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## How much of society can the sociologist digest at one sitting?

### The "macro" and the "micro" revisited for the case of fast food

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#### Introduction

This essay is a polemic directed against those who hold that symbolic interaction cannot handle the "great big" things of society. It is aimed at those who think that its proper place is the study of "little" interactions between "little" people. And it is a polemic in favour of the claim that interactionism can and should deal with the "macro" and the "micro" in the same terms. It is therefore directed against the "macrosociologists," whether these be functionalists or Marxists, who hold interactionism to be an (arguably fascinating but) ultimately irrelevant diversion from the major tasks of social analysis—the understanding of the "great" things of society at the "macro-level." But it is also directed against those interactionists—unfortunately all too many—who by acts of omission or commission, collude with this division of labor.

We should not connive with the idea that the ethnography of (say) sexual deviance or shop floor interaction is a "little" matter to be relegated to the sociological second division. We should not accede to the notion that the "great big" things of society—class, power and the rest—are different in kind from

what we study, and are therefore not for us. We should assert that symbolic interactionism is *not* an entertaining "microsociological" side show, but is rather a form of sociology pure and simple. "Big and small, short and tall" as the children's nursery rhyme has it—all fall within our area of competence.

What went wrong with symbolic interaction? Where did it lose its nerve? How did it find itself relegated to the second division? I don't want to deny that *force majeure* had something to do with it. In the suffocating atmosphere of structural functionalist American sociology of the 'forties and 'fifties, it was perhaps something of a triumph to sustain an interactionist research tradition at all. Now, however, times have changed, though not necessarily for the better. In the sociological world that I inhabit, functionalism is dead but it has been replaced by the multi-headed hydra of Marxism. Though there are fifty-seven heads on this beast, they all unite in one respect at least: they argue that symbolic interactionism is all very fascinating—that it may be good for students to read Goffman's *Asylums*—but that the *real* work has to be done down there in the infrastructure where the "great" class interests and contradictions are defined.

But *force majeure* does not justify our failure of nerve. We have colluded with the "macro-sociologists" and my proposal is that we should stop that collusion. Just because *they* think that we study trivial little things does not mean that we have to accept their definition of reality. Just because *they* think that there is a qualitative distinction between interaction and social structure does not mean that we have to go along with such a division. Just because *they* think that class or functional requirements underlie everything else does not mean that we should accept such absurdly oversimplified reductions. It is high time that we asserted our own view that such dichotomies are not only unhelpful, but that they positively *hinder* analysis of a complex social world.

Let me pose the question again: what went wrong with symbolic interaction? Our Chicago forbears did not so blinker their vision. They arrived in America ready to study whole cities and their interacting subcultures. Mead had a vision of the whole of society, indeed of international relations. But somewhere along the way that vision got lost. The shutters were put up, and the center of gravity of interactionism moved in a "microsociological" direction. Perhaps this happened in part because it became clear that the liberal and functionally integrated model of society that lay behind much of Mead's thinking was unrealistic, and the tension between this and the pluralistic subcultural ethnographies became too great.

The worry about Mead's social world view was obviously well founded, but the ensuing retreat was not. The question then is: how can we reoccupy that ground? This essay makes a few suggestions, and in the course of making those suggestions involves itself in a study of symbolism. It does this because it starts with a critical examination of the unwarrantably overlooked writing of H.D. Duncan. Duncan *never accepted the "macro-micro" distinction*, and attempted to occupy the space abandoned by everyone else with his concepts of "symbol

system" and "drama." I am going to argue that Duncan's vision was great but flawed: though his writing occupies the kind of space at which interactionism should be aiming, and embodies the kind of vision that interactionists should share, certain basic problems prevent us adopting his position in its totality. In writing about Duncan, then, I shall suggest that we should attempt the same task as he did, but do it with a different set of analytical tools.

I start with a brief discussion of Duncan's sociology, and then look at the question of symbolism and social commitment. Next I turn myself into an anthropologist and consider the symbolism of the extraordinary (to a non American) and successful dramas staged by the McDonald's Corporation. Finally I show how this study of McDonald's—admittedly in a sketchy and preliminary fashion—can be seen as a paradigm for the way in which symbolic interaction can recover its nerve and its lost grasp on the whole of social. If this is successful then the "macro-micro" distinction, so beloved by those of our opponents who wish to arrogate the big things to themselves, will be swept away.

## Symbol and drama: the sociology of H.D. Duncan

In many respects Duncan's writing follows that of Mead: there is his characteristic analysis of democracy; there is his commitment to a profound analysis of the nature of the (big) social order; and there is his realization that it simply does not make sense to talk of the (big) social order without talking about the (little) social interactions through which this is done. Perhaps most fundamentally, however, he follows Mead in his commitment to the primary importance of the symbolic. He sets this problem up in a characteristically forthright manner at the beginning of *Symbols in Society* (Duncan, 1968):

It is impossible to talk about human relationships without saying *something* about meaning. And meaning ...is usually studied through the interpretation of symbols, for it is only in symbols that meaning can be observed.

Now we can either deal with such meaning through sociological methodology which allows us to interpret symbols in their social categories, or we disregard symbols and assume that they are but "reflections" of some kind of extra-symbolic reality. We "know" (like Pareto) that behind the mask of the symbol there lie interests—economic, political, sexual, as the case may be—which "really" determine human relationships. This, of course, reduces symbols to epiphenomena which exist on the surface of a social system whose "gearing" and "meshing" ...really determine human motivation. (Duncan, 1968:6)

We are, as it were, stuck with the symbolic.<sup>1</sup> Whether we are thinking about the structure of society or that of the natural world, this is classified and ordered via condensed systems of interrelated classes. It is the job of the sociologist to "interpret symbols in their social categories." At last in principle the answer is easy: first, it has to be understood that symbols are not vague and nebulous

entities which cannot, unlike material features of life, be easily grasped. In fact the situation is almost the other way round because language orders society and experience.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, it has to be grasped that symbols are transmitted in the course of action. The notion of action and symbol are intimately related:

Rules ... are observed in communication; communication in turn arises from the enactment of roles; roles are enacted in hierarchical dramas; and hierarchical drama creates social bonds because it creates and sustains social order. (Duncan, 1962:146)

In other words, it is not social structure that we observe. Rather we observe people playing at or representing *versions* of social structure. The central problem for the sociologist is, therefore, to observe the communication of symbol systems. If we can develop methods for doing this we can follow in the wash of the actors, as it were, and observe how it is that they relate the various bits and pieces of action together to produce both a sense of social structure, and social structure itself—for there is nothing more basic lying behind the symbolic.

As the above passage suggests, the notion of "drama" is very important for Duncan's sociology. It is through dramas that the principles of social order or "hierarchy" are enacted (or so it is hoped). If social order is to be sustained, it is important that members of society subscribe to "transcendent symbols of social integration" (Duncan, 1962:11). These symbols are transmitted via dramas, and it is in these terms that Duncan defines the notion of drama:

Social order is considered. . . as a drama of social hierarchy in which we *enact* roles as superiors, inferiors, and equals. We enact roles through communication...

Put in this way, dramas are little more than interactions. One of Duncan's methodological propositions (Duncan, 1968:161) makes this clear:

The staging of an act in society is a social drama of authority which we analyse by asking: where, or under what conditions, is the act being presented? What kind of act is it? What kinds of actors are selected for what kinds of roles? What means or instruments do the actors use to communicate authority? And how is the expression of hierarchy related to a principle of social order?

There are two major types of drama—comedy and tragedy.<sup>3</sup> Each of these operates by juxtaposing social action with a set of principles that are held to be a necessary or important part of the social order (Duncan, 1968:187). They each (though this is especially true for comedy) seek to render deviant action open to discussion between members of society.<sup>4</sup> They each simultaneously seek to define the limits of the acceptable.<sup>5</sup> There, however, their similarities end. Tragedy generates an outsider, someone who denies or undermines the bounds of the permissible, and is accordingly victimized. It thrives on mystery, on an appeal to ultimate powers (Duncan, 1968:60). It celebrates those powers by

means of victimage: inherited guilt, all the lapses and mistakes are cleansed in the great dramas of tragedy (Duncan, 1962:125-6).

Duncan gives us a number of examples of tragedy at work. He cites, for instance, the expulsion of the Jews by Nazi Germany (Duncan, 1962:224-252). He argues that in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler created a sense of community and social order among the Germans by excluding and victimizing the Jews who were held to be responsible for the difficulties facing Germany. Elsewhere (Duncan, 1965:155-194), he writes of the tragic victimage that occurred in Chicago after the Haymarket Riots and the Pullman strike, which resulted in a court hearing which sent the "ringleaders" to the gallows. Duncan (1965:181) does not approve of tragedy as a means of social control:

The anarchism of the Haymarket rioters and the feudalism of George Pullman formed a vicious circle which Chicagoans knew they must break if democracy was to survive ...The first problem was one of communication. Democratic action assumed that contradicting views could become a source of strength as long as they could be understood.

The alternative mode of social control via drama, that of comedy, is much to be preferred. Here some aspect of authority is questioned (Duncan, 1962:387), but the *principles* of authority are not. It is the sanctioned expression of doubt, ambiguity and disrespect (Duncan, 1962:393) which can be traced back at least as far as the medieval court fool. It does not, like tragedy, end in the expulsion or death of the critic or rule-breaker—but in his reabsorption, possibly by means of the readjustment of social norms, through laughter and irony. This is the testing of social limits by means of tolerant discussion and amusement.

This analysis of the forms of drama and the commitment to comedy show that it is possible to place Duncan very firmly in the liberal tradition of the Chicago school: like Mead, he believed that the social order can be maintained without victimage and by means of reasoned discussion. The differences between himself and Mead in this respect—his analysis of tragedy as a means of social control—doubtless arose from his knowledge of the horrors wreaked by Nazism and Communism in Europe.

If society can be pictured as a set of symbols that are enacted in a variety of kinds of drama, then the symbols that are expressed or enacted in the course of these dramas are typically presented as principles of general, indeed universal, applicability (Duncan, 1962:315):

We can distinguish five basic types of...ultimate appeals. There are the ultimates of the person, as when the authority of parents, prophets, or gods is invoked; of rules and codes, as when we say "laws, not men, uphold social order;" of environment or nature, as when we ascribe causes of order to "tendencies," "processes," or "laws" in nature; of means, as when we turn to methods, techniques, instruments, or magic; and finally the perfect end or ideal, whose immanence infuses social order with meaning.

These are, precisely, appeals. It is usually easier to enlist people in an institution if that institution is linked to such universal symbols (Duncan, 1968:22). Duncan in fact devotes considerable attention to the role of rhetoric in drama—a theme which he develops from the work of Kenneth Burke. Rhetoric is, as it were, something that enlists the interests of the hearer: it creates in him a state of mind and then goads him to action. The goal of rhetoric is identification—identification of the speaker with the hearer. It is, in other words, what lies, at least in part, behind the successful enactment of a drama. Thus Duncan (1962:169) notes that:

The relationship between identification and persuasion is very close. The speaker persuades through stylistic identification, in which he tries to identify himself with the listener's interests; and the speaker in turn draws on identification of interests to establish rapport between himself and the audience.

Needless to say, Hitler was a master rhetorician. *Mein Kampf* can be read as a textbook on rhetoric: on how to grip an audience by means of oratory, on the importance of carefully staged mass meetings. It is, however, important to realize that persuasion is not a one-way channel. Persuasion by the rulers, is, to be sure, necessary, but there is an art to being ruled too (Duncan, 1962:254):

Hierarchical relations are sustained through persuasion because superiors, inferiors and equals *must court* each other. Sometimes they do so in love, often (alas!) in hate, and frequently in irony. For if there is any basic fact about courtship, it is that *the responses of the other necessary to hierarchical satisfaction are never taken but given.*

Or, as he notes elsewhere, one can do everything with a bayonet but sit on it.

Duncan has a tendency to assume that those who participate in a drama accept the master symbols that lie behind it (Duncan, 1962:11). Such an acceptance of the principles of social organization does not necessarily mean, however, that there will be consensus throughout society. It is necessary to determine who it is that controls the *enactment* of the dramas: those, in other words, who have the greatest power (Duncan, 1962:264). Different ceremonies may be controlled by different authorities:

. . . social order is always defined in terms of disorder, and in the present sad state of affairs in human society, order is at best merely a resolution of struggle between authorities of widely differing views who seek to convince us. . . that their principles alone are the principles of order. (Duncan, 1962:10)

In such instances there are, of course, no agreed transcendent symbols to structure social organization, to enlist and relate people together. Duncan suggests that this is a situation that is increasingly prevalent with the growth of modern means of communication (Duncan, 1968:132).

There is much about Duncan's writing that I have not reported in this brief

survey. Nevertheless, it is now possible to sum up the most important points of his understanding of society, an understanding that is organized around three crucial terms: symbol, drama, and rhetoric. Society, or the structure of organization in society, is governed by symbol systems—indeed it *is* a set of symbol systems. It is, accordingly, a mistake to treat symbols as either vague or epiphenomenal, and then to look behind them for "basic" material causes. One cannot escape from the domain of the symbolic. The symbol systems—which may well be in conflict with one another—are transmitted by means of dramas which are held to have rhetorical force. The social order (or more precisely, any given version of it) is seen as hierarchical;<sup>6</sup> it is a set of symbols which are *enacted* by individuals who have been enlisted, which puts those individuals (and others who participate) into acceptable relationship with one another. Obviously, if there are rival symbol systems and rival dramas, then there will be overall social incoherence: society will not be "organized" as a whole at all.

There are many admirable features of this understanding of society. Indeed, in later sections of the present paper we will find that it is possible to build upon the framework provided by Duncan. In particular, I would like to underline the essential irrelevance of the division between "macro" and "micro" to Duncan. These terms do not appear as important in his work, and he is equally at home talking about the Middle West or Chicago on the one hand, and an individual such as the architect Sullivan on the other. His interest is in symbols, how they are transmitted or imposed, and what they stand for. It is obvious that some symbol systems expand to cover more ground than others, but the focus of Duncan's interest is precisely in this expansion rather than in distinguishing a priori between the "micro" and the "macro."

That this is the case is nowhere more evident than in his empirical masterpiece, *Culture and Democracy* (Duncan, 1965). Duncan's method in this study involves an analysis of the various dramas, and the symbol systems that they represent. Sometimes this involves focussing on particular individuals, sometimes on "mass movements." However, it is the size or empirical area of the symbol systems that is at stake; it is not assumed that there is a "macro" system which limits the possibilities for "micro" negotiations. In every drama the components have to be reassembled into a (hopefully) convincing whole. The size of symbol systems is, as it were, an interesting accomplishment, not something assumed in analysis.

If the general structure of Duncan's sociology is admirable for its contempt of "macro-micro" distinctions, there are nevertheless several difficulties that stand in the way of its complete acceptance. The first is his commitment to the (relatively) optimistic rationalism of the liberal: the idea characteristic of Mead's sociology that reasonable persons who sit down together will, indeed, be able to resolve their differences reasonably and amicably. In Duncan's sociology this vision is expressed primarily in the distinction between tragedy ("feudalism") and comedy. The latter is the method of social control, of reasonable social

change, that is characteristic of liberal democracies. The former is to be found in dictatorships of left and right. The liberal vision also expressed itself in his optimistic expectation that somehow symbolic means might be found to relate the different parts of society into a coherent whole—a whole that would be very different from the "symbolic rivalry" fostered by modern communication. However, whatever we feel about liberal democracy,<sup>7</sup> it is surely mistaken to privilege it in analysis in this way. There are "tragedies" in liberal democracies, just as there are "comedies" in totalitarian countries. The problem here is that Duncan has a tendency to overemphasize the role of the political, and to forget that this is, after all, only *one* aspect of social life, *one* way of putting events or actors into relationship with one another.<sup>8</sup> The economic, the familial, the military, the educational, the industrial, the scientific, the religious—there are countless other areas of social organization that coexist with the political. Though the latter seeks to dominate in totalitarian societies, it meets with only a limited degree of success. Vast areas of activity are organized in wholly different ways.<sup>9</sup>

But this leads to a second blind spot engendered by Duncan's commitment to liberal democracy: his hope that, after all, the totality might be organized in relation to comedy or irony. This hope is, in many ways, like a pessimistic version of the Durkheimian theory of the integrative function of ritual. Whereas the neo-Durkheimians enthusiastically *assume* that overall political integration is ensured by such events as the Coronation of the Queen (Shils and Young, 1953) or even the assassination of President Kennedy (Verba, 1965), Duncan more skeptically *wishes* that overall symbolic integration might be generated by the great dramas of state. The more realistic position would be to note (as Duncan also does) that there are competing symbol systems and dramas, and then to consider how it is that one version of the social order expands at the expense of another.

Even this, however, does not properly get to the nub of the problem. To do this we have to consider three further and linked themes in Duncan's writing. These are his tendency to idealism; his assumption that dramas carry a single set of dominant symbols of social organization; and his dependence on a theory of rhetoric. I want to argue that these assumptions are all false. To make this argument it will be convenient to follow Steven Lukes' (1977) criticisms of the neo-Durkheimian analysis of ritual. It is true that Duncan is not, at any rate explicitly, Durkheimian, and that some of Lukes' more specific comments are, accordingly, inappropriate. Nevertheless, his general line of argument is such that it is applicable to Duncan's conception of the role of drama in the social order.

For our purposes we may treat Lukes' analysis in terms of four propositions:

1. Various (and complex) factors hold society together—not simply, if at all, ritual or drama.<sup>10</sup>
2. It is important to understand *why* actors embrace rituals (or dramas). They



may have different significance for different people: they may be embraced willingly or not.

3. Rituals may divide rather than integrate.
4. Rituals represent models or paradigms for social organization.

The last two points can easily be extracted from Duncan's work. There seems, for instance, little in the following suggestion of Lukes' (1977:68) that Duncan would want to take exception to:

...political ritual should be seen as reinforcing, recreating, and organizing *representations collectives* (to use Durkheim's term), that the symbolism of political ritual *represents, inter alia*, particular models or political paradigms of society and how it functions.

Lukes' (1977:65) discussion of counter-rituals also fits (though somewhat less adequately) with Duncan's already discussed "pessimistic Durkheimianism:"

...there are, of course, ...contemporary rituals which express alternative and non-official attitudes and values. Consider, for example, the alternative Memorial Day parades staged in recent years in protest against the Vietnam War. Consider May Day parades in capitalist (as opposed to communist) societies.

The first two (linked) propositions point, however, to a serious difficulty in Duncan's theory of the social order. Though Duncan accepts that actors court each other sometimes in love, sometimes in hate, and sometimes in irony, this is about as far as he progresses towards an analysis of the different *reasons* that actors participate in dramas. Lukes is right to stress that actors engage in the same ritual for a wide variety of practical reasons, that these are precisely practical reasons which cannot be understood in terms of an analysis of the rhetoric or ritual, and that, accordingly, the "official" (perhaps, but only perhaps integrative) purposes of the ritual may be far from shared by those who participate. The argument, then, is that instead of assuming that symbols are somehow immanent in a drama or ritual, one should rather consider their "context of use" (Shapin, 1979:45). It follows from this that the "cement" that holds society together is not primarily the adherence by its members to general principles of social order, but rather their practical attempts to, or reasons for managing interaction, ritual, drama, or whatever. Lukes (1977:67) puts the matter in this

way:

... the selection by the neo-Durkheimians of official and allegedly value integration-strengthening rituals is exceedingly narrow. But so also are the analyses they offer of these rituals. These analyses begin and end with the official interpretation and altogether fail to explore, not only different levels of symbolic meaning in the rituals, but also socially patterned differences of interpretation among those who participate in them or observe them.

And again, and more pointedly (1977:63-4)

... the problem is not to explain why there is universal agreement over a set of internalised, integrative values and norms in terms of, say, political ritual and symbolism, but rather to explain the continuing compliance of subordinate groups in terms of their members' participation in activities, performance of roles and conformity to norms to which no realistic alternatives are perceived or imagined.

Thus it is not appropriate to cite, say, the Nuremberg rallies as evidence of the proposition that their participants subscribed lock, stock and barrel to the Nazi vision of the social order. Though some of the actors may indeed have done so, many doubtless attended for quite other "unofficial" reasons: fear of violence or suspicion; a desire for a few days away from home; because of organizational duties; as simple witnesses—and so on.

With these objections the initial attractive simplicity of Duncan's analysis has unfortunately disappeared. Though it perhaps makes sense to see rituals, rites, ceremonies or interactions as "dramas," the backbreaking and painstaking work of discovering why it is that people participate in these cannot be avoided. The acts and interactions have to be seen in their context, from the standpoint of those who engage in them. The supposition that participation necessarily implies acceptance (or perhaps rejection) of a transcendental vision of the social order is unacceptable. With this rejection vanish also the idealist tendencies in Duncan's analysis—the idea that coexists uneasily with his dramaturgical materialism that somehow symbols with definite meanings for social order impose themselves through rhetoric. Rather it is necessary to commit oneself plainly to the alternative position: that symbols achieve their meaning or significance only in a context of use and that, accordingly, the "same" symbols may mean quite different things to different people—differences that only become important if they become visible for practical purposes.<sup>11</sup>

The complexity of the social order increases by an order of magnitude once a one-to-one correlation between drama and (symbolic) social paradigm is denied. The same dramas may carry many messages; the same messages are carried in many dramas; and the same symbols may signify different things to different people, or to the same people at different times. Yet despite this complexity, there are three positive lessons that may be drawn from Duncan's work: first, that the symbolic is, indeed, central and cannot be avoided; secondly, that principles of order are at war with one another in seeking to enroll agents; and thirdly, that the distinction between the "macro" and the "micro" should not be built into analysis—the *size* of the principles of order is precisely what is at stake. This, then, is the space cleared by Duncan within which we have to build a general sociology of symbolic interaction.

## A "big" phenomenon: the "Big Mac"

I now wish to recreate and deepen the above argument for an empirical case—that of the growth of fast food in the United States. I start with the claim that

fast food, and in particular such chains as McDonald's and Burger King, has grown greatly since the middle 1950s. This claim is so obvious that it scarcely needs to be documented, but the scope of the phenomenon may nevertheless be usefully illustrated. Figure 1 shows the growth in the number of outlets for selected chains between the years 1964 and 1976. The story of rapid growth is reflected in financial statistics. For instance, the McDonald's Corporation claimed in its 1970 Annual Report that its share of each \$100 spent by consumers outside the home on food and drink rose from 79¢ in 1967 to \$1.22 in 1968, to \$1.70 in 1969, and \$2.10 in 1970. The total expenditure on eating and drinking out remained roughly constant at about 7% of total United States retail sales,<sup>13</sup> but fast food sales rose rapidly as a proportion of this—from 20% in 1973 to 28% in 1975.<sup>14</sup> Whatever the way in which this is measured, the major fast food chains (with the possible exception of Kentucky Fried Chicken) have been a roaring success. Our problem, then, is to make sense of this spectacular growth.

How should this be done? What I want to argue is that McDonald's (I shall concentrate primarily on this chain for the purposes of simplicity) can be treated as a *principle of order*. Without wishing to be offensive, I am suggesting that the growth of McDonald's should be understood in much the same way as (say) the growth of the Nazi Party. If we were to follow Duncan we would say that McDonald's staged dramas which, by means of the power of rhetoric, persuaded people to join in and subscribe to the basic transcendental principles enacted or represented in these dramas. The growth of McDonald's from a tiny little principle of social order (one restaurant, thousands of customers) in 1955 to its present great big size would, according to this view, be a function of the fact that, willingly or not, actors were captivated by rhetoric to subscribe to the McDonald's version of social structure.

Of course we cannot follow Duncan's line of argument in its entirety. Though we may, if we wish, speak of McDonald's as staging dramas (in the loosest sense of this term), we can assume neither that actors entering a restaurant subscribe to the McDonald's version of the social order (whatever that might be), nor, indeed, that they all subscribe to the *same* version of the social order. Rather we have to investigate in a concrete and down to earth manner the "context

NAME OF CHAIN	1976	1974	1970	1967	1964
McDonald's	4178	3232	1592	967	675
Kentucky Fried Chicken	4107	3799	2964		
Burger King	1603	1199	656	273	
Jack in the Box	882	787			

Figure 1. Number of Fast Food Retail Outlets in Four Large Chains<sup>12</sup>

of use" of these restaurants—whyever it is, for practical reasons, that people choose to eat a Big Mac rather than frog's legs or haggis and turnips. The supposition will be that they do so for a variety of possibly quite different reasons. To rephrase the conclusion of the last section, we must investigate the symbolic (including the "factual") reasons that actors give for eating at McDonald's, for agreeing to become, however fleetingly, subscribers to the McDonald's principle of order. We must treat the big and the small in the same terms, because this is what is at stake. And ultimately, we must specify more clearly what we mean by a "principle of order" for, though this occupies a similar space to that of Duncan's symbol system, it differs from this in a number of interesting and important respects.

However, before I consider the practical reasons that people have for eating at McDonald's I want to consider the possibility that there may, after all, be general symbolic reasons of a neo-Durkheimian or "Duncanian" kind for doing so. This suggestion is not quite as bizarre as it sounds. Indeed, an anthropologist, Kottak, has attempted a (semi-popular) analysis of the McDonald's phenomenon of precisely this kind. Kottak (1978:77), who undertook an extensive participant observation study of the outlet at Ann Arbor, Michigan, argues that the participation may involve varying degrees of commitment, but that it nevertheless signals acceptance of some aspects of the social order. For Kottak the ritual reveals strongly religious overtones:

The restaurant, a contemporary brick structure . . . is best known for its stained-glass windows, which incorporate golden arches as their focal point. On bright days, sunlight floods in on waiting customers through a skylight that recalls the clerestory of a Gothic cathedral. In the case of this McDonald's the effect is to equate traditional religious symbols and golden arches. And in the view of the natives I have interviewed, the message is clear.

True to the Durkheimian tradition which insists upon a distinction between the sacred and the profane, Kottak argues that the restaurant is a sacred place, set aside from the secular bustle of everyday life. The golden arches, as one of my own respondents put it, "beckon you in" to a sanctuary of cleanliness and order. It is Kottak's (Durkheimian and "Duncanian") argument that in entering the sacred institution of a McDonald's restaurant, the individual goes through the motions of subscribing to the basic principles that sustain the American social order. The first of these is personalism:

The single theme running throughout all the adult commercials is personalism. McDonald's, the commercials tell us, is not just a fast-food restaurant. It is a warm friendly place where you will be graciously welcomed. Here, you will feel at home with your family, and your children will not get into trouble. The word *you* is emphasized—"You deserve a break today;" "You, you're the one;" "We do it all for you." McDonald's commercials say that you are not simply a face in the crowd. At McDonald's you can find respite from a hectic and impersonal society—the break you deserve.

The second principle is that of collectivity. Kottak suggests that participation in the McDonald's ritual implies that the individual is willing to subordinate his own specific social and cultural preferences for a time to an institution that symbolizes the equality and community of all American citizens. Not everyone in America has enough money to walk into a McDonald's and purchase a hamburger and coffee, but perhaps all the "proper" members of the society do.

It must be admitted that Kottak's analysis is certainly suggestive. "Personalism" and "collectivity" are indeed themes that can be detected running through much of the advertising put out by the chains. The "lyric" from a Burger King ad will serve to make this point:

Two hundred million people,  
No two are quite the same,  
Each doing things their own way,  
Each plays a different game,  
And most agree on some things,  
But all agree, they say,  
Everybody loves a burger  
If they can have it fixed their way.  
That's why America loves Burgers  
And we're America's Burger King.

Voiceover at the close of the commercial says,  
"We make 600,000,000 burgers a year, one at a time."

(*Advertising Age*, 22 Nov., 1976, pp. 1 and 79)

In Kottak's view, then the overall message is that at McDonald's you eat with all Americans, symbolically subordinating your particular personal or cultural preferences. At the same time you and your associates remain individuals, recognizably separate persons in the great collectivity.

This is an analysis of which any neo-Durkheimian would be proud. It is also consistent with the conception of social structure outlined by Duncan: Mc-Donald's is being seen as a common symbol system which persuades individuals to subscribe to a general conception of the social order by rhetorical and dramatic presentations. Unfortunately, attractive though it is, it entirely fails to deal with the mundane question of the *practical* circumstances under which people eat at McDonald's. Accordingly, all the criticisms mounted by Lukes and described in the previous section against the neo-Durkheimians may be brought against it. Even if there *is* some truth in Kottak's suggestions, we cannot avoid considering the context of use of the McDonald's restaurants.

What, then, are these? It is difficult to answer this question conclusively without conducting one's own version of McDonald's market research—something which for practical reasons I have not been able to do.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, a variety of sources point in the same direction. When the question is posed of

customers: why McDonald's? the investigator tends to obtain a series of rather standardized responses. He is told, for instance, that the food is served quickly and that standing in long lines is generally unnecessary. He is told that it is relatively cheap. He is told that it is convenient. And he is often told (though there are those who would take strong exception to this view) that the food is good. When the same question is posed of those who *stage* the McDonald's dramas, similar sorts of answers are elicited. In particular, the McDonald's marketing operation surveys its customers in order to obtain their reaction to the adequacy of their experience in the restaurant on a number of criteria: convenience, value, quality, cleanliness and service.

The overall conclusion, then, is that a certain very limited number of factors are crucial in the enrolment of the consumer in the McDonald's drama. Obviously the potential customer needs a certain, rather small, amount of money. He needs to be physically able to remove himself to a restaurant. But, given these initial conditions, expectations and conceptions of adequacy are quite simple. If the food is "good" then he eats it and comes back again. If the food is "not good" then he may go elsewhere next time.

The marketing department of the company accordingly monitors the above—mentioned criteria, and if it finds that one of them is slipping in consumer estimation it tries to put the fault right at source, while simultaneously constructing an advertising campaign to persuade the customer that the next experience will be up to expectation. Thus, at the time of my discussion with a member of the marketing department, the index of consumer satisfaction with respect to quality had seriously declined. The response in terms of advertising was to circulate a series of posters which sought to emphasize the "beefy" quality of the hamburgers.

The next thing to note is that these criteria (or those mentioned by customers in the course of conversation) are in no way "natural" or inevitable. Rather they must be seen as cultural constructs. The idea that food should be fast, cheap, or convenient would be anathema, for instance, to certain sections of the French middle class where elaborately prepared dishes served in a standard order are normal fare. For those who prefer to dine at the Savoy, price is indeed scarcely a primary consideration. And so on.

These reasons for eating at McDonald's might equally well be reasons for *not* eating there in another culture. And this fact in part explains why, even within the United States, fast food enjoys differential demographic success. It is predominantly eaten by the young and middle aged, by the relatively affluent, the geographically mobile, those who have the use of a car, and by those families where the wife and mother is in the workforce.<sup>16</sup> The old, the very poor, and the very rich are under-represented in the McDonald's clientele. Indeed, on occasions the latter have been able to resist the proposed siting of an outlet—as happened on Madison Avenue in New York.

The latter phenomenon hints at a further dimension to the "McDonald's

experience" that has not, so far, been considered: this is its potential for the transmission of social messages. The Madison Avenue McDonald's (and one in Hampstead, London) were never opened because (among other reasons) it was thought that they could generate dirty litter and encourage an inappropriate class of person to frequent the neighbourhood. Clearly, then, one man's clean restaurant is another man's dirty hangout.

The importance of the social message is clear from the fact that many customers express a degree of ambivalence about their presence at a McDonald's restaurant. I found, for instance, as a visiting member of staff in an American city-center university, that those colleagues whom I discovered partaking of a Quarter Pounder and french fries at an adjacent McDonald's frequently expressed the view that this was an activity which in one way or another had been forced upon them. Circumstances to do with the necessity for speed and convenience of the location of the restaurant had conspired to oblige them to consume there on this occasion. They were vaguely apologetic or embarrassed by their presence there, and intimated that this activity did not truly reflect their value, personal worth, or normal position as regards the consumption of food.

Other colleagues who discovered that I sometimes returned to the university department with a Quarter Pounder, french fries, and a cup of coffee, suggested that my preferences for food were a shade unwholesome, and of doubtful taste. In the course of such interactions I would note my own slight embarrassment. These observations (together with the fact that my study of the phenomenon of fast food was considered to be a subject of both humor and abiding interest by those of my colleagues who knew about it) alerted me to the existence of social "non-utilitarian" messages carried by the activity of consuming fast food in particular, and the "refuelling ethos" in general.

The distinction between the "utilitarian" and the "social" can only be sustained for practical purposes—for as I have already indicated, what counts as a utilitarian reason for eating at McDonald's is very much a social construction. It is the fact that it *is* a social construction that leads to the fact that a decision to enter a McDonald's restaurant carries with it social messages about the kind of person that one is: one is presumed to have a no-nonsense utilitarian attitude to food; a quick bite in informal circumstances is what one desires.

From certain standpoints—for instance those of gourmet cuisine or health food, it appears that one is but little concerned about quality. This, of course, illustrates the point that I emphasised in the last section about the meaning of symbols. "Quality" is a notion that depends for its meaning upon the context of its use—just like all the other "transcendental" symbols monitored by McDonald's in the course of their market research. It is assumed (possibly incorrectly) that all Americans care about "quality." The job of the marketing department is to represent the food purveyed as, indeed, exemplifying quality. It is, in other words, its job to construct a particular conception of quality, one that will be accepted by members of relevant groups in the United States.

I am arguing that the decision to enter a McDonald's restaurant carries with it a load of social messages. The exact nature of these social messages depends upon who witnesses this act.<sup>17</sup> I want to concentrate, in what follows, on some of the more favorable messages that may be read into the consumption of a hamburger. A clue to at least some of these may be found in an in-house McDonald's slogan: the idea that the experience (and the advertising representing that experience) should comprise of "food, folks and fun." Much of the McDonald's advertising that is not aimed at small children or at emphasizing the strictly economic advantages of eating a hamburger, is aimed at "the family." It is designed to convey the idea that something special happens between parents and children when they enter a McDonald's restaurant. The experience is represented as emotionally warm, as fun, and it is suggested that, as a result of the informal atmosphere (for instance, no place-setting, and no definite family seating arrangement) children will in particular enjoy themselves. Families are always depicted as informal, an informality that is extended to the crew person who is both friendly and highly efficient.

That this informality is an important—perhaps the key—social message is supported by evidence drawn from McDonald's customers. They know that they do not need to wear a tie and order from a waiter. They can drop in alone, with a friend, or as a member of a group of any kind or size—the whole business is no kind of problem. It is possible to eat informally in five or ten minutes on the way to or from the store. The structure of the food is such that it contributes to the relaxed atmosphere. There is no cutlery to manipulate, no elaborate place settings, no decisions about the proper wine to choose to go with the fish dish. In sum, McDonald's customers are relaxed, informal, easy-going, practical and matter-of-fact in their eating habits—or at least this is the burden of the positive messages that they give off. Naturally this conception is more acceptable to some than to others. We have already indicated that for those who make a fetish about health food or gourmet cuisine, the act of wolfing down a hamburger has indeed its shameful overtones. Hence the excuses of my academic colleagues.

As I suggested earlier, McDonald's is a splendid success story. It has spread across the land, staging its dramas, and persuading its customers to play their roles. The point that is crucial is, however, that they do so for a variety of practical reasons: it is a cheap and easy way to feed the family; it is precisely a way of getting *away from* the family; it is a convenient way of taking a quick snack; it is the only feasible possibility in the course of a long journey; the food is good—and so on. Its customers are enrolled in a variety of different ways to play in the great McDonald's drama—and these ways have little to do with either rhetoric or the subscription to certain transcendental symbols of political or social order.

I have argued, of course, that a variety of social messages are implicated in the choice of a fast food restaurant, but my suggestion is that these should be primarily located much closer to home than Kottak would have us believe. These,



then, are messages about food and how it should be properly eaten; there are also messages about *with whom* it should be eaten. If I am correct, then the dominant social message suggests that food should be shared between those who are relaxed and informal in relation to one another. A certain conception of the social structure is, of course, implied, but this concerns the *practice* of family or other intimate social relations. It rests upon and reproduces a particular *practical* way of conducting a part of one's life. The symbols (such as "informality") are only given meaning in the course of their interpretation.

I suggest that the onus of proof is upon those who wish to claim that the decision to eat a hamburger has transcendental implications or is functional for a collectivity such as "America." Certainly it is safe to say that McDonalds' executives do not see it in that way. In their attempts to persuade the public to eat a hamburger they concentrate on the operationalization of much more down-to-earth matters: quality, value, cleanliness, folks and fun. They do not ignore the social messages implicit in the consumption of a Big Mac—indeed a large part of their advertising is designed to present the experience in a light that is socially favorable from the standpoint of the target groups—but this is at a down-to-earth level, that of the relationships between intimates or customers and serving crews.

As I have already indicated, the market research department of McDonald's is both large and sophisticated. Its members interview many thousands of their customers every year, and perhaps have more knowledge of their clientele than any other organization in the world. They are also one of the biggest advertisers in the United States (in 1976 it is estimated that they spent \$105 million, *Advertising Age*). Though they spend less than, say, Proctor and Gamble, unlike the latter McDonald's advertising is concentrated on a very specific market and not dispersed across a wide range of different products. Though this can only be a guess, it would appear likely that the corporation mounts the most intensive and sustained advertising in the world—and its advertising appears to be very effective.<sup>18</sup>

The details of this research and the reasoning behind the advertising are, of course, closely guarded commercial secrets. Again it is necessary to piece together a story from a wide variety of sources. Nevertheless, it is possible to make at least some general claims about the structure of this effort. These claims may be summed up in the following way: *McDonald's has a theory of the interests of its customers and potential customers; it attempts to build upon or modify these interests in order to induce customers to buy its product.* It is, of course, primarily interested in the latter: consumers' attitudes toward political issues, or their preferred team in the forthcoming baseball season are substantially irrelevant to the McDonald's marketers. It is necessary to make this rather obvious point for two reasons: firstly, sophisticated though they are, the McDonald's surveys nevertheless *simplify* the customer. They reduce him, as it were, to a formula. Consumers are held to have certain interests *in relation to their eating*

*habits*. These interests are limited in number—we have already substantially covered them—and they are held to be differentially distributed across the population.

Thus McDonald's view of the American public divides this into a limited number of criss-crossing classes (age cohort, income level and ethnic group are among three of the most important) which are held to have distinctive attitudes or practices in relation to eating. The object, as I have indicated, is to build upon or manipulate those interests in order to turn consumers into customers. We might, in sum, say that McDonald's has a grossly simplified social map of the American public. It is grossly simplified because it is designed to take into account only those factors that are relevant to the very specific interests of the corporation. Obviously if these interests were different, then the map would be different. If they were in the business of selling shoes or automobiles, they would ignore consumers' feelings about food, and concentrate on quite other matters.

The McDonald's social map is, therefore, simplified: it turns customers who are, from one point of view all individually different, into a limited number of types with typical interests with respect to the consumption of fast food. It is necessary to emphasize this simplification for a second reason—a reason that takes us back to my earlier suggestion that the firm can be treated as a *principle of order*: it attempts to (and in large measure succeeds in) ordering a *very specific slice* of the activity of millions of Americans. It insinuates itself into a few minutes of their lives each day or week, and succeeds in ordering these minutes in the desired manner. Its own interests are, of course, eminently practical; it aims to ensure that people eat its products, and the whole effort is bent in this direction.

Now consider the limits to its success. Even the very addicted perhaps only eat there three times a day. Those who like the food nevertheless often eat in other places—from Burger King to their own homes. Then there are those who like "better quality" food—who go to steak houses or vegetarian restaurants. There are those who are "too old" to enjoy the McDonald's experience, too far from a restaurant to eat there, or caught up in such necessities as school or work which prevent easy access to a Big Mac. From the standpoint of McDonald's, these types of limits are conceptualized in terms of the differential distribution of interests across a population. Some of these interests cannot be quickly influenced: few people are likely to drive 100 Miles to eat a Big Mac. Here the remedy is to bring McDonald's to the customer. Other interests are, however, manipulable, at least on the margins. If the people's interest in quality is not being met, it may, as I suggested earlier, be possible to represent the hamburger as pure and beefy, and hence as good to eat; if people start preferring Burger King because of its "personalized burger" it may be possible to reorganize the McDonalds' burger to match this appeal—or to insist that each Big Mac is, after all, made with "tender, loving and individualized care." If those over 44 don't eat as many hamburgers as their juniors, it may be possible to lure them in by

making them feel younger, or by introducing a breakfast menu.<sup>19</sup> Overall, then, as McDonald's struggles to maintain and expand its market share, it does so by staging its "dramas" in ways that appear practically attractive to as many potential customers as possible. It creates classes of consumers, theorizes that they have certain interests, and builds upon or slightly diverts these interests in order to enlist members of that group for a few minutes each day or each week. It does this, group by group and interest by interest, in very particular ways. It does not, as Duncan might have proposed, do so by rhetoric.

The crucial difference between what I am suggesting and a rhetorical analysis, is this: I am arguing that persuasion works by seizing upon certain specific attributes ("interests") that are presumed to direct the behavior of the consumer, and presenting that interest as something that can be realized or articulated in the course of following the activity in question. Action is accordingly induced not by the abstract power of words and images in advertising, but rather in the way that these words and images are put into practice by the corporation, and then *interpreted* in the light of the (presumed) interests of the hearer. Advertising and enrolment work if the advertiser's theory of (practical) interests is workable: that is to say, if his message indeed latches onto something in the consumer that the latter sees as acceptable, desirable, or at the very least unavoidable.

The success of McDonald's is a daily achievement. Its theory of consumer interests is, of course, always on trial. Perhaps it will cease to work, or a rumor that the meatiness of the hamburgers is achieved by the addition of earthworms will gain such currency that nothing can be done to arrest a catastrophic decline in the attitude of the consumer towards the quality of the product. The simplifications of the McDonald's theory of the consumer, though provisionally workable from the standpoint of its desire to sell hamburgers, conceal a much more complex reality: just as McDonalds seeks to organize a few minutes of every American's day, so too do other *principles of order* ranging from Burger King through the Republican Party to the Church of the Latter Day Saints. Sometimes these principles of organization are in conflict with one another. A successful attempt by Burger King to promote the Whopper is likely to lead to a reduction of sales of the Big Mac. More often they impede one another or get in each others' way in a less direct manner. If consumers spend more on, say, home video they may have less to spend on hamburgers. If they subscribe to the theory and practice of health food they will avoid eating at hamburger stands. If they enjoy formal dinner parties, then the relative social informality of McDonald's will not appeal to them. And we must, of course, not exclude the possibility that the successful expansion of one principle of organization may assist another. Not *all* is competition and conflict. McDonald's would hardly exist today without the historically successful attempt by Detroit to enroll the American consumer and government.

The empirical argument now permits us to broaden and deepen the theoretical suggestions outlined in the previous section. It allows us to see the justice of

Duncan's view that sociologists should take as their topic of study the growth, maintenance and decline of intersecting and conflicting principles of order. However, the idea that all might be resolved between them is clearly unacceptable liberal wishful thinking, and his analysis of what is implied when the individual decides to play a role in a drama is clearly inadequate: we have no reason to suppose that such a decision is anything other than something made on practical grounds. Rhetorical appeals to transcendent theories of the social order have little or nothing to do with such decision-making—and even subscription to the "same" principles may lead to entirely different practical activity.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, in the present theory, *principles of order* occupy essentially the same space as the notion of "symbol system" does in Duncan's writing. Such principles structure and organize actions; they create bits and pieces, and they put them into relationship with one another; they select and they simplify; they enroll, and thereby establish some kind of provisional order in a slice of social life; and they do so from a very particular point of view—for instance from the standpoint of the eating habits of certain groups of citizens. Their success is an accomplishment. Put otherwise, their size is not something which is independent of their capacity to enroll. Their capacity to enroll is tested afresh each day. If they fail to entice, bribe, or bully those whom they seek to enroll into compliance, then they start to shrink—they *have* shrunk: they no longer rank as principles of order, because from their point of view the social world has become unorderable.

The principles of order discussed in the present text are in a more intimate relationship with each other than Duncan's systems of symbols. There are various ways of expressing this suggestion. One is to point out that, given their strictly practical concern with enrolment, the extent to which they wish to enroll any given individual is strictly limited. McDonald's successes arise from the fact that it enrolls many individuals in the course of its daily dramas for a few minutes at a time. It does not organize entire days' worth of activities (except for those who work for it). Accordingly, as the individual works his way through the activities of his day he is enlisted for practical purposes by first one and then another organizing principle. Looked at from the standpoint of the individual, therefore, the general choice is not between principles of organization "A" and "B" (though this sometimes naturally occurs). It is rather a question of preference, of juggling the various possibilities together into a practically satisfactory whole.<sup>21</sup> There are two ways of looking at such an activity. One is to look at it from a particular point of view (say that of the man from McDonald's) and treat the individual (or the *class* of individual) as being possessed of certain given "interests." We have seen that, from such a specific standpoint it may, within limits, be possible to build upon or alter these interests. The man from Mc-Donald's thus attempts to persuade older consumers that eating at a fast food restaurant can, indeed, be fun. The other way of considering the matter is to note, however, that while any particular "decision" to enroll in a given activity may be seen as a function of "interests," each such decision in turn affects the

structure of those interests. Or, to put the matter slightly differently, "interests" can be understood as a function of successive decisions of individuals to allow themselves to be enrolled in a large number of principles of order—decisions that are themselves a function of previous decisions, and so on.<sup>22</sup>

## Conclusion

It is of course the case that some things are bigger than others. McDonald's is a large organizing principle, far larger than, say, Fat Freddie's Deli which has one and only one outlet, and counts its customers in hundreds, not millions. But visible differences in size do not legitimate the conceptual dichotomy between interaction and institutions which is now to be found in sociology. At present interaction is a second-class object of study because it is not important. Important features are all located up there in the structures. From time to time certain "macrotheorists" may genuflect in the direction of "microsociology." It is agreed, for instance, that structural sociology must be based on a realistic conception of the actor. Or attempts are made to reconcile the "macro" with the "micro."<sup>23</sup> The burden of this essay, however, is not only that the division between "macro" and "micro" is misplaced; it is in addition that attempts to reconcile them are misguided. Interactionism and its allies do not need to be "fitted in" to the great structures created by the macrosociologists. We are not the foundations upon which a sociology of structures can be built. Rather we constitute a realistic alternative to the reductionistic pretensions of the currently "great" sociologies. What is required is simple. We must stop colluding with our second class role, and go out to claim the social—the whole of the social—as our own.

So differences in size exist. Of course they do. We know that they exist because they are accomplished by actors every day. Some organizing principles grow and others contract. It is our job to understand the *processes* by which such growth and contraction takes place. To be more precise, it is our job to make sense of the *processes of enrolment*: how it is that McDonald's, the Nazi Party, or any other principle of organization extracts compliance from its subjects. My digression into an analysis of symbolism in the main body of this essay is a preliminary attempt to consider the way in which this occurs. In particular, it is intended to show that there are no short cuts. Transcendent symbols of social unity do not in general explain the success (or failure) of organizing principles. Thus, though Duncan's notion of a symbol-drama system is very valuable, it is too simple-minded, too Durkheimian. The mortar that holds the society precariously together is not commitment to general principles, it is rather a set of much more complex—indeed ultimately unknowably complex—practical decisions by actors to allow themselves to be temporarily enrolled.

The case of McDonald's suggests that one way at least in which such enrolment occurs is as a result of the *reconstruction of interests*. Organizing principles

make imputations about the background interests which are thought to direct the behavior of actors. They then attempt to cash in on or manipulate those interests. In analytical terms enrolment occurs at the moment when the actor takes it to be in his or her interests to comply with what is sought by the organizing principles. In the present essay I have illustrated this for the case of McDonald's. However, the process seems to be general. Recent work in the sociology of scientific knowledge reveals that such "interest games" are to be found at the core of the production of scientific knowledge, as scientists attempt to entrap one another and possible clients by mapping out and then transforming relevant conceptions of interest.<sup>24</sup>

There are several points worth noting about these "interest games." The first is that the strategy of McDonald's is like that of much of contemporary sociology—a strategy criticized by Duncan since it involves the attribution of "real causes" that underlie the surface appearances of the social. In a word, it is reductionistic. For McDonald's, background social causes (in the form of interests) produce success or failure. For the sociologist they explain phenomena of interest. Looking at the success of McDonald's or, say, Marxism it must be readily conceded that the strategy enjoys a certain degree of success. Consumers do indeed eat Big Macs and within limits macrosociology can, say, explain why it is that Americans vote in the way in which they do. Perhaps such "macro" theories have their place. The question is, what is that place?

What, then, is the matter with such explanations? Is it not enough to note that, after all, they work? The answer to this must be "no" for any interactionist. Just because they work to some extent does not mean that we must concede ontological status to such fairy tales. Their reductionism is obnoxious in terms of our program. It identifies final causes with what are in fact precarious and contingent states of affairs. That should be enough to lead us to reject such a simplificatory strategy with its inevitably reificatory consequences for the "macro-social" background. But even in their own terms such reductions are potentially unsound. "Final causes" have a way of turning out to be far from final, and these local attempts at simplification thereby lose their predictive power. Of course, if the reductionists treat their models as heuristic devices then perhaps one cannot fairly object. Possibly McDonald's is less guilty in this respect than our "macrosociological" brethren who all too often grace their fairy tales with untoward epistemological status.

In any case, an attractive alternative is available. If we think of interests as being constructed and manipulated, instead of stopping with an assumed set of background causes, then the social world takes on the shape of an endless set of interest games played between different principles of organization with temporary and precarious success for some of these, and failure for others. If we look at the social world in this way, then we shift our analytical focus from background causes to a study of the unfolding processes of enrollment—to the schemes that principles of organization use to attract actors here and there. Size

thus becomes an accomplishment, something that has to be managed minute by minute, and recreated each day. It is what is at stake. And social "structure" is the moment by moment relationship between the different and in many cases competing principles of organization.<sup>25</sup>

This is a program that is in its infancy, but it is a program that was outlined, albeit in a rather different way, by Duncan, who asked us to consider the social world as a struggle for allegiance between symbol systems or social paradigms and who, correspondingly, devoted much of his energies to the study of the ways in which social recruitment takes place. No one can legislate about how symbolic interaction should develop. It is one of its strengths that it is to some extent anti-systematic, ethnographic and idiosyncratic.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, I believe that the time is ripe to reclaim the social—all of the social—for ourselves. Our failure of nerve is no longer acceptable.

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## Notes

1. Indeed, we cannot escape the symbolic even in those cases where we appeal to other types of causes (Duncan, 1962:144):  
When we explain social motives by biology, physics, history, economics, politics, or other "realities" which are "beyond" symbols, there is a very high percentage of inference or interpretations—even in a statement we are content to call "factual." The trend of much recent work in the sociology of symbol generation is to argue that even in the "hardest" sciences the "percentage" of interpretation is 100. For this point well argued, see Collins (1975).
2. "The greatest body of observable social 'facts' are not derived from what people do but from what they *say* about what they do." (Duncan, 1962:146)
3. Elsewhere Duncan classifies seven types of drama (Duncan, 1968: 173ff). Four of these—play, the game, the party and the festival are relatively unserious. At a party, for instance, we occupy individual or personal roles, and *play* at society. At festivals we again play, but as these are staged in the community, the actors play community or social roles. Three further types of drama—ceremonies, rites, and ritual dramas, are, however, more serious. Ceremonies (Duncan, 1968:183) are social dramas at which we seek to uphold the dignity and majesty of the social roles that are believed necessary to the social order. Rites (Duncan, 1968:185) are those dramas in which collective sentiments are fixed by means of communication with supernatural powers who are believed to sustain the social order. Frequently, obviously, rites are religious in nature. Finally, and perhaps more important, there are the misleadingly called "dramas" (misleading because all the above categories are also called dramas).

4. In the case of rites, the discussion, by contrast, is between men and Gods.
5. Here as in many other places Duncan sounds distinctly Durkheimian.
6. See Duncan (1968:51); though for a contrary statement see 1962:327.
7. For what it is worth, the author prefers this form of political structure to any likely alternative, despite its obvious injustices and imperfections.
8. This overemphasis of the political is, in one way, a rather strange feature of Duncan's work which consistently stresses that rival symbol systems cannot be reduced to single causes.
9. For an entertaining account of state failure to organize economic activity in Hungary see Kenedi (1982).
10. I will treat the terms "ritual" and "drama" as synonymous-though ritual in the Durkheimian sense treated by Lukes covers only "high drama." Furthermore Lukes is explicitly concerned with political ritual.
11. This lesson has been pressed home in a variety of contexts in recent years. For a particularly clear theoretical exposition see Barnes (1982).
12. Sources: The McDonald's Corporation *Annual Reports*, 1970 and 1976; Heublein's Inc. *Annual Reports*, 1972, 1974 and 1976; the Pillsbury Company *Annual Reports*, 1969, 1970 and 1977; *Advertising Age*, August 29th, 1977, page 164, and August 18th, 1975, page 173.
13. Statistics from *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 97th Annual Edition, 1976; Table 1358 "Retail Sales by Kind of Business."
14. *Advertising Age*, August 26th, 1974, page 154; *Business Week*, July 11th, 1977.
15. My data come from: personal experience, informal interviews, a questionnaire circulated to 100 predominantly freshman year college students in a semi-rural neighbourhood, analysis of McDonald's advertising, interviews with McDonald's operatives, study of appropriate company reports and commentary in the professional and general press.
16. *Institutional Investor*, October, 1973, pages 93-5.
17. Goffman considers these questions sensitively in his essay "Role Distance." See Goffman (1972).
18. Ninety-six percent of American children are reported to recognize Ronald McDonald, compared with 98% for that more traditional figure, Santa Claus.
19. In one advertisement, we see a cheerful and youthful grandfather biting into a Big Mac and saying "Gee, these kids are on to something!"
20. For a version of this point see Kuhn's discussion of what it means to follow a paradigm (Kuhn, 1970).
21. There is plenty of symbolic interactionist writing about the way in which this juggling takes place. For a particularly interesting example see Becker (1960).
22. The conception of "interest" has recently been the object of a fierce debate in the sociology of culture. For an attack on sociological explanations that use the concept to explain action and belief see Woolgar (1981a and 1981b). For a spirited rejoinder see Barnes (1981). For a commentary on this debate posed in terms consistent with the present analysis see Callon and Law (1982).
23. See Karin D. Knorr-Cetina and Aaron V. Cicourel (1981).
24. This is shown in Latour's study of Pasteur (Latour, 1983) and my own work on a contemporary biochemistry laboratory (Callon and Law, 1982; Law, 1983; Law and Williams, 1982).
25. For an outline of this view see Callon and Latour (1981).
26. See Rock (1979).

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