retrieving experiences "that are ordinarily overlooked or unformulated"—all suggest that the mode of social inquiry Bourdieu deploys is "beyond" hermeneutics only insofar as it rejects the logic of textuality and deconstruction and instead develops and deploys the logic of constructing constellations.[35] In fact, it is no accident that Bourdieu describes his interpretation of taste in *Distinction* as a discursive montage (*RS*, 66). Such a montage method, as we saw especially in our discussion of Benjamin, interprets evidence or truth bearers that other interpretive forms of social study simply miss.

To be sure, however, Bourdieu's work does not simply repeat the logic of constructing constellations—now shorn of its Foucauldian

reductionisms—as it emerges and is modified in the social theory of the Frankfurt School. Indeed, Bourdieu makes a crucial contribution to that logic by cashing out the context-sensitive role of the social critic not in terms of affects like melancholy or hopefulness but rather in terms of *reflexivity*. Put differently, Bourdieu's reflexive sociology is another, in fact *more precise*, way to describe the context-sensitive role of the social critic who deploys the logic of constructing constellations. Moreover, Bourdieu's account of reflexivity helps to distinguish the interpretive and empirical role of the social critic in the logic of constructing constellations from the accounts of evocation we saw in Derridean-inspired discussions of the radical logic of textuality and deconstruction, such as those of Clifford and Tyler.

On Bourdieu's account, reflexivity is an attempt to incorporate the context-sensitive, participatory aspects of the activities of the social critic while avoiding the observational or over-the-shoulder reading strategies (Geertz) and subjectively self-centered evocations (Clifford and Tyler) that are the hallmarks of the sublogics of textuality and deconstruction examined and criticized in chapter 1.[36] Bourdieu says that "[t]o objectivize the objectivizing point of view of the sociologist is something that is done quite frequently. . . . When we say 'the sociologist is inscribed in a historical context,' we generally mean the 'bourgeois sociologist' and leave it at that. But objectivation of any cultural producer demands more than pointing to—and bemoaning—his class background and location, his 'race,' or his gender. We must not forget to objectivize his position in the universe of cultural production" (*RS*, 69). Reflexivity here thus has little to do with linguistic self-reference or play or a vague, bourgeois methodological self-awareness. Instead, in most general terms for our discussion here, Bourdieu's reflexive sociology is about making explicit *types* of context-sensitivity.

As far as I can discern, Bourdieu's version of reflexivity occurs at three intertwined levels: at the level of the social critic himself, at the level of the field of academic discourse (the context of science, sociology, history, etc.), and at the level of a critique of society. The first level of reflexivity describes the coordinates of the researcher, or what Bourdieu calls the researcher's "biographical idiosyncrasy"

(*RS*, 71). The second level of reflexivity describes the coordinates of those coordinates or what Bourdieu calls the position the researcher occupies in "academic space and the biases implicated in the view she takes by virtue of being 'off-sides' or 'out of the game' " (*RS*, 71–72). While the third level of reflexivity makes social inquiry critical and political. "By helping the progress of science and thus growth of knowledge about the social world," Bourdieu argues, "*reflexivity makes possible a more responsible politics*, both inside and outside of academia" (*RS*, 194). Hence the political force of the logic of constructing constellations is decidedly *not* dependent upon the shock of an image but on the context-sensitive *reflexivity* of the social critic.

Now, the way in which such a threefold methodological reflexivity is achieved, according to Bourdieu, is by way of participant objectivation (*RS*, 68). On Bourdieu's account, participant objectivation transforms the everyday relation of the social critic to his universe of study—it makes him a stranger in his own context or field and makes him at home in an estranging context or field. Put another way, participant objectivation does for the reflexive Bourdieuean social critic what melancholy-hopefulness does for the Adornian social critic: both make possible the context-sensitive feel necessary to make the mundane exotic and the exotic mundane in an attempt "to render explicit what in both cases is taken for granted" (*RS*, 68). Of course, Bourdieu himself is suspicious of the interpretive turn of contemporary social theory, but here we must recall that the logic of constructing constellations is itself a rather unique brand of interpretive social inquiry. When viewed from such a unique perspective, the making-it-explicit function of Bourdieu's account of reflexivity can be seen as an insight into the enabling, context-sensitive ways in which social critics thematize (interpret in Adorno's sense) and potentially transform human practices—and the contexts in which those practices take place—from *within*. First, the social critic makes explicit or thematizes the way in which she is embedded in her biography. Second, she makes explicit or thematizes the way in which that biography (or thematization) is embedded in the field of academic-scientific practice. And, finally, such thematizations provide the necessary resources not merely for

more first-order thematizations but also for second-order thematizations that have the potential to transform "what is taken for granted" in existing social contexts or fields. It is precisely for this reason that Bourdieu argues that the achievement of genuine reflexivity makes social inquiry not poetic but context-transforming: "reflexive sociology allows us to understand, to account for the world . . . to *necessitate the world*" (*RS*, 199).

In this way, Bourdieu's account of reflexivity bears little or no resemblance to the pseudo-reflexivity of the radical logic of textuality and deconstruction, presents a better version of the account of affect in Adorno, and stands as an antidote to Foucault's failure to develop an account of the social critic turned archaeologist-genealogist.[37] Context-sensitive interpretations of social life are not reducible to poetic evocations or mere intrinsic descriptions of systemic power networks. Nor must they be the exclusive province of melancholy or negative dialecticians. In Bourdieu, reflexive participant objectivation describes both the practically enabling character of the empirically embedded social critic and the potentially context-transforming potential of that critic's interpretive necessitations.

In short, Bourdieu's account of reflexivity constitutes a significant and ongoing development of the logic of constructing constellations in social theory today. Bourdieu rightly faults both Foucault and the social theory of the Frankfurt School for all too often exchanging grand theories and generalizing claims about Enlightenment for empirical research. When viewed from the logic of constructing constellations, certainly texts such as *Discipline and Punish* and *Dialectic of Enlightenment* are susceptible to such a charge, as even the logic of rationality and reconstruction points out albeit for different reasons, as we saw in the previous section of this chapter. And, indeed, much of Adorno's work, including his study of Kierkegaard, which we examined in chapter 3, does not follow up on his own 1931 insight that the days of grand theories are over and that the micrological materialism of interpretive philosophy needs to collaborate with sociology. Bourdieu's reflexive sociology should be viewed as a welcome corrective to grand social theorizing in *both* its German *and* French guises, and

as a much needed clarification of the reflexively interpretive role of the empirically oriented, context-sensitive social critic.

Consequently, there is simply no good reason, despite Bourdieu's occasional protestations, to uncouple Bourdieu's work from the logic of constructing constellations in the social theory of the Frankfurt School or from some of the methodological insights in the work of Foucault. On the contrary, there are, as we have seen in this section, several compelling reasons to make explicit and deepen the methodological connections between Benjamin, Adorno, and Foucault. In so doing, the rich logic of constructing constellations gains coherence, clarity, and contemporaneity as a viable materialist alternative to the pervasive logic of textuality and deconstruction in social theory and cultural study. Bourdieu's reflexive sociology reminds social critics that in a fragmented social world of symbolic forms, beyond the traditional hermeneutical tasks of deep text-reading, and in place of the radical but pure evocations of an interpretation beyond interpretation, there is another option: A *disenchanting* construction of symbolic social struggles that depends not on a vague utopianism or theology of redemption but on the practical or change-causing force of a genuinely reflexive thematization of the social field.[38]

5

CONSTRUCTING URBAN CONSTELLATIONS

The preceding four chapters have argued that a distinct *logic of constructing constellations* is at work in the social theory and method of Benjamin, Adorno, Foucault, and Bourdieu. Further, it has tried to show that that logic, though beyond traditional hermeneutics in so many ways, is nevertheless uniquely interpretive in its methods of retrieval and disenchantment. Benjamin's image-constructions, Adorno's interpretive philosophy, Foucault's archaeology-genealogy, and Bourdieu's reflexive sociology—all these are best understood as materialist modes of social inquiry that effectively recast interpretation as the context-sensitive thematization of embedded, unexamined, or forgotten cultural forms and social practices. Moreover, such context-sensitive interpretations, it was argued, are true in the sense that they thematize or reflexively make explicit evidence or truth bearers that are disenchanting and potentially context-transforming. Finally, it has been an overarching concern of the foregoing chapters to show that the logic of constructing constellations presents a materialist, more empirically oriented alternative to the more widely deployed sublogics of textuality and deconstruction in social theory and cultural analyses.

Such arguments have been advanced in two interlocking ways. First, I have developed the logic of constructing constellations in Benjamin, Adorno, Foucault, and Bourdieu with an eye toward theoretical clarification and, when necessary, theoretical emendation—this was especially the case in the discussion of truth as evidence or truth bearers in chapter 3. Second, the theoretical

clarifications and emendations that constitute the analysis of the previous chapters has been accompanied throughout by examples taken from the work of Benjamin, Adorno, Foucault, and Bourdieu; hence the attention devoted to Benjamin's image-construction of the Parisian Arcades, to Adorno's construction of the bourgeois *interieur*, to Foucault's analyses of power, and to Bourdieu's study of taste. Such examples were meant to show the theoretical logic of the constructing constellations at work in practical interpretations of social life. What emerged in these examples was the rich, and at times problematic, way in which the context-sensitive logic of constructing constellations connects empirical research to interpretation. Benjamin, Adorno, Foucault, and Bourdieu do not read or evoke the social text. Instead, their interpretations retrieve potentially context-transforming evidence. Such context-transforming interpretations have been characterized in the previous analyses as disenchanting precisely because they make explicit those embedded elements of social life that other forms of social inquiry—and social actors themselves—tend to take for granted.

The foregoing chapters have also sought to suggest that while the logic of constructing constellations stands as an interpretive materialist alternative to the logic of textuality and deconstruction in social theory, its context-sensitive and empirical focus might productively serve as a supplement to the logic of rationality and reconstruction. We saw in chapter 1 that although there is little question that the logic of rationality and reconstruction better captures the dialogic character of social life than does the logic of textuality and deconstruction, it remains an open question to what extent its normative emphasis on reconstructing communicative actions is compatible with a broad-based and materialist form of social inquiry. An analysis of social relations and their reifications must incorporate a wide array of political histories, cultural artifacts, and social practices, and it is in this regard that the logic of constructing constellations makes a much needed contribution to the logic of rationality and reconstruction: the logic of constructing constellations interprets evidence or truth bearers that the normatively restricted logic of rationality and reconstruction misses.

I want to concretize this study by deploying the logic of constructing constellations where, as we have also seen in the previous chapters, it is in many ways most at home—in interpretations of modern urban life. Like cultural anthropology and sociology, urban study is a particularly fruitful field for such a concluding investigation precisely because it demands a mode of inquiry that is both empirical and interpretive, context-sensitive and context-transforming. The first section of this chapter, then, draws on the work of Camilo José Vergara, whose study, *The New American Ghetto*, makes extensive use of photographs and interviews to construct or interpret the emergence of a new form of American urban existence by making visible decaying and threatened yet persistent and vibrant forms of that existence. To be sure, Vergara does not explicitly describe his investigations in terms of constructing constellations. But the methodological relationism that informs his analyses reveals deep affinities with that logic, as do Vergara's own descriptions of his work.

The second section of this chapter draws on the empirical research of Bourdieu's sometime collaborator, Loïc Wacquant, whose studies of boxing in Chicago also actualize the logic of constructing constellations. In fact, Wacquant's ethnography, as we shall see, not only avoids the pitfalls of the logic of textuality and deconstruction (for him, urban life and practices are decidedly not texts to be read or evoked) but also captures what the current developments in the normative logic of rationality and reconstruction tend to obscure. In Wacquant's study of Black Chicago, it is not the context-transcending, moral grammar of the struggle for recognition that is evidenced but rather the empirical struggle for social differentiation. In this way, I shall develop Wacquant's work here as both an exemplar of the logic of constructing constellations at work and as an immanent critique of recent investigations into the logic of rationality and reconstruction.

I. GHETTO LIFE IN AMERICA

The New American Ghetto is a series of sociological montages, picture puzzles of urban social life, arresting constructions of hope

and suffering—constellations. In the ghetto, where at least 40 percent of the population lives under the poverty line, the task of social inquiry is not to read deep meanings over the shoulder of those who live there or evoke the disembodied play of planar texts or merely to reconstruct distorted dialogs. Another approach is required. Vergara describes his unique approach in the following way:

> I first record the changes evident from close observation of images—that is, what has been added to or has disappeared from a block; what seems to be ailing and what seems to be thriving; and what is happening to the vacant land. Secondly, I compare aspects of different cities, for example, their commercial streets. I supplement the description through interviews with those who live and work in these neighborhoods. . . . Whenever possible, the collection has been organized into pictorial networks that begin with a panoramic shot covering several blocks. The sequence proceeds toward ever-smaller units photographed from the ground, the roof of a car, or the top of a smaller structure. Thus, we move from the panorama to shots of one of its single blocks or buildings, and then to selected details. Often I have repeated and added on to the sequence over the years, which allows the viewer to follow ongoing transformations. And this work is open ended. By carrying on the documentation themselves, others interested in these urban areas can detect new trends as they emerge.[1]

The innovative and context-sensitive use of photography (Vergara shoots film from ground level and from the rooftops of decayed buildings), the focus on the detailed and overlooked, and the interweaving of interviews and images make for an interpretation that shares much with the logic of constructing constellations. Vergara makes it clear he is interested not in a single image but in the cross-references, juxtapositions, contrasts, and contradictions that a montage of historical images can generate. Motion and micrological materialism are key aspects of interpretation here.

There is also a kind of rescuing critique at work. Vergara's context-sensitivity allows him to focus on what he calls the edges of

the new American ghetto—those "remote neighborhoods, forgotten corners, often lacking political representation or even a name, located by railroad lines, expressways, cemeteries, and industrial areas" (*Ghetto*, xiv). The interpretation of such edges retrieves evidence not merely of chaos and disorder and disintegration but also of a vibrant, albeit threatened, social existence. "By recording the voices and looks of ghettos," Vergara writes, "I hope to help rescue from oblivion a part of this nation's history and to capture the world that survivors themselves are shaping" (*Ghetto*, 11). When interpreted according to the logic of constructing constellations, "[t]oday's ghettos are diverse, rich in public and private responses to the environment, in expressions of cultural identity, and in reminders of history. These communities are uncharted territory; to be understood, their forms need to be identified, described, inventoried, and mapped" (*Ghetto*, 15).

Or again, Vergara says:

> Ghettos are important depositories of the nation's past, containing vestiges of its former wealth, of its capacity to make possible "the good life," and of its power to shape the future. Such remains include the long broad streets of Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit, with their imposing mansions, entertainment palaces (now sleeping like enormous turtles), or the railroad underpasses, yards, and lines that slice the city in all directions.
>
> Among those confined to ghettos are many residents who have been displaced. Former homes, where they spent their youth and raised a family, have become ruins or vacant lots. Cora Moody, the president of the tenants' association at the Hayes Homes in the Central Ward of Newark, lived for ten years in a now-derelict building, part of the Hayes development, that she calls "a piece of my history." Contrasting with what remains—the stinking vacant structure, with its broken windows and its entrance full of garbage and excrement—is the vital community that the building once anchored: "I was pregnant with my fifth child when I moved in there. I can see my kids playing hopscotch, I can hear them outside

> my window, calling up for money." Pointing to a littered, overgrown spot on the grounds, she says: "There used to be a shower there. My kids would use it at all times during the summer, even at midnight, and I would not be worried. There were public telephones in here; you could use them. You could wait, you did not have to get your own phone right away. We did not have to worry about people hurting us. There was a community of people you could trust and got along with." Cora explains why she sees the ruined building with so much affection, saying: "You cannot shift memories to another place. These are my greatest memories. They took all that away from us when they closed the building." The present is inscribed on a wall nearby: Shahonna Tovheedah in the mother-fucking house. If you don't like it kiss my ass. (*Ghetto*, 9)

The logic of constructing constellations both retrieves the broken promise of the good life recalled by Cora Moody and makes visible the violence and alienation expressed in Shahonna Tovheedah's graffiti. As a context-sensitive observer(photographer)-participant(interviewer), Vergara thematizes a peculiar mix of embedded hope and despair, community and isolation. And the idea that a context-transforming interpretation of ghetto life is naïve meets only with the sharpest of rebukes in Vergara's work: "In reply to those for whom dreams of a more just society have lost their power, and to those who believe that ghettos are necessary to have strong communities elsewhere, stand the haunting, defiant, and despairing words scribbled on the stairway of an East Harlem high-rise: 'Help me before I die, motherfucker!' " (*Ghetto*, 22).

There are three interconnected moments in particular that, when juxtaposed, perhaps best illustrate the logic of constructing constellations at work in Vergara's study. Let us call the first moment the revenge of nature, the second the revenge of capital, and the third the revenge of tradition. In each moment I shall incorporate images selected from Vergara's work into a social constellation of the new American ghetto.

Revenge of Nature

One of the most striking things about the new American ghetto is that its perennial description as a concrete jungle has gained a new but unintended precision. New ghettos are so ruined and uninhabited that the corrosive of nature has successfully asserted itself against historically produced objects and historically producing subjects. Nature—not culture—would appear to have triumphed here. For the inhabitants that remain, the reification of social life runs so deep in today's ghettos that, more often than not, history appears not to be made but seems to happen—not behind the backs of social actors but right in front of them. Concrete decays, grass grows, trash piles up, and local ghetto artwork responds to and incorporates such phenomena in its presentation of emergent concrete jungles. Sections of Detroit that were the scene of that city's 1967 uprising—a moment when men and women did in fact make history—now look like Midwestern prairies.

Today, as Vergara points out, a reified nature reveals itself to alienated and isolated residents whose existences are so damaged (and often so few in number) that they no longer seem able to make history, or even to clean it up. Occasionally, these areas are farmed, but that is the exception. In most cases, nature revenges itself upon a present that it now makes, and the price for such revenge is attenuated hope:

> Residents of poor communities intensely fear and dislike empty lots, seeing them as public garbage dumps, breeding grounds for rats, places to 'get high'—wasted spaces that are dark and dangerous at night. Empty land serving no useful social purpose conveys the message that people and their community are unwanted and forgotten.
>
> Physically and psychologically residents try to separate themselves from their surroundings. Living isolated behind locked doors, bars, and tall fences, they often remain attached to the memory of a neighborhood that exists only in their minds. Although most residents are resourceful and do what they can to keep up their homes, they feel overwhelmed by the trash, abandonment, and violence surrounding them. Their

1. West Side, Detroit, 1991 © Camilo José Vergara

2. Rosa Parks Boulevard, Detroit, 1987 © Camilo José Vergara

lack of trust in government is often justified, yet they cling to the hope that the city will revive. (*Ghetto*, 28)

Of course, not all the vacant lots of America's ghettos remain so or become farmlands. Some are in fact cleared, and in their

place new housing is erected. But such housing conveys much about another aspect of the reifying natural history of ghetto life: discontinuity. Whereas most original ghetto structures are or were made of brick and steel, and were often themselves notable for architectural reasons, the new townhousing of the ghetto is fabricated of plastic and wood. In a mosaic of photos of a South Bronx housing complex, where sturdy brick edifices decay and new townhouses replace them, Vergara makes visible the contradictory tensions of a persistent past that was supposed to live forever and a present one that is supposed to make do.

The past broke its promise of the good life, while the present can afford to make no such promise or, as Vergara himself says:

> When I first saw it in 1980, the building on 178th Street and Vyse Avenue seemed like a castle of brick and iron, filled with Puerto Rican and African American children. The late seventies and early eighties were times of pervasive destruction. Walking along the streets I had a sense of impending doom. Yet this particular building was so large, so useful, and seemed so solid that its abandonment and destruction were unthinkable.
>
> Fires began in the fall of 1980, in top-floor apartments. (This is a telltale sign of arson, because when a fire is started on the top floor it is understood that the residents will flee, so that charges of murder will not be raised.) Then scavengers moved in to remove the pipes, radiators, and appliances, leaving the water running to flood the apartments below and force the tenants to move out. The building was completely abandoned in January 1983.
>
> Continuity has been lost. In an extraordinary transformation taking place over thirteen years, a big, solid building with sixty-four apartments was replaced by three townhouses, built to accommodate six families. Brick, iron, and stone was replaced by wood and plastic; dark brown gave way to light blue; and where a courtyard with two staircases and a balustrade ringed the entrance, there are small lawns and some pavement for the owner to park a car. Two Bronxes are

3. 178th Street and Vyse Avenue, 1980 © Camilo José Vergara

> visible in these photographs: one that died too soon and one too flimsy to last. (*Ghetto*, 69)

Revenge of Capital

The young residents of today's American ghetto might find it difficult to believe that the broad boulevards that run through most major cities in America were once lined with places of consumption, entertainment, and service. Capital was the lifeblood and raison d'être of most American urban centers. But when commerce shifted to the suburbs, capital lived on in the ghetto in the most paradoxical of ways—as a return to a local economy of quasi-medieval peddling, where vendors sell everything from homegrown vegetables to homemade drugs. Meanwhile, the most frequently abandoned buildings that persist among the ruins of what were major commercial thoroughfares are those symbolic and literal storehouses of capital: banks. In fact, it is bank buildings, abandoned but sturdy, fortresslike, and expensive to demolish, that are the first edifices in the ghetto to be reoccupied by commercial and religious investors.

4. 178th Street and Vyse Avenue, 1982 © Camilo José Vergara

5. 178th Street and Vyse Avenue, 1983 © Camilo José Vergara

Under the imperatives of natural history, these buildings show themselves to be immensely secure in ways that other local structures, old and new, simply are not. Indeed, new ghetto townhouses may be made of plastic, but the depositories of capital are built to

6. 178th Street and Vyse Avenue, 1986 © Camilo José Vergara

7. 178th Street and Vyse Avenue, 1988 © Camilo José Vergara

outlive the objects they contain and the subjects who rely on their safety. Capital leaves, laboring subjects leave, and in their absence the storehouses of reified nature contain pizza joints, sex shops, and the fragility of isolated religious communities. There are no

8. 178th Street and Vyse Avenue, 1991 © Camilo José Vergara

9. 178th Street and Vyse Avenue, 1993 © Camilo José Vergara

banks in the new American ghettos; there are only bank buildings. Capital exacts its pound of flesh most ruthlessly in its absence.

Vergara writes: "There is no better illustration of the flight of capital from ghettos than the scarcity of operating banks and

10. 178th Street and Vyse Avenue, 1996 © Camilo José Vergara

the large number of former bank buildings. . . . Between 1978 and 1990, according to a 1992 study by the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs, in the poorest fifth of the neighborhoods of Brooklyn 30 percent of all the bank branches were closed. This situation was even worse in similar areas of the South Bronx, where during the same period half of the bank branches were closed (*Ghetto*, 90).

Revenge of Tradition

The dialectic of tradition and revolt once fueled the political energy of the ghettos in America. What often held racialized ghettos together—some sense of shared tradition based on skin color, common historical roots, or shared experiences of daily degradation—served as the reservoir for context-transforming social movements, especially in the 1960s and early 1970s. Vergara devotes some time to interpreting large-scale mural imagery in the ghetto. New American ghettos are a confused jumble of corroded murals that draw upon the iconography of African-American experience in the 1960s and newer, flashy murals invoking a Marcus Garvey-like sense of Africa.

11. East Side, Detroit, 1991 © Camilo José Vergara

12. Central Ward, Newark, 1993 © Camilo José Vergara

Vergara's work here is crucial in its ability to make explicit a striking juxtaposition of the disenchanting but fading critical heritage of urban experience and the re-enchanting and colorful temptations of dehistoricized tradition. On the one hand, the

13. Highland Park, Michigan,
1993 © Camilo José Vergara

erosion of the Black Panther murals stands as a concrete allegorical expression of the decaying but persistent possibilities for an activist critique of cultural, historical, and political traditions. On the other hand, the recent and more well-preserved images of a generalized, mythic Africa of untrammeled nature (Egyptian hieroglyphs, the preponderance of native African wildlife) signals an attempt to access and redeem a life-world that exists outside of *all* materialist conceptions of history. It is no accident that the latter images, as Vergara notes, are reproduced on T-shirts and bumper stickers and sold on ghetto street corners, as if the dream of a tradition outside of history could be purchased for a few dollars. And yet it must be acknowledged that an ur-history of Africa contains something that must be (re)activated in relation to the political militancy of

14. West Side, Chicago, 1986 © Camilo José Vergara

15. Harlem, New York, 1992 © Camilo José Vergara

the American 1960s and 1970s. Without some promise of authentic happiness, of a life freed of such a powerfully reifying context, and of a reconciliation with nature, there is and was little reason to undertake a critique of current social conditions and the practices that continue to structure them.

Vergara's analyses of the ghetto murals are penetrating:

> Exposed to time and the elements, the existence of murals is precarious from the start. Typically they are painted on the exposed side of abandoned buildings, and destroyed with the demolition of their host structures. Those rare ones that survive become eroded—their paint fading, their bright colors muted, the plaster behind the paint showing, the composition breaking down into fragments, softening the stern faces and whitening Afros.
>
> Contemporary signs are nostalgic, constructing a remote utopian past, chronicles of lost battles, martyrs, victims, and dreams. Depicted as a lost paradise under a red-hot sun is a primordial Africa with giraffes, lions, and panthers running wild in a vast open landscape. In a world that was pure, maidens pour antelope milk from pitchers. And in a place where black men ruled, Zulu warriors, spears in hand, sit adorned in traditional attire . . .
>
> The need to claim roots is a dominant theme in these essentialist images. In vacant lots, in the midst of devastation, one encounters images of the first man and the first woman, "the first queen" (Nefertiti?), and Jesus. The contrast could not be stronger between the degraded urban settings where these images are displayed and the lofty beginnings the residents claim. (*Ghetto*, 135–37)

I have briefly focused on three moments of Vergara's construction or interpretation of the emergence of new American ghettos. But the richness and possibilities of his research is not thereby exhausted. There are, to be sure, other interpretations to be developed out of the rich archive that constitutes Vergara's empirical research: over nine thousand slides from the South Bronx, Harlem,

North Central Brooklyn, Newark, Chicago, Gary, Camden, Detroit, Los Angeles, Oakland, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Washington DC, Miami, Atlantic City, Paterson, East St. Louis, South Boston, and Roxbury.[2] The strength of Vergara's work lies in its ability to thematize embedded truth bearers when the field of existing social relations grows rigid, reified, seemingly fixed, and enchanted.

There is an image-construction in *The New American Ghetto* that I think crystallizes the interpretive strengths of the logic of constructing constellations, and I want to close this section with it. In Newark, what was an oil drum stands chained to a post (see figure 16). There is no depth, no play, no suppressed or actual dialog here. Yet there is a certain gravity to this rather eccentric and unassimilated artifact. The garbage can is painted with the face of a black youth. Raised eyebrows, wakeful eyes, and an expressionless and closed mouth convey a kind of frozen suspicion. Trash protrudes from what would be the head of the figure. And a chain dangles like a braided lock of hair, or the chain that it in fact is. In America's ghettos it is not only the trash of history but the containers of such trash that the context-sensitive logic of constructing constellations makes visible; indeed, before the chains of the new American ghetto can be broken they—and those they restrain—must first be seen.

2. SOCIAL STRUGGLE IN CHICAGO

Recent social theoretical research carried out within the normative framework of the logic of rationality and reconstruction has drawn upon the now familiar Habermasian distinction between instrumental action (which is strategic and means/end oriented) and communicative action (which is normative and oriented toward context-transcending validity) in a postlinguistic analysis of social struggle. In his *The Struggle for Recognition*, Axel Honneth makes additional use of the work of the early Hegel and the developmental psychology and pragmatism of George Herbert Mead in an attempt to reconstruct the context-transcending *moral* grammar

16. Central Ward, Newark,
1994 © Camilo José Vergara

of social conflicts in contradistinction to struggles for power or group-specific interests.[3]

As a way of verifying his account of a distinctly moral struggle for recognition, Honneth considers the empirical research of the English historian E. P. Thompson. According to Honneth, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1966) demonstrates the empirical truth of his theory, namely, that social struggles for improved working conditions or better wages are motivated by and emerge as moral responses to historical experiences of degradation and disrespect.[4] Social struggles among working-class English arose not when workers were moved by strategic group interests but rather when they were motivated by a moral logic of recognition, when, that is, their sense of personal integrity and collective

identity was no longer *recognized* (*Struggle*, 166 ff). According to Honneth, Thompson's historiographical work shows how a *moral* economy of recognition motivates social struggle. Of course, Honneth maintains that not every empirical example speaks, as it were, in the context-transcending moral grammar of recognition. Nor, he argues, can a conception of struggle based on moral recognition simply replace a conception of struggle based on strategy or utility. Indeed, Honneth qualifies his theory not theoretically but rather empirically: "It is important to stress, however, that this second model of conflict, based on a theory of recognition, should not try to replace the first, utilitarian model but only extend it. It will always be an empirical question as to the extent to which a social conflict follows the logic of the pursuit of interests or the logic of the formation of moral reactions" (*Struggle*, 165).

But is the distinction between a moral and a utilitarian conception of conflict *in fact* an empirical question? When viewed from the context-sensitive logic of constructing constellations, the answer to such a question is, as we shall see here, not necessarily. For when social struggles are examined from the relational and material perspective of social actors—in the actual field of individual and group practices where, as we saw in Vergara's work, the restraining chains of the everyday are most palpable but also most difficult to see—it is precisely such an either/or distinction that does not readily appear. In fact, many of the forms of practice lived by social actors engaged in conflict and struggles do not lend themselves to the logic of rationality and reconstruction's distinction between strategy and normativity.[5] Indeed, an interpretation of social struggle developed within the more materialist framework of the logic of constructing constellations will show, as we shall see here, that such an either/or formulation of strategic interests or moral reactions is quite difficult to locate in contemporary urban social spaces of conflict and struggle.

To be sure, an analysis of social struggle carried out according to the logic of constructing constellations does not intend to claim that moral struggles for recognition have no basis in historical conflicts or that utilitarian strategic action is the all-determining feature of social interaction. Instead, it makes only the modest empirical

claim that social struggles are many-faceted, multidimensional conflicts over social *differentiation*. As an empirical case study for such a multidimensional struggle for social differentiation I want to draw on Loïc Wacquant's ethnography of boxers and boxing in the new American ghetto of Chicago. Such a focus should not be seen as arbitrary but rather as very much in keeping with the focus of the previous section and with the logic of constructing constellation's core strength, namely, its context-sensitive ability to make explicit the quasi-invisible practices and spaces of urban social life in ways that are potentially context-transforming.

I will present Wacquant's empirical research in three parts. First, I shall consider his work on the pugilistic point of view to show how the self-understanding of professional boxers is a highly intricate one. Boxers do not see their struggles in and out of the ring in the either/or terms of strategy or normativity but rather in the multidimensional terms of differentiation. Boxers see themselves, that is, as skilled laborers engaged in a complex and ambiguous form of practice that they do not formulate dualistically.[6]

Second, I shall consider Wacquant's analysis of what he calls the social logic of boxing. Here I want to examine the multidimensional social character of belonging to a boxing club, focusing on group membership in and collaborative practices inside the gym. The social space of the gym is a site of struggles and collective differentiation that also does not follow the antinomial logic of utility and normativity. Indeed, Wacquant's research suggests that individual and collective social struggles are empirically experienced as attempts at differentiation in the context of de-differentiating social locations such as the ghetto, the street, the hood, the barrio, and so on.

Finally, in light of the evidence presented here, I shall make explicit that the pressing empirical task emergent in an interpretation of social struggles in urban locations is not to determine whether they should be measured with the context-transcending yardstick of moral recognition or the context-dependent ruler of utilitarian interests. Rather it is to discern context-transforming ways in which new venues of social differentiation might be produced.[7]

The Pugilistic Point of View

Those who have come to know famous boxers from television, film, newspaper reports, and published biographies are familiar with the enchanted narratives that tend to underlie popular media and print presentations of the sport. Here the image predominates of a solitary figure (typically a member of a minority ethnic group) capable of incredible but focused violence. Such a person either resists the crime and gang life of the inner-city streets or succumbs to them and then is saved by boxing, thus devoting his life to "going legit" and "making it" and eventually winning a championship belt, only to remain an anomaly in a civilized society.

In any event, the popular image of "the boxer" is the result of a romanticized and often racialized social and historical decontextualization. Indeed, when viewed from the everyday perspective of boxers—from the bottom up—the social practice of boxing bears little resemblance to the popularized existentialist images all too familiar in America. Loïc Wacquant's ethnographic study of boxers, "The Pugilistic Point of View: How Boxers Think and Feel about Their Trade," illustrates this fact quite clearly.[8] Based on three years of observations, interviews, and participatory activities as a full-fledged member of the social world of professional boxers in Chicago, Wacquant reflexively thematizes not only what boxers themselves have to say about what they do and why they do it but also the structured and structuring contexts in which such articulations are embedded.[9]

Thus, Wacquant's research is expressly not a normative reconstruction of the struggles endemic to urban American social life, nor is it a deployment of the logic of textuality and deconstruction in either deep or planar versions of that logic. Here, there are no appeals to the context-transcending force of moral recognition. But neither is there a relativizing lapse into thick description or an ontologizing evocation of the linguistified social text. Instead, Wacquant has a different approach: he tries to construct a sociological constellation of relations from within the field of practice known as boxing. In short, Wacquant's deployment of the logic

of constructing constellations presents what he himself describes as an *ascending* "sociological hermeneutic of the boxer's life-world" ("Pugilistic," 491). Here, I shall develop three ineluctably entwined aspects that seem integral to the pugilistic point of view in order to show how individual social struggles do not readily disclose themselves dualistically to social actors, as the empirical assumptions of the current version of the logic of rationality and reconstruction would have it. From there we shall be in a better position to examine the question of collective struggle in similar terms in an analysis of the multidimensional social functions of a boxing gym.

Violence and Skill

On one level, the behavior of boxers in the ring might best be described as a rule-bound version of extreme strategic bodily interaction, one where nastiness and brutality and sheer instrumentality prevail. In this account, boxing and boxers are seen both as the expression and reflection of a kind of pure strategy and violence. As Wacquant quickly points out, "[i]njuries and bodily deterioration are not incidental to the game, they are the necessary outcome of proper professional exertion" ("Pugilistic," 495).

But Wacquant argues in the light of his empirical findings that to reduce boxing to mere violence is to reduce a multifaceted practice—he calls it a bodily occupation—to only one of its *aspects* ("Pugilistic," 496). A distinct kind of violence is, from the perspective of a boxer, a part of his practice and in no sense its sum. In fact, boxers themselves formulate their violence as a skill in contradistinction to the everyday violent crime of the neighborhoods in which most of them live and the freestyle street fights that take place in such neighborhoods. Or, as expressed by Bernard, a black light-heavyweight employed as an X-ray technician in one of Chicago's most prestigious hospitals:

> Streetfighten', I'll prob'ly, half-*kill* a person. Boxin is *skill.* You got gloves on your hands an' you cant really kill a person, as quick as you could with your hands. (In streetfighting) you

> don't have any rules. You can pick a bottle up. You can go home an' get a gun an' come back, you know, or tell a big brother. You know, a frien' coul' jump in an' double-team you. You ha' rules. I don't look at boxin', you know—there's a lot of articles abou' boxin' shoul' be banned an' thin's of tha' nature, but boxin' to me is a sport. Its not tryinna knock, tryinna kill a person, its jus' tryinna accumulate punches an' beat this guy an' knock him down, but *en route to tha'*, it gets a lil' more serious, then you have to do what you have to do, but it *is* a sport. It has *rules* and there is a point of sportsmanship involved in boxing. It differs vastly, you know, from street fightin'. ("Pugilistic," 498)

Thus, Wacquant suggests that the boxer's skill is best described not as a formalized Hobbesian "war of all against all" but as a keen ability to *manage* violence, since what a boxer does requires that violence be skillfully regulated and restricted in its execution. In day-to-day ghetto life this kind of management is not only defined against street fighting, as Bernard's reflections make clear, it also serves as a low-grade deterrent to the arbitrary violence of everyday life. Many boxers, Wacquant's research reveals, understand themselves to be possessors of a technical know-how as professionally skilled individuals, and they tend to shun everyday altercations for some of the same reasons that a professional basketball player is loathe to engage in a game of pickup basketball—to avoid injury and legal complications, for example, but also out of a sense of professional morality, a sense, that is, that they are too good to engage in certain forms of conflict ("Pugilistic," 500).

Work and Differentiation

The incorporation of violence and skill exhibited by boxers—what we have described as a mix of managed violence and the goodness of professional morality—should nevertheless not in the first instance be formulated as manifesting a clear separation between strategy and normativity. The skill a boxer possesses no more makes him a shrewd Hobbesian strategist than it makes him a good Meadean capable of recognizing the moral dimensions of self/other

relationships. Rather, the management of violence in a boxer's practice differentiates him first and foremost as a successful *worker*. It is perhaps the chief contribution of the logic of constructing constellations in Wacquant's work that it demonstrates the self-understanding of boxers as workers engaged in a practice that is esteemed for its proletarian status.

Prizefighting, Wacquant writes, "is first and most evidently a *working-class job*, that is, a means of earning a living or, to be more precise, of augmenting other sources of income by exchanging the only tangible asset that those bereft of inherited wealth and educational credentials possess: their body and the abilities it harbors" ("Pugilistic," 501). Or, as one of the boxers in Wacquant's study says:

> "It's a job, tha's how I make my money, tha's how I get paid," avers Aaron, a black lightweight from a northern suburb of Chicago with an undistinguished record of four defeats in six bouts. . . . That boxing is a working-class occupation is reflected not only in the physical nature of the activity but also in the social recruitment of its practitioners and in their continuing dependence on blue-collar or unskilled service jobs to support their career in the ring. It is indicated also by the fact that fighters consider training not as avocation and relaxation but plainly as work: "Its a job before's anything else, an' its entertainment when you in that ring. But the trainin's your job," insists Roy. "Work, work. I'm going to work, shovel the dirt: this yo' job," corroborates Ned." ("Pugilistic," 501–2)

Danny, another of Wacquant's boxers, expresses the matter perhaps more pointedly: "If I hadn't found boxin', I be in some trade school as a mechanic or some kind of laborer, or maybe in a factory. 'Cause that's the only thing for me, (joyfully) I mean, *I'm lucky I found boxin'*. 'Cause you know I'll be (with a touch of bitterness) like the rest of minorities in Chicago, y'know: jus' workin' in some factory or doin' somethin' laboral to make do" ("Pugilistic," 519). Wacquant tends to formulate the work of boxers explicitly in terms of an attempt at differentiation on the existential level, as an attempt to create an image of "heroic selfhood" or to fashion

an "ontological transcendence" in the face of a horrid actuality ("Pugilistic," 501).

Yet it is clear in Wacquant's elaboration of boxers' preferences for their form of work over and against other low-wage inner-city labor options (such as employment in fast-food restaurants) that the social differentiation boxers achieve can be understood on a less metaphysical level. First, boxers differentiate themselves in the high degree of control they maintain over their labor process, even determining to a considerable extent their working hours, and they are held directly (bodily) accountable for their work ("Pugilistic," 502). Second, boxers' routines are comprised of routinized, strategic, and repetitive activities, such as running, jumping rope, bagwork, sit-ups, repeating punch combinations, and so on, which are not altogether unlike repetitive factory work (or even fast-food service jobs). But boxing requires a feel for the game, a unique capacity for the innovative application of existing routines, activities, and ingrained habits. The work on the factory floor is always the same, but the prospective work in the ring is always different, and the context-sensitive character of the boxer's craft differentiates him from other workers in low-paying, routinized jobs ("Pugilistic," 503–4). Third, and finally, a boxer's craft work is recognized, esteemed, and socially valued in a sense not unlike that of other craftsmen ("Pugilistic," 505). A boxer's individual record and success are in fact less important in a crime-ridden neighborhood than the symbolic capital that resides in the social fact that he is a janitor *and a boxer*, that he is a *special kind* of proletarian. Thus, Wacquant quotes Ed, thirty-six-year-old black cruiserweight who doubles as a correctional officer and counselor in a halfway house: "I mean, to be able to stand before a man, a *massive* man, an' he punches you an' he goes through efforts to hit-an'-harm you, an' he's unable to even touch you an' you're no more than uh, (whispering excitedly) twelve inches away from him: that, that, it takes an art to be able to do that. . . . That's to be able to have your *rhythm*, to put forward your own individual style, and have it portrayed and presented to the public, uh to be able to, I mean, *have an art*, and have it appreciated, you know: its very beneficial" ("Pugilistic," 506).

Ed's just-quoted comment suggests that boxing is an art to him because it has a rhythm, a style, and is presented to the public and appreciated. Thus, there is a certain aesthetic dimension to a boxer's acquisition of distinction in his struggle for social differentiation. Clearly, Ed's work is also part artwork—it is a self-distinguishing craft in a social location where few such crafts are to be had. It is also something else, for the social distinction of boxers is not merely aesthetic but also moral in the sense that they acquire respect and a decidedly positive sense of self-worth. Indeed, in his study Wacquant points out that "even drug dealers . . . openly acknowledge the boxer's normative precedence over them: 'They look up to me. Because they see, that I jus', I picked somethin' an' I stuck with it an' I became somethin' an' they look up to me,' claims a black light-heavyweight raised in a high-crime area of Chicago's West Side" ("Pugilistic," 517). And Wacquant goes on to describe the standing of professional boxers: "Neighbors and kin esteem professional fighters for their stout refusal to bow to social necessity, for fighting—literally—to make a better life for themselves, and for resisting either succumbing to dependency or demoralization. . . . They are grateful for the fact that, contrary to the sinister figure of the dope seller, the pugilist's industry is oriented, if tenuously, towards the 'legit' side of society and adds to the community's commonweal rather than subtracting from it" ("Pugilistic," 517).

Yet such insights into the aesthetic and moral marks of social distinction in and on a boxer must not be misconstrued as evidence of a struggle for moral recognition *over and against* analytically distinguished utilitarian or strategic forms of action. In controlled bursts of violence, the art-work of a boxer is to beat and be beaten by other people, and yet it is in part for that form of work that he is accorded a distinct status in the neighborhood in which he lives. The struggle for differentiated distinctions here is not readily captured in the either/or terms of the logic of rationality and reconstruction. For what is sought in the work of boxing is the symbolic—be it aesthetic and/or moral—capital needed for social differentiation in harsh urban contexts. Such a struggle for

differentiation is successful to the extent that it involves precisely the nondualistic *entwinement* of violent strategy and professional morality in a disciplined form of practical work that most other members of the community are, for one reason or another, unable to acquire.

Perhaps another way of making this point about the complexity of social differentiation is to recall that the seemingly high degree of (aesthetic/moral) distinction that discloses itself from the pugilist's point of view is paid for with the currency of bodily degradation. Such a degradation is not incidental to a boxer's struggle for social differentiation but ineluctably part of that struggle in those urban locations, where, as Wacquant points out, social actors are often forced to make use of the one resource they have, namely, their bodies.[10] Put rather crudely, the work that boxers do inevitably damages and degrades their bodies as they fight—quite literally—for social differentiation in social spaces where other, more traditional or civilized avenues of work are unavailable or unappealing to them. Boxers don't need to achieve the rank of "The Greatest" to develop and formulate a loathing for the very bodily craft that often painfully differentiates them: "I cant *stand* the sport," says Vinnie, "I hate the sport, (but) its carved inside of me so I cant let it go" ("Pugilistic," 521).[11] It is precisely this paradoxical kind of ingrained degradation/repulsion and distinction/attraction that makes the self-understanding of this invisible population of inner-city social actors decidedly difficult to elaborate in the terms of the normative logic of rationality and reconstruction. Indeed, in this case the complexity of the struggle for social differentiation appears to exceed the existing dualistic vocabulary of the struggle for moral recognition.

The Social Logic of Boxing

If the pugilist point of view, developed according to the logic of constructing constellations, presents evidence of a nondualistic and complexly multidimensional understanding of the practice of boxing from the perspective of boxers, then that is not simply because those actors are engaged in individual deceptions or private

mental illusions about the nature of what they do and why they do it. Instead, Wacquant's research suggests that multidimensionality is at the very material core of individual struggles for differentiation. But it is not only individual boxers whose practice manifests a complex multidimensional struggle for social differentiation. When interpreted from the perspective of the logic of constructing constellations, the boxing gym and gym membership evidence a *collective* multidimensional struggle for social differentiation in the context of urban spaces.

Indeed, the gym is one of the few social spaces in the harsh urban settings of the new American ghetto where social actors can differentiate themselves collectively—as protected, organized, autonomous, but collaborative members of what Wacquant usefully characterizes as an egalitarian working-class guild. It is precisely the peculiar nature of this group or collective differentiation, which also does not lend itself to the distinction between strategy or normativity, that I shall briefly consider in the remainder of this concluding section, using the data collected in Wacquant's ethnographic field notes entitled "The Social Logic of Boxing in Black Chicago: Toward a Sociology of Pugilism."

"The Stoneland Boys Club," writes Wacquant,

> is surrounded on one side by the crumbling remnants of the former Maryland Theater, of which only the boarded-up facade, covered with posters advertising the latest rap concert or a Farrakhan meeting ('A New Dawn is Coming') remain, and on the other side by a vacant lot occupied in part by a children's playground where jobless men from the neighborhood come share a 'taste' on sunny days. Immediately behind the club is a large, abandoned brick building whose doors and windows are condemned by a metal bar and locks. On windy days, garbage and flying papers accumulate in the back of the building at the boxers' entrance.
>
> More than physical degradation, however, it is the erosion of public space brought about by rampant crime that is chiefly responsible for the constricted and oppressive tenor of daily life on Chicago's South Side . . .

> The club shelters itself from this hostile environment in the manner of a fortress: all entries to the building are protected by metal bars and solidly pad-locked; the windows of the day-care and Head Start center are latticed with iron; the back-door entrance has two enormous bolts that cannot be opened or shut without a hammer, and an electronic alarm system is set by the last person leaving the building. A baseball bat is at hand near each entrance, one behind the counter of the day-care office, the other behind the coach's desk, in case it proves necessary to repel the intrusion of unwanted visitors *manu militari*. ("Social Logic," 227–28)

This physical description of the besieged gym calls to mind the other remaining fortresses in the ghetto—old bank buildings which, too expensive to demolish, have been turned into fast-food joints—as we saw in Vergara's work in the last section. But unlike fast-food labor industries, whose presence in old bank buildings illustrates how seamlessly the storehouses of economic capital can be converted without being transformed—how, that is, forms of capitalist domination are interchangeable—the gym is a space of socialization and formal organization not determined merely by utility or profit. What happens in the gym is something *other* than what goes on in other low-wage labor settings: relations in the gym are organized precisely in ways that are ruled out in other ghetto social spaces. The Stoneland Gym, Wacquant argues,

> constitutes *an island of stability and order where social relations forbidden on the outside become once again possible*. The gym offers a relatively self-enclosed site for a protected sociability where one can find respite from the pressures of the street and the ghetto . . .
>
> "I can go to the gym an' I can fin' a peace of min'. I can relax in my min' . . . I don' have ta *worry abou' thin's on the street* right here bein' in the gym, because my min' is on one thin' an' my min' is on conditionin' an' my min' is on makin' somethin' outa what it is that I'm doin' that I really like an' hum, susseedin' in it. When I get to the gym, its like I'm in a *whole new diff'ren' atmosphere*, a whole differen' place. Its

> jus' like a whole new differ'en worl' to me an' that's why in my blood, I don' know what it is, its jus' in my blood, its like I was spoon-fed the gym. . . . The gym is jus' like havin' another family. Like I said, the gym is *another world of its own*." (professional, age 26, stockman) . . .
>
> "You can go there and you feel good about yourself. Like I said, you feel *protected*, *secure*. You in there, aw, you're alright—its like a second family. You know you can go there for support. . . . If you feelin' down, somebody be there to pump you up. I say, take your frustration out on the bags. Getting' up in there and sparring, you might have felt down when you got there, then, make you feel a whole lot better." (amateur, age 19, still in high school) ("Social Logic," 229)

That gym members—both professional and amateur—create and experience the gym as an organized site of stability and protection even though its physical properties make visible just how threatened and fragile its existence is demonstrates the extent to which they, as a community of collaborative coworkers, a second family, are differentiated from the everyday solitariness and alienation of ghetto life. Indeed, it is no accident that boxers are collectively differentiated by gym membership—by simply belonging to a formal organization called a boxing club—especially when one considers that the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of the inner city belong to *no* group-based organizations ("Social Logic," 233).

Yet it is not simply belonging to a group that distinguishes boxers collectively. It is that this particular membership affords them the chance they do not have in the world outside the gym, the chance, that is, to work collaboratively in an egalitarian form of social organization. "The gym culture is self-consciously egalitarian, in that all participants are treated basically alike: Irrespective of their status and goal, they all have the same rights and the same duties, particularly that of 'working' hard at their trade and displaying a modicum of ring bravery when called for," says Wacquant ("Social Logic," 234). Here again, moreover, Wacquant stresses how the oddly collaborative world of boxing has strong affinities with an

"artisanal workshop" ("Social Logic," 238).[12] And he goes on to make explicit the crucial but all-too-often overlooked empirical point that "boxers do not generally come from the most disenfranchised fractions of the ghetto subproletariat but rather from those fractions of the minority working class that struggle at the threshold of stable socioeconomic integration" ("Social Logic," 232).[13]

There are, of course, many kinds of protected, organized, and egalitarian work that take place inside the gym among "those fractions of the minority working class that struggle at the threshold of stable socioeconomic integration." But when considering boxers as collaborative members of an artisanal workshop two merit special mention. Call the first "gym talk"; call the second "sparring logic." In the first, Wacquant sees the gym space as a salon in which the hidden curriculum or the collectively shared oral knowledge of boxers and boxing—and life on the streets outside—is exchanged and passed on. In the second, Wacquant sees how the social space of the gym is determined by cooperative but antagonistical body practices. Wacquant captures the key bodily form that antagonistic cooperation assumes when he describes the "social logic of sparring," in which complex forms of practice are constituted, learned, and shared. Taken together, gym talk and sparring logic constitute the forms of collaborative learning that differentiate boxers as group members. I want to take up each of these respectively.

Gym Talk

The give-and-take that goes on in the gym constitutes a form of education that Wacquant thematizes as a cross between shoptalk and folklore. On the one side, the practical aspects of boxing itself—making the required weight, exchanging techniques, coordinating sparring partners and schedules, and so on—comprise the bulk of the conversations in the gym. "Advice and tips are continually traded," writes Wacquant, "boxing bouts, local and national, are avidly dissected" ("Social Logic," 231). In this way, a collaborative exchange of practical know-how emerges. Boxers rely on one another in the social space of the gym for critical observations, feedback, criticisms, new perspectives, and so on,

even as they return such favors in kind. Such shoptalk sharpens boxers' abilities to read—and, in turn, opens them up to being read in a critical light.

On the other side, this unique brand of shoptalk-critique is punctuated by a shared set of historical narratives—what Wacquant calls pugilistic folklore. The ability to recall, recognize, share, and manipulate such narratives is not a matter of norms in any traditional sense—the nondistorted validity claims and truth-contents of such narratives are not up for debate in gym talk. Rather, what is at stake, as Wacquant's research makes evident, is the mastering of a collectively binding epistemic code:

> In the course of these endless conversations (shoptalk), head coach Richie and the older members of the gym reveal a near-encyclopedic knowledge of the names, places, and events that make up the pugilistic folklore. The outstanding fights of history, especially regional, are frequently evoked, as are the success and setbacks of boxers on the rise or on the decline. Through a deliberate upturning of the official hierarchy of values, the great televised clashes (e.g., Leonard v. Hagler or Holyfield v. Foreman) are less prized than local confrontations, and the strings of names mentioned in gym gossip include many more obscure fighters than famous boxers known by the media or the general public. Conversations insensibly shift back and forth between boxing and stories of street fights, shady traffics, "hustles," and street tricks and crime, of which everyone seems to possess an extended repertory. Under this angle, Richie's office—a small back room adorned with old boxing posters and pictures and which looks into the gym proper through a large window—functions in the manner of a Parisian *salon*, as the stage where each can attest his excellence in the manipulation of the specific cultural capital, namely pugilistic knowledge and street smarts, and display his mastery of the informal code of the ghetto and its demi-monde.

The significance of these ongoing mundane gym conversations should not be overlooked, for they are an essential

> ingredient of the "hidden curriculum" of the gym: They insensibly teach its members the lore of the game. In the form of stories, gossip, fight anecdotes, and other street tales, they orally impregnate the boxers with the core values and categories of judgment of the pugilistic universe. ("Social Logic," 231–32)

Wacquant's analysis here allows us him to make visible the peculiarly differentiating functions of gym talk. Indeed, its twofold differentiating potential is crucial. The critical production and exchange of shared, practical know-how and the acquisition and mastery of epistemic codes or shared cultural capital in the form of narratives or folklore constitute not merely ideological inculcation or reciprocal moral recognition. Rather, they constitute two core features of one of the forms of social differentiation made scarce in the boxer's social milieu: *education*. The logic of constructing constellations makes visible the way in which gym talk functions as pedagogical practice by another name—in gym talk symbolic capital is (re)produced by and dispensed to symbolically impoverished social actors.[14]

Sparring Logic

In conjunction with gym talk, sparring might be best understood as the embodied form of educational practice that takes place in the gym. Sparring is a point of mediation between the actual fight and the endless road- and bag-work and shadowboxing that are parts of the boxer's training. It involves the work of collaboratively learned bodily practice; it is in fact a most unique form of cooperation, for one fights with an *opponent*, but one spars with a *partner*. Indeed, not only are sparring sessions carefully monitored and sparring partners strictly paired and regulated, but being a good sparring partner is a learned *distinction* ("Social Logic," 242–44).

What then are the chief lessons learned in the collectively differentiating work of sparring? Wacquant cites three: perceptual, emotional, and physical. Sparring provides perceptual lessons in the sense that it "is an education of the senses and notable of visual

faculties; the state of emergency it creates effects a progressive reorganization of perceptual abilities and habits. A transformation occurs in the structure and scope of one's visual field as one climbs up the hierarchy of sparring. Instead of seeming cluttered and entropic, this field progressively achieves pattern and regularity; one becomes better able to sort stimuli, to shut out unneeded sensory information and to interpret and even anticipate relevant ones" ("Social Logic," 244).

Sparring teaches emotional lessons in the sense that sparring sessions teach boxers the appropriate ways to express feelings in their trade. Wild outbursts of unmanaged violence sap precisely the perceptual faculties necessary to monitor punches thrown and being thrown, and they make for a poor sparring *partner* (that is, a bad boxing club member). " 'This new kid, he think he can beat everybody up: 'I can whup this guy, I can kick his ass! I'm better than 'im, lemme get in the ring!' I don't know what to do 'cause I cant let him spar with that kinda attitude. (Richie, Stoneland Coach)" ("Social Logic," 244). What boxers learn emotionally in sparring, Wacquant writes, is "the 'feeling rules' specific to their occupation" ("Social Logic," 245). They learn, that is to say, the skills necessary to differentiate themselves in *group* terms—as participating and contributing members of a group of partners or coworkers whose shared goal is to beat one another without *beating* one another.

In addition to the occupationally necessary perceptual and emotional lessons of sparring, Wacquant points out the physical aspect of hitting and being hit. Sparring is physical work in the sense that it explicitly accustoms boxers' bodies to undergoing the unusual pain of being hit without overreacting to such pain and thereby making themselves vulnerable to further blows. "The adequate socialization of the boxer presupposes an endurance to punches whose basis is the ability to master the first reflex of self-protection that undoes the coordination of movements and gives a decisive advantage to the opponent" ("Social Logic," 246). Wacquant insightfully describes the lesson of physical work learned in sparring sessions not as the capacity to take a punch but in Maussian terms as the progressive acquisition of resistance to excitement—boxers learn

to resist bodily stimuli according to habituated practice ("Social Logic," 246).

Hence, when interpreted according to the more material logic of constructing constellations, the collaborative learning of the perceptual, emotional, and physical lessons needed to get the feel of the space in which the labor of boxing takes place can be seen in all of their complex multidimensionality. In sparring, boxers learn not merely how to execute a set of strategic maneuvers designed to win or how to apply the regulative norms of ringmanship. Instead, they learn how to be at home *at work* in the ring.[15] And this in turn differentiates them as distinguished members of a social group who possess a unique kind of shared social power or joint symbolic capital that cannot be gotten easily elsewhere in the de-differentiating context in which they live.

We saw in chapter 1, and again at the beginning of this section, that the logic of rationality and reconstruction depends upon an analytic but empirically verifiable distinction between strategy and normativity for the context-transcending force of its interpretations. Indeed, that strategic forms of social action can be interpretively sorted from normative forms of action constitutes one of the core presuppositions of the normative logic of rationality and reconstruction. To be sure, the construction of a constellation of boxers and boxing in this concluding section—limited as it is to Wacquant's study of boxers and boxing in Chicago—has not tried to show that the *conceptual* distinction between strategy and normativity does not obtain in *some forms* of social struggle (the persistence and viability of such a conceptual distinction is for future research to determine). Instead, it makes the more modest point that the normative logic of rationality and reconstruction misconstrues the empirical question of social struggles. Consequently, that logic risks missing some of the crucial features of such struggles in its analysis when it relies too heavily on the analytic distinction between strategy and normativity in its interpretations of social life. In particular, it misses the nondualistic multidimensionality and differentiating aspects of embodied practices such as work and bodily cooperation that are a part of the invisible, everyday struggles of life in the ghetto.[16] Expressed less abstractly,

what needs to be interpreted in an analysis of social struggles is not merely the normative motivations and goals of such struggles but also the empirically structured and structuring *contexts* in which attempts at social differentiation take place.

For when the social struggles played out in urban America are reflexively thematized from the material and empirically embedded perspective of the logic of constructing constellations they do not appear as two-dimensional conflicts determined by utilitarian interests or context-transcending moral truths. Rather, they are multidimensional practices determined by attempts at social differentiation in de-differentiating social spaces. Of course, the multidimensionality of social struggles for differentiation contains elements of the demand for moral recognition as well as those of strategic interest. The individual and cooperative group work of boxers and boxing clubs includes both features without being reducible to either one. Indeed, boxers themselves do not formulate their individual or collective practices in the antinomial terms of utility and morality but rather in the multidimensional terms of differentiation, as we have seen in presenting Wacquant's work.

It is precisely for that reason, however, that the logic of rationality and reconstruction cannot easily defend the claim that "it will always be an empirical question as to the extent to which a social conflict follows the logic of the pursuit of interests or the logic of moral reactions." The problem with such an argument is that it forces an analysis of social struggle onto the horns of a dilemma that might not be readily located in many forms of social practice in modern urban life—where, one might add, the struggle for better working conditions carried out during nineteenth-century labor movements is today often reduced to a highly diffuse struggle for work itself.[17]

"According to the latest usable census figures," Wacquant writes,

> those of 1980, a third of the families (in Stoneland) live under the official federal poverty line and the average annual family income of 10,500 dollars amounts to barely half of the city

figure. The percentage of households recorded as female-headed has reached 60 percent (compared to 34 percent 10 years earlier), the official unemployment rate is 20 percent (twice the city average after tripling over a decade), and fewer than one in 10 households own their own homes. Only a third of all women and 44 percent of all men hold a job; 61 percent of the households have to rely in part or whole on grossly inadequate welfare programs for their survival. Among the work force, the single largest occupational category is that of clerical workers with 31 percent, private household and service personnel coming in second at 22 percent. Over half of the adult residents did not finish high school, while the current dropout rate for high school students from the area is believed to fluctuate between one-half and two-thirds. The neighborhood no longer has a secondary school, movie theater, library, or job training facility. Nor does it have a bank, supermarket, or insurance agency. Despite the proximity of one of the world's most advanced centers of medical innovation, the University of Chicago Hospital, infant mortality in Stoneland is estimated at about 3 percent and rising.

Like other inner-city public establishments in Chicago, local schools are hostage to poverty and crime. Plagued by massive shortages of supplies, inadequate if not crumbling facilities, and demoralized and unstable teaching personnel, they have become akin to custodial institutions that merely process students until their eventual discharge. No wonder many youth find the expanding illegal economy more attractive when schools lead nowhere—they do not even offer college preparatory classes. Once powerful agents of social integration, churches have also declined significantly; most of the 30 or so religious institutions still operative two decades ago have closed their doors. . . . The absence of new construction for decades and the gradual erosion of the existing housing stock—which was cut by nearly one-half between 1950 and 1980, 70 percent of all remaining units predating World War II—in an area situated near the city's lakefront, less

> than 10 miles from the heart of the third largest metropolis of the country, testifies to the abandonment of this community. ("Social Logic," 226–27)

A genuinely materialist interpretation of social struggle in modern urban social spaces needs to make visible the complex and increasingly desperate character of the struggle for differentiation and to link that struggle to the threatened and ever-vanishing fields of social practice where such context-transforming differentiations have historically taken place—in Stoneland's neighborhoods, schools, places of work, churches, and so on. A context-sensitive interpretation of the struggles of the people of Stoneland carried out according to the logic of constructing constellations makes evident with painful clarity how these former sites of differentiation have been lost. It also helps to raise questions about how and by whom new venues might be produced in their absence. For in such urban fields of seemingly intractable economic inequality, relentless de-institutionalization, and persistent ethnoracial degradation, the logic of constructing constellations shows that what is most needed is not context-transcendent truths—nor context-destroying untruths—but rather context-transforming *truth bearers*: another school; a library; respectable jobs at living wages; locally owned shops and markets; durable networks of communal, cultural, and religious organizations; accessible social and medical services; a decent home. Such things—so everyday and yet so extraordinary—are indeed constructed by social critics and those they interpret, if only one constellation at a time.

Afterword

CONSTRUCTING CONSTELLATIONS, OR THEMATIZING EMBEDDEDNESS

To understand what happens in places like "projects" or "housing developments" as well as in certain kinds of schools, places which bring together people who have nothing in common and force them to live together, either in mutual ignorance and incomprehension or else in latent or open conflict—with all the suffering this entails—it is not enough to explain each point of view separately. All of them must be brought together as they are in reality, not to relativize them in an infinite number of cross-cutting images, but, quite to the contrary, through simple juxtaposition, to bring out everything that results when different or antagonistic visions of the world confront each other.

Pierre Bourdieu, "The Space of Points of View"

This study began by describing the logic of constructing constellations rather vaguely as a hermeneutics of retrieval and disenchantment. After working through and modifying that logic as it emerged in the theoretical and empirical investigations of Benjamin, Adorno, Foucault, and Bourdieu, and after viewing that logic at work in the research of Vergara and Wacquant, we are now in a position to be more precise about the interpretive character of constructing constellations: The logic of constructing constellations is an interpretively materialist mode of social analysis that is perhaps best described as *reflexively thematizing embeddedness.*

Indeed, it is no accident that the phrase *thematizing embeddedness* has at crucial moments in this study proved most apt in characterizing the relational and materialist logic of constructing constellations—a logic that persists even in some of the more recent research of Pierre Bourdieu, as the epigraph to this chapter suggests.[1] As we have seen, thematizing embeddedness is the way in which context-sensitive critics reflexively make explicit potentially context-transforming evidence or truth bearers. It is, that is

to say, another way of characterizing the approach that is most suited to nonrelativizing interpretive-empirical studies of a social world where increasing numbers of social actors, cultural practices, conflicting histories, and antagonistic social facts are marginalized, forgotten, taken for granted, reified.[2] For embeddedness is both the implicit matrices of given or enchanted empirical relations in which social critics (and actors) find themselves and also the interpretive location from which those critics (and actors) make such implicit ensembles of relations explicit in potentially context-transforming ways.

Hence, embeddedness names an enabling predicament of social critics insofar as it does not simply condemn such critics to relativizing thick descriptions or ontologizing evocations of textuality but also makes it possible for them to construct constellations that transform such contexts from *within*. In the thematization of embeddedness genuinely reflexive social critics make visible not merely themselves but empirical evidence or truth bearers. Indeed, according to the logic of constructing constellations, social inquiry is reflexive precisely because its context-sensitive thematizations are dependent upon yet can alter embeddedness in the social world.

There are, as we have seen, strikingly concrete ways in which the logic of constructing constellations is potentially context-transforming—in its ability to bring into view unintentional evidence, in its graphic presentation and juxtaposition of new relevances, and in the way it makes explicit everyday but invisible struggles in sociological constructions that seek to alter what counts and how it counts for social actors in a given context. It is perhaps in its promise of concretion that the logic of constructing constellations or thematizing embeddedness may be most productively contrasted with the logic of textuality and deconstruction. Most generally, this study has tried to show that the difference between thematizing embeddedness and thick description or textual evocation turns on how interpretation is understood and how the role of the social critic in such an interpretation is figured. Specifically, we have seen two crucial ways in which the account of the

logic of constructing constellations developed in the preceding investigations may be positively distinguished from the logic of textuality and deconstruction.

First, while any account of social inquiry as text-reading or text-evoking is inherently text-sensitive, the focus on textuality in both sublogics of textuality and deconstruction tends toward linguistic hypostatization. As this study's elaboration of the logic of constructing constellations as the thematization of embeddedness has argued, reading or deconstructing a social text must include thematizing its structured and structuring *contexts.* For as we have seen, both sublogics of textuality and deconstruction tend to obscure the fact that social inquiry must interpret not merely the (linguistic) text of social practices but also the empirical embeddedness of those practices. In fact, according to the logic of constructing constellations, the two are ineluctably intertwined but never merely identical or reducible to the play of linguistic signifiers.

Second, neither sublogic of textuality and deconstruction is sufficiently reflexive at the level of method. According to the logic of constructing constellations, social critics are never reducible to readers or texts but are instead thematizers of various forms of embeddedness, including, but not restricted to, their own predicament as interpreters of the merely given interpretations or constructions of existing forms of social life. Indeed, such a double hermeneutic inherent in interpreting culture and society does not justify the call for a relativizing or ontologizing logic of textuality and deconstruction.[3] On the contrary, reflexive thematizations of embeddedness often make possible *objective* reconfigurations of social practices and social spaces—both the practices and spaces of the social critic and those of the subjects she investigates—as we saw especially in the work of Vergara and Wacquant in the previous chapter.

The analyses in this book have thus sought repeatedly to demonstrate the nonrelativizing and materialist merits of the logic of constructing constellations. The overarching argument has been that the logic of textuality and deconstruction should be increasingly replaced—and the logic of rationality and reconstruction

supplemented—with the practical reflexivity of the logic of constructing constellations. For the reflexive thematizing of embeddedness seeks to do more than read self-referential texts; instead, it makes explicit evidence or truth bearers that may transform the structured and often painful contexts in which social life takes place. In short, the logic of constructing constellations elaborated here has sought to retain the practical reflexivity of any materialist social theory worthy of the name. Indeed, in an increasingly reified and reifying social world of fragmentation, stratification, and de-differentiation, context-sensitive thematizations of embeddedness seek to accomplish one of the typically stated core tasks of such forms of social study as cultural critique, critical theory and critical race theory, critical sociology, urban studies, and materialist historiography, among others—that is, the task of social change. That the precise form of such change cannot be articulated in advance but instead must emerge from *within* a construction of a particular social field suggests only that the truths of the logic of constructing constellations are as practical as the method that interprets them.

Notes

1. THE CONTEMPORARY LOGICS OF SOCIAL THEORY

1. I borrow this schematic layout from Clifford Geertz's useful essay, "Blurring Genres." Geertz himself adheres to a deep or thick model of text, and I shall develop his position in what follows. For a useful summary of contemporary currents in cultural anthropology, see George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer's *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*.

2. Paul Ricoeur, "Model of Text," 197 (hereafter cited in the text as "Text"). The shorthand account of Ricoeur that follows is neither critical nor comprehensive. My limited purpose here is merely to outline one of the chief sources of the model of text in the work of Clifford Geertz.

3. For another account of the text model in social science, see Charles Taylor's "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man." Taylor emphasizes the clarifying role of text reading—interpretations make the unclear, the contradictory, and the confused clear, noncontradictory, and sensible.

4. Geertz, *Works and Lives*, 142. For sociological aestheticism, see Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 30 (hereafter cited in the text as *Cultures*).

5. For a robust defense of Geertz against the objections of his post-modern critics, see Bohman's "Holism without Skepticism."

6. The term *poetics of culture* emerges in the work of Stephen Greenblatt, who has imported the textual turn of cultural anthropology back into the methods of literary criticism. In his *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, he writes:

> I have attempted to practice a more cultural or anthropological criticism—if by "anthropological" here we think of interpretive studies of culture by Geertz, James Boon, Mary Douglas, Jean Duvignaud, Paul Rabinow, Victor Turner, and others . . . anthropological interpretation must address itself less to the mechanical customs and institutions than to the interpretive constructions that members of society apply to their experiences. A literary criticism that has affinities to this practice must be conscious of its own status as interpretation and intent upon understanding literature as part of a system of signs that constitutes a given culture; it proper goal, however difficult to realize, is a "poetics of culture." (4)

The fact that literary criticism can reappropriate *without modification* the text model of social theory suggests that the distinction between the two has been all but liquidated. I shall consider the merits of a poetics and politics of culture in what follows.

7. Even without the aid of Geertz's critics one would want immediately to ask the following of his reading of the cockfight: What of the Balinese, especially Balinese women, who may not be nearly so fascinated with cocks—allegorical or otherwise? Is the cockfight *Lear* or *Macbeth* to them? In what sense? On what basis? For a similar set of criticisms, see Vincent Crapanzano's "Hermes' Dilemma," especially 68–76.

8. James Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths," 25. And for another version of the more radical logic of textuality and deconstruction, see especially Paul Atkinson's *Ethnographic Imagination*.

9. See Stephen Tyler's "Post-modern Ethnography" (hereafter cited in the text as *PE*). See also Tyler's *The Unspeakable*.

10. Here one might also point out that Mikhail Bakhtin's heteroglossia is most at home in a theory of novelistic discourse and not in the give-and-take of actual world-historical social actors. Bakhtin's work has been readily appropriated in literary criticism precisely for its *aesthetic* insights. The point to be made here is that dialogue without depth—heteroglossia or polyphony—is no more dialogic than Geertz's over the shoulder method of reading.

11. Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," 278 (hereafter cited in the text as "Structure"). Like the previous shorthand discussion of Ricoeur, the consideration of Derrida to be undertaken here does not claim to be comprehensive. The brief analysis of Derrida is meant only to provide one of the chief origins of the more radical logic of textuality and deconstruction in cultural study.

12. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158–59.

13. See Clifford's introduction to *Writing Culture*, 25 (hereafter cited in the text as *WC*).

14. I take this to be one of Edward Said's main points in his *Culture and Imperialism*.

15. James Clifford, *Predicament of Culture*, 10 (hereafter cited in the text as *PC*).

16. Though even here Clifford seems rather unsure about his own position: "Ethnographies," he writes, "are both like and unlike novels" (*PC*, 110).

17. Indeed, Clifford writes,

> The procedures of (a) cutting out and (b) assemblage are of course basic to any semiotic message; here they *are* the message. The cuts and sutures of the research process are left visible; there is no smoothing over or blending of the work's raw data into a homogenous representation. To write ethnographies on the model of collage would be to avoid the portrayal of cultures as organic wholes or as unified, realistic worlds subject to a continuous explanatory discourse. . . . The ethnography as collage would leave manifest the constructivist procedures of ethnographic knowledge; it would be an assemblage containing voices other than the ethnographer's, as well as examples of "found" evidence, data not fully integrated within the work's governing interpretation. Finally, it would not explain away those elements in the foreign culture that render the investigator's own culture newly incomprehensible. (*PC*, 146–47)

18. Related kinds of objections to Clifford have been raised in even more polemical terms. In a review entitled "Anthropology without Tears," Paul Roth argues that "after all the sophisticated literary analysis of voice is done, all the ordinary questions of method—for example, under what conditions the evidence cited supports a claim—remain" (560). And in a review of Clifford and Geertz, Thomas McCarthy suggests,

> Perhaps the nonreciprocity and asymmetry of cross-cultural representation cannot be eliminated or even significantly countered by literary self-consciousness and textual ingenuity alone. Maybe replacing scientism with aestheticism misses the root cause of the problems haunting anthropology. This is not to deny that reflexivity building awareness of the diversity of potential readers into the construction of multivocal texts is a legitimate and sometimes effective way of anticipating competence of 'others' to challenge cross-cultural representations. But it does not itself speak to the social, economic, political, military and cultural asymmetries of the global force field within which anthropology is still situated. ("Doing the Right Thing," 643)

Jim Bohman rejects Clifford's and Tyler's positions in favor of Geertz's epistemic fallibilism in *New Philosophy of Social Science*, 126–29. For still other relevant criticisms of the model of text, see Habermas's excellent piece, "Philosophy and Science as Literature?" and Edward Said's *World, Text, and Critic*, especially chapter 1. See also the last section of my review

essay, "Heidegger, Literary Theory, and Social Criticism," and Richard Rorty's "Nineteenth-Century Idealism."

19. Another exemplar of the logic of rationality and reconstruction is Axel Honneth, whose work on social struggle and moral recognition I shall consider from the perspective of the logic of constructing constellations in the final chapter of this study.

20. Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, 106 (hereafter cited in the text as *CA 1*). For the second quotation, see Habermas, "Interpretive Social Science," 260.

21. Indeed, Habermas has called communication the pacemaker of societal evolution. See his *Communication and the Evolution of Society.*

22. I borrow this useful characterization of Habermas's theory from Albrecht Wellmer's essay, "Communication and Emancipation."

23. Feminist critics of Habermas repeatedly make a similar set of points in different ways, arguing that Habermasian reconstructions fail to attend to the material and socially mediated character of gender. See, for example, Nancy Fraser's *Unruly Practices* and Seyla Benhabib's attempt to situate rationality more concretely in contexts of gender and community in her *Situating the Self.* And for a fine summary of the kinds of critiques of Habermas that I shall only intimate in this section, see especially Andrew C. Parkin's useful "On the Practical Relevance." Thomas McCarthy takes up Habermas's hermeneuticism in his *Ideals and Illusions.*

24. The Positivist Dispute in German sociology is relevant for another reason as well: it is perhaps the last time that Adorno makes almost explicit reference to the logic of constructing constellations, as we shall see in section 3 of chapter 3.

25. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer argues that "every age has to understand a transmitted text in its own way. . . . Understanding is not, in fact, understanding better, either in the sense of superior knowledge of the subject because of clearer ideas or in the sense of fundamental superiority of conscious over unconscious production. It is enough to say that we understand in a different way, if we understand at all" (296–97). In such a statement the possibility of a normative critique of ideology is, according to Habermas, jettisoned.

26. Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, 173–74 (hereafter cited in the text as *Logic*).

27. On this point, see especially Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action*, 120–21, which I paraphrase here.

28. See Habermas's *Toward a Rational Society*, especially 112–13.

2. METHOD AND TRUTH AMID THE RUINS OF THE SOCIAL

1. Hence, my rather narrow focus here excludes the sociology of Georg Simmel, whose study of money could in fact be read as the first deployment of the logic of constructing constellations outside of the tradition of critical theory. For while it was Marx who argued that money was the "bond of all bonds"—the "true agent of separation and union, the galvano-chemical power of society"—it was the methodological relationism of Simmel that made such a claim empirically demonstrable. For a rich account of how a sensitivity to the fragments of modernity and shared intellectual biographies link Simmel to the work of Frankfurt School theorists, see David Frisby's *Fragments of Modernity.* Frisby notes that

> Simmel attracted as students many who were later to become the most original critical social theorists, such as George Lukacs and Ernst Bloch. He also attracted the young Kracauer who, at one point, considered writing his doctoral dissertation under Simmel. Although this did not take place, Kracauer has left us with one of the most sensitive but critical appropriations of Simmel's social theory by any of his students. Kracauer's own analysis owes not a little to Simmel. In Weimar Germany, Kracauer himself had an extensive network of connections with the younger generation of critical social theorists. Aside from his close friendship with the young Adorno and his sometimes uneasy but productive relationship with Bloch, Kracauer was on relative close terms with Benjamin. As an increasingly prominent reviewer in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in the late 1920's, Kracauer was responsible for placing a number of Benjamin's short pieces in the newspaper as well as producing one of the most illuminating reviews of Benjamin's *One-Way Street.* For his part, Benjamin was impressed by Kracauer's critical pieces in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and especially by *Die Angestellten*, which he reviewed twice. (8)

And for a more extended discussion of Simmel's continued methodological relevance for social theory, see Frisby's *Simmel and Since*, especially chapters 6, 8, and 9.

2. It is, of course, Habermas who coins the term *rescuing-critique* to characterize Benjamin's work. See Habermas's "Consciousness-raising or Rescuing Critique." I shall try to show with some precision the aptness of such a characterization in this chapter. Gershom Scholem makes a similar claim when he argues that Benjamin's insights are those of a theologian

shipwrecked in the realm of the profane. See his essays on Walter Benjamin, collected in *On Jews and Judaism*.

3. Walter Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 35, translation modified (hereafter cited in the text as *Origin*, with English pagination. All translations silently modified).

4. For a discussion of Benjamin's work as the origins of negative dialectics, see Susan Buck-Morss's pioneering study, *Origins of Negative Dialectics*. For a discussion of Benjamin's work on image-construction and literary criticism, see Michael W. Jennings's *Dialectical Images*.

5. For a more literary reading of Benjamin's image-constructions of urban life, see, for example, Peter Szondi's "Walter Benjamin's 'City Portraits'."

6. Benjamin thinks of such images as dialectical or picture-puzzles or even mosaics, as well as constellations.

7. Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagenwerk*, 575. English translation of "section N" available in *The Philosophical Forum*, 15, no. 1–2 (1983–84): 1–40 (hereafter cited in the text as *Arcades*, followed by page numbers taken from Benjamin's *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5). All English translations modified.

8. To understand the specific theoretical problems that emerge here, one needs only consider briefly Susan Buck-Morss's account of the dialectical image in her *Dialectics of Seeing*. Buck-Morss adequately characterizes the dialectical image in Benjamin as the intersection of the axes of waking/dream and petrified nature/transitory nature in the commodity as cultural artifact (210 ff). In this way, she helps to clarify the *structural* features of the logic of Benjamin's image-construction. Yet she falters when she tries to explain how such a structure is true. Buck-Morss (not unlike Benjamin) simply ontologizes the internal structural features of the image. In her account, dialectical images contain an explosive charge that awakens. In this way, the very structure of the image becomes the vague justification for its political truth. But here it remains unclear *why* there is a *necessary* connection between shocking images and political action.

9. See Habermas's essay on Benjamin, "Consciousness-raising or Rescuing Critique."

10. Walter Benjamin, *Reflections*, 161–62.

11. Adorno puts the matter in more orthodox dialectical terms in a 1935 letter to Benjamin:

> If you transpose the dialectical image as 'dream' into consciousness, then not only has the concept been demystified and rendered sociable, but precisely through this it has also forfeited that objective

> liberating power that could legitimize it materialistically. . . . I am the last person to fail to see the relevance of the immanence of consciousness for the nineteenth century. But the concept of the dialectical image cannot be derived from the immanence of consciousness. Rather the immanence of consciousness as *interieur* is itself the dialectical image for the nineteenth century as alienation. . . . Accordingly, what is required is not to transpose the dialectical image as dream into consciousness, but to dispose of the dream in its dialectical construction and to understand the immanence of consciousness itself as a constellation of the real. (*Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, 496; hereafter cited in the text as *Correspondence*)

12. For two thorough accounts of the theoretical disputes between Benjamin and Adorno, see Buck-Morss, *Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 136–84, and Wolin, *Walter Benjamin*, 163–212. See also Martin Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 202–12.

13. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 18 (hereafter cited in the text as *MM*).

14. Investigations that deal with one or more of these conceptions include, for example, Joseph Früchtl's *Mimesis*; J. M. Bernstein's *Fate of Art*; Christoph Menke's *Die Souveränität der Kunst*; David Robert's *Art and Enlightenment*; Lambert Zuidervaart's *Semblance of Subjectivity*; Max Paddison's *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*; Peter Hohendahl's *Prismatic Thought*; Frederic Jameson's *Late Marxism*; and Max Pensky, *Actuality of Adorno*.

15. For a helpful recent analysis of Adorno's practice of cultural criticism, see Henry W. Pickford's "Critical Models."

16. Buck-Morss, *Origin of Negative Dialectics*, especially 90–110. And Adorno himself, in his *Negative Dialectics*, refers to Weber's deployment of the logic of constructing constellations as a "third possibility beyond the alternative of positivism and idealism" (166). But here in Adorno the logic of constructing constellations is confined to an analysis of *concepts* and not the social actors and cultural practices that both structure and are structured by such concepts.

17. Martin Jay, *Adorno*, 14.

18. See Jay's *Adorno*, 15–21.

19. Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, 61 (hereafter cited in the text as *AAT*). But see also Pensky's discussion of constellations in the context of his treatment of Benjamin in *Melancholy Dialectics*, 69–72; see as well Jameson's *Late Marxism*.

20. Most recently, Shierry Weber Nicholsen has presented the constellation in all three senses—as the origin of Adorno's style, as a metaphor, and most explicitly as a mode of aesthetic construction or configurational form. See her *Exact Imagination*, chapters 3 and 4, especially 103–24 and 179–80. This last passage merits citation here, both for its provocative and yet limited linguistified sense of the constellation:

> The coherence from one sentence to the next is provided by the concept or image in a sentence showing first one face, which links it to the sentence proceeding, and then another face, which links it to the sentence following. In this way, we may imagine each concept or image to be faceted like a jewel, with several faces that point in different directions. This comparison of the individual concepts and sentences in *Aesthetic Theory* to faceted jewels expands the idea of the constellational form of *Aesthetic Theory*. We may now imagine it as an interlacing of multitudinous constellations—a whole night sky, perhaps—whose nodes are those faceted jewels. (180)

21. Theodor Adorno, "Actuality of Philosophy," 126 (hereafter cited in the text as "Actuality").

22. This is precisely what Adorno means when he says elsewhere that "the constellation is not a system. Everything does not become resolved, everything does not come out even; rather, one moment sheds light on the other, and the figures that the individual moments form together are specific signs and a legible script." See Adorno's *Hegel: Three Studies*, 109.

23. In this limited sense, the logic of constructing constellations shares something with the more radical logic of textuality and deconstruction, though it draws very different conclusions from its engagement with the metaphysics of meaning, as we shall see later in this chapter.

24. For Benjamin's discussion of truth, see especially the prologue to his *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 35 ff.

25. For a short version of Adorno's quarrel with Mannheim, see Adorno's essay on the sociology of knowledge in *Prisms*. And for a comparative reconstruction of critical theory and Mannheimean sociology, see Leon Bailey's *Critical Theory*.

26. See Walter Benjamin's *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 159–235.

27. And here we need only recall the line from Adorno's "Actuality" lecture, where he says explicitly that constellations "do not lie organically ready in history . . . they must be produced by human beings."

28. Theodor Adorno, "Idea of Natural History," 122 (hereafter cited in the text as "Natural History").

29. See Walter Benjamin's *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, especially 167–82.

30. See Walter Benjamin's *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 166.

3. AFFECT AND EVIDENCE IN THE LOGIC OF CONSTRUCTING CONSTELLATIONS

1. As is well known, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* was Adorno's *Habilitation*—the second full-length scholarly work required for a professorship in the German academy.

2. But for a notable exception, see Peter Fenves's "Image and Chatter."

3. As cited in Rolf Wiggershaus's *Frankfurt School*, 91–92 (hereafter cited in the text as *Frankfurt School*).

4. Theodor Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, 3 (hereafter cited in the text as *Kierkegaard*).

5. It is for this reason that Adorno characterizes Kierkegaardian existentialism as an "archaic conceptual realism" (*Kierkegaard*, 92).

6. Of course, Adorno's sense of the *enabling* power of melancholy in social analysis is indebted to Benjamin. As Max Pensky rightly points out in the introduction to his study of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* investigations, "melancholy isolates; conversely, the enforced isolation from social institutions and practices produces both melancholy sadness and the alienation necessary to gain a critical insight into the structure of society itself," *Melancholy Dialectics*, 33.

7. Adorno will characterize this as a "dialectic of hope" without salvation (*Kierkegaard*, 110).

8. Adorno had long since been aware of the difficulties inhering in his account of the social critic, as a letter to Kracauer regarding the Kierkegaard study illustrates. Adorno writes, "I went into theological categories more deeply than I wanted to, and I'm afraid that I may have brayed rather too long about rescue and above all, of course, about reconciliation" (*Frankfurt School*, 92).

9. Such a conception of truth is intimated in Horkheimer's early writings as well. See his 1935 essay entitled "On the Problem of Truth," where he says that "a hydrogen atom observed in isolation has its specific characteristics, acquires new ones in molecular combinations with other elements, and displays old ones again as soon as it is freed from combination. Concepts behave in the same way; considered individually, they preserve their definitions, while in combination they become aspects of new units. . . . The

movement of reality is mirrored in the 'fluidity' of concepts" (*Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, 437).

10. Richard L. Kirkham, *Theories of Truth: A Critical Introduction*, 59 (hereafter cited in the text as *Theories of Truth*). Though Kirkham is, I think, mistaken to suggest that truth bearers are simply a matter of choice (59).

11. See Ian Hacking's "Language, Truth and Reason."

12. Of course, it is true that Hacking himself argues that what determines truth candidacy is the style of reasoning that frames or occludes the emergence of an empirical object or cultural practice. But according to the logic of constructing constellations, an interpretive account of truth candidates does not need to meet the strong criteria of rationality.

13. I borrow this useful example from James Bohman's "World Disclosure."

14. To extend the example, one might think of the ways in which soy products have begun to replace meat and dairy products as candidates for protein-rich diets in America. The truth bearingness of soy in American culinary life alters not only the eating habits and health of many Americans but also the practical context in which those habits are embedded. The substitution of soy burgers for beef, for example, reduces the severe environmental damages caused by cattle farming and the cruelty of livestock slaughtering. For several exemplary discussions of the social and cultural context-relevant truths of food, see Doris Witt's *Black Hunger*; David Bell and Gill Valentine's *We Are Where We Eat*; Harvey A. Levenstein's *Revolution at the Table*; *Sociology on the Menu*, ed. Alan Beardsworth; and Sidney W. Mintz's *Sweetness and Power*.

15. See Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action*, where he argues that in the late Adorno negative dialectics and aesthetic theory "helplessly refer to one another" because Adorno cedes to art the mimetic competence to represent the "sheer opposite of reason" (384, 390).

16. For an extended analysis of Popper's position in the Positivist Dispute developed from within the tradition of the Frankfurt School, see also Albrecht Wellmer's *Methodologie als Erkenntnistheorie*.

17. For Habermas's specific contributions to the Positivist Dispute, see his "Analytic Theory" and "Against a Positivistically Bisected Rationalism."

18. *Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, 88 (hereafter cited in the text as *Positivist*). The shorthand account of Popper here should in no way be viewed as an attempt to summarize Popper's work. Rather, it is

designed only to provide the frame of reference in which Adorno's remarks regarding interpretive philosophy are made.

19. And here we may recall how Benjamin's image-construction of Da Vinci and bomber planes made visible just such a contradiction, as we saw in section 1 of chapter 2.

4. METHOD AND TRUTH IN FRENCH SOCIAL THEORY

1. See, for example, Habermas's lectures on Foucault in *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*; Honneth's "Foucault and Adorno" and *Critique of Power*; and Nancy Fraser's *Unruly Practices.* For a related but different approach, see Mark Poster's *Critical Theory and Poststructuralism.*

2. Again, see especially Habermas and Honneth. Note, however, that careful distinctions must be drawn between Horkheimer and Adorno's top-down account of power developed in the tradition of Marx and Weber and Foucault's ascending micro-physics of decentered power relations. For a fine discussion of the connections and differences between Weber and Foucault, see Colin Gordon's "Soul of the Citizen." See also David Ingram's "Foucault and Habermas."

3. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 222 (hereafter cited in the text as *DP*). See also the following passage: "Historians of ideas usually attribute the dream of a perfect society to the philosophers and jurists of the eighteenth century; but there was also a military dream of society; its fundamental reference was not to the state of nature, but to the meticulously subordinated cogs of a machine, not to the primal social contract, but to permanent coercions, not to fundamental rights, but to infinitely progressive forms of training, not to the general will but to automatic docility" (169).

4. Again, see especially Habermas's and Honneth's work. But for an attempt to give a more positive account of Foucault's ostensible aesthetics of the social, see David Hiley's *Philosophy in Question* and William Connolly's rejoinder to Charles Taylor: "Taylor, Foucault, and Otherness."

5. This is Habermas's strategy in the lectures contained in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity.* It is beyond the purposes of this chapter to consider at length the considerable weight placed upon *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in Habermas's arguments in those lectures. But it is important to note that its limited focus on reason forces the logic of rationality and reconstruction to overburden the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a text that

Habermas uses to criticize not only Horkheimer and Adorno but also Foucault, Derrida, Nietzsche, Bataille, and Hegel.

6. I borrow the formulation "beyond hermeneutics" from Burt Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow. See their *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (hereafter cited in the text as *Michel Foucault*). While I think that Dreyfus and Rabinow are right to argue that Foucault seeks to move beyond hermeneutics, it is one of the arguments of this chapter and the book in general that Foucault, like Benjamin, Adorno, and Bourdieu, moves beyond hermeneutics not by abandoning interpretation but rather by reinventing it according to the logic of constructing constellations, or what Dreyfus and Rabinow describe in related terms as interpretive analytics.

7. In designating Foucault's method as archaeology-genealogy, I follow Dreyfus and Rabinow, whose analysis of Foucault perceives no analytically useful distinction between a pre- and post-archaeological phase in his work. See especially *Michel Foucault*, 104 ff.

8. This is how Foucault himself describes his work in an interview on method. See "Questions on Method," 100–117.

9. See, for example, Foucault's claim in his introduction to *The Order of Things*:

> I am not concerned, therefore, to describe the process of knowledge towards an objectivity in which today's science can finally be recognized; what I am attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field, the *episteme* in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather of its conditions of possibility; in this account, what should appear are those configurations within the *space* of knowledge which have given rise to the diverse forms of empirical science. Such an enterprise is not so much a history, in the traditional meaning of that word, as an "archaeology." (xxii)

10. Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 135 (hereafter cited in the text as *AK*).

11. Foucault in fact deploys what we have been calling the logic of constructing constellations at several points in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. See, especially, 66–67, 103, and 114.

12. Here we may productively recall Adorno's remark about constellations in his study of Hegel: "The constellation is not a system. Everything does not become resolved, everything does not come out even; rather,

one moment sheds light on the other, and the figures that the individual moments form together are specific signs and legible script" (109).

13. See, for example, Honneth's claim that "the attempt to analyze the cultural systems of knowledge solely from the perspective of an external observer constitutes the unique contribution and the particular attraction of Foucault's social theory" (*Critique of Power*, 109). Unfortunately, Foucault himself is often prone to needlessly overstate the descriptive and purely observational character of his archaeology as an "intrinsic description of the monument" or a "project of a pure description of discursive events" (*AK*, 7, 27).

14. Already in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault claims that his mode of analysis has much more than a descriptive capacity. Indeed, it is no accident that he outlines an archaeology of sexuality as an *ethical* analysis:

> Such an archaeology [of sexuality] would show, if it succeeded in its task, how the prohibitions, exclusions, limitations, values, freedoms, and transgressions of sexuality, all its manifestations, verbal or otherwise, are linked to a particular discursive practice. It would reveal, not of course as the ultimate truth of sexuality, but as one of the dimensions in accordance with which one can describe it, a certain "way of speaking"; and one would show how this way of speaking is invested not in scientific discourses, but in a system of prohibitions and values. An analysis that would be carried out not in the direction of the episteme, but in that of what we might call the ethical. (193)

15. Or, as Foucault asks elsewhere: "Is a pure description possible? . . . Are these descriptions accurate or distorted? But doesn't this reintroduce truth?" (*Michel Foucault*, 85).

16. While it is true that the social theory of the Frankfurt School, and Adorno in particular, is not inattentive to the implications of modern power mechanisms for a conception of truth, neither Benjamin nor Adorno reduce the context-transforming potential of interpretation to the functionalist reproduction of systemic power, as we shall make clear at the end of this section.

17. See "What Is Enlightenment?" 46.

18. Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," 132 (hereafter cited in the text as "Truth").

19. Jürgen Habermas, "Taking Aim," 106. Habermas develops his normative critique of Foucault in two lectures in *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. For a similar set of criticisms developed from within the logic

of rationality and reconstruction, see especially Nancy Fraser's essay on Foucault and power in her *Unruly Practices.* And for a related set of criticisms, see Charles Taylor's "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," in his *Philosophy and the Human Sciences.*

20. See Axel Honneth, "Critical Theory," in *The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*, 81.

21. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 132, 136, 127ff (hereafter cited in the text as *DofE*). Of course, there is an important difference to note here: Adorno and Horkheimer seem to vacillate between a Freudian version of a repressive hypothesis (power limits or constrains self-realization) and a productive hypothesis (power produces all bodily desires and conceptions of selfhood). Foucault, of course, is more consistent in this regard: power for him is purely anti-Freudian, a *productive* force that generates effects.

22. Here we need only recall that, as we saw in chapter 3, it is Adorno's interpretive philosophy that demonstrates how even in the most enchantedly reifying of social contexts (the bourgeois *interieur*) evidence of an emancipated form of social life is to be interpreted.

23. Theodor Adorno, "Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?" 246, my emphasis.

24. Foucault makes this clear in an interview: "As regards Marxism, I'm not one of those who try to elicit the effects of power at the level of ideology. Indeed I wonder whether, before one poses the question of ideology, it wouldn't be more materialist to study first the question of the body and the effects of power on it. Because what always troubles me with these analyses which prioritise ideology is that there is always presupposed a human subject on the lines of the model provided by classical philosophy, endowed with a consciousness which power is then thought to seize on" (*Power/Knowledge*, 58).

25. For two exemplary executions of a Foucault-inspired version of the logic of constructing constellations—executions freed of Foucault's own reductionisms—see especially Paul Rabinow's *French Modern* and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble.* In the former, Rabinow interprets the emergence of practices of reason in France not as texts but "as a set of practices bearing complex relations with a congeries of symbols . . . [the study] is about fields of knowledge (hygienic, statistical, biological, geographic, and social); about forms (architectural and urbanistic); about social technologies of pacification (disciplinary and welfare); about cities as social laboratories (royal, industrial, colonial, and socialist); about new social spaces (liberal disciplinary spaces, agglomerations, and new towns)"

(9). In the latter, Butler interprets how various hetero-normativized power relations produce effects at the level of the body that in turn delimit what counts as a gender identity in a matrix of cultural intelligibility on the one hand and, on the other hand, attempts to make legible those moments when a particular gender identity fails to conform to existing gender identity constitutions in a discourse formation. The persistence and proliferation of such moments, Butler argues in her context-sensitive analysis, provide potentially context-transforming evidence. They provide, that is, "critical opportunities to expose the limits and regulatory aims of that domain of intelligibility and, hence, to open up within the very terms of that matrix of intelligibility rival and subversive matrices of gender disorder" (17). And for two more Benjaminian archaeological studies, see Mike Davis's *City of Quartz* and James Deetz's *In Small Things Forgotten*.

26. See Honneth's "Fragmented World of Symbolic Forms," 197 (hereafter cited in the text as "Symbolic"). See also Honneth's interview with Bourdieu: "Struggle for Symbolic Order." And for a related critique, see Jeffrey Alexander's extended essay on Bourdieu in his *Fin de Siècle Social Theory*. See also David Gartman's "Culture as Class Symbolization."

27. Here I borrow Scott Lash's apt characterization of Bourdieu's work as a hermeneutics of retrieval. See Lash's essay, "Reflexivity and Its Doubles."

28. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, 160 (hereafter cited in the text as *Distinction*). For another fine example of the logic of constructing constellations at work in Bourdieu, see his construction or interpretation of class in "What Makes a Social Class?" 1–17. Bourdieu says: "The social world can be conceived as a multidimensional space that can be constructed empirically by discovering the main factors of differentiation which account for the differences observed in a given social universe, or, in other words, by discovering the powers or *forms of capital* which are or can become efficient, like aces in a game of cards, in this particular universe, that is, in the struggle (or competition) for the appropriation of scarce goods of which this universe is the site" (4).

29. Bourdieu makes precisely this point in his preface to the English-language translation of *Distinction*: the construction or interpretation of taste, Bourdieu claims, seeks to present "the complexity of the social world in a language capable of holding together the most diverse things while setting them in rigorous perspective . . . to say things that were de facto or de jure excluded" (xiii).

30. The shift from text to practice in Bourdieu's conception of culture helps to distinguish his work from that of Ricoeur and Geertz. In chapter 1

we saw how the deep model of text is insufficiently materialist and reflexive and has deeply relativizing tendencies. For an insightful discussion of the distinction between Geertz and Bourdieu, see Orville Lee's "Observations on Anthropological Thinking."

31. For the English translation, see Jacques Derrida's *Truth in Painting.*

32. Bourdieu characterizes the method of the radical logic of textuality and deconstruction in the following way:

> On one side, there is the "right" reading, the one which Kant has designated in advance, by manifesting the apparent architectonics and logic of his discourse, with a whole apparatus of skillfully articulated titles and sub-titles and a permanent display of the external signs of deductive rigour. . . . On the other side, there is the deliberately skewed approach, decentred, liberated and even subversive, which ignores the signposts and refuses the imposed order, fastens on the details neglected by ordinary commentator, notes, examples, parentheses, and thus finds itself obliged—if only to justify the liberty it takes—to denounce the arbitrariness of the orthodox reading and even of the overt logic of the discourse analysed, to raise difficulties and even to bring to light some of the social slips which, despite all the effort at rationalization and euphemization, betray the denied intentions which ordinary commentary, by definition, overlooks. Although it marks a sharp break with the ordinary ritual of idolatrous reading, this pure reading still concedes the essential point to the philosophical work. (*Distinction*, 497–98)

33. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 102 (hereafter cited in the text as *RS*).

34. See especially, *Reflexive Sociology*, 97.

35. Of course, Benjamin had long since perceived the context-sensitive potential of photography to illuminate the ruins and minutiae of society. In his 1936 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility," Benjamin argues that

> close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action. Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared

> to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling. With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject. (*Illuminations*, 236)

The importance of photography for the logic of constructing constellations is apparent in Bourdieu's *Distinction* as well as the work of Vergara, which we shall examine in the next chapter. Photography also plays a key role in Susan Buck-Morss's attempt to complete Benjamin's image-construction of the Parisian Arcades (see especially the "Afterimages" of her *Dialectics of Seeing*). As we already noted in chapter 1, Buck-Morss's work is deeply Benjaminian in its strengths (conceiving of interpretation as materialist image-construction) and weaknesses (overemphasizing the shocking truths of such constructions).

36. Indeed, Bourdieu says "I must . . . disassociate myself completely from the form of 'reflexivity' represented by the kind of self-fascinated observation of the observer's writings and feelings which has recently become fashionable among some American anthropologists who, having apparently exhausted the charms of fieldwork, have turned to talking about themselves rather than about their object of research. When it becomes an end in itself, such falsely radical denunciation of ethnographic writing as 'poetics and politics' opens the door to a form of thinly veiled nihilistic relativism . . . that stands as the polar opposite to a truly reflexive social science" (*RS*, 72).

37. Here we may also note that while Bourdieu strongly rejects the account of the critic in the radical logic of textuality and deconstruction, he also rejects the logic of rationality and reconstruction. On the one hand, Bourdieu criticizes what he calls the "aestheticism of transgression" in Derrida, who situates "himself both inside and outside the game, on the field and on the sidelines, he plays with fire by brushing against a genuine critique of the philosophical institution without completing it" (*RS*, 154–55). On the other hand, Bourdieu rejects what we characterized briefly in chapter 1 as the historical insensitivities of the logic of rationality and reconstruction in Habermas:

> If there exists, *pace* Habermas, no transhistorical universals of communication, there certainly exist forms of social organization of

communication that are liable to foster the production of the universal. We cannot rely on moral exhortation to abolish systematically distorted communication from sociology. Only a realistic politics of scientific reason can contribute to the transformation of structures of communication, by helping to change both the modes of functioning of those universes where science is produced and the disposition of the agents who compete in these universes. . . . I do not think that reason lies in the structure of the mind or language. It resides, rather, in certain types of historical conditions, in certain social structures of dialog and nonviolent communication. (*RS*, 188–89)

38. Bourdieu himself admits as much when he says,

I believe that sociology does exert a disenchanting effect, but this, in my eyes, marks a progress toward a form of scientific and political realism that is the absolute antithesis of naïve utopianism. Scientific knowledge allows us to locate real points of application for responsible action; it enables us to avoid struggling where there is no freedom—which is often an alibi of bad faith—in such a manner as to dodge sites of genuine possibility. While it is true that a certain kind of sociology, and perhaps particularly the one I practice, can encourage sociologism as submission to the "inexorable laws" of society. . . . I think that Marx's alternative between utopianism and sociologism is somewhat misleading: there is room, between sociologistic resignation and utopian voluntarism, for what I would call a reasoned utopianism, that is, a rational and politically conscious use of the limits of freedom afforded by a true knowledge of social laws and especially their historical conditions of validity. The political task of social science is to stand up both against irresponsible voluntarism and fatalistic scientism, to help define a rational utopianism by using the knowledge of the probable to make the possible come true. (*RS*, 196–97)

5. CONSTRUCTING URBAN CONSTELLATIONS

1. Camilo José Vergara, *New American Ghetto*, xiii (hereafter cited in the text as *Ghetto*). For another example of the logic of constructing constellations at work in an interpretation of urban existence, see John R. Logan and Harvey L. Molotch's *Urban Fortunes.*

2. See also Vergara's most recent work, *American Ruins.*

3. See Axel Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition* (hereafter cited in the text as *Struggle*).

4. See E. P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class.*

5. In a relevant review of Honneth's paradigm of recognition, Jeffrey C. Alexander and Maria Pia Lara argue that Honneth fails to see the extent to which recognition is textured and mediated. See their "Honneth's New Critical Theory."

6. Wacquant's research is limited to male boxers, but the growing popularity of women's professional boxing suggests that boxing may become an avenue for social differentiation for women as well. For a recent and similar analysis of women's boxing, see Carlo Rotella's "Good with Her Hands." See also Jennifer Hargreaves's "Bruising Peg to Boxerobics."

7. Of course, the ur-constellation, as it were, of urban life in Chicago is St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton's pioneering 1945 study, *Black Metropolis.*

8. See Loïc Wacquant, "Pugilistic Point of View" (hereafter cited in the text as "Pugilistic"). See also Wacquant's "Prizefighter's Three Bodies."

9. For a more detailed summary of Wacquant's methodology, see his "Social Logic of Boxing," a text to which I shall refer in the next section of this essay (hereafter cited as "Social Logic").

10. Other not unrelated uses of the body include, for example, prostitution, stripping, and other forms of exotic dancing, day laboring, hustling, and various forms of thuggery.

11. The statistics gathered by Wacquant illustrate the generalizability of such a sentiment: "Over 80 percent of Chicago's pugilists . . . would prefer that their sons not enter the trade" ("Pugilistic," 523).

12. Though in my opinion Wacquant misleadingly and against the very evidence he collects links the work of boxing to the world of the factory ("Social Logic," 238).

13. Even the start-up costs of a boxing membership have a profoundly egalitarian effect: "There is no direct economic barrier to boxing to speak of: Yearly dues to enroll at the Stoneland Boys Club amount to 10 dollars: the mandatory license from the Amateur Boxing Federation costs an additional 12 dollars a year, and all the necessary equipment is graciously loaned by the club (save for the handwraps and mouthpiece that can be purchased for less than 10 dollars in the few sports stores that carry them)" ("Social Logic," 232).

14. Here I depart sharply from Wacquant's analysis, which in my opinion too closely and homologously links the hidden curriculum of pugilistic universe and that of ghetto street culture ("Social Logic," 232). If I am

right about the struggle for social differentiation, then that struggle cannot be reduced to the reproductive inculcation of the structures of street life. Boxers see their practices as socially differentiated and differentiating labor practices that, though never wholly separable from ghetto street culture, are nevertheless distinct from that culture.

15. Wacquant makes precisely this point: "From an alien place where one feels awkward, out of place, or plain endangered, the ring progressively becomes a 'place of work,' a stage for self-expression where pugilists are 'at home'—this is the expression they use most often when asked how it feels to step into the ring" ("Social Logic," 246).

16. Of course, it is only fair to add that Honneth has gone some way toward recuperating a critical conception of work over and against Habermas's situating of labor on the strategic side of the strategy/normativity dualism: "In the version employed by Habermas, the concept of instrumental action itself is thematically too thin to be able to grasp the moral tension inherent in established work relations." See Honneth's "Work and Instrumental Action," 49. But here again the strategic/normative distinction still prevails, albeit in an attenuated form.

17. On this point see Katherine S. Newman's recent study, *No Shame in My Game*.

AFTERWORD

1. Collected in *Weight of the World*, ed. Pierre Bourdieu. And for another insightful deployment of the logic of constructing constellations in the context of urban study, see Loïc Wacquant's contributions to this collection: "America as Dystopia" and "Inside 'The Zone'."

2. I have elsewhere developed an account of thematizing embeddedness in the context of a discussion of Bourdieu's work. See my "Thematizing Embeddedness," where I argue that Bourdieu's method of reflexive sociology must extend its account of reflexivity to social actors *themselves*.

3. Perhaps Alfred Schutz most aptly characterized the double hermeneutic of social inquiry. See especially his "Common-Sense and Scientific Interpretation." See also Anthony Giddens's *New Rules of Sociological Method*.

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Index

absolute concept of truth, 89
actions: instrumental vs. communicative, 27, 139; as social text, 6–7
"The Actuality of Philosophy" (Adorno lecture), 54, 58, 63, 65, 67, 86
Adorno, Theodor, 2, 5; appropriation of reified second nature by, 66; critique/appropriation of Benjamin by, 36, 47–52; formulation of interpretive philosophy by, 51–69, 87; formulations of mimesis by, 85, 86; Frankfurt School tradition followed by, 39; on Heideggerean ontology, 63, 64, 65; interpretive motion as conceived by, 55–56; Kierkegaard study by, 71–81; on Popperian logic of problem-solving, 90–93; riddle-image conception by, 56–58; on social life, 114–15; on unintentional truth, 58–59
Aesthetic Theory (Adorno), 53, 172 n.20
affirmative text-reading, 15–18
American ghetto life. *See* Vergara ghetto life study
Arcades Project (Benjamin), 36, 40–42, 44, 46, 51, 102
archaeology-genealogy. *See* Foucaultian archaeology-genealogy
The Archaeology of Knowledge (Foucault), 99–100, 101
authority/knowledge false antinomy, 31–32

Bakhtin, Mikhail, 24
Balinese cockfight, 11–12, 166 n.6
behavioralist model of culture, 5
Benjamin, Walter, 2, 5; Adorno's critique/appropriation of, 47–52; image-construction by, 36, 39–47; natural history as conceived by, 64; on social life, 114–15; suicide of, 51; on trash of history, 38, 41–42, 52; on truth as historical evidence, 85
Bentham, Jeremy, 103
Black Panther murals, 136, *137*
Bourdieu, Pierre, 2, 5, 36, 94, 95, 96, 110, 161
Bourdieuean reflexive sociology: on class struggles related to taste, 111–12, 116, 179 n.29; as context-transforming, 119; critique of Foucault's systems of power, 113–14; focus/core tasks of, 96; logic of constructing constellations version of, 110–20, 179 n.28; on logic of textuality/deconstruction, 112–13, 180 n.32; materialist methods of, 94; as modification of Frankfurt School, 117–20; use of participant objectivation in, 118–19; on social life, 114–15; on social reality as field of struggle relations, 114–16; three levels of, 117–20
bourgeois *interieur*: construction of, 72–77; context-sensitive interpretation of, 76–78
boxers/boxing study. *See* Wacquant's boxers/boxing study
Buck-Morss, Susan, 53

Central Ward, Newark (1994), *140*
Chicago social struggle study. *See* social struggle
class struggle. *See* social struggle
Clifford, James, 1, 6, 13, 14, 26, 95, 117
Clifford text model: described, 22–23; ethnographic surrealism of, 24–26;

Clifford text model (*continued*) objections to, 167 n.18; text-reading using, 23–24
commodity construction, 59
communicative action, 27, 139
Conrad, Joseph, 24
constellation metaphor, 53. *See also* logic of constructing constellations
constructing constellations. *See* logic of constructing constellations
construction of commodity, 59
context-relevant evidence, 83
context-sensitivity: of archaeologist, 99; Benjamin on potential of photographic, 116, 180 n.35; Bourdieu's attempt to incorporate, 117–20; of bourgeois *interieur* construction, 76–78; of historical montage, 42–43; of image-constructions, 48; importance of social critic, 70–71, 116; of logic of constructing constellations, 44–45, 81, 82–83; truth bearers made visible through, 93; of Vergara's study, 124–25
context-transformation: Benjamin on interpretation which is, 107; Bourdieu's reflexivity as, 119; described, 5; historical evidence and, 44–45, 107; logic of constructing constellations potential for, 61–69, 162–63; using reflexively thematizing embeddedness for, 161–64; revelations for Stoneland's neighborhood, 160; truth of evidence potential for, 83–84
Cree hunter story, 25–26
Critique of Judgement, 113
cultural anthropology, 6
culture: Bourdieu's class struggles/tastes of, 111–12, 116, 179 n.29; Clifford's text model of, 22–26; Derrida's text model of, 14–18; ethnographic version of, 20–21; Geertz's text model of, 9–13, 24; models of, 5–26; performativist model of, 5–6; planar text/text-evocation model of, 1, 6, 13; poetics of, 165 n.6; Ricoeur's text model of, 6–9; structuralist model of, 5; Tyler's text model of, 20–23

Dasein, 62, 63, 65
deep text/text-reading model of culture. *See* text-reading models
Derrida, Jacques, 1, 6, 95
Derrida text model: linguistic play, affirmative text-reading of, 15–18; structure question in, 14–15
Dialectic of Enlightenment (Horkheimer and Adorno), 96, 97, 108, 119
Dilthey, Wilhelm, 26
Discipline and Punish (Foucault), 96, 102, 103, 105, 108–9, 112, 119
disenchantment task, 5, 26, 53, 94
Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste (Bourdieu), 111, 114, 116
La Distinction (Bourdieu), 95

The Elementary Structures (Lévi-Strauss), 15
evidence. *See* truth of evidence
evocative cultural criticism, 20–22
experience: evaluative nature of hermeneutic, 33–34; hermeneutic insight into, 31–32; linguistic aspect of understanding, 29

Fear and Trembling (Kierkegaard), 79
field of struggle relations (Bourdieu), 114–16
Foucault, Michel, 2, 5, 36, 94, 95, 96
Foucaultian archaeology-genealogy: Adorno's interpretive philosophy distinguished from, 108–9; on archaeology of knowledge, 102–3, 176 n.9; on archaeology of sexuality analysis, 177 n.14; on

construction of power, 103–5, 113; form of social critic within, 98–99, 102–3; on interpretation of discursive constellations, 101–2; logic of constructing constellations interpretation by, 95–96, 101–2, 103–10; logic of rationality/reconstruction framework of, 96–98; materialist methods of, 94; on Panoptican proposal, 103–4; resistance to interpretive social analysis by, 100–101; on social life, 114–15
Frankfurt School: Adorno's interpretive philosophy contribution to, 39; aesthetic character of truth within, 85; Bourdieu's contribution as modified, 116–20; compared to logic of textuality/deconstruction, 94; *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as proof text of social theory of, 97; Positivist Dispute reconstruction of, 95; similar logic used by Foucault and Bourdieu, 96; tie between logic of constructing constellations and, 40, 54, 98–110; two interpretive turns of social theory of, 87–93. *See also* social theory
French social theory. *See* Bourdieuean reflexive sociology; Foucaultian archaeology-genealogy
Freud, Sigmund, 92
Frye, Northrop, 12

Gadamer, Hans-Georg, 26, 29, 87
Geertz, Clifford, 1, 6, 95
Geertz text model: comparing Clifford/Tyler's positions to, 13–14; comparing Ricoeur to, 10, 11; described, 9–10; dialogic critiques of, 24; meaning of social text in, 10–13, 81–82; reading of Balinese cockfight using, 11–12, 166 n.7; struggle over relativism in, 13
German literature: Benjamin on role of truth in, 48; Benjamin's use of constellation to examine, 39–47
ghetto life study. *See* Vergara ghetto life study
ghetto mural imagery, 134–39, *137*
gym talk (Wacquant study), 153–55

Habermas, Jürgen, 1, 3, 6, 23, 27, 45, 107
Habermas's social theory: on hermeneutics for critique of ideology, 32–35; Positivist Dispute in German sociology and, 28–29, 86; on role of interpretation in, 28–30; on truth and hermeneutic methods, 30–32, 86–87
Hacking, Ian, 84–85
Hegel, Georg, 48, 139
Heidegger, Martin, 21, 61, 62, 63, 64, 67
Heideggerean ontology historicity, 63, 64, 65–66, 68
hermeneutics: evaluative nature of, 33–34; Foucault on archeological methods as critique of, 101–2; Habermas's interpretation of Gadamer's, 29–35, 86–87; insight through, 31–32; rationality and reconstruction logic in, 26–35
historical evidence: context-dependency/transforming link of, 107; transformative character of, 44–45
history: Adorno's development of natural, 63–69; constructing constellation as conceptual, 53; *Dasein* concept and, 62, 63, 65; Heideggerean ontology compared to natural, 63, 64, 65–66, 68; Lukacs, Benjamin's influence on Adorno's, 65–69; narrative on ghetto life, 125–26; trash of, 38, 41–42, 52, 71
Honneth, Axel, 1, 107, 110, 139–44
Horkheimer, Max, 51, 71

"The Idea of Natural History" (Adorno lecture), 63
ideology: language distortion function in, 30, 33–34; Marxism on effects of power at level of, 178 n.24; rationality/reconstruction for critique of, 32–35
image-construction: Adorno's appropriation of Benjamin's, 41, 47–52; Benjamin's use of constellations for, 39–47; Buck-Morss' clarification of, 170 n.8; context-sensitive, 48; rescuing-critique of, 45–46; Vergara's use of, in ghetto study, 139
incest prohibition, 15
injustice, 20–21
instrumental action, 27, 139
interpretation: archaeological avoidance of, 100; Benjamin on context-transforming through, 107; Foucault on archaeology of knowledge and, 102–3; Foucault on discursive constellation, 101
interpretive philosophy: Adorno's formulation of, 51–69, 87; distinguished from Foucaultian archaeology-genealogy, 108–9; as distinguished from science, 55, 72; interpretive motion of, 55–56; micrological materialism of, 59–60; practical transformation potential of, 61–69; riddle-image of, 56–58; six intertwined features of, 63; sociological elements of, 60–61; task of, 71–72; unintentional truth of, 58–59

Jay, Martin, 53

Kant, Immanuel, 111, 113
Kierkegaard, Søren, 36, 69, 71
Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic (Adorno): on bourgeois *interieur* construction, 72–77; on bourgeois *interieur* context-sensitive construction, 76–78; demanding text of, 71; on disposition of social critic, 78–81; logic of constructing constellations outlined in, 86; on task of interpretive philosophy, 72–73; thesis of, 72; "window mirror" symbol of, 72–75
Kirkham, Richard L., 84
knowledge: false antinomy between authority and, 31–32; Foucault on archaeology of, 102–3, 176 n.9; learned from mistakes, 89; Mannheim's sociology of, 61; as power, 105; problems as starting point of, 87–88; redemption as light of, 80; unintentional truth and authentically materialist, 59

language: as domination/social power medium, 33; Habermas on Gadamer's account of, 29–35; ideological distortion vs. understanding function of, 30, 33–34; riddle-image conception in, 56–58
"Language, Truth and Reason" (Hacking), 84
Leonardo Da Vinci, 46–47
Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 14, 15, 16, 21
linguistic play, 15–17
literary criticism: Bakhtin's work used in, 166 n.10; textual method of, 165 n.6
literature: Benjamin on role of truth in German, 48; Benjamin's use of constellation to examine German, 39–47
logic of archaeology. *See* Foucaultian archaeology-genealogy
logic of constructing constellations: Adorno's critique/appropriation of Benjamin's, 47–51, 53–55; as alternative to sublogics of textuality/deconstruction, 121–23, 163–64; Benjamin's image-

construction using, 39–47; Bourdieuean reflexive sociology version of, 110–20, 179 n.28; of bourgeois space in Kierkegaard, 72–77; context-sensitivity of, 44–45, 81, 82–83; context-transforming potential of, 61–69, 162–63; described, 2, 35–37; Foucaultian interpretation of, 101–2, 103–10; interdisciplinary nature of, 60–61; interpretive philosophy used in, 51–55; micrological, 59–60; origins of, 36; photographic context-sensitivity potential in, 116, 180 n.35; Popperian problem-solving method and, 90–93; rescuing-critique method and, 45–46; social critic's embeddedness and, 26; tie between Frankfurt School and, 40, 54, 98–110; truth vs., 41; Vergara ghetto life study application of, 125–26, 139; Wacquant's boxing study use of, 143–44, 157, 160
logic of rationality/reconstruction: compared to textuality/deconstruction, 27, 34; critique of Bourdieu's reflexive sociology using, 110; described, 1; as Foucaultian archaeology-genealogy framework, 96–98; in hermeneutics tradition, 26–35; relevance for critique of ideology by, 33; strengths/weaknesses of, 27–28, 34–35; supplemented by logic of constructing constellations, 164; Wacquant's boxing study and, 157–59
logic of textuality/deconstruction: Bourdieu's distancing from, 112–13, 180 n.32; Clifford's text model of, 22–26; compared to rationality/reconstruction, 27, 34; Derrida's text model of, 14–18; described, 1; Geertz's text model of, 9–13, 24; logic of constructing constellations alternative to, 121–23, 163–64; Ricoeur's text model of, 6–9; Tyler's text model of, 20–23
"The Logic of the Social Sciences" (Popper), 87
Lukacs, Georg, 64, 66, 67
Lukacs's "thingification," 64

The Making of the English Working Class (Thompson), 140
Malinowski, Bronislaw, 24
Mannheim, Karl, 61
Marx, Karl, 38
Marxist social theory, 42
Mead, George Herbert, 139
melancholy/hopefulness, 77–78, 173 n.6
micrological logic, 59–60
Minima Moralia (Adorno), 51–52, 80, 108
"The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text" (Ricoeur), 6–7
Moody, Cora, 125–26
mural imagery, 134–39, *137*

The New American Ghetto (Vergara), 123–24, 139. *See also* Vergara ghetto life study
New York City Department of Consumer Affairs, 134
Nietzsche, Friedrich, 15, 16

objective concept of truth, 89
Of Grammatology (Derrida), 16–17
"On the Logic of the Social Sciences" (Adorno), 90
On the Logic of the Social Sciences (Habermas), 28

Panopticon proposal (Bentham), 103–4
Paris Arcades Project (Benjamin), 36, 40–42, 44, 46, 51, 102
"Paris, Capital of the 19th Century" proposal (Benjamin), 48
"Partial Truths" (Clifford), 19–20
participant objectivation, 118–19
performativist model of culture, 5–6

photographic context-sensitivity potential, 116, 180 n.35
planar text/text-evocation model of culture, 1, 6, 13
play movement, 15–17
play of evocation, 20–21
poetics of culture, 165 n.6
Popper, Karl, 86, 87–93, 116
Popperian problem-solving, 90–93
Positivist Dispute in German sociology: Adorno/Popper exchange on, 86–93; as dispute about method and truth, 86–87; Habermas vs. Gadamer on, 28–29, 86; Popperian problem-solving logic in, 90–93
"Post-Modern Ethnography" (Tyler), 20–21
power: Bourdieu's critique of Foucault's systems of, 113–14; conflation of truth with, 102–3; construction of subject-centered/systemic, 103–4; cultural taste linked to class struggle over, 111–12; Foucaultian construction of, 103–5, 113; knowledge as, 105; language as medium of social, 33; link between truth and systems of, 106; Marxism on effects on ideology, 178 n.24
The Predicament of Culture (Clifford), 22, 24
prizefighting. *See* Wacquant's boxers/boxing study
problem-solving solutions, 87–93

rationality/reconstruction. *See* logic of rationality/reconstruction
reflexively thematizing embeddedness: context-transforming truth revealed using, 161–64; described, 161; on role of social critics, 162
reflexive sociology. *See* Bourdieuean reflexive sociology
reified second nature, 66, 67
relativism problem, 13
rescuing-critique social theory, 45–46
Ricoeur, Paul, 1, 6, 7, 95
Ricoeur text model: on actions as social texts, 7; comparing Geertz to, 10, 11; linguistic constitution of, 7–8; questions posed by, 6–7; relations of deep text and world, 9; text-reading paradigm of social analysis in, 8–9
riddle-image, 56–58
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 16, 17
Ryle, Gilbert, 10

Schleiermacher, Friedrich, 15
Schuhl, Pierre-Maxime, 46
science: interpretive philosophy distinguished from, 55, 72; relationship of philosophy and sociological, 60–61; scientific method of, 87–93
second nature meaning, 66, 67
Simmel, Georg, 92, 169 n.1
social analysis: Adorno on unintentional truth from, 58–59; Derrida's notion of text-based, 15–18; Foucaultian archaeology-genealogy resistance to interpretive, 100–101; Popper on scientific method of, 87–93; rationality/reconstruction logic of hermeneutic, 26–35; Ricoeur's text-reading paradigm of, 8–9
social critic: Adorno on Popper's critical rationalism of, 91–92; Adorno's Kierkegaard study on, 78–81; Clifford on dialogic analyses role of, 23; consequences of embeddedness of, 26; context-sensitivity of, 70–71, 116, 117–20; disenchantment task of, 5, 26, 53, 94; evocation used by, 20–22; Foucaultian form of, 98–99, 102–3; interpretive role of, 21, 116; logic of rationality/reconstruction used by, 28, 34–35; melancholy and hopefulness functions for, 77–78, 173 n.6; as participant-observer, 25–26; reflexively thematizing embeddedness on role of, 162;

response to context-transforming evidence by, 84; scientific method of social analysis used by, 88–93; structuralist schools of literary, 8–9
social differentiation: boxing aesthetic and moral marks of, 148–49; boxing gym talk potential for, 153–55; boxing potential for female, 183 n.6; of boxing as work, 145–47; social logic of boxing and, 149–53; sparring logic and, 155–60
social inquiry: Benjamin's use of constellation for, 39–47; Foucaultian archaeology-genealogy method of, 98–110; hermeneutic methods part of, 30–31; logic of constructing constellations task of, 35–37; reconstruction of deformed speech task of, 28; text as object of, 6–7
social life: Bourdieu's conception of field in, 115–16; comparing Foucault, Benjamin, Adorno, Bourdieu on, 114–15; deuniversalization of linguistification of, 29–30; history of ghetto, 125–26; justification for enlisting montage to study, 42–43; logic of constructing constellations critique of, 2, 35–37; rationality/reconstructive normative critique of, 27–35; structured contexts of relations in, 28; Vergara on loss of good, 125–26, 127–39
social logic of boxing (Wacquant study), 149–53
"The Social Logic of Boxing in Black Chicago: Toward a Sociology of Pugilism" (Wacquant field notes), 150
social reality: Adorno on nature of interpretation of, 59–60; Bourdieu's conception of, 114–16; *Dasein* conception of history within, 62, 63, 65; interpretation of unintentional, 58; logic of constructing constellations conception of, 35–37; models required for text-based, 2–3; riddle-imagistic quality of, 56–58
social relations: Bourdieu's field of struggle in, 114–16; structured contexts of, 28; Wacquant's construction of boxing and, 143–44
social struggle: Bourdieuean reflexive sociology on field of, 114–16; moral vs. utilitarian view of, 141–42; social theories used to study, 139–41; study on Chicago, 139–44; Wacquant's boxers/boxing study on, 142, 143–60
social text: Clifford's reading of, 24–25; Geertz's reading of, 11–13, 81–82; as object of social study, 6–7; Ricoeur vs. Geertz on, 10, 11
social theory: Bourdieuean reflexive sociology contribution to, 94, 96, 110–20; on class struggles, 139–41; cultural anthropology area of, 6; four models of culture in reconfiguration of, 5–26; German, 36, 38; Habermans's early work on, 28–35; Marxist, 42; rescuing-critique and, 45–46; Ricoeur's text model applicable to, 9; Simmel's continued relevance for, 169 n.1. *See also* Frankfurt School; Habermas's social theory; interpretive philosophy
sociology: disenchanting effect of, 182 n.38; Mannheimean, 61; Positivist Dispute in German, 28–29, 86–93; relationship between philosophy and, 60–61. *See also* Bourdieuean reflexive sociology
"The Space of Points of View" (Bourdieu), 161
sparring logic (Wacquant study), 155–60
"The Stoneland Boys Club" (Wacquant field notes), 150–52
structuralist models: of culture, 5; of literary criticism, 8–9

structure: Derrida's interpretation of, 14–16; Lévi-Strauss's work on organized, 14
"Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (Derrida), 14
The Struggle for Recognition (Honneth), 139

tastes (cultural), 111–12, 116, 179 n.29
text-evocation models, 2–3
text-reading models: affirmative, 15–18; Clifford's, 23–24, 167 n.18; Derrida's, 14–18; described, 1, 6; examination of, 2–3; Geertz's, 9–14, 24; Ricoeur's, 6–11; Tyler's, 20–22
Theories of Truth (Kirkham), 84
Third Critique (Kant), 113
Thompson, E. P., 140, 141
Toward a Rational Society (Habermas), 34
trash of history: context-sensitivity to collect, 71; described, 38; function of, 41–43, 52; made relevant to modern life, 52; possible truth in unintentional, 84; truth and, 41–45
Trauerspiel study (Benjamin), 39, 67
truth: absolute or objective concept of, 89; Benjamin on the role of, 48; Benjamin's use of constellation for reconstructing, 39–47; Clifford's view on problem on, 19–20; conflation of power with, 102–3; in culinary practice of American culture, 85, 174 n.14; Hacking's account of, 84–85; hermeneutic methods in search for, 30–32; Horkheimer's writings on, 173 n.9; linked to systems of power supporting it, 106; logic of constructing constellations vs., 41; Nietzsche on nature of, 16; Popperian method of problem-solving conception of, 87–93; Positivist Dispute about method and, 86–87; surrealist awakening vs. historical evidence, 82–85; trash of history and, 41–45; unintentional, 58–59
truth bearers: introduction of, 69; made visible through context-sensitivity, 93–94; revelations on Stoneland's neighborhoods by, 160; truth as, 81–86; truth candidacy vs., 85
truth of evidence: context-relevant, 83; as potentially context-transforming, 83–84; three features of, 84; truth as, 82–85
Tyler, Stephen, 1, 6, 13, 14, 20, 21, 117
Tyler text model, 20–22

unintentional truth, 58–59
urban constellations. *See* Vergara ghetto life study; Wacquant's boxers/boxing study
Der Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels (The Origins of German Tragic Drama) [Benjamin], 39, 67

Vergara, Camilo José, 37, 123
Vergara ghetto life study: Central Ward, Newark (1993), *135*; context-sensitivity of, 124–25; East Side, Detroit (1991), *135*; Harlem, New York (1992), *137*; Highland Park, Michigan (1993), *136*; logic of constructing constellations applied to, 125–26; on loss of good social life, 125–26, 127–39; 178 Street and Vyse Avenue (1980–1996), *130*, *131–34*; on revenge of capital, 130–34; on revenge of nature, 127–30; on revenge of tradition/mural imagery, 134–39; Rosa Parks Boulevard, Detroit (1987), *128*; social inquiry into, 123–24; West Side, Detroit (1986, 1991), *128*, *137*
La Verite en Peinture (Kant), 112

Wacquant, Loïc, 37, 123, 142

Wacquant's boxers/boxing study: on aesthetic/moral marks of social differentiation, 148–49; on boxer violence/skill management, 144–45; existentialist images of, 143–44; on gym talk/social differentiation, 153–55; logic of constructing constellations used in, 143–44, 157, 160; presentation of, 142; on social logic of boxing, 149–53; on sparring logic/social differentiation, 155–60; on Stoneland demographics, 158–60; on work/social differentiation of boxing, 145–47
"window mirror" symbol, 73–75
Writing Culture (collection of essays), 19, 22

Zuidervaart, Lambert, 53

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