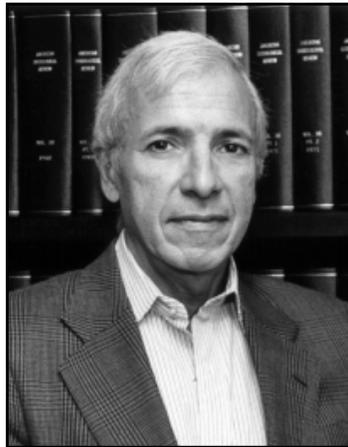# THE HIDDEN ABODE:
## SOCIOLOGY AS ANALYSIS OF THE UNEXPECTED[*]
### *1999 Presidential Address*

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*Purposive social action has provided the bedrock for theoretical developments and model building in several social sciences. Since its beginnings, however, sociology has harbored, a "contrarian" vocation based on examining the unrecognized, unintended, and emergent consequences of goal-oriented activity. I present several examples of the sociological practice of bashing myths based on the logic of purposive action and offer a typology of alternative goals, means, and outcomes illustrated by both classic sociological writings and contemporary research. The multiple contingencies documented by sociologists in the past cautions against attempts to build institutions or implement programs grounded on grand blueprints. The cautionary tale supported by sociological analysis of concealed goals, shifts in midcourse, and unexpected effects does not lead, however, to the conclusion that scientific prediction and practical intervention are futile endeavors. It leads instead to an emphasis on the dialectics of social life, and on the need to take into account the definitions of the situation of relevant actors. I offer some illustrations of successful mid-range theories that are based on the analysis of dilemmas in social processes and the importance of sensitivity to the unexpected in the implementation of programmatic interventions.*

A little while ago, during one of his periodic trips to New York City, I met Roberto Fernandez Miranda, principal of the La Luz school in the Dominican Republic.

Business in his private school was booming, despite its steep tuition—unusual for a Third World country. The secret was that his students were mostly children of expatriates, not those who had returned home, but immigrants still living and working in New York. About the same time, an article in *The New York Times* reported on the proliferation of

such schools in major Dominican cities indicating that the experience of La Luz was not exceptional.[1]

For this bounty, Dominican educators have American legislation to thank. Traditionally, raising children in the Caribbean has entailed the use of physical discipline to enforce parents' and teachers' authority. In most families, corporal punishment is used sparsely, but it stands as the ultimate sanction for serious violations and as an accepted instrument of proper child rearing. Upon arrival in the United States, Dominican immigrants are promptly deprived of this means of control. Children soon learn that they can neutralize any threat of physical punishment by the counter threat of calling 911 and denouncing their parents for child abuse. They are then at liberty to explore the many lures offered by American youth culture, including the semi-open use of drugs.

Immigrant parents thus face a dilemma. By working in New York, they escape the grinding poverty in which they were mired at home, but they risk losing their children to the streets—perhaps to a tragic end. Many come to a logical but wrenching solution; namely, to split the family by sending children back to live with grandparents or other kin to attend private schools in the Dominican Republic (Itzigsohn et al. 1999). These schools are expected to apply the same stern discipline in which parents themselves were socialized, untroubled by foreign legislation. Once some immigrant families took this drastic step, it quickly spread, to the benefit of private educators in the island. The compassionate framers of child protective legislation in the United States could not possibly have expected that it would end up building a private school sector in another country. The experiences of Dominican parents are apparently not isolated, since researchers report that immigrants from other nations also send their children home to protect them from what they see as the perverse consequences of excessive American freedom (Matthei and Smith 1996.)

From our first days in the discipline, we social scientists have been trained in the formulation of hypotheses about aspects of social reality. Scientific hypotheses explicitly assume the lawfulness of the real world that makes a number of regularities predictable and observable. More implicitly, the logic of hypothesis formulation commonly assumes that consequences follow more or less linearly or rationally from certain antecedents. Linearity implies a cumulative process where the presence and growth of given factors lead logically to their culmination in specific effects. Rationality implies intentionality when these effects are brought about by the deliberate actions of those involved.

Many aspects of social life are linear and rational in this sense and, hence, lend themselves to a science of cumulative and predictable consequences. Examples include the transformation of parental aspirations into children's educational achievements; the translation of years of formal education into money wages; the conquest of political power by movements able to mobilize human and material resources; and the achievement of higher growth rates by nations that have invested for many years in physical infrastructure and technology.

The presence of so many linear regularities has stimulated many social scientists and large subsets of established disciplines to constitute themselves on the basis of the formulation and refinement of theories based on this general assumption: The world is predictable, and consequences follow cumulatively from certain premises. Much contemporary economic theorizing provides a suitable example of grounding formulations on the assumption of stable preferences and action guided by the rational search for individual gain. There is certainly nothing wrong with the analysis of such outcomes or with grounding a field on a family of predictable, cumulative events.

But sociology seems to have a different, alternative vocation, defined by its sensitivity to the dialectics of things, unexpected turns of events, and the rise of alternative

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countervailing structures. It is to this "contrary-to-expectations" family of outcomes and sociology's affinity to it that I call attention because it holds both the basic promise and the principal challenge for our discipline at century's end.

## SYSTEM-BUILDING AND COUNTER-SYSTEM CRITICS: A TWO-CENTURY TRADITION

Efforts to build systems of sociology have a history of almost two centuries, coinciding with the very beginnings of the discipline. For the most part, system-builders grounded their efforts in a cumulative logic that identified certain master principles of society from which a series of predictable consequences would follow. Not only Durkheim, but every French, German, and then American sociologist worth his salt at the turn of the twentieth century tried his hand at this intellectual endeavor. The resulting books, variously titled *Sociology*, *Principles of Sociology*, *Community and Society* and the like form a core part of our heritage.[2]

But along with these efforts, there has always been an alternative tradition that questions the validity of explicitly stated intentions and of linear predictions. This alternative camp has encompassed a heterogeneous group, ranging from theorists that gave primacy to nonrational and charismatic factors to those that elevated conflict to the category of the true motor of history. This second and diverse intellectual tradition can claim Marx and Engels' synthesis of Hegelian dialectics and materialism, Simmel's analysis of the functions of conflict, Sorel's ([1908] 1961) celebration of violence, and C. Wright Mills's (1959) critique of the Parsonian system.

Conventionally, these broad intellectual currents have been presented in social theory as the "consensus" versus the "conflict" perspectives, but this is not what I have in mind. A conflict orientation can spawn theories based on incremental linear thinking, as documented by the Althusserian and other

versions of doctrinal Marxism, and a consensual perspective can pay attention to latent dysfunctional as well as functional consequences of institutions whose manifest purposes are quite different (as noted by Merton [1949] 1968:92–96). The key feature I wish to focus on is the sociological penchant for skepticism—for looking at the "hidden abode" (Marx's term) behind the appearance of things, and for unearthing the unexpected in social structures and events. This "contrarian" tradition owes much to social theorists of different orientations, but it is not exclusively identified with them. In fact, the institutionalization of this mode of thinking owes as much or more to its empirical practitioners.

## SURPRISES FROM THE FIELD: THE PRACTICE OF BASHING MYTHS

The military regime of General Augusto Pinochet in Chile succeeded in drastically transforming that country's economy and putting it on a "free market" footing that conforms strictly to the neoliberal model of development. Analysts of this experience have described it as a drastic departure from the socialist policies sponsored by the deposed Allende regime and the state capitalist model fostered by earlier Christian Democratic administrations. What these analysts failed to notice is that it was the policies of these earlier regimes that furnished the basis for the success of Chilean neoliberalism under Pinochet. The Christian Democrat's agrarian reform crippled the power of an entrenched rural oligarchy, while the extensive privatization of urban industry under Allende put in the hands of the Chilean state an amount of economic power incommensurate with that of the private actor.

Equipped with these resources, Pinochet's economic team—the "Chicago Boys" (so called because most had obtained their formal training at the University of Chicago's Economics Department)—were able to implement their program. They did not so much "free" the Chilean market as recreate it according to their own blueprints by selectively divesting the state of the industrial resources put in its hands by the earlier nationalizations. Hence, a socialist program aimed at breaking the power of the Chilean bour-

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[2] As a first-year student of sociology in Buenos Aires, I learned my first notions of sociology from three such system-builders: Americans Robert M. MacIver and Charles H. Page (1955), and Frenchman Armand Cuvillier (1950).

geoisie and promoting a more egalitarian society ended up facilitating complete dominance by the propertied class and increasing social inequality. As the Chilean sociologist Alvaro Diaz (1996) put it, "One never knows for whom one really works in the end."[3]

Reality commonly proves more adept at flights of imagination than the most daring theorists. Time and again, we sociologists are surprised by the limitations of our conceptual blueprints in comparison with the complexities of empirical phenomena. Theory likes neat, incremental processes that make sense in terms of some formal logic. Reality is subject to no such constraints and, for this reason, is free to roam beyond the limits of mental constructions. Gaps between received theory and actual reality have been so consistent as to institutionalize a disciplinary skepticism in sociology against sweeping statements, no matter from what ideological quarter they come.

The sociologist's eye for the unexpected thus goes hand in hand with the disciplinary practice of bashing myths, for myths are commonly built on a concatenation of supposedly predictable steps. In his analysis, Diaz (1996) lamented retrospectively the demise of the socialist myth that by gaining control of the means of production revolutionary regimes would usher in social equality. Other myths have been more proactive, as the following three illustrate:

### Myth #1: Organizational Hierarchies Are Real

Weber's ideal-type of "bureaucracy"—an imperatively coordinated association with clearly demarcated authority lines and a salaried staff subject to codified rules (Weber [1922] 1965:182–86, 324–41)—corresponds fairly well to the image that builders and managers of corporate structures have of them. Not long after the original publication of Weber's work, glitches had begun to appear in his blueprint. Office bureaucracies

and industrial assembly lines did not behave as the well-oiled machines they were theorized to be. In particular, undetermined factors held down productivity among clerical staff and factory workers.

A number of sociologists thus found themselves employed by industrial firms to investigate what actually went on in corporate offices and plant floors. Not all of their studies were financed by management, but all coincided in uncovering two significant facts: First, an imperfect correlation existed between formal and real authority structures in industrial plants; second, normative structures among factory workers regulated worker behavior more effectively than did company-issued rules (Finlay 1983; Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939).

Spearheaded by the famous Western Electric Hawthorne study, this school of industrial sociology produced a number of insights into the actual day-to-day functioning of industrial plants and office floors (Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939). Contrary to received wisdom, modern organizations did not operate as smooth-running hierarchies, but as complex entities riddled with alliances, conflicts, personal favors, and unwritten rules. Informal normative structures grew from interactions between people over time, and these informal structures constrained the operation of formal blueprints.

Consider Dalton's (1959) analysis of how department heads in a large industrial corporation tipped each other off in advance about the "surprise" visits of central auditing staff:

> Notice that a count of parts was to begin provoked a flurry of activity among the executives to hide certain parts and equipment. . . . Joint action of a kind rarely, if ever, shown in carrying out official directives enabled the relatively easy passage of laborers and truckers from one work area to another. (Pp. 48–49)

The accumulation of such evidence gave a distinct orientation to the sociological study of organizations. Unlike theoretical work in other disciplines which continued to take organizational hierarchies at face value, sociologists tended to see these structures as problematic. This trained skepticism remains and is evident in Granovetter's (1985) critique of the "markets and hierarchies" approach in modern institutional economics, in

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[3] Diaz made this observation during a presentation at the Conference on Responses of Civil Society to Neoliberal Adjustment Programs, sponsored by the Andrew W. Mellon Program in Latin American Sociology, University of Texas-Austin, April 1995.

studies of corporate cultures by Morrill (1991) and Kanter (1977), and in the importance assigned by Burt (1992) and Podolny and Baron (1997) to the forms of social networks within and between complex organizations.

### Myth #2: Poor Urban Areas Are Socially Disorganized

A tradition in writings about cities has characterized poor inner-city areas as places of social disorganization and pathological behavior. These writings follow a straightforward logic in which the unenviable living conditions in these areas are imputed to personal and social shortcomings of their inhabitants. An equally long tradition in sociology contradicts these expectations and points to the existence of patterned behavior and normative structures in these areas.[4] The controversy remains. The apparently obvious link between personal/group shortcomings and poverty continues to spawn a pseudo-scientific literature in which various authors identify the "missing element" in impoverished areas and exhibit it to all as the true cause of the problem. The latest such culprit is the alleged absence of "social capital" in the ghetto and the consequent inability of its inhabitants to act together. Reasoning retroactively, the idea is that the poor are poor because they lack the collective spirit and solidarity found among more successful communities. Contrary to such pronouncements, empirical studies by sociologists such as Uehara (1990), Edin (Edin and Lien 1997), and others document the presence of social networks and reciprocity in the inner city and heavy dependence of its inhabitants on these social resources. The problem in poor areas, they say, is not that people do not know each other or help each other, but that the resources to do so are meager and the social ties so insulated as to yield meager returns. A recent study of community ties in

[4] Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1943), Liebow's *Tally's Corner* (1967), and Suttles's *The Social Order of the Slum* (1968) are examples of this early literature. Nevertheless, the characterization of poor urban areas as places where cultural pathologies lead to deep poverty rather than vice versa continues to our day.

black West Baltimore makes this point clearly:

> One way to understand conditions in the urban ghetto is by noting that children living in it often lack meaningful connections beyond their immediate kinship. . . . Social capital generated by their families can only be parlayed into resources existing in their physical surroundings. Because those resources tend to be of poor quality, the advantages derived from social capital are few. . . . (Fernández-Kelly 1995: 217–18)

The core finding of this empirical literature is that the poor are no different from anyone else. They simply lack the resources and information to climb out of this self-reproducing condition. Ultimately, poverty causes social pathology—not vice versa (Stack 1974). Outside observers from the government, the elite press, and academia have consistently attributed to the poor—currently labeled the "underclass"—features that distinguish them from the rest of society and that "cause" their permanent disadvantage. Sociologists have been among the most consistent critics of such arguments.

### Myth #3: Immigration Can Be Stopped by Legal Regulation

A currently popular declaration in newspaper editorial columns and among policy pundits is that "America has lost control of its borders" (Brimelow 1995:4–5). To stop the flow, critics have whipped up public sentiment to compel the government to enact restrictive immigration laws. The argument is simple: Enact rules that prohibit the continuation of immigration and the flow will simply stop. Sociologists studying immigration have not so much advocated its continuation as they have focused on the unanticipated consequences of trying to stop the movement by legislative means.

This particular controversy has had several ups and downs. Public outcry about rising immigration flows in the mid-1980s led Congress to pass the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986. The Act was designed to stop all illegal immigration by granting amnesty to undocumented immigrants already in the country and criminalizing the hiring of new undocumented immigrants by American employers. Supporters

were enthusiastic about the measure, arguing that it would bring the illegal population "above ground" and end the impunity with which produce growers and other employers had used cheap illegal labor. As one prominent congressional staffer told me at the time, "American employers are law-abiding citizens and, once the loopholes are closed, they will obey the law."[5]

Researchers studying migration thought differently, however. They noted the resilience of social networks linking would-be immigrants in Mexico and other sending countries to kin and prospective employers in the United States and the vital importance for many American firms of a continuous supply of low-wage labor (Bach 1978; Cornelius 1998; Massey 1998). By and large, U.S.-bound immigration has been sustained less by the goals of the immigrants themselves than by the demands and political will of their prospective employers. This correlation of forces continues and features a fit between employers' labor needs and immigrants' goals so tight as to defy attempts to break it down by legislative fiat. The eventful history of the 1986 Immigration Act supported these warnings.

First, amnestied illegals promptly used their new status to strengthen their networks with family and friends back home and bring in their kin as soon as they could. Second, contrary to the prediction of my congressional friend, employers complied with the letter of the law, but not with its spirit. As required by the Act, they dutifully completed forms indicating that they had been shown proof of legal residence by prospective employees, but they made little effort to check the authenticity of that proof. Predictably, an instant industry sprung up in Los Angeles and in other large cities to provide illegal workers with the requisite papers. Immigrants were often told by prospective em-

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[5] This remark was made by a staffer of then-congressman Peter Rodino at a conference on "America's Immigration Law" (held at the University of California–San Diego in 1982). Proceedings of the conference, including debates about the alleged consequences of immigration control, were published the following year and provides a rich source of sociological and official analyses of the topic prior to the actual enactment of the law (see Cornelius and Montoya 1983).

ployers to get the necessary papers and come back the following day (Bach and Brill 1991). When Immigration Service raids became too frequent, employers resorted to subcontracting work to informal jobbers and gang leaders, driving illegal labor further underground (Cornelius 1992).

Through these adaptive strategies by immigrant workers and their employers, a law designed to control and reduce immigration ended up *increasing* it substantially in the following decade. Both the legal and the illegal flow have continued apace. Figure 1 presents the time series for legal admissions and illegal alien apprehensions after passage of the 1986 Immigration Control Act. Though the number of apprehensions does not equal the actual number of illegal entrants, over time the figures have reflected fairly accurately the ebb and flow of the movement. With the evident failure of their project, the pre-1986 proponents of immigration control faded from view, only to be replaced by new militants unwilling to learn from the past. To them the proposition "change the law and reality will follow suit" remains self-evident, and sociologists have continued to cast the skeptical vote, pointing to the unintended and frequently perverse effects of these legislative attempts at immigration control. Their analysis of the 1996 immigration reform laws echoes those advanced a decade earlier:

> The combined effects of the 1996 Immigration and Welfare Reforms will be to produce unintended and possible undesirable consequences. The acts reflect Congressional failure to consider how individuals and institutions are likely to react in the face of new policies . . . , the 1996 reform measures, instead of preserving legal immigration and discouraging illegal immigration, are likely to *reduce* the former and *expand* incentives for the latter. (Espenshade, Baraka, and Huber 1997:77D, italics in original)

## QUESTIONING APPEARANCES: FORMS AND EFFECTS

This contrarian vocation of the discipline, starting with the classics and continuing to the present day, has been the prime source of sociological insights and intellectual excitement. A cumulative linear logic seldom produces surprises. The positive relationship be-
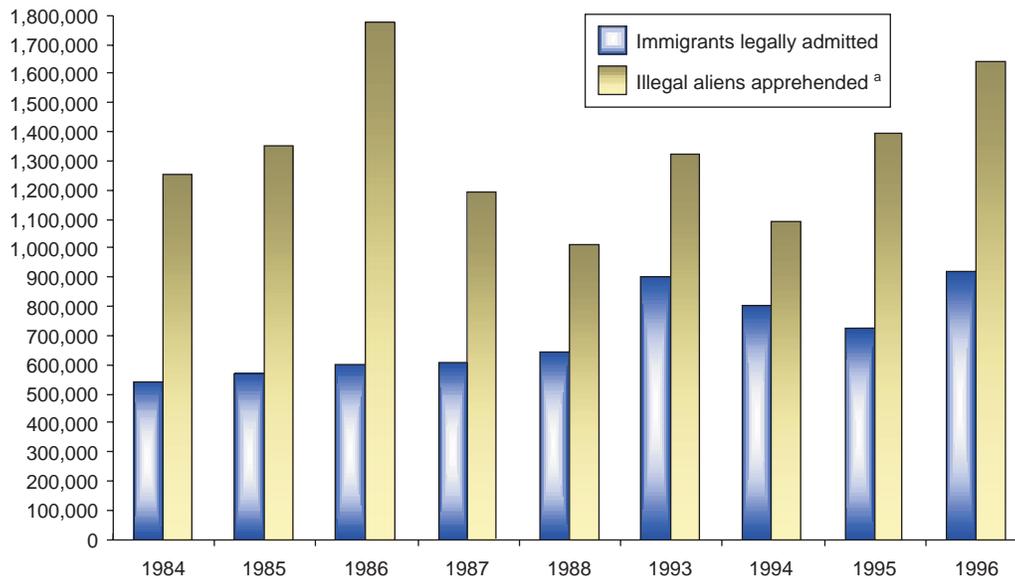
**Figure 1. Immigrants Legally Admitted for Permanent U.S. Residence and Illegal Aliens Apprehended, 1984 to 1996**

*Source*: U.S. Department of Justice (1997, tables 1 and 58).

[a] Figures represent numbers of apprehensions, not numbers of persons (i.e., persons can be apprehended more than once).

tween education and earnings can be demonstrated and theorized, but is fully expected by the social scientist and lay public alike. At best, a linear approach codifies and defines sensible expectations; at worst, it borders on truism. When we are told, for example, that cities where authorities and citizens are imbued by a "civic spirit" are better governed and more economically prosperous than those riddled by self-interest and free-riding, we can readily accept the notion without being greatly excited by it. The opposite would indeed be surprising.

Written more than 60 years ago, Merton's (1936) article, "The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action," continues to be as relevant today as when it was first published. Merton's article did two things: It summarized the tradition of sociological skepticism from the classics to its time; and it drove a wedge into the ambitions of sociological system-builders of the period that were grounded on the assumption of purposive action. In so doing, the article opened the door to a number of modern sociological concepts, all of which highlighted the paradoxical nature of social life. Merton himself was a prime contributor to

this literature, adding the concepts of "self-fulfilling prophecy," "latent functions and dysfunctions," and "the serendipity pattern" (Merton [1949] 1968, [1989] 1998). My line of argument follows his lead, seeking to extend the original contribution on the basis of other common alternatives to a purposive means-ends continuum. The goals of an activity may not be those actually announced and may not even be well understood by participants; goals may not be accomplished by the intended means, but by a fortuitous concatenation of events.

Let me be systematic about this. A linear process is one represented by a straight arrow between the avowed goal of actors—individual or collective—and the achieved end-state. It is possible to identify five different conditions that trigger skepticism about the routine implementation of this linear relationship: (1) The announced goal is not what it seems—that is, it is not what the actor or those in authority in a collectivity actually intend; (2) the announced goal is intended by the actors, but their actions have other significant consequences of which they are unaware; (3) the goal is what it seems—but the intervention of outside forces trans-
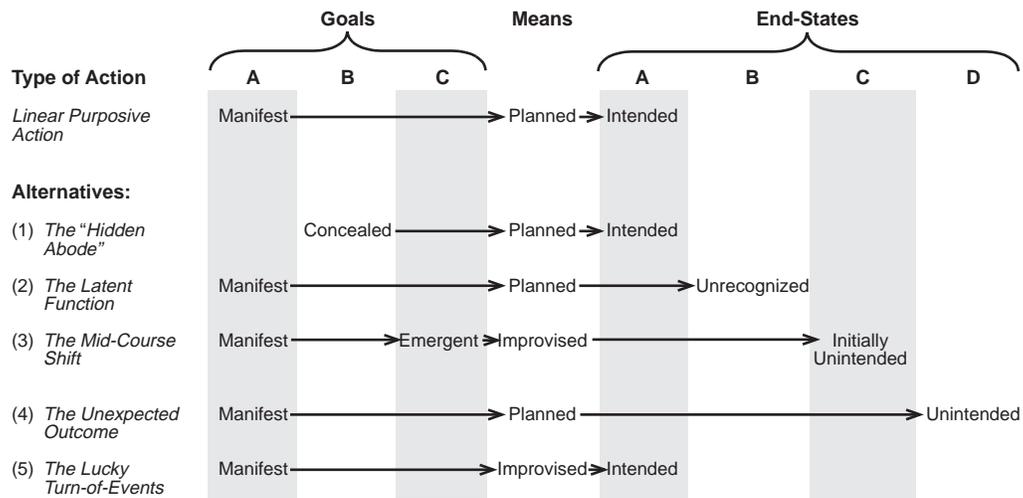
| Type of Action | Goals A | Goals B | Goals C | Means | End-States A | End-States B | End-States C | End-States D |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Linear Purposive Action* | Manifest | | | Planned → | Intended | | | |
| **Alternatives:** | | | | | | | | |
| (1) *The "Hidden Abode"* | | Concealed | | Planned → | Intended | | | |
| (2) *The Latent Function* | Manifest | | | Planned → | | Unrecognized | | |
| (3) *The Mid-Course Shift* | Manifest | | Emergent → | Improvised | | | Initially Unintended | |
| (4) *The Unexpected Outcome* | Manifest | | | Planned → | | | | Unintended |
| (5) *The Lucky Turn-of-Events* | Manifest | | | Improvised → | Intended | | | |

**Figure 2. Linear Purposive Action and Five Alternative Action Sequences**

forms it mid-course into a qualitatively different one; (4) the goal is what it seems—but the intervention of outside forces produces unexpected consequences different and sometimes contrary to those intended; (5) the goal is what it seems—but its achievement depends on fortuitous events, foreign to the original plans.

In summary form, these alternatives represent different end-states from those assumed by a purposive logic as follows: (1) the real goal is not the apparent one; (2) the real goal is not what the actors actually achieve; (3) the real goal emerges from the situation itself; (4) the original goal is real, but the end-state is contrary to its intent; (5) the original goal is real, but it is achieved by an unexpected combination of events. Figure 2 summarizes my argument and the examples that follow.

Marxist and neo-Marxist analyses of social structure have made a specialty of unearthing the *real* ends of capitalism—the ones behind its political facade and cultural superstructure. This is the "hidden abode" that Marx described in such poignant detail and that Edwards (1973) documented a century later in his analysis of labor market segmentation.[6]

In modern times, the works of neo-Marxists and critical sociologists, from Mills (1956) to Piven and Cloward ([1971] 1993) represent efforts in this tradition, unearthing the power structure behind the apparently representative institutions of formal democracy.

Recent analyses of the cultural superstructures of advanced capitalism oscillate between the first and second types in Figure 2—that is between portraying them as a deliberate tool for legitimating the existing class structure or as having an autonomous origin, but unwittingly serving that end. Thus, Harvey (1989), in *The Condition of Post-Modernity*, sometimes depicts post-modern cultural forms as the deliberate creation of advanced capitalism in its latest incarnation, that of "flexible specialization," but at other times presents them as autonomous growths which, nevertheless, function the same way that superstructures have always done—namely to mystify the economic realities underneath. Similarly, Bourdieu's (1984) study of cultural "refinement" and the consumption of high art looks behind the apparent enjoyment that such activities bring to unearth their significance as markers of status and symbolic schisms between masses and elites.

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[6] The original reference for the "hidden abode" is in volume 1 of *Capital*: "Accompanied by Mr. Moneybags and by the possessor of labor power, we therefore take leave for a time of this noisy sphere, where everything takes place on the sur-face and in view of all men, and follow them both into the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there stares us in the face 'No admittance except on business'" (Marx [1867] 1967: 176).

Consequences that are not recognized but are nonetheless real find their classical representation in Durkheim and his followers. Religious rituals organized to propitiate the gods have the real, albeit unrecognized, consequence of strengthening collective solidarity. Marriage and extended families, though organized around various manifest goals, actually function to protect individuals from the destructive consequences of anomie (Collins 1994:190–91; Durkheim [1897] 1965:171–202). An entire school of anthropology operated on these theoretical premises, seeking to uncover the unrecognized functions of primitive cultural practices (Lévi-Strauss [1949] 1969; Mauss [1925] 1967).

The study of modern institutional forms has also been based on the logic of looking for the system's real outcomes, underneath its announced and "intended" goals. Thus the work of Meyer and associates (Meyer, Ramirez, and Soysal 1992; Meyer et al. 1997) suggests that modern institutional structures, such as research institutes and programs of advanced education, when transplanted to the remote confines of the Third World have the manifest goal of promoting scientific advancement, but the latent effect of serving as symbols of the country's modernity and, hence, relative parity with the developed world. Closer to home, the existence of such governmental institutions as the Border Patrol and the Drug Czar are amenable to the same kind of logic. Though they fail, year after year, in their goals of stopping the flows of illegal immigration and illegal drugs, they are kept on the job, at least in part, because of their latent role as symbols of a national determination to defend certain values (Dombois 1998; Massey 1998; Tokatlian 1995). Functionaries of these agencies may not recognize what they are really doing and instead orient their efforts toward their office's manifest ends, even if it is the latent consequences that actually keep them on the job.

The third departure from linear purposive action in Figure 2 has to do less with the existence of concealed or latent ends beneath manifest ones than with the actual shift of goals during the course of a given activity. Weber's ([1904] 1985) famous thesis of the effect of Puritanism on economic behavior derives its appeal precisely from this type of

argument: namely, how "preferences" are not stable at all but can change under the press of events. In Weber's account, ascetic actions originally intended to bring about otherworldly salvation were reoriented, by the influence of external forces, into the search for business success and wealth accumulation. This analysis of a mid-course shift—from the ascetic puritan to the rational capitalist entrepreneur—remains one of the most intellectually appealing arguments left to us from sociology's classic period.

Nor is it the only example. Michels's ([1915] 1968) Iron Law is grounded on a similar logic. In this case, logic prompts idealistic bands of reformers and revolutionaries to shift goals over time—from the single-minded pursuit of altruistic aims to the selfish defense of privileges they acquire in the course of the struggle. If for Pareto ([1920] 1980, chaps. 9 and 10) history is but a cemetery of elites, for Michels it is the scenario for the continuous degeneration of lofty undertakings into material pursuits.

In modern sociology, the shift in midcourse is a common script in both political and economic sociology. In the political realm, the play of external forces can lead to changes in legislation that not only moderate original goals, but actually change their content. Thus, Pedriana and Stryker (1997) document how Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, designed originally to guarantee equal employment opportunity based exclusively on merit, evolved into "affirmative action," a policy explicitly aimed at furthering the employment opportunities of discriminated minorities. In economic sociology, the concept of embeddedness introduced by Polanyi (1944) and developed decades later by Granovetter (1985, 1992) is illustrated in numerous instances of goal shifts among market actors. The growth of a "tradesman culture," the power of mutual obligations, and the development of distinct social networks not only restrain the profit motive among business players, but may redirect their action.[7]

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[7] Thus Morrill (1991) describes the culture of a New York corporate headquarters so obsessed with "executive honor" that top executives in the firm spent most of their time defending their sta-

The fourth departure from linear purposive action is arguably the most important. It involves end-states that are qualitatively distinct, and sometimes the opposite of, those originally intended. The concept of "cumulative consequences" finds in this family of events its exact opposite (Becker 1963; Portes 1995). Instead of the past leading in straight incremental steps to the present, events sometimes take unexpected turns coming full circle. Among classical sociologists, it is undoubtedly Simmel ([1908] 1964) who showed the keenest eye for these outcomes.

For Simmel, the formal facts of numbers and space play havoc with purposive action leading to unexpected forms of sociability. Thus, the peaceful assembly turns into the violent mob under the influence of numbers and contagion. And the success of the religious sect in recruiting new members leads necessarily to dilution of its original radicalism, under the influence of dispersion and growing heterogeneity (Spykman 1965). For Simmel, social conflict is not the unmitigated disaster that it seems to be because it possesses certain emergent positive consequences. This argument, codified and developed decades later by Coser (1956), anticipated numerous treatises in political sociology about the nation-building potential of war and the legitimacy extracted by ruling elites from confrontations with outsiders.

This fourth variant also comes closest to Merton's (1936) original treatment of unintended effects. In that article, he stressed the role of the paradoxical in social life, a perspective that came into full bloom in subsequent analyses of self-fulfilling prophecies and the clash between cultural ends and the structural opportunities to attain them.[8] The influence of the original concept is pervasive in modern sociology, even among those who endorse a rational means-ends paradigm. Thus, Coleman (1994) noted that when a number of actors pursue their goals without preestablished institutional restraint, their actions often lead to consequences that are exactly the opposite of those intended. He offers market "bubbles," "stampedes," and "panics," as examples of these processes.

In economic sociology, the study of underground economic activities has offered fertile ground for a dialectical analysis of the unexpected outcomes of regulation. It turns out that these activities are often a direct outgrowth of attempts to control the economy, because legal constraints open, ipso facto, opportunities for their profitable violation (Lommitz 1988; Portes 1994). Thus, governmental attempts to fix the exchange rate lead to a currency black market; high tariffs stimulate contraband; and attempts to tightly regulate the labor market result in ingenious forms of bypassing them through informal subcontracting (Lozano 1989; Sassen 1989.)

A final example comes from Castells's (1998, chap. 1) analysis of how, in its quest for military parity with the United States, the Soviet Union ended up deeply dependent on its rival's technological capacity. As the pace of innovation in electronics accelerated, Soviet military planners became increasingly worried that their scientific establishment would miss a crucial step, leaving the country behind in the arms race. Hence, they opted for the safer approach of copying the latest Western computer equipment, furnished or stolen by KGB agents. In the process, the Soviet government succeeded in hollowing out their country's own autonomous technological capacity. Castells (1998) puts their reasoning as follows:

> [L]et us have the same machines as "they" have, even if we take some extra time to reproduce their computers. After all, to activate Armageddon, a few years' technological gap in electronic circuitry would not really be relevant. . . . Thus the superior military interests of the Soviet state led to the paradox of making the Soviet Union dependent on the United States in [this] crucial field. (P. 31)

This example also introduces the fifth and last departure from linear purposive action in Figure 2. For additional illustrations, I depend on Tilly (1996), who actually devel-

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tus and reputation rather than seeking to improve the firm's bottom line. Even among Wall Street traders, arguably the most individualistic and profit-driven types in American capitalism, Abolafia (1996) finds evidence of social embeddedness that directs and refocuses their behavior.

[8] See Merton's classical analysis of social structure and anomie (Merton 1938, [1949] 1968).

oped the concept,[9] and on another incident in this country's rather lucky external wars. Tilly tells us how, by the end of his long reign, Louis XIV was able to reflect on his achievements in bringing peace and internal order to France. With the wisdom of hindsight, he presented the achievement as the outcome of a foresighted, well-thought-out plan. Closer scrutiny reveals that there was no such plan. Instead the king and his minister, Colbert, engaged in "determined, but often desperate improvisation in the face of unexpected reactions—both popular and elite—to royally sanctioned initiatives" (Tilly 1996:590). As is the case even today, history is continually reconstructed into neat means-ends narratives, when the actual process of reaching a goal required on-the-spot decisions, sudden improvisation, and numerous departures from the intended course.

This also happened to Colonel Jimmy Doolittle and his marauders as their aircraft carrier, the *Hornet*, approached Tokyo Bay in 1942. After Pearl Harbor, the United States stood in dire need of a psychological uplift, and this is what Doolittle and his men intended to deliver by bombing the Japanese capital. The raid was scheduled to take place at night and was meticulously planned. Unfortunately, hundreds of miles before the planned takeoff, the *Hornet* was spotted by Japanese fishing trawlers—the key element of surprise was destroyed. Doolittle decided to attack immediately to prevent the Japanese from strengthening their defenses. The raid took place in broad daylight, and was launched a great distance away from its target. Against all odds, it was successful because the trawlers never actually alerted Japanese air defenses and because, by an extraordinary coincidence, that day had been singled out in Japan for civil defense exercises against the very threat that Doolittle's planes posed. The planes reached their target undetected, in part because they were initially assumed to be part of the fake maneuvers.[10]

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[9] As opposed to Adam Smith's "invisible hand," Tilly (1996) offers the "invisible elbow" to signify the patched up, improvised character of actions leading to a specific end. I am indebted to Viviana Zelizer for bringing Tilly's essay to my attention.

[10] There are alternative versions of what happened on that day. The present account draws

The analysis of latent consequences, mid-course shifts, unexpected effects, and improvised means are part of a disciplinary tradition unique to the social sciences. It represents one of sociology's distinct contributions and one well worth keeping in mind when sociologists adopt the role of policy analyst. For the bearing of this analysis on the question of policy advice and policy prescriptions, I turn to the work of one of my most distinguished predecessors, James Coleman.

## REBUILDING SOCIETY ON A RATIONAL, PURPOSIVE BLUEPRINT

In 1992, Coleman presented a memorable presidential address before the American Sociological Association. In his opening story, he compared his canoe leisurely cruising the Wisconsin and Mississippi Rivers at four miles an hour with the much faster tugboats chugging the river and the trains onshore, whizzing by at 20 times the canoe's speed. His comparison documented the rapid evolution from social organization based on the family and relations between real persons toward organizations based on relations between fictive persons and the progressive removal of individuals from family bonds.

In his remarks, Coleman echoed a long tradition of social thought that documented the passage from feudalism to industrial capitalism, and from "community" to "society" (Eisenstadt 1964; Töennies [1887] 1963). He went beyond these earlier descriptions, however, to make a central point: Social control and, hence, social order, in earlier times had depended on the structure of community networks that monitored individual behavior and ensured normative compliance. This form of "primordial" social capital eroded with the weakening of family and community bonds, and with the rapid replacement of local society by national corporate structures (Coleman 1993a).

The result is that the achievement of social goals has come to depend on the deliber-

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from the series broadcast by the History Channel as "Secrets of World War II," which includes additional evidence in support of the present account of events (The History Channel, March 24, 1999).

ate application of incentives and coercive power by large organizations, in particular the state. In lieu of the spontaneous family-based organization of the past, we have new corporate organizations where community social capital is replaced by a deliberate schedule of incentives to individuals. Coleman saw this trend as unstoppable and proposed that sociology's task should shift from analyses of historical events to the construction of social organization based on rational blueprints.

As an example, Coleman observed that family care for children has declined because the flow of material resources has increasingly shifted from parents to children, making it uneconomical for parents to pay greater attention to their offspring: hence, his proposal that the state should step in to provide a schedule of incentives to parents and guardians proportional to the difficulty of raising their particular child and to the "value added" of his or her proper upbringing (Coleman 1993a:13–14, 1993b). As an experienced sociologist, Coleman recognized that social relations, cultural expectations, and normative structures still developed among people in large organizations and that these forces could either support or derail collective goals. Accordingly, he sought to harness the assumption of individual rational interest and sociological knowledge about networks to the solution of problems through deliberately constructed organizations:

> What does this transformation mean for sociology and sociologists? It implies a future in the design of organizations, institutions, and social environments—designs intended to optimize relevant outcomes. . . . This involves, of course, social theory—but social theory directed to this task, not to chronicling and conceptualizing changes of the past. (Coleman 1993a:14)

Coleman's arguments were attacked as conservative, because deliberately constructed organizations usually correspond to the interests of powerful actors, or are seen as ushering an Orwellian world of Big Brother rule. In my view, these criticisms were misplaced. Coleman's urgent call to the discipline to take an active role in the resolution of social problems and his vision of applying sociological theory to this end are crucial.

The real problem with Coleman's view is somewhat different—namely that the deliberate design of organizations clashes inevitably with the paradoxes of social life. The task of social engineering relies on a linear logic in which goals are manifest and the task consists of devising means to achieve them. Such means consist, for the most part, in the manipulation of incentives so that occupants of given roles would *want* to enact behavior X rather than Y. Even sophisticated analyses that take into account the spontaneous emergence of norms assume that these can also be manipulated toward the desirable goal. This may be true in some cases, but not always. Some possible derailing factors to such purposive designs include:

- The goals of some of the avowed supporters of the constructed organization are concealed and differ from their declared intent.

- Factors of a habitual and emotional order enter the picture, altering the schedule of incentives for participants and their cost-benefit calculations.

- Participants react to being manipulated by a higher authority and devise means of bypassing the intended consequences of their actions.

- External factors grounded in the history and circumstances of participants lead to divergent and unanticipated responses to the same set of incentives.

- Solutions to the motivational problems among one class of actors trigger protest and discontent among others.

The constructed organizations of the now-defunct command economies of Eastern Europe offer a suitable illustration of some of these pitfalls. These structures were not built irrationally. On the contrary, after the early revolutionary effervescence, planners deliberately sought to incorporate schedules of incentives for firms, managers, and workers. The problem was that these schedules and the plans they supported clashed with realities on the ground—leading, in time, to perverse consequences. Kornai (1992:263–75) noted how communist authorities' goals of full employment, high material production, and monitored interdependence between

firms produced an economy of "soft budget constraints." In this system, firms could not go bankrupt, and they benefited from hoarding supplies and avoiding innovation (Castells 1998; Grossman 1989).

The blueprints of socialist planners sought to organize material incentives for the achievement of state goals. However, they did not know and could not cope with the play of unexpected forces that eventually brought the entire experiment crashing down. Stark (1989) has made this point compellingly:

> As with children in the domestic household, so with firms in the socialist economy: responsibility is inversely proportional to dependence. An enterprise whose director dutifully follows detailed instructions to the very letter of the rule can scarcely be blamed when it produces only losses. . . . The attempt to scientifically manage an economy as if it were one factory prevents the scientific management of any given factory. (Stark 1989:648–49)

Despite the greater informational freedom of democratic societies, there is no dearth of examples closer to home. Efforts to "reconstruct" existing organizations for the sake of certain goals commonly yield perverse consequences. Thus, the decision of the Reagan Administration to weaken administrative controls on the banking industry had the manifest goal of promoting competition and, hence, stimulating savings and investments. The result was the savings and loans debacle, triggered by the decision of a number of owners and managers to pilfer their own organizations for personal advantage (Calavita, Tillman, and Pontell 1997). *Their* schedule of incentives had not been taken into account by framers of this costly policy.

A longer list of examples would only lead to the same conclusion: There is danger in deliberate attempts at reconstructing society because, even if the manifest goals are real, the means of intervention can clash with complex social forces, derailing the entire effort or taking it in unexpected directions. To be sure, institutions can be built that serve their intended purpose, and goals of the most diverse kinds can be achieved. Louis XIV did restore internal order to France and Doolittle managed to bomb Tokyo, but they did not achieve their goals on the first try or on the basis of well-polished plans. Ends are not commonly achieved by "social engineering" but by complex trial-and-error processes in which the original blueprints are abandoned and constant adaptations are made to the contours of reality. These complex dynamics are often ignored in calls to reconstruct society on a purposive blueprint.

## CONCLUSION: THEORY, POLICY, AND SKEPTICISM

A reasonable objection to my argument is that it can lead to paralysis in both policy and theory. Because the dialectics of social life are so complex and everything depends on the specific context in which it is embedded, it becomes nearly impossible to predict how individuals and groups will behave or what outcomes will extend from deliberate policy. The role of sociologists as engineers of the future dissolves into the much less attractive role of professional doubters and critics.

There is truth in this: Awareness of the paradoxical character of social structure leads naturally to caution. Despite its limitations, the role of informed contrarian seems preferable to that of the enthusiastic but naive visionary. This is not the whole story, however, because a skeptical stance can lead, under certain conditions, to more sophisticated theory and more effective policy. This outcome requires staying close to the ground and avoiding broad generalizations or universally applicable blueprints. Much sociological theorizing of the mid-range consists of just such narratives about how things got "from here to there," including the multiple contingencies and reversals encountered in the process. At this level of analysis, it is possible to delineate, at least partially, the structural constraints and other obstacles affecting a specific individual or collective pursuit.

Consider Evans's (1995) analysis of the role of states in national economic development. He begins his book with Adam Smith's inquiry into the factors promoting the "wealth of nations" (Smith [1776] 1979; Todaro 1977). To try to address this question, Evans takes us through a zigzag course, where solutions at a given step create problems at the next. (Figure 3 summarizes the successive steps of Evans's argument.) He considers first the neoclassical
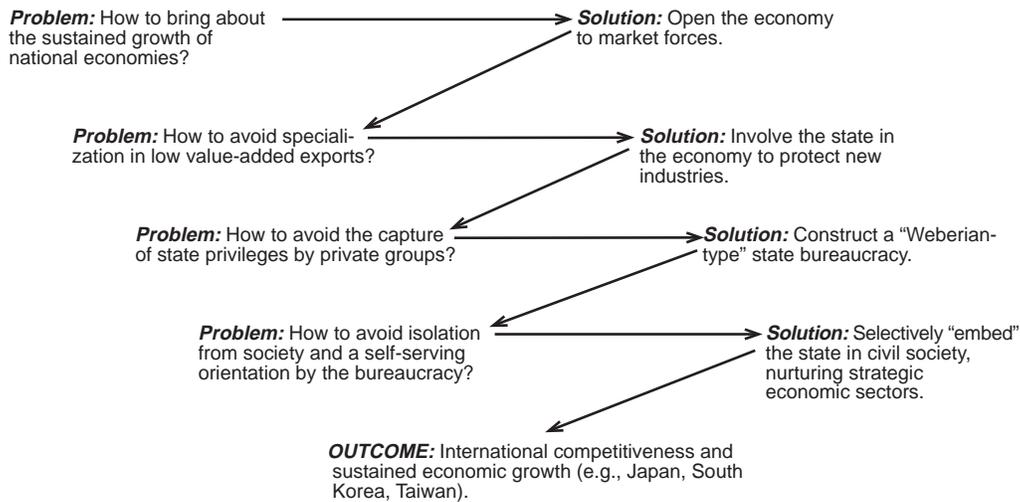
**Problem:** How to bring about ⟶ **Solution:** Open the economy
the sustained growth of                        to market forces.
national economies?

**Problem:** How to avoid speciali- ⟶ **Solution:** Involve the state in
zation in low value-added exports?             the economy to protect new
                                               industries.

**Problem:** How to avoid the capture ⟶ **Solution:** Construct a "Weberian-
of state privileges by private groups?         type" state bureaucracy.

**Problem:** How to avoid isolation ⟶ **Solution:** Selectively "embed"
from society and a self-serving                 the state in civil society,
orientation by the bureaucracy?                 nurturing strategic
                                                economic sectors.

**OUTCOME:** International competitiveness and
sustained economic growth (e.g., Japan, South
Korea, Taiwan).

**Figure 3. Evans's Theory of Embedded Autonomy**

*Source*: Evans (1995).

solution to development, which consists of the enriching potential of free trade: Just let the market perform its magic and it will yield the greatest good for the greatest number. Yet, poorer nations that have followed this path have often found themselves confined to the role of specialized producers of low value-added commodities. The logical solution is then to have the state take an active hand in developmental efforts. Still, this next move runs into the problem that weak states in poor nations are easily colonized by powerful economic interests, which turn their developmental projects into "rental havens" for business groups. Instead of the state developing the nation, it ends up developing the fortunes of a few individuals able to bribe and co-opt their way into official favor.

The solution to this second-level problem is to construct a "Weberian bureaucracy," well-insulated from civil society and immune to bribe-taking. This new solution creates, in turn, its own set of problems in the form of an isolated and increasingly self-serving officialdom lording over society but incapable of guiding it effectively. (The state bureaucracies of the defunct Soviet block come to mind as a partial illustration.) The remedy to this third-level problem is then to fashion a "modified Weberian state" or "embedded state," in which competent officials involve themselves in the selective

nurturing of industrial and commercial firms until the latter are able to compete effectively in world markets.

The trick is to preserve the state's role as incubator of promising economic initiatives, but without allowing emerging firms to colonize state agencies in turn. Evans (1995) offers Japan as the archetypical example of the embedded state, although recent evidence of corruption in high places and "rental havens" for well-placed bankers has partially tarnished that image. Even with this and other explanatory problems,[11] Evans's theory represents one of the most sophisticated approaches to national development in the discipline today.

At the level of policy, awareness of the dialectics of social life does not lead to paralysis either but to more cautious forms of intervention. These alternative forms require

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[11] Evans (1995) does not offer clear empirical criteria to differentiate appropriately "embedded" states from those colonized by interests in civil society. This omission can make the theory circular by defining as "embedded states" only those that have succeeded in promoting economic growth. When this identification is done ex post facto, the theory is reduced to saying: If a state succeeds in promoting economic development, then it is embedded. This shortcoming can be overcome by an explicit and measurable specification of differences between states captured by private interests and those autonomous of them.

relentless questioning of the initial blueprints and an examination of the various contingencies at each step of program implementation. In particular, this approach results in two practical considerations: First, change must proceed in measured steps, with close attention to fortuitous events and pressures from outside forces; second, one must know the actors involved and their actual goals in order to anticipate their reactions to external intervention.

Consider, for example, a program to improve the quality of education in public schools by increasing "social capital" among parents and teachers. Social capital, in the form of greater mutual knowledge and higher levels of trust, is expected to lead to overall improvements in the quality of schools (Coleman 1993b; Putnam 1993). For this purpose, a schedule of incentives is devised to encourage parents' attendance at PTA meetings and their presence at other school events. The logic of the program is clear and can be portrayed as a linear sequence of steps: Intervention occurs in the form of economic incentives promoting greater social interaction $\rightarrow$ parents and teachers come together and in the process develop greater mutual understanding $\rightarrow$ which leads, in turn, to greater parental support for teachers' efforts and mutual assistance in educating the children.

Maybe. But the process is fraught with contingencies that could lead to quite different outcomes. For simplicity, contingencies can be summarized into three families of variables: (1) the perceptual framework in which the policy is interpreted by parents and teachers and the possibility that one party or the other has concealed goals at variance with those overtly announced; (2) unexpected consequences of increased interaction, including racial cleavages and greater awareness of the other party's shortcomings; (3) external factors preventing the implementation of collectively reached decisions. Contingencies in each of these three categories are multiple and lead to outcomes very different from those intended.[12]

Getting from "here" to "there" is never easy, in terms of either theory or policy. Sociology has remained, for the most part, faithful to its empirical tradition and, along with it, true to a focus on the complexity of social processes. More than "social engineers" or "social architects," high-flown labels that carry with them the danger of premature hubris, I would propose the label "social craftsmen" to describe those engaged in building or reconstructing social institutions. Like the artisans of yore, who applied their skills with painstaking attention to the quality and uniqueness of their materials, so can deliberate interventions in the real world proceed and progress. If my analysis is correct, sociology's chance at helping rebuild society at century's end does not hinge on the elaboration of grand engineering blueprints, but instead in careful analyses of social processes, awareness of their concealed and unintended manifestations, and sustained efforts to understand the participants' own reactions to their situation. Without this painstaking effort, any organizational blueprint, no matter how well devised, is likely to yield unexpected outcomes, thus following the fate of so many failed interventions of the past.

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[12] Among such alternative effects are: Parents have been "burned" by failed programs in the past and do not attend—the program folds; parents attend and socialize in good faith, but growing awareness of teachers' and the school's shortcomings leads them to seek other alternatives, including private school vouchers; threatened by independent parental initiatives, teachers and administrators withdraw support from the program —it folds, leaving a worse situation than at the start; parents and teachers come together to improve things, but discover that what they actually need is material resources to improve school infrastructure and facilitate students' outside contacts—demands are not met by the school administration, leading to widespread demoralization.

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| Frank W. Blackmar | Stuart A. Queen | Everett C. Hughes | Kai T. Erikson |
| James Q. Dealey | Dwight Sanderson | George C. Homans | Matilda White Riley |
| Edward C. Hayes | George A. Lundberg | Pitirim Sorokin | Melvin L. Kohn |
| James P. Lichtenberg | Rupert B. Vance | Wilbert E. Moore | Herbert J. Gans |
| Ulysses G. Weatherly | Kimball Young | Charles P. Loomis | Joan Huber |
| Charles A. Ellwood | Carl C. Taylor | Philip M. Hauser | William Julius Wilson |
| Robert E. Park | Louis Wirth | Arnold M. Rose | Stanley Lieberson |
| John L. Gillin | E. Franklin Frazier | Ralph H. Turner | James S. Coleman |
| William I. Thomas | Talcott Parsons | Reinhard Bendix | Seymour Martin Lipset |
| John M. Gillette | Leonard S. Cottrell Jr. | William H. Sewell | William A. Gamson |
| William F. Ogburn | Robert C. Angell | William J. Goode | Amitai Etzioni |
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| Emory S. Bogardus | Samuel A. Stouffer | Peter M. Blau | Neil J. Smelser |
| Luther L. Bernard | Florian Znaniecki | Lewis A. Coser | Jill Quadagno |
| | | Alfred McClung Lee | Alejandro Portes |

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Gathering together twelve major sociologists, Craig Calhoun launches a thorough reconsideration of Merton's achievements and inspires a renewed engagement with sociological theory. Merton's work addressed the challenges of integrating research and theory. It connected different fields of empirical research and spoke to the importance of overcoming divisions between allegedly pure and applied sociology. Merton also sought to integrate sociology with the institutional analysis of science, each informing the other. By bringing together different aspects of his work in one volume, Calhou