Revolution and Witchcraft

The Code of Ideology in Unsettled Times

Gordon C. Chang

Foreword by Richard Biernacki

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Dedicated to Hugh "Bud" Mehan,
who has made the world positive and different

FOREWORD

Socio-cultural investigators who take their task as that of unmasking the historical peculiarity of putatively universal terms, including "the human," will surely be provoked by the very opening of this book. For Gordon Chang thinks he has license to ponder "human beings" as such, or at least the building blocks of their inferences and meaning-making. The great accomplishment of his comparisons of discursive derangements in wildly different cultural contexts is to make good on that methodological conceit. He does not say that American political discourses leading to the invasion of Iraq are "like" those leading to his other showcases of collective madness, the Maoist Cultural Revolution, and the early modern witch hunts in Europe. He discloses merely how the dimming of public reasoning in the American polity of our day represents a more insidious merger of discursive maneuvers that had remained disjoined in other episodes of craziness. "Anatomize, then historicize!" might be his credo. That comprises Chang's novel invitation for analysts of discourse to think big again.

Berkeley, CA, USA   Richard Biernacki
May 2022

Acknowledgments

The core part of this book was written during a one-year sabbatical leave awarded by Western Illinois University between 2017 and 2018. I spent the year as a visiting scholar at the University of California, San Diego, my alma mater. UC San Diego, from the late 1990s and 2000s, is where I developed my interest and training in qualitatively oriented, theoretically driven sociology. I have had the good fortune to encounter and interact with scholars of various disciplines in sociology as well as in other departments. There are too many people to mention, but some notable examples are Carlos Waisman, Kwai Ng, Richard Madsen, Ivan Evans, Jeff Haydu, Martha Lampland, Harvey Goldman, Susan Yonezawa, Makeba Jones, and George Lipsitz. Among them, Charles Thorpe and Isaac Martin have provided understated but much appreciated critical support. Ultimately, I could not have been more fortunate than to have selected Hugh Mehan, Bennetta Jules-Rosette, Richard Biernacki, Gary Fields, and Masao Miyoshi as members of my doctoral dissertation committee in 2008. Rick had been my honest, supportive figure in every stage of my work; Gary is the right kind of humanistic scholar needed for every controversy. The late Masao Miyoshi is responsible for delaying this book for

several years by—through his insistent, vivacious, inspiring critique—compelling me to connect social constructionism with critical theory.

For many years, I have been part of the Art, Culture, and Knowledge (ACK) research group coordinated by Bennetta Jules-Rosette. I have benefited deeply from exchanging ideas on topics related to the sociology of culture, art, and knowledge with several long-term members in this community for more than two decades. These members include Lea Ruiz-Ade, Wayne 'J.R.' Osborn, Lorna Lueker Zukas, Alex Zukas, Ricardo Guthrie, Erica Fontana, Pierce Flynn, and Eduardo Santana. J.R. Osborn, in particular, has been a terrific peer who adds wonder to every one of our conversations as he challenges my logic and assumptions.

I want to thank several anonymous reviewers who have shown a warm interest in the initial book proposal, and one key reviewer for this manuscript has especially shaped the fate of this book by his support and detailed review. Elizabeth Graber from Palgrave Macmillan, by judiciously mediating author's and publisher's needs, has been a wonderful editor to work with. Outside of Palgrave Macmillan, Ramon Battershall has magnificently copyedited multiple early drafts of this manuscript. Chris Buchanan, Noah Faingold, and Bennitta Rector have provided insightful, pragmatic feedback as this book's beta readers. In ways more than I initially realized, the friendship and companionship of Erik Borowitz, Sean Dinces, and Alex Jong-Seok Lee, as well as my interactions with the ethnomethodology and interactionist communities, have helped me sustain the energy needed to complete this book.

There are, however, three individuals without whom my thoughts in this book would never have come to fruition.

The late John McNeil, former professor of education at UCLA, has been a spiritual anchor throughout my academic career. I was lucky enough to have had the invaluable opportunity to meet and converse with him regarding the theory of humanistic education since 2001, and he has watched this book project develop step by step into its current form. John has read and commented on all the chapters of this book when they were in their fledgling versions and provided incredibly frank and pertinent feedback during many critical junctures of my writing process. It should be added that he was still actively commenting on my drafts at the centennial age of 100 in 2020! I am forever grateful and indebted to him for his support, trust, and generosity of spirit.

Bennetta Jules-Rosette has been an important mentor, companion, and friend. Besides involving me in her ACK group and the African and

African-American Studies Research Center (AAASRC), she has deeply influenced my interest in the worlds of qualitative sociology and sociology of knowledge. During 2017–2018, she helped to coordinate a visiting scholar arrangement with the AAASRC and the Department of Sociology at UC San Diego, during which I completed the core part of my research and writing. Our habit of holding extensive multi-hour conversations dates back many years; some of the key ideas in this book originate from those extended conversations, especially as they pertain to semiotics and ethnomethodology.

Hugh 'Bud' Mehan, who I first met in 1998, initially introduced me to the fascinating world of sociology. He showed me the sheer intellectual power and promise of qualitative sociology, and subsequently took the practical actions required to help me develop an academic career so that I could work in this immersive field. This book project, as well as my whole orientation toward sociology, is owed to the insights he had developed over the course of many years. I hope that readers can see my appreciation of the depth and genius of his academic approach through the parts in which his framework is referenced. For the many years of support he has extended to me, I owe him more than I could possibly articulate. This book is dedicated to him.

Lastly, politics is a fickle thing; great differences can emerge between moral and intelligent people; I hope this work captures something constant. Although many individuals have been mentioned in this acknowledgment, this book has not been written with their direct approval. Therefore, the defects and shortcomings are entirely my own.

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Gordon C. Chang (郑志达/鄭志達) is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Western Illinois University. His main areas of interest are theory and the sociology of knowledge.

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一念天堂一念地狱
One Thought [Could Lead One To] Heaven;
One Thought [Could Lead One To] Hell.

失之毫厘 谬以千里
Miss a Centimeter; Wrong by a Thousand Miles

Ideas, by their nature, are prone to abuse.
Human beings, by their nature, are prone to abuse ideas.

Although this work can be read as a cross-disciplinary theory book, this entire project originated from an interest in answering some key questions about the human condition: *Why do people end up doing what they do, and why do things happen in society the way they do?* An answer is sought through an exploration of ideas.

Ideas shape the thought processes of entire societies. Powerful *sets* of ideas provide the tools and methods that enable humans—groups of people, not simply individuals—to travel much further and faster in thinking than otherwise possible. In situations when ideologies and idealogues run rampant or amok, extreme mass-scale social mishaps occasionally follow, and in such unfortunate circumstances many efforts to contain these situations are rendered futile. This book utilizes three cases to demonstrate

how ideologies, as *idea systems*, operate within the contexts of human societies and shape human behavior.

The first case (Chaps. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7) covers a variety of witch-hunt movements in early modern Europe (1450 to 1750). It demonstrates a model of an idea system that is highly *evidentially driven* (or *factually* or *empirically* driven).

The second case (Chaps. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13) is the futuristic, Communist Revolution led by Mao Zedong and his devoted followers in China from 1949 to 1976. It demonstrates a model of an idea system that is highly *ideationally driven*.

The third case (Chaps. 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18) is the U.S. War on Terror from 2001 to 2004, a far-reaching but somewhat nebulous project enacted by the George W. Bush administration. This case demonstrates a model of an idea system that is an eclectic, but extremely well-integrated, *hybrid*.

Using these three examples as a guide, this book demonstrates how slight differences in ideas, slowly but steadily accumulating, can misdirect not only our lives' trajectories but also whole societies'. Such differences are not marked in the degree of logical rigor, in the quality of available evidence, or in the techniques of its acquisition. They cannot be described with simple dictums or maxims. These differences can be found in the principles unveiled in this book pertaining to how whole *idea systems* work. They can be found in the intricate codification *decisions* that people made in real-life contentious contexts.[1]

The Spontaneous Formation of Ideological Ideas

Ideas proliferate wildly in today's fast-paced public political discourse. A condition of extreme openness seems to mark the circulation of ideas—an openness that now includes ubiquitous manipulation. Pervasive and efficient manipulations, paradoxically, could mean closing minds to any objective truth while opening them to other possibilities. A guarding mechanism against intellectual anarchy has been a liberal ethic of uncensored public discourse and private deliberation. Conceptually, discursive participants are encouraged to battle openly to expose and detail the manipulative techniques used by others; audiences, for their part, are

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[1] Here, I am referring to the profound differences that lie between a centimeter and a thousand miles, and between "heaven" and "hell" as referred to in the epigraph.

encouraged to take an active role in processing the ideas circulated, exercising "critical" and "independent" thinking.

Mechanistically, this ethic of a self-policing public discourse falls short, given the professional, systematic manipulation operating on a massive scale and the broad social range constituting the public. With the appearance of almost every new controversy, people's ideas have converged, rapidly falling into mutually segregated camps. Actors on every side can quickly draw upon a reservoir of information, worldviews, and expressions that are loosely but systematically organized. Furthermore, there are often exemplary figures who comprehend the whole scale, the most compelling aspects, and the most dexterous uses of all resources within that reservoir. Certain figures—such as those who have exclusive informational and institutional access—could even exert disproportionate control over what flows into the reservoir. Even though most participants *feel* they are equal participants or active players in the discourses—including in the domain of idea manipulation and defense against manipulation—their roles and their ideas seem somewhat limited, or even predestined. It is easiest to build their ideas within established systems—and those systems are already partly designed and coordinated. Any attempt to depart from the system will be harder, thus positioning the individual to be much less equipped— and much too slow—to best other idea circulators in fast-paced conflicts.[2]

The ways people are manipulated into generating particular ideas with a great deal of spontaneity and free will—rigorously and passionately— relate to the contemporary and historical puzzle of "ideology." Ideologies have never merely been small, private opinions; they are highly meaningful ideas—associated with methods of thinking and speaking, as well as emotional conduct and ways of living[3]—that potentially bind, divide, and motivate various institutions and collectives—especially affecting social changes during critical times. In crucial ways, ideologies condition the

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[2] For a discussion of how the current mode of public political discourse is mediated by "mediatization," or what David Altheide calls "media syndrome," in which the public is profoundly constricted and manipulated, see David Altheide, *The Media Syndrome* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016); Caja Thimm, Mario Anastasiadis, and Jessica Einspänner-Pflock, eds. *Media Logic(s) Revisited: Modelling the Interplay between Media Institutions, Media Technology and Societal Change* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

[3] "Ideologies are Symbolic, Affective, Behavioral, and Relational." Gary Alan Fine and Kent Sandstrom, "Ideology in Action: A Pragmatic Approach to a Contested Concept," *Sociological Theory* 11, no. 1 (March 1993), 21.

realities and relations in which people live.[4] Cultural theorist Fredric Jameson recently declared: "I will need to say why Ideology… subsumes everything else in culture and the superstructures, assuming the position that religion once held for the first historians and cultural theoreticians of the West."[5]

The techniques to create ideological control and conformity are advancing with increased experience and the technological means utilized by those who practice them. Traditional academic frameworks and approaches, conversely, seem to have run into a point of limitation. They are still useful, but they are not quite sufficient and a little too incohesive to deal with the increasingly complex ideologies generated by manipulative social actors at accelerated speed and given the current amount of informational backing. In fact, they might even be insufficient to deal with the ideologies of the past. The major point of limitation, I contend, is methodological and theoretical and intimately related to *operationalization*.

Scholarly Engagements with "Ideology"

Discourse theorist Teun van Dijk has formulated the most encompassing, cross-disciplinary scholarly definition I have yet encountered:

> ideology is something like a shared framework of social beliefs that organize and coordinate the social interpretations and practices of groups and their members, and in particular also power and other relations between groups.

Under this umbrella definition, there have been at least three very different, ideal-typical scholarly engagements of ideology in the academic literature.[6]

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[4] Cf. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989); Masao Miyoshi, *Trespasses: Selected Writings* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 127–150, 243–252.

[5] Fredric Jameson, *Allegory and Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 2020), ix. As early as in the 1980s, Jameson has been concerned with the "operationalization" problem with regard to ideology and proposed semiotic approaches in solving the problem. Fredric Jameson, foreword to *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory*, by Algirdas Julien Greimas, trans. Paul J. Perron and Frank H. Collins (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

[6] For a brief survey of the field, see Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London and New York: Verso, 1991); John B. Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1984); John B. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press 1991), 28–73.

The first type of engagement, exemplified by Karl Marx's usage of the concept, embeds a clear mission of social critique. "Ideology" is a value-laden, pejorative term; it is something to be *negated*. In the view of Marx, the dominant classes meticulously construct and sustain ideas that ensure their own class interests. These ideas span the realms of economy, law, morality, politics, and culture. Intellectuals are often co-constructors of these ideas, but the masses typically give their consent and some even do so enthusiastically. The Marxian tradition has set the trend to define ideology as ideas and representations that are organized to mask truths, perpetuate falsehoods, enable power subjugation, conquer others, or combinations of the above.[7] Scholars in the traditions of cultural studies, post-Marxism, neo-Marxism, and critical theories paradigmatically seek to unveil economic, colonial, religious, political, and cultural ideologies that hinder societal liberation and potential.[8] Reflecting or critiquing "ideologies" is their endeavor to improve social conditions by helping society resolve contradictions via philosophical reflection and praxis.[9]

A second type of engagement deliberately deals with ideology in a non-pejorative and non-evaluative way. This "neutral conception" of ideology is synonymous with "'systems of thought', 'systems of belief' or 'symbolic systems' which pertain to social action or political practice."[10] Supposedly this is the original meaning of ideology, as coined by French thinker Antoine Destutt de Tracy in 1796 to refer to his vision of a new science that would "[regulate] society in such a way that [humans find] there the most help and the least possible annoyance from [their] own kind."[11]

[7] For example, see Karl Marx, *A Critique of the German Ideology*, trans. and ed. Salomea W. Ryazanskaya (Moscow, RU: Progress Publishers, [1845–1846]1968), republished by Marxists Internet Archive in 2000: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_The_German_Ideology.pdf; Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, trans. Saul K. Padover and Daniel de Leon (Chicago, IL: Charles H. Kerr & Company, [1851–1852]1907), republished by Project Gutenberg (Salt Lake City, UT) on Feb 19, 2006 (EBook #1346): https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1346/1346-h/1346-h.htm

[8] For example, see Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott. Stanford: Stanford University Press. [1947] 2002; Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society, 2nd Ed*. London: Routledge, [1964]1991); Nannerl Keohane, Michelle Z. Rosaldo, and Barbara C. Gelpi, eds., *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*.

[9] John B. Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1984) 1, 141–142.

[10] John B. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1980), 5.

[11] Cited in Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture*, 30.

Every set of philosophical ideas, as well as cohesive moral or spiritual beliefs used toward organizing social-cultural relations more generally, would fit under this neutral conception.[12] Scholars could be studying the "ideology" of a group without meaning to criticize the ideas of any particular actor or institution as problematic. One can see ideology as potentially offering both positive and negative functions.[13]

The third type of engagement—and probably the largest and most underacknowledged—does not use the term ideology at all (or does so only sparingly) but actually engages with ideology in theorization, critiques, or empirical inquiries. The works by Michel Foucault, Edward Said, Pierre Bourdieu, Jean Baudrillard, Dorothy Smith, Patricia Hill Collins, and Stuart Hall are prominent examples in the field of social theory.[14] So too are the many scholarly and practical studies that substantively address how certain sets of developed *ideas* are linked to the development of societal power, which in turn shapes social formations and institutions.[15]

[12] A few exemplary works that employ this notion of ideology include Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," in *Interpretation of Cultures*, 193–233; Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), 292–297; Michael Freeden, ed., *The Meaning of Ideology: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007); Susan Gal and Judith T. Irvine, *Signs of Difference: Language and Ideology in Social Life* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[13] Michael Freeden, *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[14] Stuart Hall, *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse* (Birmingham, UK: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1973); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980); Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 1983); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990); Dorothy. E. Smith, *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1990); Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic. Power. Pierre Bourdieu*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991); Miyoshi, *Trespasses.*

[15] For example, Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2008); Arlie R. Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (New York: The New Press, 2016); David H. Price, *Cold War Anthropology* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016); Barbara J. Risman, *Where the Millennials Will Take Us: A New Generation Wrestles with the Gender Structure* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Bennetta Jules-Rosette and J.R. Osborn, *African Art Reframed: Reflections and Dialogues on Museum Culture* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2020); Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: The Shameless Normalization of Far-Right Discourse, 2nd Edition* (London, UK: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2020).

Diverse definitions and engagement approaches are not problems in themselves.

One practical problem *is*, however, present for all scholars: ideology is a concept that is hard to operationalize in an analysis. When "ideology" is grasped through its individual elements, empirically or theoretically, we often cease to look at it as a whole but instead as truncated parts. While ideology can be easily referred to as a holistic entity, it is of limited use in scholarship if we can only interact with and think of it as a conflated whole. This is a "gestalt problem" related to cognition and to sociology at large.[16] While the production and distribution of ideologies in the field of practice are hardly curtailed by this scholarly hurdle, this problem causes dulls and stalls many scholarly efforts.

Utilities of a System Perspective

The use of a system metaphor (or a system perspective) is a way to operationalize ideology in social research and analysis. To be sure, a system metaphor is not always the most suitable tool for such analysis. Some occasions call for scholars to identify hidden ideologies or critique existing ones in broad terms rather than analyze their mechanics. A system metaphor is most useful after the initial stage of recognition. It excels in helping us make sense of the *organizational* aspects of ideologies and to delineate the time, place, and manner of ideological activation. This is preferable for scholars who wish to view ideologies from the perspective of a designer or practitioner. A vehicle driver or seller needs only to deal with an automobile as a whole, whereas a mechanic or anyone who is seeking to fix a car would find it more beneficial to know how the entire vehicle is constructed through its component parts. Previous scholarly works have enabled us to develop a method to empirically examine the specific, *organizational* aspects of ideology.[17]

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[16] I am simply using this term exploratively, in the way that scholars in other disciplines have done. For example, see Anton Amann, "The Gestalt Problem in Quantum Theory: Generation of Molecular Shape by the Environment," *Synthese*, 97, no. 1 (October 1993), 125–156.

[17] Discourse studies, as a field, excel at these efforts. For an example, see Gunther Kress and Robert Hodge, *Language as Ideology* (London, UK and Boston, MA: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979); Teun A. van Dijk, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 1998); Paul Chilton: *Analysing Political Discourse: Theory and Practice* (Routledge, 2004); Teun A. van Dijk, *Discourse and Knowledge. A Sociocognitive Approach* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

The initial problem concern which motivated my adoption of a system perspective arose from a ubiquity of ideological content. During early moments of my research, my inquiries were repeatedly curtailed by an inability to clearly delineate causal relationships between ideology and social relations, for almost every historical account of the Great European Witch Hunts offers a wealth of materials related to "ideology"—religious, gender, class-based, national, local, legal, folk ideas, and so forth. In light of such ubiquity, it becomes difficult to discern what elements do not obtain an ideological character. Consequently, it is challenging to conceptualize which factors were stimulating or mitigating the extreme dynamics during the witch hunts; counteracting movements were also powered by some form of ideology.[18] This problem could be analogized to a fish that cannot see the specific properties of the water (the oxygen level, microbes, pollutants, etc.) that is assisting or stunting its development. It is one thing to reveal a hidden ideology that people are unaware of—which previous scholars tend to emphasize—and another one entirely that people can see it everywhere but yet cannot delineate any problematic elements "hidden" in it. The system metaphor then emerged, which can serve several functions to help resolve the research problems.

Considering the Dynamic Part-Whole Relations

In an ideology, multiple subcomponents have a fluctuating presence and relevance. Their effects and significance are not constant, and their appearances are always intermixed with the shifting presence of other subcomponents.[19] We should therefore strive to specify (or argue) which particular parts (mechanisms) were the most salient—or could *potentially* be salient—in causing an effect at a given time (when those parts exist in combinative forms with many other ones). The same electric capacitor may serve the same function for a vehicle; yet the same cannot be said of words or a chess

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[18] For discussion, see George Steinmetz, "Odious Comparisons: Incommensurability, the Case Study, and 'Small N's' in Sociology." *Sociological Theory* 22, no. 3 (September 2004), 371–400; James Mahoney, "Comparative-Historical Methodology," *Annual Review of Sociology* 30 (2004), 81–101; James Mahoney and Gary Goertz, "A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research," *Political Analysis* 14, no. 3 (June 2006), 227–249. Jon Elster, *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1–54.

[19] Any signs (phrases, information, physical expressions) can shift in their meanings depending on the much more holistic representational contexts as well as the specific interactional situations in which the signs are placed. Harold Garfinkel, "Ethnomethodological Misreading of Aron Gurwitsch on the Phenomenal Field: Sociology 271, UCLA 4/26/93," eds. Clemens Eisenmann and Michael Lynch, *Human Studies* 44, no. 1 (April 2021), 19–42.

move. The part-whole relations, in other words, are far more slippery and fluctuating.

Nonetheless, these dynamic, fluid part-whole relations *can* be discovered and illustrated to some extent. A pragmatic-linguist can analyze word usage in context; a chess-game analyst can explain the relevance of each player's moves in the context of a game. Scholars also can sketch out the shape of a running system of ideas that has many divisive parts while also, at the same time, studying the dynamic processes in which particular acts of activation are engaged. One effort this book has made is to present the analysis in a *structural* form (through visual diagrams and displays), alongside on-the-ground, situated *structuring* processes, to make the system and its operational logic clear, visible, and intelligible.[20]

Delineating Causal Relationships

Once we can see how an ideology is *organized*, we can determine which parts of the components or organizing processes have led to an outcome. Consequently, we can conduct more careful considerations about causation.[21] To use the analogy of a fish again, we can move away from judging whether "water" in general—or a specific pool of water—is good or bad for the fish, to the question of analyzing why this is the case.[22] Suppose the

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[20] This analytical style has been developed in qualitative sociology with a constructionist orientation—and theorized in the field of ethnomethodology in extremely thorough, interesting ways. For an introduction of ethnomethodology's program and efforts to unpack seemingly enduring social structures and their structuring processes, see Anne Rawls, "Editor's Introduction," in Harold Garfinkel, *Ethnomethodology's Program: Working Out Durkheim's Aphorism* (Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 20–25; Hugh Mehan, "Structuring School Structure," *Harvard Educational Review*, 48 (February 1978), 32–64; Hugh Mehan, Alma Hertweck, and J. Lee Meihls, *Handicapping the Handicapped: Decision Making in Students' Educational Careers* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986). For a discussion of the connection between ethnomethodology and textual and discourse analysis, see Stefan Titscher, Michael Meyer, Ruth Wodak, and Eva Vetter, "Two Ethnomethodologically Oriented Methods of Text Analysis: Membership Categorization Device Analysis and Conversation Analysis," in *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis* (London: Sage Publications, 2000), 104–124.

[21] In addition to efforts at identifying cultural causes, it also includes various attempts to explore the topics of agency, contingency, and event causation. David R. Gibson, *Talk at the Brink: Deliberation and Decision During the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Robin Wagner Pacific, *Theorizing the Standoff: Contingency in Action* (New York and Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[22] On the other hand, inadequately breaking things down into disembodied variables (i.e., disembodied from the context of a *system*) can cause another problem, which is to yield a choppy picture of causality, in which every variable is assumed to have causal effects.

Chinese Communist Revolution has led to both gains and shortfalls, and we want to know why. We can thus dissect and assess the relative role of different ideologies' constitutive components and processes, weighing them against other ones. Although this book does not address this question very explicitly, readers can compare the roles of several factors (variables): (a) the content of the ideology (i.e., the Communist vision); (b) Mao's personal leadership; (c) the Party's bureaucratic structure after the Revolution; (d) the upper-leadership of the Party; (e) specific government policy; (f) the material conditions of the nation; (g) the cognitive, discursive institutions present; (h) the agency of the masses (the peasants and the working class); and (i) external factors. We can consider which of the factors (mechanisms)—in which interactive combinations with one another and when—play which kind of role. After doing so, we could more confidently determine which of the above variables seem to play the role of a *root* cause—a cause which has a primacy that influences other ones in leading to positive or negative outcomes—the roles of conditional, peripheral, catalytic, or inhibitive causes. Each of these "variables," such as "cognitive, discursive institutions," could further be broken down or not, depending on the analytical argument.

These procedures can prove useful beyond formal academic analyses. Many individuals and groups commit their politics, morality, and actions in accordance with the ways that they attribute causation. Many ideological actors can even mobilize targets by suggesting causal linkages. By clarifying our vision of the ideology and delineating its components and processes, we can understand how actors manipulate social views regarding causal relationships with greater precision.

Identifying Situated, Competent, Artfulness Ideological Works

By applying our understanding of the intricate configurations of an idea system, we can better evaluate the artfulness of different social actions in context. In particular, we can interpret their significance in the context of a rather *long* chain of actions or interactions within a dynamic, large-scale system whose conditions change over time. Indeed, ideological constructions and activations are not performed in isolation, but are rather *chained* together in collaborative processes involving multiple actors over time. For example, an accuser in a witch trial may later use codified language to describe an event as evidence, then respond to counter-evidence, and subsequently become involved in one or more other witch trials. Although the topic itself may be said to encompass the beliefs of a codified system,

and thereby considered ideological, the personal acts of exaggeration, further exaggeration, walking back previous claims, then recasting events, and so on would be amiss from inquiries if we only observe these actions in isolation. In face-to-face interaction, very subtle actions—like pausing for a few seconds more than usual—would nonetheless be understood by others.[23] In all our cases, the significance of subtle changes in depictions cannot be judged by the magnitude of changes; the actions' significance—as well as their competence and artfulness—could only be understood if we have a basic sketch of an interactional series.

Sociologist Hugh Mehan, who has a background in conducting this moment-to-moment analysis of face-to-face interactions, pioneered this effort through collaborations with colleagues in an experiment to treat international discourse as a site for such interactions between institutions at the time of the nuclear arms race during the Cold War.[24] Statements between multiple actors were examined in rough, temporally situated sequences—and retold by the researchers regarding the subtle implications of sign use.

In this book, the War on Terror case is the most exemplary in terms of borrowing from his trailblazing work (since the available data afford this mode of analysis the most). Ideology was manipulated by a central actor—the George W. Bush administration. By using a system metaphor alongside an "interactional" analysis, my case analysis aims to convey that the practice of ideological constructions and activations is often accompanied by intricate alteration and recoding (such as a slight change in interpretation or lexicon), done in small increments, with profound coherence and continuity. Artful, cognitive work was first put in to connect the 9/11 attacks to a cast of characters within a storyline based on past events,[25] *and then* substantiate such a connection (al Qaeda and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan) using selective information, *and then* announce a list of political demands that were unlikely to be satisfied, *and then* formulate an official reaction to the Taliban's response, and so on, for a period of around three years. These chains of artful actions, carried out by skillful ideological actors, were largely imperceptible despite being conducted in plain sight. President Bush and his administrators appeared to carry out acts—in

[23] See Frederick Erickson, *Talk and Social Theory* (Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014).

[24] The only paper I could find is by Hugh Mehan and James M. Skelly, "Reykjavik: The Breach and Repair of the Pure War Script," *Multilingua* 7, no. 1–2 (1988), 35–66.

[25] Ivan Leudar and Jiří Nekvapil, "Practical Historians and Adversaries: 9/11 Revisited," *Discourse & Society* 22, no. 1 (January 2011): 66–85.

a rather brash manner—that were so obviously "ideological," "unreasonable," "dishonest," and "biased" that their actual artful practices were severely underdiscussed. So many practices warranted critique, and more obvious problems overshadowed the subtler ones[26] Successful manipulation ensued because, ironically, the bold, brazen aspects of the ideology disguised the intricate, significant ones.

Definition and Characterization of Idea Systems

For the purposes of this book, I define "idea systems" as *a set of ideas that are related to one another as a system and, as such, will have a distinct set of superordinate operational principles and dynamics that cannot be completely reduced to the individual ideas or other smaller elements that constitute it; the system is inscribed in the complex relations between the parts and the whole.*

Invisible Control of Building Block Patterns

A brief building block analogy may capture my working idea of the dynamic nature of ideological manipulation. My heuristic model resembles the building blocks of a toy construction kit being given to a population to "spontaneously" form a structure. These pieces happen to *fit together* into a cohesive whole: some pieces can be joined together to make a house, while others can create a garden. Over time, more pieces are added until grand structures become possible. If we, as builders of such constructions, look to the works of our fellows, we may find their creations similar to our own. While they may use and position their pieces differently, perhaps even nefariously, with some pieces painted over or superglued, the resulting structures resemble one another simply because they share identical and recognizable elements. In contrast, the building blocks provided by another manufacturer may not fit as well; forcefully using them may make the final product look shoddy or even strange.

There are advantages to working with such predesigned pieces, namely their ease of use. With such elements, we are able to spontaneously construct grand, polished, and familiar products. The disadvantage, however, is the structural vulnerability to manipulation by manufacturers and distributors. To extend this metaphor to a public discourse, we may be highly

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[26] Douglas Kellner, *From 9/11 to Terror War: The Dangers of the Bush Legacy* (Lanham, MD and Oxford, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); Douglas Kellner "Lying in Politics: The Case of George W. Bush and Iraq." *Cultural Studies ←→ Critical Methodologies* 7, no. 2(2007): 132–144.

intelligent, creative, or even critical users of the system. But as interlocutors, to what extent is our dialogue derivative of structural designs? Can we insert a green color into our constructions naturally when all the building blocks given to us are blue? What can we do when certain pieces, which could have formed inextricable linkages, are conspicuously missing or damaged?

Analogous to the limitations implemented by the metaphorical toy manufacturers are the limitations shaping public ideas. Although the potential pools of resources are extensive, only a much smaller pool of resources is provided to idea-makers at any given point in time. In other words, *institutional filtering* processes limit the options available for use in formulating ideas. A societal culture, for example, can filter out many potentially useable pieces—so could powerful people and organizations.[27] Other natural circumstances, such as the limitations of people's innate cognitive capacity, can also induce filtering. Aside from these externally imposed factors, individual idea-makers also actively attend to selected happenings, choose codes and information, and deliberately draw upon limited knowledge bases for their conclusions. These are small-scale acts of filtering, which postdate the external filtering processes.

Observing and Deconstructing Codification

An especially critical part of forming ideas are the processes associated with "codification." Though it is a broad term with multifold definitions, codification, for the purposes of this text, refers to *the broad range of processes of designing, selecting, and utilizing codes (i.e., conventionalized sets of symbols) toward the task of idea-making.*[28]

[27] Institutional filtering may be distinguished from a general individual's cognitive filtering. Herman and Chomsky's classic "propaganda model" discusses the existence of various "filters" in mainstream U.S. media outlets that help to create public consent. My use of institutional filtering is similar, though it is applied to a broader range of sociohistorical contexts. Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon Books, [1988]2002.

[28] The word "codes" and its string of related words (e.g., "coding," "encoding," "decoding," "codification") have different academic usages and meanings, but the overall process of using conventionalized symbols to process information is common across different bodies of literature. Our definition in this book thus adopts the generalist definition. For an entry into the basics of the dynamic nature of codification discussed in specific fields, see Theo van Leeuwen, *Introducing Social Semiotics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004); Vyvyan Evans and Melanie Green, *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2006); Jay Friedenberg and Gordon Silverman, *Cognitive Science: An Introduction to the Study of Mind* (Thousand Oaks, London, and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006).

Integrating an analogy from computer programming can help us visualize the form this codification may take. Computer programmers use specialized languages to give instructions to computers. The rules embedded in the languages (the conventions) are called codes; the specific command lines (the symbols) written within the language are also referred to as codes.[29] To "crack the code" is to successfully understand the rules of a computer program, by way of its computerized language. "Writing code" is the work performed by programmers who input strings of symbols, or command lines, into a program to optimize its design and functionality. Despite the slightly varied usage of the term, as it may reference either rules specifically, or symbols generally, we will consider codes, summarily, as *conventionalized sets of symbols.*

Humans' symbolic processes are far more dynamic than those of computer programs. We can use a program to make all computers process symbols ("think") in the same way; it is much more difficult with humans. Applications inherently afford a certain amount of creative freedom. A word processor minimally determines the content of what words are written; a video game is more restrictive, nonetheless actors are "free" to act in the game to an extent granted to them by the maker. Under some circumstances, people can also select which applications to use or subvert their uses, and some can even "hack" the code of a program to alter the otherwise uniformly designed applications. Precisely because of this reason, how idea systems can often generate streamlining patterns of thinking in our society is especially fascinating—particularly among supposedly creative free thinkers who seem to come up with the converging thoughts on their own agency.

People's words, appearances, and behaviors can look and sound original—but one may not appreciate just how unoriginal they are until they are viewed in terms of the patterns in which they fit with others. A certain male gun rights activist who denigrated another as a "two-bit whore for Fidel Castro," declared that dissenting parties could "suck on my machine

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[29] "The term code was first used in information theory, where it designates an inventory of arbitrarily chosen symbols, accompanied by a group of rules for the composition of coded "words," and often compared to a dictionary or lexicon of the natural language (*cf.* the Morse code). We are dealing here, in its simple form, with a derived artificial language. In this sense, the alphabet, together with spelling rules, can be considered a code." Algirdas Julien Greimas and Joseph Courtes, *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary*, trans. Larry Christ, Daniel Patte, James Lee, Edward McMahon II, Gary Phillips, & Michael Rengstorf (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983), 31–32.

gun," expressed that he wanted to shoot obvious attackers dead with "no court case," and screamed "freedom" to articulate his repressed desire may be revered as an original orator, but this person could simply be repeating a streamlined model of thoughts and political expressions. Alternatively, he could be a minor innovator who revises some thoughts and expressions for others to emulate.[30]

We do not have to determine this identity in great detail; more central to our inquiry is the structure of active programming as indicated by such expressions. We can obtain a sense of this structure through the analysis of the codes and the codification processes in which multiple cultural actors exercise "agency" in composing their thoughts. This includes the methodical ways of converting, storing, retrieving, and employing a set of conventionalized symbols to process information.[31] Proficient cultural actors who are familiar with nearly every aspect of a program can do much more with codes than those who are less knowledgeable. And there are always a few cultural actors who know the codes so well that they can creatively rewrite them, thus binding others by the codes that they compose.[32]

Codification, therefore, is central to the analysis of this text. We want to analyze not only the finished products fabricated from conceptual building blocks but also the properties of the individual pieces and the conditions determining their properties. We will not limit our examination to ideological panoramas, or the basic contents and forms of ideological

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[30] See Charles Thorpe, *Necroculture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 132, 246, 267. Viewed in the discursive context, such cohesively woven "creative" expressions fit the programmatic logic of an idea system, hence fitting the concept of a code. "A field may be created or constituted by discourse, as for example, in an artistic or scientific field, by practices, or by material objects.... [D]iscourse fields that can be mapped onto larger social structures of signs. Organizations...can be characterized by logic that is constituted of fields of argumentation. That which provides the social connection among the components of a sign, a set of signs clustered as texts, and even assembled as discourse, is a *code*." Peter K. Manning and Betsy Cullum-Swan, "Narrative, Content, and Semiotic Analysis," in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 466.

[31] Here, processing information can involve selecting only that which is useful for them to code an idea into being and disregarding all information that does not serve that purpose. It can involve converting (recoding) any neutral or positive information into standardized, pejorative forms, or expressing an idea in the meanest and simplest terms possible, such as name-calling, or indulging in lengthy argumentation or speculation.

[32] The notion of sociocultural and discourse *competence* can be applied. Erickson, *Talk and Social Theory*, 14–15; 122, 153–154. See also Hugh Mehan, "The Competent Student," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (1980), 131–152.

constructions. Instead, we will extend our analysis to the intricate processes of ideological construction, and the structural organization of the specific elements utilized in this construction. Therefore, to effectively demonstrate the principles and applications of idea systems, this text must engage its analytical subjects at the level of codification.

Seven Domains of Components for Idea Construction

To add precision to this mode of analysis, this book delineates seven loosely connected domains of components relevant to the formation of idea systems, the full logic of which will be explained in Chap. 2. These seven domains are (1) *happenings* (or *raw reality*); (2) *pre-coded information*; (3) *codes*; (4) *coded information* (or *specific mental objects* or *coded things*); (5) *data*; (6) *ideas*; and (7) *idea systems*. This conceptual scheme will guide my analysis of codification in this book. The system of terminologies can also be used as a starting instrument to analyze a broad range of idea systems.

Without being too specific for now, I will use just one example from this book's case studies to convey how the scheme works. The U.S. War on Terror was based and developed upon a set of larger ideas rooted in the nation's historic roles in combatting certain uncivilized, evil forces, thus bringing forth freedom, perpetual peace, and light to the world (*idea system*). The interpretation of the imminent threat posed by Saddam Hussein in Iraq was one of the main propositions, elaborated with many other sub-propositions (*ideas*). These ideas likely have their support, such as the ambiguous signs (*data*) indicating the possibility of Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction and collaboration with terrorists. Looking into the pool of data provided, one could find specific facts or things (*coded information*) one after another, such as satellite photos of moving trucks and the presence of terrorists in Iraq. Each such object consists of the application of certain conventionalized words (*codes*) like "mobile biological research laboratories," which were used to describe some form of messy, unadulterated information (*pre-coded information*), indicating the existence of those objects, such as eyewitness accounts. The actual raw reality (*happening*)—pertaining to what had actually taken place in Iraq, what took place behind the scenes of informational gathering and processing—may involve puzzles we cannot solve, but the asserted ideas were purported to correspond to this state of raw reality.

The aforementioned example is a case where a string of correspondence exists between the seven domains. The stabilized definitions and analytical distinctions can help us more precisely consider the level at which departures and disagreements may arise. Departures in selecting pre-coded information are different from departures in selecting codes to be applied. Recklessly marrying codes and information is different from using data selectively to substantiate ideas. Scholars should ideally be prepared to scale their analysis at different levels. Such precise pinpointing is needed when we are no longer generally viewing ideas by their contents but rather by their structural relationships with one another within the context of idea systems.

Social Actors Who Design, Manipulate, and Activate Idea Systems

Let us now move on to *social actors*—including institutions or institutional spokespersons that play the role of actors[33]—who design, control, activate, and use idea systems for manipulative purposes.

First, manipulation can have an innocent definition—simply a reference to *skilled, "handful" application*, such as when we say that a pottery artist is manipulating the clay via pinching. But our use of the term from now on will be connected to the *critical* sense of the word—the *abusive usage of social power.* A typical manipulative actor is one who skillfully controls or influences others to accomplish selfish ends, even at the expense of other people's autonomy, interest, or well-being.[34]

Then, there are nuanced differences between these social actors. Although these social actors' roles in real-life scenarios are often overlapping, these identities should be conceptually separated. Based on my

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[33] Hugh Mehan and James M. Skelly, "Reykjavik: The Breach and Repair of the Pure War Script," *Multiüingua* 7, no. 1/2 (1988), 35–66.

[34] Teun A. van Dijk, "Discourse and Manipulation," *Discourse & Society* 17, no. 3 (May 2006): 359–383. Critical theorist Max Horkheimer's classic essay offers an absolutist, dialectical view of ethics, largely borrowing from Georg Hegel. Accordingly, manipulation within his vision of "critical theory" could be actions that magnify the contradiction between "a definite individual in [his/her/their] real relation to other individuals and groups, in [his/her/their] conflict with a particular class, and, finally, in the resultant web of relationships with the social totality and with nature." Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 188–243. *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell, et al. (New York: Continuum, [1937]1992), 211.

inductive analysis in this book, I delineate three general kinds of social actors—three casts of characters—that exist in most publicly circulated idea systems: (A) *active, grand-scale manipulators or designers*; (B) *small-time manipulators*, and (C) *passive, conduit-like users and activators*. The differences between three kinds may primarily be measured by their *innovativeness*, and secondarily by their *influence*.

Active, Grand-Scale Manipulators or Designers

The first kind actually manages to develop an internally cohesive chain-complex of information, codes, objects, evidence, and ideas with the backing of epistemic authorities. They play a significant part in *innovating* and *designing*. The reach of their social power helps them accomplish these grand-scale tasks. They do not merely make minor revisions but actually inject significant modifications into existing epistemic resources, and in doing so they "give birth" to a whole system of ideas which is equipped with its own logic, dynamic, and "life cycle." These parties have an interest in monitoring the holistic shape and conditions of the whole idea system with a long time-horizon, making interventions and changes as needed.

Small-time Manipulators

Small-time manipulators of an idea system merely need to make minor adaptations to existing ones, perhaps intermixing the works of several others. Their influences, however, are not to be neglected. When the power of the big-time manipulators is dim, the power of small-time manipulators comparatively shines. These people can exist within bureaucracies, political parties, local institutions, villages, and even families and peer networks, where they already have a compartmentalized purview of power. When these actors activate idea systems, they can do more than simply twisting them a little; they can instead manipulate them to accomplish twisted ends. As this study will show, selectively changing a few pieces of information or words, inserting a slight bias here and there, can significantly alter the outcomes of idea-making if the actors understand the principles of the idea system and its codification. Cumulatively, these actors' deeds can distort the shape and conditions of whole idea systems.

Passive, Conduit-Like Users and Activators

The third kind of people, *passive users and activators*, do not play an active part in changing, developing, or altering idea systems. These agents can be situated in big or small institutions. They mainly accept and reproduce them as they appear; hence, they are *conduits* of others. Their understanding of codification need not be comprehensive. Even if they are loud in voice or stylish in presentation—hence seeming to be usually "active" and "creative"—their modes of activation involve little true originality other than peripheral elaboration. Thus, even if such people—like bombastic television anchors—influence others by the thousands and millions, they do not actively condition idea systems in significant ways. By no means do I mean that these actors are socially passive; they are merely passive in their innovation. These actors can foster extreme dynamics through their acts of amplification.

This typology of actors can help readers see the *social interactions* that occur in the case stories. We can see the agents not as particularized individuals but rather as historical subjects who bear differing relations to idea systems. Some of them might have exceptional mastery in combatting others who have less, and some actors might actually be surprisingly responsible and reasonable toward others even if they also activated idea systems.

Moreover, we should also be cognizant of the fact that once an idea system is widely diffused in society, it is often not under any actor's absolute control. The historical record offers countless examples wherein entire systems of ideas are radically transformed to the point of serving inadvertent purposes, becoming utterly unmanageable in the process. When a sophisticated idea system becomes corrupted, so too will the identity and actions of the individuals who subscribe to it. The task of remedying the situation could be onerous because a sophisticated system tends to have many relative advantages to vanquish less developed ideas and discourses. When manipulators lose control of their creation, they may find themselves shackled to the malignant iterations of their initially constructive idea systems.

METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES TO STUDY IDEA SYSTEMS

This book employs and alternates between several strategies in the study of codification. Each of these strategies has a methodological consideration.

The first strategy is a focus on *intelligent social cognition*. I try to examine especially *intelligent* manipulations and applications of idea systems—by

actors who demonstrate a high-level mastery of codification.[35] The ways in which dexterous parties interact or vie with one another can reveal a lot about the principles of idea systems' operation. In contrast to those parties, the simpler, standardized, routine maneuvers are easier to comprehend.

The second strategy is an attempt to relate to some *real-life, situated, and situational contexts*, as afforded by the data. Sometimes, the sense of why something could be said but was not, what informational and intellectual resources are realistically available for people to make ideas, or what real-life consequences are implied when certain words are used to describe an object, cannot be fully appreciated unless we can examine the codification processes in light of those contexts.[36] People are often existentially tied to small groups, families, and friends in their communities; interpretations of their behaviors would be much richer if we can consider such real-life contexts to an extent.[37]

The third is an attempt to *compare* across different texts and cases. This entails a deliberate effort to collect data that represent contrasting "voices"—and to look at them through texts. Often, many accounts appeared to be so internally coherent, sensible, and intelligent that their arbitrariness was not easily discovered. Comparing across codification

[35] By the word *intelligence* here, I mean the ambition to as much as possible engage humans' *full* intelligence (high-level cognitive capacities) in creating ideas, especially within pressing social, institutional, situated, and situational contexts. Sociologists have long challenged the caricature of a "madding crowd" to explain collective behaviors—which would include the cases of witch-hunters and revolutionaries in this book. It is also a classic effort within ethnomethodology to refuse the reification and dismissal of humans' intelligence in social research. Going beyond the extent to which other disciplinary discourses have complex cognition, this book is written in the spirit to highlight subjects' *full* intelligence. See Clark McPhail, *The Myth of the Madding Crowd* (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine De Gruyter, 1991); Michael Lynch, "Revisiting the Cultural Dope," *Human Studies*, 35, no. 2 (Summer 2021), 223–233.

[36] Adele E. Clarke, Carrie Friese, and Rachel Washburn, *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory After the Interpretive Turn, Second Edition* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2017). Cf. Erickson, *Talk and Social Theory*, 143–161, 177–181; Dirk vom Lehn and Will Gibson, "Interaction and Symbolic Interactionism," *Symbolic Interaction*, 34, no. 1 (Summer 2011), 315–318.

[37] For the importance of small groups and local institutions that embed actors' motivations and actions, see Gary Alan Fine, *The Hinge: Civil Society, Group Cultures, and the Power of Local Commitments* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2021). For the role of "ethnographic" contextualization of situated actions in social research, see Erickson, *Talk and Social Theory*, 146–155. Staying close to the situation also aligns with the classic pragmatist tradition, which emphasizes the need to develop ideas that are in tune with the context of practice. George H. Mead, *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, ed., Merritt H. Moore (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1936), 1–24, 215–242.

processes—especially in disagreeing voices about the same phenomena, in real-life interaction with one another—can help us see how there are often other possible ways to think about, speak upon, and act toward a phenomenon.[38] In so doing, we can more easily see people as dynamic, cognitively endowed agents in society—even if they are users of their cultural repertories.[39] Lastly, by looking at similarities between idea systems that run across cases and as well as analyzing the variance, this approach helps to repeatedly demonstrate the common principles of multiple idea systems as well as the power of peculiar designs.[40]

The fourth is an attempt to study *longitudinal* patterns associated with codification. Certain patterns can only be revealed through a longitudinal approach. For example, evidential accumulation and its culmination are longitudinal outcomes—with the passage of time, more affirming and disaffirming evidence would emerge. Interactions and events are also longitudinal in nature. Activators of idea systems engage in extended, chained efforts of idea-making over time. The profound twists and turns of events, interactions, and the resultant transformations of idea systems can only be accounted for by a longitudinal approach.[41] Lastly, the cyclical momentum of ideas can only be observed longitudinally.[42] Even if this book's analysis is not sufficient to study a whole "life-cycle" duration of an idea system, we can gain insights by observing how idea systems operate through smaller cycles—their initial ascendance and subsequent consequences, the adaptation and transformation, their decline and the respective causes. A

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[38] The research methods of comparing systematically different "voices" via textual and discourse analysis is heavily borrowed from the "politics of representation" approach developed by the lifelong work of Hugh Mehan. For example, see Hugh Mehan, "The Construction of an LD Student: A Case Study in the Politics of Representation," in Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor, Simeon J. Yates, eds., *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader* (Thousand Oaks, CA, London, UK, and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001), 345–363.

[39] For a discussion of how researchers may study the work of cultural actors who employ signs to weave together complex cultural practices, see Richard Biernacki, "Language and the Shift from Signs to Practices in Cultural Inquiry." *History and Theory 39*, no. 3 (2000): 289–310.

[40] Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers, "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 22, no. 2 (April 1980), 176, 178.

[41] Mehan, Nathanson, and Skelly, "Nuclear Discourse in the 1980s"; Hugh Mehan and James M. Skelly, "Reykjavik: The Breach and Repair of the Pure War Script," *Multiüingua* 7, no. 1/2 (1988), 35–66. See also David R. Gibson, *Talk at the Brink: Deliberation and Decision During the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Robin Wagner-Pacifici, *What Is an Event?* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

[42] See John R. Hall, *Apocalypse: From Antiquity to the Empire of Modernity* (Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009).

summary of these life-cycle characteristics will be provided at the end of the book.

Last but not least, this book veers toward a *holistic*, rather than a specialized, approach, even as it seeks to provide the tools for readers to see how specialized parts relate to the whole. Further elaboration on this point will be provided shortly.

Three Cases of Idea Systems

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, this book examines three major cases of idea systems that are typified as *evidentially driven*, *ideationally driven*, and *hybrid*—each of which has a distinct, ornate structure with a different set of contents. Each case highlights a unique set of codification processes that have contemporary relevance. Each case shows how actual, creative people use all the mental and physical efforts they can muster to activate the potential of idea systems to their limits.

The term "witch hunt" is now customarily used as a convenient catch-all phrase. Mainly, people use it to label certain accusations and prosecutions driven by actions comparable to those of hysterical and ill-informed mobs. If we research the actual history, however, the witch hunts in early modern Europe were actually driven by a surprising amount of evidence. Many convincing "facts," mixed with ambiguous information, were compiled both locally and interregionally across Europe. Ideas pertaining to witchcraft, witches, and diabolic entities were often refined in debates that involved complex activities of empirical proof. Instead of sketching how barbaric irrationality had catalyzed witch hunts, the case study highlights how extremely rigorous yet creative *codification* activities drove these hunts. These activities organized numerous, extraordinary empirical happenings into a reservoir of evidence, making a vast, seemingly preposterous idea real. Hence, I highlight how the idea system was evidentially driven. The principles are highly applicable to today's information age. We still draw linkages between many kinds of information. We still observe correlative patterns. We certainly still care about coherence in our ideas. These chapters speak to these themes.

The Chinese Communist Revolution, in large part carried out by Mao Zedong and his followers between 1949 and 1976, was sustained by an idea system of a different kind. The revolutionaries put into place an elaborate set of visionary ideas—partly appealing to believable social theories and partly to futuristic ideals and self-evident truisms. This idea system

was so comprehensive that it was used to guide national and local policies, and even specific personal and familial affairs. Physical evidence was not as important in this mode of codification. Rather, interpreting how actions, facts, and phenomena fitted into the organized systems of visions and images was more salient in constructing arguments about who the moral actors were, what mistakes were committed, what needed to be done, and how the larger idealized project proceeded. Hence, I characterize the idea system as being highly ideationally driven. The principles revealed attest to so many ideas being formulated from absolute, idealistic visions based on sound logic and embellished with impeccable face value. We cannot help observe these visions proliferating in various global localities today.

The case of the U.S. War on Terror illustrates how today's political actors are proficient at both kinds of codification, capable of making creative, efficient, hybrid forms. Most of today's controversial political ideas are neither based exclusively on evidentiary claims nor on idealistic visions, but are instead a dynamic combination of and alternation between the two. The marriage of the two processes in their *codification*, however, is an intricate, tricky process. In particular, the codification needs to be seamlessly integrated with modern systems of information gathering, expert institutions, international conversations, and "open" media interrogation. The proficient activation of the War on Terror idea system can be glimpsed in the ways the Bush administration made aggressive political demands on foreign governments; the way it found vessels of evidentiary "facts" to sustain the notion of an enemy's depravity; the way it constructed and verified the empirical problems in question; the way it justified enormous financial and human costs; and, lastly, the way party politicians, within the context of mutual rivalries, used the same idea system to exploit war-related national scandals to their favor on the public stage, while reinforcing the idea system as a whole. The works are not only performed by politicians. We see people constructing flexible, hybrid forms of ideas on a daily basis; and sometimes only by intermixing codification modes can people build such magnificent constructions than if they are only limited to one set of methods.

Academic, Humanistic, and Practical Connections

This book is primarily written to target a cross-section of specialists, learned audiences, and advanced students. Many original academic terminologies have very specific, qualified meanings. Words like "codes,"

"frames," "schemas," "information," "narratives," "events," "symbols," "culture," and many other concepts are prime examples of this. Accordingly, I have standardized and streamlined a set of several dozen terminologies and used them consistently. These terminologies are assembled as a small toolbox of starting instruments for a newcomer to deconstruct a range of idea systems in a step-by-step manner. If readers follow the cases in this book, they can experience connecting microscopic pictures of discourse and large-scale social significance. Technical references will be sprinkled throughout the text for readers interested in the entry points to explore some of the territories inhabited by specialists.

By integrating multiple tools and using the five previously explained methodological strategies, this book seeks to create a wider bridge between the abstract and concrete approaches, and seemingly "microscopic" and "macroscopic" investigations.[43] It hopes to make use of some of the precise instruments cultivated by discourse analysts, semioticians, ethnographers, linguists, and interactionists, by relating them to the concerns and questions on a grand scale—such as the flow of dialectical change, the causality of historical events, and the question of societal order.

By using three cases that involve considerable human costs, I hope the stories told here will alert readers to the detrimental potential of codification and the danger of ostensibly appealing idea systems. Some problematic forms of idea-making may even be recognizable in our own practice. The cases represent a geographic, topical, and temporal balance—covering Europe, China, and the United States during different periods. Idea systems encompassing religion, politics, and science are incorporated. I hope this arrangement will maximize the book's cross-cultural, cross-situational, and cross-institutional applicability. The framework is meant to be flexibly *scalable*, meaning that it can be applied to national ideologies as well as to the social psychology of individuals.

Engaging Ideological Problems in the Present Time

Relating to the current scene of public political discourse, many potent, dangerous techniques of idea-making documented in this book are conspicuous. The term "post-truth" has been used by some authors to broadly

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[43] Erickson, *Talk and Social Theory*, 157–161. Gary Alan Fine, "The Sad Demise, Mysterious Disappearance, and Glorious Triumph of Symbolic Interactionism," *Annual Review of Sociology* 19 (August 1993), 61–87.

describe the conditions of today's public political discourse: an institutional-ized space that seems to be filled with bold-faced lies, one-sided information, deliberate omissions, and pornographic appeals to sensations and emotions, all coupled with a general lack of an effective mechanism of self-correction. [44]

Similar "post-truth" conditions can be seen in many past historical eras: a general debilitation of an ethic of truth commitment within the epistemic culture, accompanying a callous, cavalier ethos of constructing and circulating ideas—including ideas that relate to truth, fantasy, value, and aesthetics. The social abuse of ideas that so often alarms third-party observers, however, may not always be noticeable by the social actors who practice it or the audience to which the ideas are directed. Contrary to seeing "big lies" as having a brazen presence, I see that insidious manipulation tends to hide "the devil" within the subtlest of details. Outwardly innocent, yet prevalent in our discourse, are piecemeal operations (of codification) committed by social actors. These operations involve slightly substantiated evidence that could burn in the mind, cunning analogies that carry exceptionally malicious implications, and nonchalant speculations that actually seem reasonable at almost every step, yet, somehow, they build upon one another to create cumulative effects that potently enable destructive ends. When working together, these operations can maintain a questionable order during settled times, and, in addition, contribute to the making of unsettled ones.[45] The three stories in this book demonstrate these dynamics.

In some respects, our current trying times are distinct from many past ones. The techniques of cognitive manipulation have become so much more advanced, and informational and communicative technologies have become so much more widespread, that efforts of idea manipulations have seen accelerated development. [46] Even children are increasingly co-opted players and audiences in the new propaganda institution. Textbooks and syllabi on propaganda tend to feature World War II propaganda as the classic, extreme example. Many scholars, however, are aware that the

[44] Lee McIntyre, *Post-Truth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018); Dana L. Cloud, *Reality Bites: Rhetoric and the Circulation of Truth Claims in U.S. Political Culture* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2018).

[45] Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (1986): 273–86.

[46] Hartmut Rosa and Jonathan Trejo-Mathys, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

pinnacle of propaganda and disinformation in human history thus far is not the World War II period; it is here, now.

Rather than critiquing the specific manifestations or advocating for one specific set of rules, this book seeks to call attention to an enduring problem regarding the nature of both ideas and humans. Returning to the two sayings quoted in the epigraph of this chapter, this book is about the moments of significance when people hold strong ethics and great diligence toward a single thought as well as—on the flip side—get ideas wrong inch by inch. Such problematic natures ingrained in human epistemology occasionally lurk in society—often quite visibly in societies taken over by ideas. For the parts of the problems that this book fails to capture in any words, I hope it provides hints as to their dark shadows looming in the background.

The European Witch Hunts

Making Compact Symbolic Structures

…we have demonstrated through divine and human authorities, and by the evidence gathered throughout antiquity, and by divine along with human laws, experience, judgements, convictions, confrontations and confessions that the transportation of sorcerers is therefore possible; it follows that both sterility and storms are achieved through their [the sorcerers'] influence.

—Jean Bodin, *Of the Demon-mania of the Sorcerers (1580)*
(A different translation of the passage was cited in Virginia Krause, "Witchcraft Confessions and Demonology," in *The Witchcraft Reader, 2nd ed.*, ed. Darren Oldridge (London and New York: Routledge, [2002]2008), 307. For original text, see Jean Bodin, *De la démonomanie des sorciers* [*Of the Demon-mania of the Sorcerers*] (Paris, France: Chez Jacques Du-Puys, [1580]1587), Book 4, Chapter 3, 464).[1]

The Great European Witch Hunts refers to the substantive waves of witch trials and prosecutions during the early modern period, from aapproximately1450 to 1750, with a variation of 50 years.[2] Even though

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[1] Available at The Internet Archive, added on December 2, 2012: *https://archive.org/details/BodinDemonomanieBNF1587/* (accessed June 6, 2022).

[2] The printing press started to appear around the 1450s, and industrialization began after 1750. But there are certainly good reasons to stretch, narrow, or modify this time frame by around 50 years.

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witch prosecutions took place during the medieval period, it is during the early modern period that the number of trials and prosecutions reached its highest point and then subsided.

Roughly 90,000 trials were held throughout Europe between 1500 and 1800, with around a 50% execution rate; this means about 45,000 people were actually penalized by death.[3] Around half of the witch trials took place in what is now Germany. There were also additional deaths due to imprisonment, suicide, torture, or illnesses from the harsh and unsanitary conditions during incarceration.

While the scale of death is insubstantial compared to numerous wars, plagues, famines, and natural disasters, especially for the entire European continent across a time span of around 300 years, the witch hunts nonetheless continue to form a substantial part of today's consciousness for *qualitative* reasons—in the distinct dynamics, environments, and events they galvanized. This fact notwithstanding, numbers (*quantitative* aspects) do matter if they are densely concentrated in particular historical locations or against specific populations.

Some cities had seen mass trials of several hundred people—involving thousands—that surely impacted an entire district or region. Quedlinburg, Saxony-Anhalt, in 1589, saw "133 witches burnt in one day."[4] Historians report that in certain towns and villages, the entire adult female demographic was at risk of eradication, as women were dying at such a fast rate after several waves of prosecutions.[5] Even in places where few prosecutions ultimately resulted, the feeling of continuous fear and uncertainty was repeated in many communities when vivid accounts were being circulated, with prominent people participating as witnesses. And if a smaller-sized community conducted unofficial "swimming tests" on suspects, even

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[3] Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe. Fourth Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 21; Wolfgang Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts: A Global History* (Cambridge, UK, and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004), 156–57; Julian Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 27.

[4] Henry Charles Lea, *Materials Toward a History of Witchcraft* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939), vol III, 1075. Even accounting for exaggeration, half or a third of the number would be noteworthy; and even the fact that the event was recorded or tabulated this way—by any outlet existing at the time—conveys how the townspeople or authorities might experience witch hunts as an exaggerated, sensational phenomenon.

[5] "Levack, *The Witch-Hunt, 4th ed.,* 175; Lea, *Materials,* vol. III, p. 1075; H. C. Erik Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany 1562–1684: The Social and Intellectual Foundations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), 91.

though there may only have been a few lives at stake, the spectacle could still involve half of all adult villagers.

These events dramatically introduce new phenomena, new and contested collective representations, and involve the emotional, mental, and physical energy of many community members to negotiate new norms and eventual outcomes. What is so phenomenal about witch hunts that warrants historical examination is not the quantity of people they involved, but rather the *quality* of the events, the dynamics, and the environments they created that were at once unique and abhorrent—yet so eternal to human societies that they transcended these particular historical locations.

The forms, causes, processes, effects, and scales of witch hunts were diverse in nature. Taken as a whole, the "Great Hunt" overwhelmingly affected more women than men, but mixed-gender composition was not infrequent. In many instances, witch prosecutions were isolated and never caused a "panic" in a community. The variations in execution rates, political intervention, and legal regulations that have been meticulously analyzed in historical research are too numerous to recount here.[6] Still, it is worth noting that half of all witch executions in Europe took place in German territories—which was dubbed "mother of so many witches"— though the exact reasons might not be entirely linear or clear.

Keeping in mind the incredible varieties and intricacies of patterns and causations, our focus is on the *cognitive* dimension associated with the Great European Witch Hunts. The main phenomenon of our interest is this: again and again, believable ideas of extreme crimes, at first with minimal material evidence, were being propagated in the community, which then evolved into actual charges in court systems. Suspects often found themselves unable to fend off these aggressive ideas, as the accusations were incredibly hard to resolutely disprove using counterevidence. Subjects who had neither financial nor reputational backing were especially vulnerable. Furthermore, the empirical information and evidence leveled against them had a tendency to multiply upon itself, actualizing, elaborating, and even expanding the original allegations. Occasionally, these charges grew contagiously. One incident would breed additional allegations of

[6] Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt*, 267–69; Levack, *The Witch-Hunt, 4th ed.*, 19–22; William Monter, "Witch Trials in Continental Europe: 1560–1660," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Period of Witch Trials*, eds. Bengt Ankarloo, Stuart Clark, and William Monter (London: Continuum and Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 12–18.

witchcraft involving greater numbers of people. Embodying with great momentum and energy, these dynamics eroded barriers of trust in the community, standards of morality, and miscellaneous protections that came with status, knowledge, historical religious devotion, political positions, and even family ties. These events originate from a reconfiguration in the idea system pertaining to malicious witchcraft.

Preexisting Knowledge

To explain what people were seeing and thinking, it is important to first acknowledge that participants encountering incidents and events did not start with a cognitive "blank slate." People already possessed certain "stocks of knowledge" regarding witchcraft when they looked at their world. The educated elites "from above" had developed stocks of concepts, facts, and ideas that were significantly different to those of the illiterate poor "from below."[7]

To briefly summarize this difference, the elites had built their stocks through various printed texts. These include the early confirmations of the Devil from monks who wrestled with strange experiences, illnesses, and temptations; theologians who rigorously theorized and debated the characteristics of the Devil, often based on closed readings of biblical passages; and the opinions of uncountable numbers of respected scholars, educators, judges, and writers—including among them Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine, and many popes.[8] The general questions around the 1450s were not whether the Devil or witches existed but about their specific properties. For example, how much power did the Devil actually have? Could the Devil physically transport witches?

As the early modern period progressed, two additional sources came to influence the elites' stocks of knowledge regarding witchcraft. First were the court records and documented statements by confessors and denouncers—which were meticulously compiled because of the shift toward a "modern" legal system guided by an inquisitorial legal doctrine, a point I will explain later. Another new source, related to the first, was the published books and writings devoted to the "science" of demons and the

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[7] Levack, 159–60, 169.

[8] For a selection of primary documents, see Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters, eds., *Witchcraft in Europe, 400–1700* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 43–111.

Devil; the corpus is generally known today as European *demonology*. Demonological writings often included summaries and analyses of case histories—and they were generally written by theologians, physicians, and jurists who had access to the sources of witch prosecution cases. From these sources, the knowledge and ideas of witchcraft evolved from disparate pieces of information in the Bible, classical literature, scholarly writings, and the *Canon Episcopi* (a legal document in the Middle Ages, part of which addressed the topic of witchcraft) to much more synthetic theories and elaborate ideas.

Noted examples of the demonology corpus include the *Malleus Maleficarum* (usually translated as *Hammer of Witches* or *Witches' Hammer*), authored by Heinrich Kramer, a professor of theology at the University of Salzburg, Austria, and a Dominican inquisitor. The book had been reprinted in over twenty editions between 1487 and 1620.[9] Other titles include *De la demonomanie des sorciers (On the Demon-Mania of Sorcerers)* (1580) authored by the French jurist Jean Bodin, *Daemonolatreiae libri tres* (*Demonolatry*) (1595) by the French magistrate Nicolas Remy, *Disquisitionum Magicarum Libri Sex* (*Investigations into Magic*) (1599–1600) by the Belgian Jesuit Martin Del Rio, *Discours exécrable des Sorciers* (*An Examen of Witches*) (1602) by the French inquisitor Henry Boguet, and *Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et demons* (*On the Inconstancy of Witches*) by the French judge Pierre de Lancre (1612). These texts were used extensively among witch believers and prosecutors. The authors notably express diverging opinions on specific points, but they all contribute to the corpus' development by integrating new, successful cases in purging demons and witches as well as making personal, synthetic observations.[10]

Ideas about activities during the sabbath, the special powers and idiosyncrasies of the Devil and his witches, and methods to detect and combat witchcraft became accepted knowledge that trickled down in different

[9] R. Po-Chia Hsia, Review of *Malleus Maleficarum. Vol. I: The Latin Text. Vol. II: The English Translation, The English Historical Review* 123, no. 502 (2008): 719–20; Hans Peter Broedel, "Fifteenth-Century Witch Beliefs," in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. Brian P. Levack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 32–49.

[10] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt, 4th ed.,* 27–62; Kors and Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe,* 43–137; Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts*, 41–82; Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 106–7.

forms in different societies and institutions.[11] Around 1900, German archivist Joseph Hansen termed the synthetic understanding of witchcraft, circulated in medieval and early modern Europe, as the "cumulative concept of witchcraft."[12] This cumulative concept was posited as follows: *There were witches who made pacts with the Devil during the sabbaths, which were held in secret places and attended by other witches, and these witches in turn caused harm and impairment upon the world.* [13] Local and regional deviations from this conception, however, differed widely. We can therefore find multiple cumulative concepts with overlapping similarities when we look into each specific case.

What we want to focus upon here is the developmental ("cumulative") aspect. These concepts were not hasty, impromptu creations springing suddenly from the mind. The idea systems surrounding witchcraft had reached a previously unseen level of complexity, refinement, and elaboration precisely because they had gone through centuries of theological dialogues, scholastic debates, legal experiences, and other demonstrations. The idea system could easily withstand normal refutations voiced by random individuals. Supporters of witchcraft accusations could readily draw on a rich collection of authorities, interpretations, rulings, and records to organize their claims. And there were regular additions of new "empirical" evidence, and a new roster of elite epistemic authorities—building upon the old—promised to further develop and refine the paradigm of thinking.

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[11] For example, "The Errores Gazariorum," compiled by the Savoyan inquisitor in charge, most likely [Dominican inquisitor] Uldry de Torrente in 1436, with later additions by 1439, refers to a particular method of causing hail in a thunderstorm. A witch had confessed that she had caused the storm by carrying large blocks of ice up to the clouds and dropping them onto the crops. Precisely this method of destroying crops had been confessed by Aymonet Maugetaz during her trial in 1438, a trial conducted by Uldry de Torrente. Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts*, 67.

[12] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt, 4th ed.*, 29.

[13] Cf. Broedel, "Fifteenth-Century Witch Beliefs," 33; Richard Kieckhefer, "Mythologies of Witchcraft in the Fifteenth Century," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 1, no. 1 (2006): 79–109; Richard Kieckhefer, "The First Wave of Trials for Diabolic Witchcraft," in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. Brian P. Levack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 159–78. An early consolidation of ideas could be traced back to the "Laussane paradigm" based on activities in and near western Switzerland in the 1430s but was later diffused and even modified into various versions. And many other regional variations that did not share the similar "cumulative" concept, where diabolic pacts, nocturnal assemblies, or the killing of children were at times absent in the ideas.

Average peasants generated and circulated stocks of knowledge of a different kind. Such stocks consisted of local history, rumors, rich folklores, folk knowledge, and folk beliefs. Throughout Europe, people routinely sought out magical practitioners (shamans, healers, "witches," and most commonly "the cunning folk") to cure sickness, solve problems, predict the future, and help them fall in love, hunt treasure, and recover stolen items.[14] To deal with curses and malevolent spirits, they may use "amulets, protective symbols on roofs, an iron nail above a baby's cot, or an iron horseshoe outside the door" to ward off the "evil eye."[15] They may, for example, offer a minor gift in the hope of its acceptance by a widely suspected witch (i.e., a process of "reconciliation"). Many ritualistic testing and extralegal trials of witches—such as "swimming," "weighing," or "scratching" the witches—contain practices that stemmed from folk beliefs.

These two stocks of knowledge inspired but also clashed with one another. Elites ridiculed peasants' superstition constantly, deeming the common folk to be ignorant and misguided. Elites often denounced the ideas that witches could fly to the sabbaths at night, transform into animal forms, and possess abilities as powerful as causing hailstorms. Church authorities strongly condemned the use of "counter-magic" and methods of testing witches, deeming some to be bordering on the heretical. At the same time, the average peasants, who were exposed to official pronouncements and verdicts, would insert their own creativity and synthesis into the dominant ideas, adding "local flavors" to the ideas pertaining to witchcraft.[16] Occasionally, they even managed to prosecute members of the elite class via village committees and local courts. Demonologists, several of whom were jurists, were also profoundly developing their own thinking by sorting through and organizing local cases.[17]

[14] James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 58–79; Robin Briggs, "Circling the Devil: Witch-Doctors and Magical Healers in Early Modern Lorraine," in *Languages of Witchcraft: Narrative, Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Stuart Clark (New York: St. Martin Press, 2001), 161–78; Edward Beaver, *The Realities of Witchcraft and Popular Magic in Early Modern Europe: Culture, Cognition, and Everyday Life* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 215–337; Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt*, 106–13.

[15] Goodare, 112, see also 106–13.

[16] For example, see Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, [1976]2013).

[17] Robin Briggs, "Witchcraft and Local Communities: The Rhine-Moselle Region," in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. Brian P. Levack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 199–217.

Compact Symbolic Structures

Witchcraft as a concept has its preexisting epistemic bases; these bases then dynamically interacted with the influx of new information. Overall, ideas pertaining to witches may be analyzed as a set of *compact symbolic structures*, or a set of *mutually shared and enacted symbolic structures made up of coded information*.

Seven Domains of Components

I hereby posit a model that distinguishes seven, loosely connected domains of components for idea systems to come into formation: (1) *happenings* (or *raw reality*); (2) *pre-coded information*; (3) *codes*; (4) *coded information* (or *specific mental objects*, or *coded things*); (5) *data*; (6) *ideas*; and (7) *idea systems*. This scheme can be used as a starting instrument to analyze a broad range of idea systems, whether they are evidentially or ideationally driven.

These components are arranged in a *loose* hierarchy—in the sense that the components in each domain could potentially assert a primary role in organizing ideas, violating the normal hierarchical order. Still, the stereotypical order is arranged according to how raw reality is asserted as the basis to cognitively inform the formation of ideas or even the development of whole idea systems. According to such assertions, individual ideas or the integrity of whole idea systems can be validated or invalidated by deductively tracing back to the best information people could gather about raw reality. [18] Disputes over filtering and codification processes are

[18] My conceptual model here is inspired by a reading of Edmund Husserl's reflection on the nature of idea generation. Although I have part ways from his terminologies, I am particularly inspired by his description of the semi-autonomous processes of idea generation—which, on the one hand, does not entirely reject the existence of thought-independent, objectively valid truths, while, on the other hand, focuses on the complex, multifold, thought-dependent processes of making ideas in the lifeworld—and only some of them are explicitly relevant to the pursuit of truths. See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson. (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd and New York: The Macmillan Co., 1931), 45, 57–58, 119, 154–155; Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology, 4th ed.*, trans. William P. Alston and George Nakhinian (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), 4–12, 34–38, 46–49, 54–58. This approach is reflected in the approaches adopted in phenomenological, ethnomethodological, and social constructionist approaches.

often based on the assumed, *supposed* interrelations (of correspondence) that exist between these domains.

(1) *Happenings. Happenings* is a domain that includes numerous matters and dynamics—physical or otherwise—beyond the scope of humans', animals', or computers' ability to perceive or cognitively comprehend. This domain may alternatively be defined as "raw reality."[19]

Suppose, for a moment, maleficent witchcraft actually exists. Then whatever the actual events and nonevents that occur in the supernatural realm, and whatever magical power the Devil uses, would be within the domain of *happening*. This raw reality may not feasibly be comprehended by humans, even if we may seek to explain it by the means of physics, chemistry, biology, and so on.

(2) *Pre-coded Information.* This domain consists of potentially perceivable and processable bits of information existing in an unprocessed, "undigested" state by the percepts and cognition of biological or mechanical mechanisms. It either exists outside the field of attention, or it receives only an elementary level of attention—and

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[19] The concepts of "happenings" and "raw reality" here are similar with what philosophers have called "external reality," "reality," "the objective world," the absolute," and more. (Each of these words also carries specific connotations in their concrete usage.) Theorist Harold Garfinkel has characterized it in these words: "there is something concrete 'out there' that resists human construction. The physical features of information—or anomaly—are in some sense independent of how they are perceived—even though they can only be experienced as perceived and against a background of expectations." Harold Garfinkel and Anne Rawls, *Toward A Sociological Theory of Information* (New York: Taylor and Francis), 46. In this book, I assume that the absolute, raw reality is never fully comprehensible and may never reveal itself. In tune with phenomenological and ethnomethodological traditions, by demarcating this category as a separate domain, I will be suspending my assumptions about what the "raw reality" or real "happenings" might be, so that it would not significantly affect the subsequent analysis.

therefore limited consideration—by biological or mechanical mechanisms. [20]

Continuing with the previous scenario, pre-coded information corresponds to the ability with which humans could *potentially* comprehend the properties of Satan. Although we may not understand the intricate processes, we could see certain clues—such as the effects of Satan's power in the form of witchcraft. If there are multiple instances of ostensible manifestations, then there is a pool of *potentially* codable information about the Devil and witchcraft that could be compiled. This is not very different from a three-year-old child who wants to comprehend the properties of fire by observing many fires.

It is also worthy to note that the prefix "pre-coded" does not literally mean that the information has not been coded by others. It primarily means that a social actor has not registered the information at the cognitive level—or at least not at the perceptive level. The dossiers of distant witchcraft cases inaccessible to local judges clearly contain previously coded information, but it is "pre-coded" by those judges, as the information has never registered to their fields of attention and precept.

(3) *Codes.* This domain is essentially a reservoir of symbols—in the forms of colors, sounds, words, letters, and numbers—that are sys-

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[20] My usage of the term "information" is consistent with how some researchers have used it to refer to "the structure of information in the environment" or how "animals [to make decisions] must gather and process information from their surroundings," that they face the task "to efficiently process the enormous amount of sensory information it receives and extract what is most relevant to its adaptive decision-making." Benjamin R. Meagher, "Ecologizing Social Psychology: The Physical Environment as a Necessary Constituent of Social Processes," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 24, no. 1 (2009), 8; Patrick Green, Nicholas C. Brandley, and Stephen Nowicki, "Categorical Perception in Animal Communication and Decision-Making," *Behavioral Ecology* 31, no. 4 (July/August 2020), 859. It is also consistent with the usage by Harold Garfinkel when he addressed the topic of information theory during 1950s in the last footnote, as well as A.J. Greimas, who, in the context of addressing information theory, defined information as "any element that can be expressed with the aid of a code." Algirdas Julien Greimas and Joseph Courtes, *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary*, trans. Larry Christ, Daniel Patte, James Lee, Edward McMahon II, Gary Phillips, & Michael Rengstorf. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983), 31–32. Other terms in different bodies of literature to describe what I call "pre-coded information"—notably "data," "sense data," "signals [of lower semiotic threshold]," and "stimuli"; however, each of these terms is used in particular contexts, chained to other terms and expressions.

tematically organized, so that biological or mechanical mechanisms could process information using symbolic means. The color red on a traffic light is a color code that conveys the message "stop" to people who are familiar with the symbolic system and can quickly convert the color code into cognitive meaning.

As stated in the introduction, in this book the word "code" refers to *a conventionalized set of symbols.* Relating to our previous example, the choice to call a female a "witch"—instead of a "herbalist," "heretic," or "criminal"—involves a process code selection. These codes are categories that embody symbolic meanings, with different implications that come from the characterization. They are also embedded in different network of symbols. A "witch," for example, would evoke religious concepts like "Satan," "God," the Devil," and so on. A "criminal" more likely evokes a language related to the court of law and the state. Different codes situate the characterizations in different cognitive frameworks, and different frameworks often have a system of vocabularies and signs used for classification and depiction purposes.

(4) *Coded information. Coded information* (interchangeable with *coded things* and *specific mental objects*[21]) refers to a reservoir of a *unified* form of code and concrete content. Whereas codes *could* be applied to a range of possible information, coded things are formed *after* codes are applied to particular sets of information. For humans, "specific mental objects" are yielded. The word "happy" is different in the English dictionary (merely as a code) than it is when we apply it to our own experience (which forms unique mental objects). Suppose the color "blue" is a code, a particular "blue jacket" one is wearing is a specifically *coded thing.* For computers,

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[21] Operating within the tradition of symbolic interactionism, Hewitt and Schulman have defined "object" as "anything that is an object of attention toward which people can act." In interactionist traditions from George Herbert Mead to Herbert Blumer and beyond, "objects" is cognitive rather than physical—dynamically created, modified, and abandoned by people as they interact with the world. John P. Hewitt and David Shulman, *Self and Society: A Symbolic Interactionist Social Psychology. Eleventh Edition* (Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2011), 225.

coded information consist of aggregate units of coded patterns that are to be processed as a package, as a whole arrangement.[22]

The phrase "diabolic animal" is an abstract category; but after it is mentally applied to the "likeness of a cat owned by Mary"—a concrete piece of pre-coded information—then a *specific mental object* is created. The cat, or *likeness of a cat*, becomes merged and unified with "diabolic animal" and becomes perceived, interpreted, mentally processed as such.

(5) *Data*. The domain of data is a reservoir of coded or pre-coded information that serves "evidential" purposes to support an idea.[23] Used in reasoning, analysis, or imagination mechanisms, data carry a value for subjects to ascertain or disaffirm phenomena. Data that are systematically organized into a reservoir or a more specified collection may be termed a *database*.

Seeing the repeated occurrence of abnormal deaths—all followed by successful witchcraft convictions—would first yield pieces of coded information (specific mental objects). Each piece of such coded things—ostensibly "evidencing" something about witchcraft—could then gradually yield a database concerning witchcraft, from which people could observe its patterns and analyze its properties.

(6) *Ideas*. This domain of ideas is a reservoir of unified formations constituted by data, codes, and information as its components and then arranged in accordance to structures. These unified formations are evoked, shaped, and suppressed dynamically in the mind. Although all ideas must rely on codes and coded things and must

[22] We can understand the difference by imagining "quick-formatting" a hard disk. When we do so, we alter the organizational schemes that previously group together information (so that they could not be "read"), rather than changing the information itself. This is different from "full" formatting, which involves rewriting the information on the disk.

[23] Husserl, *Ideas*, 219, 255, 260, 351, 375, 379–408; Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology,* 6, 9–12, 46–49, 54–55, 58. In Husserl's formulation, many data in everyday life, such as sensory data, have a *self-evident* quality to them. Such information is taken as real or valid immediately in an unquestioned manner in our consciousness. People can assemble ideas based on various "self-evidently true" information alone and use them to put together their thoughts. Even if the information might not be actually true or valid, the information can have supportive (data-like) function for one's ideas as long as they have the quality of being self-evidently true.

base themselves on a minimal level of data and information, they could also be derived rather purely by psychic processes.

The idea that someone is a witch, for example, could be developed without any affirmed data or even a rich amount of information. However, a minimal level of information must be involved to construct the basics of such conceptions.

(7) *Idea system*. This domain refers to a loosely organized set of ideas that form a *complex*; the ideas and associated components operate according to patterns that affect the gestalt of the whole system. Each idea system has a schematic set of expressions, worldviews, individuated ideas, figures, attitudes, codes, epistemic pathways, and evidentiary bases that facilitate users to generate individual ideas or process information. The corpus of demonological treatises represents a semi-cohesive idea system.

Overall, separating these loosely hierarchical domains can help us to more precisely consider the level at which departures and disagreements may arise. Departures in selecting pre-coded information are different from departures in selecting codes to be applied. Recklessly combining codes and information is different from using data selectively to substantiate ideas.

Pre-coding Assembly

The starting point of a credible witchcraft accusation was an *account* of an occurrence. Pre-coded information must meet two requirements in order to become useful for the account. One, it could not be readily 'explained' (coded) within the structures of other already-existing systems of ideas—such as by "common sense" or by existing frameworks or paradigms in medicine, science, and theology. In short, it needed to be "out-of-the-ordinary" in some way. [24] Two, it must demonstrate a fit—preferably an extraordinary fit—with the code structures supporting and informed by

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[24] Peter Rushton, "Texts of Authority: Witchcraft Accusations and the Demonstration of Truth in Early Modern England," in *Languages of Witchcraft: Narrative, Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture,* ed. Stuart Clark (London, UK: Macmillan Press Ltd and New York: St. Martin Press, 2001), 28.

an idea system pertaining to witchcraft. That is to say, it fits in some extraordinary way with the witchcraft idea system.

Pending a basic pool of pre-coded information, coded things could then be formed to substantiate both simple and complex ideas.

Compactness of Idea Sets

An idea system that is truly brought to life, I postulate, is one that exhibits a highly structured set of ideas that coheres with a rich amount of compact, dense information.

Information density (or informational compactness) was often observed in accounts of witch accusations. In many written records, a rich set of sensory or non-sensory details acted as snippets of information.[25] Such snippets of information were also quite "compact," in the sense that even just a few sentences could create a vivid picture. They are somewhat comparable to the "pixels per inch" of a recorded video; a higher-resolution video could give a story, a vignette, or an account in greater clarity and detail.

There were historical actors who mastered the art of highly visualized language. The evidential power in their accounts is intuitive: people *knew* the coded events to be true because they could *see* the coded events. The more sense data are presented to support the same visual picture, the more "self-explanatory evidence" a phenomenon contains; thus, the ideas become all the more *self-evidentiary*. And the more *compact* or *dense* the data are, the less effort it would require for an audience to "see" the phenomenon, the less likely it is that the information would become diluted to a point that an audience would have to assemble the patterns themselves.

Structures of Idea Sets

Now, let us consider the structures of information.

How much information goes into supporting an idea certainly matters—but so does the way in which the information is structured (or

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[25] Non-sensory and sensory information often complement one another. Sensory information can, of course, substantiate non-sensory information. Non-sensory information, such as pre-existing knowledge of witches or a neighbor, could help to provide the "code structures" that could quickly assimilate sensory details into "information" that is relevant for an idea-building purpose.

unstructured). Figure 2.1 marks the basic distinction between a compact versus a non-compact symbolic structure of information. If the alphabet stands for a point of information, the prime symbols (including prime, double prime, and triple prime) stand for derivatives or variants of information, and combined letters (BC) as conjunction, we can see the basic contrast.

Non-compact information (see the left side of Fig. 2.1) might be lacking in solid patterns or regularities; it may only be constructed in the form of weak or one-time associations. The points of information have sparse, scattered, uncertain, or changing connections. The relationship between information may also lack any points of "closure" or "closure-like arrangements."

A structure with many points of closure or closure-like arrangements is more cognitively complex. A story that has more characters and plot twists is more complex than one which is lacking such nuances. We can also imagine the differences between complex beliefs and a simple belief system. When each point we pick randomly is connected to several others, a point of information is "backed" or "related" in some way by other points.

That is to say, there is potentially a *synergistic* (and often evidentiary) effect of information that cannot be captured by a straightforward $1 + 1 = 2$ type of "additive" relationship. In the left box, where there are only three links between information of varying strengths, if one link is broken, then the whole idea is at risk. In contrast, the right box shows many more linkages between information, and a missing link has only a tenuous effect on the overall structure of evidencing an idea. This principle can be applied to a single idea—or to be transfigured to apply to a "big idea."

Relating to witch hunts, the accounts are often found to be complex and intricately structured. One correlative event—for example, a destructive storm that occurs after a suspect utters a curse—may be connected to
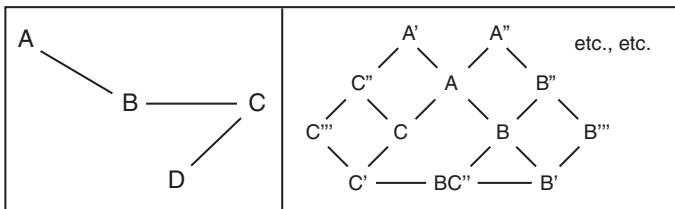
Fig. 2.1 Non-compact and compact symbolic structures

authoritative concepts, which are in turn tied to other incidents, testimonies, and textual interpretations. Faced with such compact symbolic structures (modeled by the right side of Fig. 2.1), there is a significant implication for an ordinary person. The total amount of works, skills, and resources needed to "undo" the idea can be onerous; attacking one point may necessitate that all the others must also be unpacked and undone. This effort can be especially overwhelming if new points of linkages far exceed that of undoing them. Alternatively, if the next step involves sensitive subjects or authorities, such as a declaration by the Church or a statement from the Bible, then it would be potentially costly to undertake such an endeavor, even if it is realistic to expect an ordinary person to do it at all.

Diverse, Intricate Justification Structures

There are several common forms that create mutually supporting, cohesive structures. These structural forms link different points of information, codes, and idea units in different ways.

A *narrative* (or *story*) would be a structure that has characters, a plot, course of events, and perhaps an ending.[26]

An *argument* would be a structure that has main claims, subclaims, evidence, and assumptions that ground claims to evidence.[27]

Or an idea may merely be posited in the form of a *cognizant belief*, a structure wherein there is a noticeable gap between evidence and propositions, bridged by a self-aware leap of faith or by a taken-for-granted, unquestioned, or authoritative assumption.[28]

Other less cohesive structures also could exist, such as a vignette, an underdeveloped thought, a repeated symbolic association, a conjecture, or a partially formed argument.

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[26] Jerome Bruner, *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[27] Stephen E. Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument, 2nd ed.* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 87–134.

[28] Here, I use the word "belief" *not* in the sense of how actors or cultural members having taken-for-granted unexamined beliefs, but how this word when people describe others or themselves consciously (as in "they believe…" or "I believe") as having a possible leap of assumption, as described above. Religious beliefs in modern, pluralistic societies often contain a high degree of reflexivity. Gerardo Martí, "Religious Reflexivity: The Effect of Continual Novelty and Diversity on Individual Religiosity," *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 76, no. 1 (Spring 2015), 1–13.

Each of these structures would have a different "justification" dynamic, that is, have its own criteria to make it cohesive. The personalities of the characters in narratives, for example, should not change too abruptly without explanation. The link between evidence and claims has to be warranted in arguments. A belief tends to survive more on value, vision, and faith as well as on unbroken, incorrigible core propositions well protected by easy-to-make defenses (which are called "secondary elaborations"). There are also intricate ways to "justifiably" derive more ideas and arguments from an original idea using these structures, that is, it carries its own rules, its own integrity, within the context of the case.

Considering that each case of witchcraft can have multiple incidents, witnesses, confessions, and investigations—as well as an array of stories, arguments, and beliefs grounded in rich stocks of preexisting knowledge—all moving dynamically as events go on, it would be close to impossible to actually capture the workings of any complex witchcraft case using a visual diagram. If we only look at the accounts through the lens of argument, we are likely to dismiss many of them as unjustified. And if we look at them merely through the lens of imaginative beliefs, we would overlook how they justified themselves through rigorous procedures.

Flexibility and Restrictedness of Empirical Referents

Keeping in mind the diverse forms of ideas, we first delve into the issue of "evidence." Whether they support a story or an argument, what materials qualify to be coded into data that service the idea system?

Witchcraft could be evidenced by an enormously flexible set of potential referents. To measure the speed of light, a physicist would be restricted to looking at, say, photons as referents. Witch accusers needed empirical proof, but the proof was not tied to a restricted set of empirical details. Instead, it could be tied to a wide range of empirical referents.

Table 2.1 draws contrasts between a case of murder and of witchcraft. The tangible evidence of a murder accusation is hard to attain. If a person has died from a stabbing, the tangible, material evidence would be *the* knife that had been inserted into the victim's body. A direct eyewitness would need to be present at one concrete place and time to witness that one specific act, which had occurred in only one place and at one time. More indirect evidence would involve someone seeing a person around the crime scene, or if the murderer somehow confides to someone about the act.

Table 2.1 The relative flexibility of evidence pertaining to witchcraft cases

	Scenario 1 Murder	Scenario 2 Maleficent witchcraft
Associative evidence 1	Person A saw a heated argument between the suspect and the victim shortly before the death occurred.	Person X felt usually uncomfortable after encountering the suspect.
(Evidences of evidence 1)	Three witnesses explained why the argument occurred.	Three houseguests witnessed the incident.
Associative evidence 2	Person B saw the suspect near the victim's house that very night.	Two of Person Y's horses died unexpectedly after refusing the suspect's food.
(Evidences of evidence 2)	Absent.	Two witnesses recounted the details of the suspect's facial expressions at the moment.
Associative evidence 3	Person C recalled how the suspect, while drunk, expressed that he wished the death of the victim.	Person Z's child fell very ill three years earlier after having extended contact with the suspect.
(Evidences of evidence 3)	Two witnesses were present at the drinking table, hearing the statement.	(The neighbors recounted seeing the child's illness three years ago and detailed the extended contact.)

The range of possible evidence is much more flexible involving witchcraft accusations, which entail a supernatural crime. If the idea system posits that a witch can cause only one kind of sickness (e.g., vomiting blood), the qualifying phenomena would be rather limited. But if the effects of witchcraft were so varied that they can have many derivatives—including headaches, feelings of discomfort, bad weather, or animal problems—flexible referents offer a considerably easier way to establish the presence of witchcraft.

In witch accusations, *circumstantial evidence* seems easy to come by. In the hands of a witchcraft theorist, "defective rosaries" found at home could be an inconclusive form of material evidence.[29] "Circumstantial evidence" is so called in the legal literature because it is indirect and requires an inferencing process. The "defective rosaries" are a piece of circumstantial evidence about a witch's identity—the information itself does not

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[29] Henry Boguet, *An Examen of Witches* (New York: Dover Publications, [1619]2009), 120.; see also Gerhild Scholz Williams, ed., *On the Inconstancy of Witches: Pierre de Lancre's* Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et demons, trans. Harriet Stone and Gerhild Scholz Williams (Tempe, AZ, and Turnhout, Belgium: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (ACMRS) and Brepols Publishers, n.v., [1612]2006), 459–60.

automatically prove the witch's identity, unless by indirect inference; this situation is similar to a victim's lost property found in the house of an accused thief constituting only circumstantial evidence. Whether circumstantial evidence is inherently worse than so-called direct evidence (e.g., testimonies from credible witnesses, including uncoerced self-confessions) is beside the point here. The key is that the inherent flexible referents of witchcraft accusations enabled many social actors to accrue and organize a large amount of circumstantial evidence against an accused.

The Case of Anna Fessler in Langenburg

One concrete case can help illustrate how a series of abnormal, out-of-the-ordinary coincidences or objects would later be assembled into a formal witch trial. The case was presented by Thomas Robisheaux in *The Last Witch of Langenburg*.[30] In 1672, a German village woman (Anna Fessler) who was in her "lying-in period"—the period where a woman was placed on bedrest for several weeks after giving birth—had eaten a cake delivered by her twenty-two-year-old friend and confidante, Eva Küstner. Eva had taken the cakes from her mother's kitchen. Shrove Tuesday, as was customary in the region, was believed to be an unusual day when "extraordinary social and even cosmic forces"—including supernatural forces of all kinds, both positive and negative—were more active than normal. The cakes were Shrovetide Cakes, intended for the purpose of celebrating this special day.

After eating one of Küstner's cakes, Anna Fessler died that night, with foam dribbling from her mouth. This simple event correlation was substantiated by several other "unusual" signs that eventually aided its connection to witchcraft, some of which require elaboration:

(1) *Abnormal-Looking Cake*: The basket of Shrovetide Cakes Küstner baked looked abnormal and suspicious. In fact, one of the cakes looked like it "had fallen in and was not at all pretty"; the first people (a wagonmaker and his wife) Eva delivered one of the cakes to, refused to eat it in front of Eva.[31]

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[30] Thomas Robisheaux, *The Last Witch of Langenburg: Murder in a German Village* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2009).

[31] Robisheaux, 24.

(2) *Dog's Strong Rejection*: The wagonmaker and his wife threw a piece of cake to the dog, which also refused to eat it. This was the case even when their daughter tried to beat the dog to force it to eat the cake. The dog was believed to have the ability to sense spirits and demons.[32]

(3) *Twilight Appearance:* Eva delivered the cake during an odd hour—at twilight. Twilight symbolized a liminal time of danger, when dangerous animals, thieves, spirits, and so forth were more active.[33]

(4) *The Abnormal Seventh Cake*: Three women were acting as Anna's lying-in guardians in the house during Eva's visit. They allegedly saw that Eva first presented six little cakes, but then she seemed to pull out a seventh from a mysterious place. According to one woman, this seventh cake looked special: "It was a beautiful little yellow cake… it was taller than the other ones and also much heavier."[34]

(5) *Abnormal Eating Response by Victim*: One of the women observed that Anna behaved strangely. It was as if she could not stop eating the cake. Anna also ate a cake baked by one of her guardians, subsequently claiming that that cake tasted much better than Eva's.[35]

(6) *Social Order Reversal*: Eva offering cake to Anna subverted the normal order of the village. Eva was from a miller family, so it was unusual for a person of her position to offer a gift of food to a cottage household, such as that of Anna Fessler. The fact that Eva's mother had a bad reputation—for being stingy and mean—made it doubly unusual.

(7) *Abnormal Pacing Back and Forth*: That night before Anna died, around seven in the evening, her husband saw Anna do something he never had seen before: "she paced around the room several times."[36] Having seen her apparent restlessness, he was puzzled as to whether she was psychologically excited or disturbed.

(8) *Extraordinary Illness Symptoms*: Anna behaved strangely after she went to bed. She sat up abruptly and said that she was hurting. According to Robisheaux, "She got up and went into the other

[32] Robisheaux, 24.
[33] Robisheaux, 25.
[34] Robisheaux, 25.
[35] Robisheaux, 26.
[36] Robisheaux, 37.

room, Michel [her husband] followed her. Anna felt that 'her body would explode on her.' Losing some of her personal decorum, she 'acted like she does when she is dressed and needs to pass some gas but she had on nothing but a shirt.' She then threw back her head in pain, bending over as if she needed to vomit. Michel thought that something was forcing its way up her throat, but nothing came out… Her torso began to swell. Waves of heat broke over her. An unquenchable thirst seized her. She got up, and her bowels suddenly loosened, as she passed 'brick red blood.'"[37] She struggled more that night, and then slipped into unconsciousness and died.

(9) *Abnormal Internal Organs Seen in Autopsy*: Her autopsy report from the physician identified that poisoning was likely, but the exact source was unknown. But he said that some parts of her internal organs were torn, "as if someone had forcibly ripped them apart," and the condition of the intestines was "as if someone had exploded them with great violence." The liver was enlarged. Near the spleen was a "large black mass." In the stomach, "there was still an undigested piece of Shrove Cake."[38]

Many empirical materials, in the form of highly visual imageries, were being presented in a highly compact and organized manner. Each imagery carries a direct sensorial appeal (a set of pre-coded information) such as the appearance of the abnormal-looking cake, the scene of the foam dripping from Fessler's mouth, Fessler's unusual decorum and loosened bowel movements, and the shocking description of the internal organs with a leftover piece of the Shrove Cake. Individually, these pieces of pre-coded information qualify to become evidence because of their *fit* to build the idea the illness was abnormal, possibly caused by witchcraft. By providing the information the way they did, the social actors—deliberately or unintentionally—help to organize these pieces of data into a cohesive data set, making the suspicion of diabolic involvement much more "justified." That collective organization is based on the repeated copresence of different classes of things and events, which suggests a higher pattern of correlative associations.

[37] Robisheaux, 38.
[38] Robisheaux, 48–49.

Causal Linkage from Repeated Associations, Copresences, and Correlations

Humans learn from the relations between two classes of things, two concepts, or between classes of things and concepts through *repeated associations*.[39] Therefore, by listening to and taking part in discourses, the structural relations between things and concepts are learned.

Embedded in the pre-coded information compiled against Eva Küstner was a series of correlative relationships. This form of correlation is highly qualitative in nature—that is to say, it retains its distinct richness in qualitative details. Accounts that build correlations *thrive on* such richness rather than on highly reified numbers (which are simpler, standardized, filtered codes).

One form of qualitative correlation is *correlative copresence*.

A single correlative event of the copresence of two unusual signs (or one normal sign coupled with an unusual sign) would render a theoretical connection thin. But if they appear side by side repeatedly, a pattern could be observed—a pattern in which two classes of pre-coded things that readily fit into witchcraft-related codes have a *copresent relation*. The two classes of pre-coded things should appear at the proximal time and space to create a "copresent" appearance.

It is possible for correlative relations to be established with only a few occurrences. In those cases, some of the information must be extraordinary—imagine that, as a suspect appears, a mysterious-looking creature also materializes. The quantity is limited, but the co-relation, even suggestive, *lives out* in the details of the moment. Cognitively, because of this co-relation, it becomes *justified* to become suspicious that some "pattern" is emerging.

Without any unusual things present in the correlation, suspicion would be unjustified. An object such as a house might always appear alongside many suspected or later-verified witches, but a house *also* appears with many non-witches. Therefore, for a house to be considered unusual, some unusual information accompanying the house must be noted: such as a

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[39] Physiologist Ivan Pavlov has shown in his classic experiment that dogs learn to associate two stimuli by repeated associations—such as by repeatedly presenting the food with specific sensory stimuli within a time span of several seconds. Ivan Pavlov, *Conditioned Reflexes: An Investigation of the Physiological Activity of the Cerebral Cortex*, trans. and ed. G.V. Anrep, (Oxford University Press, London, 1927), 88–109.

foul smell or a passing toad. Accordingly, a lightning strike—an extremely rare event—would be a great candidate.

Applying this to the Langenburg case, why would such an extraordinary event—Fessler losing her decorum in the most dramatic manner—be copresent with two, three, and even more extraordinary events, like an abnormal-looking cake delivered during twilight hours, that even a dog would not eat? To conceive it mathematically, if one extraordinary event is unlikely (say a 2% chance), then several unlikely events happening together would be highly unlikely ($0.02 \times 0.02 \times 0.02 = 0.000008$). A select set of pre-coded information was elicited to suggest this circumstance—this pretext of the extraordinary copresence of unlikely events. In this pretext, the explanation by "random chance" is easily and justifiably challenged by *the explanation by extraneous cause*—that is to say, an external cause that led to the extraordinary copresence.

Another form of qualitative correlation is *sequential correlations.*

If one "class" of things or events seems to consistently, *sequentially* follow another, then another correlative relationship is established. This is a specific type of correlative copresence, which can be visualized in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 A simple theorization model based on sequential correlations

	Time A (Before) Pretexts A (Action of or Related to Suspect)	Time B (After) Effects B (Event of Oddity or Misfortune)
Correlative Samples		
	[#1a] Abnormal-looking cake	[#1b] A dog refuses to eat it, even when forced
	[#2a] Eva defies stingy reputation and normal order of things in gifting the cake to Anna	[#2b] Unusually enthusiastic reception by Anna in eating the odd-looking cake
	[#3a] #1a and #2a being co-present	[#3b] Abnormal symptoms and autopsy discoveries
		[#4b] #1b, #2b, #3b being co-present
	Aggregate, sequential co-presence between column A events and B events	

Readers can vividly construct a causation between the events happening in Time A and those in Time B. The diagram helps to distill the phenomena into a few select events. Irrelevant pre-coded information, such as the size of the room, color of the flames, and arrangement of furniture, is filtered out of the idea finally being generated. With this informational filtering, readers could process correlative relations much more easily.

There are two ways to look at these correlations.

One is to view, on aggregate, that all qualitative details in column A correlate to all those of column B. That is to say, the two have some kinds of *vague* correlative relationships. While this approach is efficient, the correlation samples are actually fewer, since it groups together all events in column A in one entity and in column B in another. Consequently, these correlative samples are bound to support ideas in only a generic manner. Essentially, there was only one correlative sample, and upon questioning, the boundary revolving around the grouping of information would appear to be quite vague and arbitrary, thus much more prone to error.

An alternative way, which takes much more effort on the part of a thinker (whether by rumor-makers, legal authorities, or by historians), is to restructure the information so that *specific* temporal correlations (along with spatial correlations) could more easily be seen. Given enough detailed information to begin with, a well-triangulated account can group together information strategically, while creating separations when needed. With these specific sequences, it is possible to discern more specific sequentially correlative samples; in other words, there would be more correlative samples in the pool of information that could be turned into *data* to support the idea of witchcraft.

To arrange specific correlations to be seen, each of the correlative samples should beg for a specific explanation for the extraordinary occurrence—and the ultimate explanation for all mysterious correlations should be a unifying, explanatory *idea*. For example, the sequential correlations between the abnormality of the cake (#1a) and the abnormality of the dog's behavior (#1b)—all described with a compact amount of information and occurring sequentially—toward it allow a specific extraordinary sequential correlation to be observed, begging for very specific explanations. Moving to #2a and #2b, the sequential correlation between Eva's unusual delivery context and Anna's abnormal enthusiasm—equally rich in descriptive details—would serve the same purpose.

Ideally, what could explain the specific extraordinary copresence between #1a and #1b can also be used to explain the correlation between

#2a and #2b. Doing so would mean that one explanation simultaneously explains *three* correlative samples: #1a and #1b, #2a and #2b, and [#1a and #1b as a grouped event] and [#2a and #2b as a grouped event]. Multiplying this process forward with more information, data, and organization, a unifying pretext could explain many correlations *specifically*. To make this possible, the vivid details in witchcraft accounts are not ornamental, but pivotal, in their cognitive purpose.

Data Set: How Much Correlative Evidence Is Enough?

A larger idea system may be supported by hundreds, or even thousands, of these samples. The database being developed in the later period of the Great Hunt was indeed enormous. But for local cases, a few correlative samples, preferably of high quality (i.e., demonstrated extraordinariness of correlations), are what could be reasonably demanded from accusers. This situation does not indicate a lackluster judicial or cognitive standard. Consider the hypothetical case of murder, one also cannot reasonably expect to find thousands of extraordinary correlative forms of evidence. What matters here, as it was in the case of witchcraft cases, is the *quality of a* few remarkable "coincidences." It was up to court officials to strategically connect local cases to the other correlative samples in the larger database, a topic we will discuss in the following chapter.

Using Language to Organize Copresent and Sequential Correlations

Language use was important in organizing compact information so that different dramatically amplified details seemed to be appearing "together." One specific role it played to make correlation seeable was *compressing* time and space dynamically.

Historian Robin Briggs narrated an instance where a witchcraft suspect (Mother Staunton of Wimbish, England) had, upon being refused milk, suspiciously "made a circle in the ground with a knife" by the door of the refuser. Following this, it was observed that "[t]he next day the wife [of Robert Cornell] coming out at the same door was taken sick, and began to swell from time to time as if she had been with child; by which swelling

she came so great in body as she feared she should burst, and to this day is not restored to health."[40]

Not only did all these extraordinary events and symptoms appear in the approximate time frame, the compressed time sequences also conveyed subtler sequential correlations. The extraordinary symptoms were immediate, cast as "the next day"—not two or three days. A common link was established—the extraordinary events taking place at the door and the wife who came out at "the same door," and the events "coming out of the same door" and "taken sick" were mentioned in a compressed time and space. Swelling "from time to time" might be normal in illness and infection, but it was extraordinary when compared to pregnancy. The description of the symptoms certainly matched, if not exceeded, those of normal childbirth ("she feared that she should burst"). The gap between that day of the unusual symptoms and the present day was articulated as if the cause and effect was direct—that the aftermath of whatever happened had lingered in some form "to this day." To summarize, one extraordinary event *immediately* occurred after a theorized effect; the time frame was so compressed that it was abnormal for the events to occur without a causal relationship with one another.

How much did these events *actually* occur in the said time sequence, and how much was *because of* linguistic tricks? This brief quote offers us a clue. Suppose the description and metaphors that anchor time and space are changed.

First, if the initial act was described with fewer details or in a diluted manner—say including many events that also occurred with Robert Cornell's wife. Consequently, many things would be copresent in the same time and space, obfuscating the correlative relationships.

Second, if the speaker includes the many possible things that happened before and after the wife coming out of the door, the causal relationship could be also be diluted and weakened: many other things may also interject themselves "right before" the person was taken sick.

Third, the symptoms of illness would be less abnormal if they were not implicitly compared with pregnancy to begin with. The speaker could have compared the dramatic physical symptoms with ordinary illnesses like food poisoning or inflammation, as long as the cultural members have enough prior preexisting knowledge about them. If such mental examples

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[40] Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 95.

do not exist, they would nevertheless be extraordinary, but they might not be linked with a predicated cause of witchcraft by Mother Staunton so directly—by her verbal articulation of suggestive, pre-coded information.

Finally, the description of the effect from an unnamed, original cause suggests an abnormally enduring legacy. The image of the long-lasting harmful consequences would be diluted if many other details are included—perhaps how the subject may recover most of their capability, or that there are fluctuations in health, partly varied by other factors (e.g., food intake, habit of rest, amount of physical activity).

On reflection, the skillful use of language was crucial in constructing correlative relationships by selectively harvesting from a domain of pre-coded information, and in so doing establishing pertinent data to support the idea of witchcraft.

Causal Linkage from Experiments and Miscellaneous Testing Mechanisms

Aside from causation drawn from repeated copresence and sequential correlations, various "tests" or "experiments" are used to validate a certain theory of causal relation, involving witchcraft as a predicated cause.

These "tests" may look more or less rigorous. The basic idea is to first posit a theory (or a set of ideas), and then use empirical observations to demonstrate a match; or it first uses a set of empirical observations and then demonstrates a good *fit* with some existing, hypothetical ideas. A more rigorous exercise to create causal linkage is, by comparison, counterfactual thinking, or even an experiment-like procedure. In essence, such procedures go a step beyond demonstrating a fit, but they see to demonstrate such a fit after *controlling* the most relevant conditions except the one to be tested in the hypothesis.

These "tests," however, may primarily consist of *verbal* creations as well as *actual* creations by some physical arrangements. The verbally created kind—also the less rigorous kind—first and foremost has to establish that the observed relations are beyond a *threshold of normally expected probability*. To use a quick analogy, the approach is akin to demonstrating flipping a coin and ending up with tails nine out of ten times. Secondarily, then, one could verbally emphasize the *qualitative* fitness between empirical observations and a hypothetical idea—mainly by selectively describing the *details* of what happens during a test (or perhaps a natural event). Ideally,

such empirical details (as pre-coded information) would only fit well into one theorized idea, and not easily into other ones.

In the aforementioned case of Anna Fessler, feeding the cake to the dog was a test. A rough logic of experimental control was implicated: dogs eat *most food*, and its rejection could thus justifiably be considered extraordinary. The preexisting knowledge that "dogs could sense spirits" qualified as a theoretically justified hypothesis as to why the cake was rejected; a hypothesis that would be subject to validation from further empirical observations or testing. Other pieces of suitable information to add justification for bringing Eva to court should likewise meet two conditions: (1) departure from normal patterns (e.g., a pattern exceeding a *threshold of normally expected probability*), and (2) a fit with an existing, theoretically grounded hypothesis (even if such a fit might be explicitly articulated).

Many seemingly minute details reported about these tests therefore mattered. Let us consider a few more of the many details offered by the author of *The Last Witch of Langenburg*. For example, Anna Fessler had *also* eaten a piece of cake offered by her sister, after eating Eva's. Then she commented that the cake tasted much better than Eva's, even though, according to Robisheaux, she "seemed strangely drawn to Eva's cake. She seemed unable to stop herself from eating the delicacy."[41] The details here highlight some unusual contradictions (with *normally expected probability*). Usually, we are drawn to something by either its attractive appearance or smell, but the cake looked strange to the subject's eyes. The cake chosen by Anna also had a distinct origin. It was not among the six little cakes that were initially visible, but rather appeared somewhat mysteriously—"no one at the time seemed to notice whether she drew it from a secret fold in her apron or not"—and it even looked different; it was yellow and taller and heavier than the others, and Eva claimed it was "baked with butter." Implied in these descriptions is that not only did Anna fail to notice the strangeness of it all, but also that she was unusually attracted to it (Contradiction #1). And if the cake looked good but the taste was subpar, it would be normal to just have a small bite of the cake, or perhaps a "normal" receptive response. Instead, Anna finished it all with unusual receptiveness and then complained, albeit indirectly, of its quality (Contradiction #2).

These details were not yet fitted with a witchcraft explanation—they were not yet coded with witchcraft-related categories—but would fit very well with it. In the larger idea system, the Devil was predicatively theorized to be

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[41] Robisheaux, *The Last Witch of Langenburg*, 26.

a master of illusion; a special characteristic being that he never delivered real benefits through his power but merely offered tricks, harm, and seduction. Without explicit employment of codes, the microscopic details were compiled and organized to fit these beliefs about the Devil. With a well-selected and neatly organized group of pre-coded information, it is akin to a putting a fire next to a haystack. Who actually ignites the fire may not be as important as the fact that the materials are laid out in front of them.

Beyond the Fessler case, we can examine other similar tests that are largely verbal constructions. In the case of the Warboys witches of 1593, a suspect (Mother Samuel) was subjected to a scratching test by a family. In England, it was believed that a person afflicted by witchcraft could find relief by scratching. It was reported that an afflicted girl "lying down on her belly, her face and turned down and her eyes shut" would not touch or scratch several people's hands when they were put into her hands, but that as soon as Mother Samuel's hand was offered she scratched it vehemently. Such details would have provided weak potential evidence if more empirical details from more tests had not been incorporated. When the uncle (Mr. Pickering) tried inserting his hand in between Mother Samuel's and the child's, the girl avoided scratching his hand, and used one of her fingers to reach out to Mother Samuel's hand and scratched hers alone. After Mother Samuel's arrest, a jailor who suspected Mother Samuel's role in causing his servant's death and son's illness decided to scratch her, and his son was reportedly cured shortly after the scratching.[42]

Contrasting with the verbally constructed tests, some tests are constructed with more rigorous control procedures—at least ostensibly so. If only the accounts are true, then they indeed deserve powerful evidence. Consider a case which occurred in Hungary around 1615. A vineyard owner's daughter of ten to twelve years old "said that she could bring rain and even hail, and at his request she immediately brought an abundant shower on his vines, *without wetting those of his neighbors* [italics mine]." There had already been some folklore beliefs that witches could affect the weather methodically. The girl was "tested" to perform an extraordinary act that only could be brought about by a witch, and she indeed did so—and doing so without wetting the neighbors' vines served as an experimental control.[43]

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[42] Orna Alyagon Darr, *Marks of an Absolute Witch: Evidentiary Dilemmas in Early Modern England* (Farnham, England, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 174–75.

[43] Lea, *Materials,* vol. III, 1254. The girl stated that her mother taught her the method when asked.

In another scandal of weather-changing, which took place in Szeged [Hungary], an eyewitness allegedly reported that thirteen people had ultimately been convicted and then burned after legal judgment. But before they were burned:

> they were put to the water ordeal, when they all swam. Then the weight ordeal was tried, when a large and fat woman weighed only 1½ drachms, and her husband, who was not small, 5 drachms, and of the remainder none weighed over 1 pennyweight 3 drachms.[44]

In this case, two tests have been compiled together. There was a long-circulated notion that water was a medium of baptism and, therefore, would reject witches. The suspect who appeared to be "floating" during the swimming test would be a sign of a witch's identity; the report that "they all swam" meant that they all showed signs of floating.[45] The weight ordeal was linked to the preexisting idea that witches had little weight. In the Netherlands and Germany, people used "weigh houses" with supposedly standardized scales for weighing suspects (along with non-supernaturally corrupted people and goods). In this particular Hungarian case reported by historian Henry Charles Lea, "the control group" was a husband of normal size—"not small"—who weighed several times more than the suspects, including a "large and fat woman." Although these tests did not provide definitive proof, they provided empirical signs that fit with—as well as substantiated—the larger idea system, while setting a very high bar of entry for other explanations—mainly explanation by nature or by science.

Backstage Manipulation

The possibility of *backstage manipulation* was not entirely unknown. In the theater, the audience only sees the front stage, where the performance happens, but to produce the performance also requires elaborate

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[44] Lea, 1255.

[45] Test subjects who "sank" were not left to drown. They usually had a rope tied up to their waist and would be pulled out of the water after a certain point. Floating or sinking was not always a clear-cut judgment; a "reading" process was involved to decide whether a suspect was drowning or floating.

procedures in the backstage.[46] Contemporary scholars—as well as some observant, skeptical voices back then—have discovered hints of these backstage manipulations. For example, weighing scales may be rigged; there are ways by which the rope could be held—or the addition of a buoyant plank—while a witch was dunked that could affect the outcome of floating or sinking. In scratching tests, people could secretly collaborate with one another; a family member could be sending subtle hints to the supposedly afflicted daughter, even if the daughter was "blindfolded."

Aside from these occasional discoveries, some tests seemed harder, though not impossible, to fake. The girl who, upon testing, made rain pour on a particular vine without soaking other vines, was one example. Another example was the "bier test" (or cruentation, or "the ordeal of the bleeding corpse"), positing that a person who was recently deceased, with some sensation of sight and hearing remaining, would bleed if the murderer was present and touched him or her. A common procedure was to have a suspect walk up and touch the corpse's wounds while it was lying on a bier, and then observe any unusual signs that might have appeared. A nursemaid in Nördlingen, Germany around 1590 was coerced by family members to participate in such an ordeal. The dead child's body reportedly began bleeding as she underwent the test.[47]

Interpretive and Design Manipulations

Suppose that not all such test results were faked. And they probably were not. But several more processes mediate the final appearance of outcomes. The first concerns the interpretation of the test results. The responsibility for interpretation and judgment fell on particular designated epistemic authorities—or "epistemic experts"—to interpret the meaning of the signs. Not all cases of sinking or swimming were objectively clear-cut; neither were what counted as failure to recite a prayer and what counted as an unusual mark on the body. In these cases, the chosen authorities could simply be making judgments arbitrarily. If the error rate was 50%, then there could simply be a 50% chance of "wrongful" interpretation.

[46] Erving Goffman's dramaturgical perspective of social life is useful here to interpret institutional dynamics. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959); Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961).

[47] Wolfgang Behringer, *Witchcraft Persecutions in Bavaria: Popular Magic, Religious Zealotry And Reason of State In Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 163.

Secondly, the whole design of these tests could be manipulated merely to seek to induce—and harvest from—*confirmational bias*. Because the conclusions of these tests are not cognitively (or legally) binding, the negative result of one test does not necessarily disprove a suspicion. One could run various tests to look for affirmative signs until the desired information is gathered. If each test "naturally" has a 50% chance of affirmative result by mere coincidence, subjecting a person to multiple types of tests, and repeating each type more than once, would inevitably yield some kind of positive sign of witchcraft. For a "prayer test," people could simply have a person recite a prayer until they found a point of failure, and perhaps certain phrases are simply more easily confused in the mind—such as the famous phrase, "And lead us not into Temptation." [48] Or, in another case, the English witchfinder John Stearne tried to locate the "Devil's marks" on a suspect, and after failing to do so, found that suspect to be a witch only when applying a swimming test.[49] Without taking into account disaffirming signs and inconvenient information, tests that produce affirmative signs 50% of the time could be deadly.

[48] Kors and Peter, *Witchcraft in Europe,* 378–79. In a *prayer test*, subjects were asked to recite the Lord's Prayer, and if they failed—or failed at the same places or phrases—then certain relationships were demonstrated. The details added power. English philosopher Joseph Glanvill noted in *Sadducismus Triumphatus* (1689): "Instead of saying 'And lead us not into Temptation' in the prayer, [Julian] Cox [as requested by the Court] recited it as 'And lead us unto Temptation' or 'And lead us not into no Temptation,' though [Cox] tried to do it near half a score times in open court." This is not a well-controlled test, as particular phrases may be particularly difficult to read, but was an element of ostensible control: the witches could still manage to repeat all other clearly devout phrases. Furthermore, the mistake could be made in various ways that did not seem extraordinary, such as random stuttering. But it would indeed be striking if she conveyed, even by accident, a meaning that was against God's teaching. This correlative incident defies the normally expected probability of random chances and fits the witchcraft hypothesis, thus justifying it to become an evidential sample. It is worth noting that Glanvill also included a number of other forms of "evidence" collected besides the prayer test. These included multiple witness statements and Julian Cox's own confession; included in these accounts were people seeing wounds on Cox's leg, the victim's abnormal fits and illness, blood found on her bed, and about 30 pins presented in court—pins that Cox allegedly had asked the victim to swallow and which were witnessed by multiple people, sworn under oath, to have come out of the victim's body locations where there were swellings.

[49] Darr, *Marks of an Absolute Witch*, 167.

Types of Definitive and Uncertain Signs

The evidentiary data set—generated from correlative samples or testing mechanisms—inevitably contains signs with a range of certainty.

Near the outer edge of the range are *uncertain signs*. Such signs might fit the coding requirement of an idea system, but they retain an ambiguous status—perhaps because these signs also fit an alternative idea, demonstrate only a minimal level of fit, exist as a source of support, or establish themselves based on a marginal departure from normally expected probability. Because the threshold to produce uncertain signs is low, they is always a reserve pool from which social actors could draw. Even though they are not the strongest evidence or proof, these signs excel in their superabundance—and most will not, ever, lose their status of uncertainty.

Definitive signs, in contrast, contain a much more respectable level of certainty. Their fit with cognitive codes is less ambiguous. They have more sources of support, derived from more rigorous testing procedures, or demonstrate a clear-cut departure from normally expected probability.

Although the information itself, by its inherent characteristics, construes the definitiveness of the sign, external sources could help. One notable external source is the amount of *credibility* lent by epistemic peers who have sincerely looked into the phenomenon. The more epistemic peers affirming an idea means having more mental powers and interpersonal credibility put into double- and triple-checking the evidence and its interpretations. Even though everyone could be wrong in absolute terms, just the *interpersonal* aspect of cross-checking increases the definitiveness of the sign within an epistemic community. Another notable external source is the introduction of special, qualifying *authorities*. These people stand several notches above the peer level, often seen as the trustees of various epistemologies developed in various social institutions. Their voices make the meanings of signs more definitive.

Table 2.3 is a rough typology of different kinds of signs (or evidence) that *combinatorically* uphold an idea system in public discourse.

For the axis of Definitiveness, we see a definitive-to-uncertain continuum. *Objectively definitive signs* occur when a group of people are in agreement that the signs lend proper evidentiary support to an idea. In contrast, *objectively uncertain signs* occur when a group of people are in agreement

Table 2.3   Types of definitive and uncertain signs

	Continuum of Authority Sources: *Public vs. special authority*	
Continuum of **Definitiveness**: *Definitive vs. uncertain*	Public, and objectively definitive	Authoritative, and objectively definitive
	Public, and objectively uncertain	Authoritative, and objectively uncertain

that the signs lend weak, ambiguous, or partial evidentiary support—but nevertheless some support—to an idea.[50]

For the axis of Authority Sources, we may see a public-to-authority continuum. Some signs were meant to only be interpreted by specific people with special epistemic superiority, for instance a church authority, a witchfinder, or one of the cunning folk and people with special abilities (e.g., former witches). If the signs definitively support an idea, only they are in the position to conduct the interpretation and validation. Public signs, in contrast, are ones that "everyone could see" with their own eyes and validate with their own senses and cognition.

These four quadrants of signs have notable differences in how they help to develop compact symbolic structures. Ostensibly, peasants' "superstitious" methods and beliefs compared unfavorably to the more rational, evidence-based methods and knowledge of the judges. But once these signs enter the mind, and away from major social institutions, the separation would be highly artificial at best. Peasants are "free" to use the preexisting ideas and codes they heard from the elite to construct eclectic rumors. A rumor is justified in being just a rumor, with a low threshold of evidentiary requirement, and a private group of people is entitled to act, feel, and think differently because of rumors.

Elites have the methods, codes, and requirements that they prefer. The demonology corpus shows a rich record of "public" signs being affirmed after they move toward the "authoritative" quadrants—buttressed with more suitable codes and evidence, resulting in compact symbolic

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[50] The term "objective" here refers to what cultural members think of, or experience as, having an objective rather than a subjective quality. "Objectivity" may be seen as a particular epistemic status, wherein individuals or a community of people recognize, experience, and treat something as real and existing. And without such an "objective" quality, certain realities—*social* realities—could not effectively operate. Alfred Schultz, "On Multiple Realities," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 5, no. 4 (June 1945), 533–576.

structures so artfully formed that they could not be created in the public sphere. Even if elites disaffirm particular judgments, they might only clear away the criminal status on the grounds of insufficient proof—and not necessarily the subjects' innocence. The rumors and their preliminary evidence might never be provable or disprovable to begin with. Unless the accusers were overwhelmingly proven to have lied, the public could well believe that the difference simply depended upon the threshold being used, and they might create their own interpretations of the contradictions that differed from those made by the authorities. The clearing procedures might even add a few more uncertain signs—such as from witness testimonies—on top of the existing ones. In viewing the quadrants of signs this way, their combinative potential far surpasses their ostensible tension. In combination, they afford people to eclectically create compact symbolic structures, using variegated information and multiple methods.

Building Internal Coherence

What is *coherence*? Roughly speaking, a state of coherence occurs when snippets of ideas and idea-elements seem to intelligibly go well or "hold solidly" together—or even reinforce or build on one another intricately—without excessive intelligible contradictions or fragmentation.[1] The definition becomes clearer if we picture individuals whose ideas are *incoherent*. An example being those individuals who simply like to express information that might be potentially relevant to an idea that they desperately want to communicate—such as in brilliant idea fragments—but they never get to the point of connecting the dots successfully, and the fragments are too disparate to be easily connected by their audience.

In complex idea systems, which comprise many subparts, establishing coherence means forming component materials into a relationship so that all the individual parts fit and operate well with one another. Imagine there are several contradictory interpretations of preexisting ideas, multiple incompatible testimonies, and many forms of ideas (e.g., sensory image, symbolic association, argument, and narrative), each with their

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[1] Cf. Algirdas Julien Greimas and Joseph Courtes, *Semiotics And Language: An Analytical Dictionary*, trans. Larry Christ, Daniel Patte, James Lee, Edward McMahon II, Gary Phillips, & Michael Rengstorf. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983), 35. For an entry into a complex discussion of coherence in phenomenology and ethnomethodology, see Clemens Eisenmann and Michael Lynch, "Introduction to Harold Garfinkel's Ethnomethodological 'Misreading' of Aron Gurwitsch on the Phenomenal Field," *Human Studies* 44, no. 1 (April 2021), 1–17.

own *intricate justification structures.* Accomplishing coherence is an extremely complex task for individuals as well as for institutions. [2]

This chapter sketches out some factors, tools, methods, and mechanisms that enable social actors to create coherence by efficiently handling or preempting contradictions, and by efficiently "synthesizing" disparate components into a common form. Table 3.1 maps out eight different levels of coherence-construction activities to be examined.

I use the term *internal coherence* to refer to the form of coherence in relation to the need to unify and synchronize different accounts and data regarding a localized case. External coherence is a form of coherence in relation to the bridging of what is happening at a given site with what occurs at other sites—that is to say, to a larger set of cases where similar or dissimilar ideas and information are generated.[3]

Table 3.1   Eight levels of coherence-construction activities in witchcraft cases

Domains of coherence construction

1 Internal coherence in *event correlations* (including different asserted unusual signs and circumstantial evidence)
2 Internal coherence in *victims', eye-witnesses', and accusers' accounts made in court under oath*
3 Internal coherence in *interrogated statements (including ostensible "voluntary" confession)*
4 Internal coherence in *material evidence*
5 External coherence with *past and ongoing cases* (in news, pamphlets, demonological books, official records, etc.)
6 External coherence with *established stock of preexisting knowledge* (shared among locals or among elites)
7 External coherence with *challenging and competing ideas*
8 External coherence with *other knowledge systems*

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[2] I take inspirations from discourse analysts' efforts to link the local coherence of individual texts (which consist of "cognitive sets") to the global coherence of macrostructures (which consist of meta-structures interwoven by multiple "cognitive sets"). Teun A. van Dijk, *Macrostructures: An Interdisciplinary Study of Global Structures in Discourse, Interaction, and Cognition* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates, 1980), v-25. Fundamentally, when people state a verbal thought, a minimal coherence at the textual, social, or communicative levels is required for it to have any functions—including but not exclusive to referential, emotive, poetic, and regulative functions. See Theo van Leeuwen, *Introducing Social Semiotics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 75–78.

[3] See van Dijk, *Macrostructures*, 199–295.

A Common Code System and Its Set of Coded Things

A predicate for a coherent idea system is an essential set of codes (*conventionalized symbols*) that can generate a cohesive, unifying account. The standardized adoption of codes—for instance, "the Devil" or "witchcraft"—enables particular classes of information to be encoded into related, specific mental objects, like specific "acts of the Devil" or "acts of witchcraft." Successful, extensive coding efforts can gradually produce a body of "facts" (or a *data set* consisting of *coded information*) that enables more extensive theorizing. Theorizing within an evidentially driven idea system particularly thrives on such "factual" accumulation and organization.

Defining a Cohesive Pool of Qualifying Evidence

Some coded things such as the "winner of last night's tennis game" have only a restricted class of information that could qualify as proper evidence. In contrast, "gravity" has fewer restrictions; many different things dropping to the ground can be fitting information. "The Devil" and "witchcraft" have almost too many coded things to substantiate their existence—from flying broomsticks to unusual animals, and from poisons to orgies. Such diversity could entail potential challenges to maintain cohesiveness—the same "Devil" or "witch" may look and act too diffusely. At the same time, if managed properly, such a system of coded things could greatly enhance the reservoir of substantiating evidence—there are too much data that seem to offer varyingly rigorous proofs toward the objects' existence.

To manage the conceptual codes, *boundaries* are needed. The Devil and witchcraft are not boundless concepts. They are comprehensible to our minds as unique, vivid things because of these boundaries. The ideas (propositions) revolving around them are just *detailed* enough to become conceivable causes, yet *general* enough to enable diverse fact-finding and evidence-building activities.

This balance in the code is delicate. For a moment, let us consider this balance in the context of the cumulative concept of witchcraft.

Most generally, the motivation of the Devil[4]—and his eternal role—is to tempt humans into betraying God. His methods are multifarious but generally involve duplicity, seduction, and temptation. One means of achieving his aims is to form pacts with humans, who would serve him as "witches" and thereby become Satan's emissaries in the human world.

An example of how ideas grow in detail and complexity is given below.

Embedded in Biblical tales, the Devil often seduced individuals in a state of moral weakness, as he could not succeed in tempting truly virtuous people. Those who were morally weak were often promised the power to kill, maim, or cause misfortune to an enemy. These details in the idea *explained* the witches' motivation and the reason they are morally responsible for the harms they cause to humans.

Further details about the Devil relate to the *means* (the special power) that witches could possess. The Devil works within the confines of God's power, and perhaps even with God's permission, but never really has power anywhere equivalent to God himself. If the Devil's power could even threaten that of God, this would contradict every narrative in the Bible. Witches borrow a limited amount of power provided by the Devil, and the Devil could withdraw this power at will. This is why witches could never overpower the Devil or even the little devils, why they could be captured by humans even if they possessed supernatural power, and why they might not be able perform an act repeatedly.

Few believed the Devil truly had the power to affect natural events, such as causing a hailstorm or a plague. According to many authoritative interpretations, stating so would be tantamount to putting the Devil on the same level as God's divine power. Likewise, the Devil—or perhaps his minions, in the form of imps or demons—might change shape, change sex, turn into animals, bi-locate, and so forth, but the idea that witches could possess the same power was much more widely disputed.

Elites and peasants alike generally conceived—with little internal disagreement—that the Devil could cause *illusions* in people, for example, making people *think* illusively that they themselves had caused a hailstorm or had participated in other magical, diabolical, ungodly activities, such as attending the subversive witch sabbath by nocturnal flight on a broomstick. The events need not have physically happened, according to concept conceptions; physical events could accompany illusions. For example, the

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[4] The word "Devil," in uppercase, refers to Satan. However, it is believed that Satan commands many little "devils"; these devils will be represented in lowercase.

Devil might know that a hailstorm was going to take place and can thus duplicitously make people believe he created it. But by making subjects take certain actions, even if only in their mind, the Devil successfully made people betray God.

Details such as these enable the court to eliminate disagreement and contradictions. And for some courts that sought to examine the extent of immorality, whether the causation existed in the physical world was of secondary importance.

It was also widely accepted that the Devil could cause small-scale harm by himself—but his historic role was to tempt humans to commit sins by their own agency. Some teaching cast the Devil in a role similar to that of a background agent, an agent who required—or at least called upon—the agency of the humans to fully realize his malign purposes. And by successfully tempting humans, including the use of coercion, the Devil grew in power, perhaps just as he did through the original sins of Adam and Eve. Here lay the human responsibility in the outcomes, even if the responsibility was only partial. Sometimes the act of temptation included severe beating; even if the subjects had demonstrated unwillingness, their ultimate compliance showed they had given in to the temptation.

Constructing these details about the coded things, which build some conditions of limited tendencies and probabilities, helps to offer a degree of precision in guiding actors' interpretations and actions.

Converged Matching Evidence as Seen in Confession Accounts

By the intricate properties (or "design") of these coded constructs pertaining to the Devil and witchcraft, a wealth of matching information could be used as evidence. Many sub-ideas (consisting of coded things) are involved.

"Witchcraft" was a concept bordering both the supernatural and the natural. It was a set of *crafted methods* (or "arts") executed by humans, but could do harm on a scale that an ordinary human could not by borrowing or using diabolic power. The precise methods varied. One was *diabolic contagion*—that is to say, the ability to cause sickness or death by touch.[5] In England, it was believed that witches nurtured little demonic creatures called familiars or imps that had shape-shifting abilities. They sucked on

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[5] Henry Charles Lea, *Materials Toward a History of Witchcraft* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939), vol III, 1512.

the "teats" of witches for nourishment, and they could help the witches spy on neighbors, spread poison, or kill animals. These conceivable, traditional mental objects transformed the perceptions toward many otherwise ordinary animals; common animals thus became a potentially qualifying point of evidence for diabolic contagion.

Confession accounts substantiate some of these ideas. For example, toads show up in confessional accounts in France, England, and Normandy. In a northern French village in 1599, a woman under torture (Reyne Percheval) confessed that "she had dressed her team of toads in red, green, and yellow cloth, and had mixed their venom with water to make a concoction that could rot apples and pears."[6] Similarly, multiple confessions would confirm the existence of spell casting and ointments (salve, unguent), attributing them special properties.

In other words, such convergent accounts all functioned to affirm plausible, believable causal mechanisms that could *plausibly* explain extraordinary phenomena. Such congruity did not have to be identical—the appearance of the salves could be different. They need only be congruent enough to affirm the existence of a particular class of mental object. Many objects could have different manifestations—as the mental object "human" has its varied manifestations, from an infant to an elderly person.

Remarkable Account Convergence and Detail-Congruity

Congruence across cases—say, the mention of pitchforks in several different towns—is impressive in its own right. But *detailed congruity in empirical details* was also found *within* many individual cases. Different accounts often converge on specific points. Relating to the case of Anne Fessler (in Chap. 2), rather than different sources documenting different extraordinary signs, several sources may confirm the same extraordinary signs.

For example, historian Lyndal Roper noted that, in the 1580s and 1590s, "the stories women told [about witches] were virtually interchangeable. The Devil came dressed in black, wearing a black hat with a feather on it. His name was nearly always Federle, or Federlin 'The little feather'." Roper further cited that in a witch scare that took place in Augsburg, Germany, around 1723–1726, where children were the center

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[6] Gilbert Geis and Ivan Bunn, *A Trial of Witches: A Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft Prosecution* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 50.

of the panic, "nearly all the children accused a woman they called 'The Seamstress' of having seduced them."[7] In a mass trial that took place in Salzburg, Austria, around the 1680s, more than fifty boys ranging from nine to sixteen years old, upon being interrogated, admitted to being seduced by a legendary sorcerer named Jackl.[8] Historian Julian Goodare quotes from the Salazar documents that "In the Basque region of Spain, several witches confessed that they were accompanied to the sabbath by 'dressed toads;' toads with human faces and clothes."[9]

Therefore, a question remains concerning such congruities within individual cases. It is one thing that coercion yields confession, yet it is another entirely when multiple confessions, perhaps stretching across cases, start to concur with one another. General "agreement" on popular imageries, such as a toad—instead of, say, a seagull or a bird—can be accounted for by local customs and rumors. But the congruence of more *specific* details is more puzzling and offers a fascinating impression of the plausibility of the ideas.

To explore this curious phenomenon, let us briefly consider a German case in Trier. This case shows just how many forms of "evidence" converged to besiege the life of one man: Dietrich Flade.

The Trier Episode

The witch hunt at Trier, Germany, in the 1580s was indeed a spectacle that had arguably inspired further witch hunts in the region, if not all of Germany. Starting with isolated cases, the hunt at Trier expanded to involve thousands of people and led to 300 executions within a few years. Many new, shocking elements that the city had not previously encountered came to the surface. Renowned officials of high social status—at that time normally provided protection from witch prosecutions—were ultimately prosecuted. The most prominent figure was Dr. Dietrich Flade—the vice-governor and one of the richest men in the city, a city judge, and the dean of the law school at the University of Trier—who sought to flee

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[7] Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 85, 215, 210.

[8] Robert S. Walinski-Kiehl, "The Devil's Children: Child Witch-Trials in Early Modern Germany," in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Merry E. Wiesner (Boston, MA, and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2007), 128.

[9] Julian Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 215–16.

the city but was held at the gate. A number of children and respectable people participated in Flade's denunciations.[10]

The first significant evidence appeared when a fifteen-year-old boy (Matthias, born at Weisskirch) was arrested for witchcraft in another jurisdiction in 1587. The new Trier governor, Johann Zandt von Merl, was a zealous witch prosecutor and Flade's political enemy, who organized much of the evidence against Flade.[11] According to him, Matthias, "being examined, did at once, without torture," confessed to having attended the witch sabbaths. Among many "richly clad people" there were "two grandees in showy array." The boy did not name Dr. Flade explicitly. But "the clothing they then wore and their bodily figure, correspond entirely with Dr. Flade…in…physical proportions and in all other details." When Matthias attended a flogging, he recognized Dr. Flade immediately and declared that he had seen Dr. Flade at the sabbath.[12]

In the same year, on July 1, a second denunciation emerged. A woman ("Maria, the old Meieress" of Ehrang) from another village also testified against Dr. Flade, stating she had repeatedly witnessed him attending the sabbath. It was said that Maria "had remained firm as to Dr. Flade till her death"—"at the stake before all the crowd, she would have kept shouting

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[10] Jonathan B. Durrant, *Witchcraft, Gender and Society in Early Modern Germany* (Leiden, The Netherlands, and London: Brill), 40; H. C. Erik Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany 1562–1684: The Social and Intellectual Foundations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), 98–112; Wolfgang Behringer, *Witchcraft Persecutions in Bavaria: Popular Magic, Religious Zealotry And Reason of State In Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 221, 225–29; William Monter, "Witch Trials in Continental Europe: 1560–1660," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Period of Witch Trials,* eds. Bengt Ankarloo, Stuart Clark, and William Monter (London: Continuum and Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 23. The Trier episode had an organically developed, bottom-up character of development, according to historian Wolfgang Behringer, compared to some of the later cases in Germany that took on a more "rationalized," top-down, efficient bureaucratic approach to witchcraft prosecution—notably the witch-hunts in Ellwangen around 1611–1618, Eichstätt (1613), Bamberg (1616), and Würzburg (1616).

[11] The context, according to Robin Briggs, is that Dr. Dietrich Flade, who served as vice-governor of Trier, had taken a moderate approach to witch persecution, which went against some witch-hunters with a more enthusiastic sentiment. After an enthusiastic witch-hunter, Johann Zandt von Merl, became governor in 1584, he had a strong motivation to confront Flade. George Lincoln Burr, *The Fate of Dietrich Flade* (New York: G.P. Putnams, 1894), available online at The Internet Archive, https://archive.org/details/fateofdietrichfl00bur-riala (accessed 19 November 2017).

[12] Burr, 24.

out his name if they had not stopped her."[13] Within a month, another man (Loch Hans of Schweich) made an accusation similar to Maria's.

The rumors about Dr. Flade spread quickly in the region by the time there were three denunciations. Before October 3, 1587, several more witches in two other jurisdictions named Dr. Flade during their confessions. "In April of 1588, Margarethe of Euren…testified that Dr. Flade had come to the witch sabbath in a golden wagon"[14] and ordered all crops to be destroyed, using snails as a means. When she and some others resisted, Dr. Flade hit her with a stick. In fear she muttered the name of God, and the assembly suddenly vanished. The governor permitted Dr. Flade to send three friends—all with significant social status—to question Margarethe. But Margarethe sternly insisted on her account; one of the friends said, "it seemed as if the Devil spoke out of her."[15] Another convicted witch came forward a month later, confirming the story about the snails in her confession. By late August, the tally of accusers and witnesses was "no less than fourteen witches" from six jurisdictions; some did not explicitly mention Dr. Flade by name but "spoke only of lordly folk who seemed to come from Trier."[16] By late September, there were six more corroborating testimonies.

On January 14, 1589, Johann von Schönenberg, the archbishop-elector of Trier,[17] laid down the following case before the theological faculty in Trier. It is difficult to capture the nuanced processes that construct coherence without quoting the archbishop-elector's statement at length:

> into what general suspicion of witchcraft our Judge at Trier, Dr. Dietrich Flade, has fallen, and what has since taken place as to his flight. Now, although at first, when he was accused by only one or two of the persons executed for witchcraft, we thought the matter hardly worthy of notice, and therefore for a while, on account of his rank, let the matter drift; yet

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[13] Burr, 25.

[14] Burr, 28.

[15] Burr, 28.

[16] Burr, 30.

[17] The Archbishop-Elector (or prince-elector, or simply referred to as "the Elector" in Burr's story) was an appointment by the Catholic Church to oversee ecclesiastical matters and church affairs in an ecclesiastical principality of the Holy Roman Empire. Johann von Schönenberg played a facilitating role in witch prosecutions in the region. Gary K. Waite, "Sixteenth-Century Religious Reform and The Witch-Hunts," in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America,* ed. Brian P. Levack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 502.

afterward the scandal grew ever greater, and the accusations of the witches, **both old and young, men and women,** became **so frequent** that we were led to have the trials, in so far as they related to him, excerpted, and find that **twenty-three executed men and women have confessed against him, and persisted firmly in the assertion to their end** that he was with and among them at their witch-sabbaths, took the lead in evil suggestions, and helped personally to carry them out. **And these confessions come not from one court alone, but from many different ones—from Trier, Maximin, Paulin, Euren, Esch, St. Matthias, Pfalzel, Saarburg, and elsewhere**; and the suspicion is increased by the fact that **others accused by these same persons have been found guilty and have confessed**—among them some of **considerable respectability**, except that partly through avarice, partly through unchastity and other devilish impulses, they have fallen into this wretchedness. All this you will learn from the enclosed Extract, and especially **what a young boy who was misled into such witch-doings confessed freely and without constraint against him, Flade, though he had never before known him, with description of his person, rank, and appearance, and how, seeing him by chance at an execution, he immediately, without anybody's suggestion, pointed him out and said that he was the one who had been always at the witch-sabbaths**. Well known to you, moreover, is what afterwards occurred in connection with his **second attempt at flight**. And we send you also herewith the petition the said Dr. Flade wrote us, wherein at the end he **almost betrays himself**, desiring us to allow him to **enter the monastic life**, and offering us the **disposition of his property**; a thing which surely, if he were not conscious of guilt, **was not likely to be done by him, a man notoriously avaricious** and, as shown by an investigation heretofore made, of such character that by reason of his avarice justice was almost ill-administered, so that we perhaps already had cause enough to dismiss him from his office.[18]

This statement was not merely a mechanical listing of witnesses by the speaker, even if the listing is remarkable in its own right. There is a flow to the archbishop-elector's narrative, signaling an *acceleration* of evidence. This dynamic is important, since it conveys an impression that there could be more evidence forthcoming. He also signaled his own attitude of reservation—that one or two accusations would have been a "matter hardly worthy of notice." These simple words imply an evidential selection process, which ranked evidence based on a hierarchy of rigor. Adding to the appearance of objective reasoning is the governor's allowance of Flade's

[18] Burr, *The Fate of Dietrich Flade,* 36–37.

three friends of high social status to question a witness, a process that seems to show a desire to guard against backstage manipulations, ensuring that the coherence found was being checked by the combined credibility of Flade's peers.

The diversity added to the internal coherence. The archbishop-elector first cited age ("both old and young"), then gender ("men and women"), and that it was a repeated phenomenon ("became so frequent"). Twenty-three witnesses was a remarkable number, and they were largely presented as individuals independent of one another. A further diversity cited was geographical and judicial, since these witnesses came from not just one court but "many different ones," listing no fewer than eight. It played down the likelihood of a centralized coordination and highlighted an organically developed character.

There was also a technique resembling a synchronizing mathematical formula to maximize and calculate the total amount of credibility counted toward the evidence provided.

The credibility of these twenty-three characters was established in different ways. First, some of the witnesses had already helped to officially convict some witches of "considerable respectability" (except for their recent witchcraft involvement). Layering on top of such asserted personal credibility, by citing that the witnesses came from separate courts, he also borrowed the authority of eight separate courts. Finally, he assigned additional credibility by these confessors' motivation and attitude. The boy seemed to have little reason to be so adamant against Flade as an individual—"he had never before known him." By saying that they "persisted firmly in the assertion to their end," these witnesses were in no way uncertain about what they saw. There were no lackluster denunciations, and there seemed to be little reason to believe in any ulterior motive if they remained consistent in their attitude and assertions when they were about to meet "the end." Elsewhere in the dossier, it was recorded that two priests convicted of witchcraft were among the accusers, and they were observed to have repeated the accusation face-to-face to Dr. Flade upon being confronted.[19] By contrast, we saw Flade's character at play—his repeated attempts at flight, and his backdoor attempt at negotiation that also could be called bribery.

The purported diversity and distribution of evidential sources mattered. The more the speaker emphasized the non-manipulative (random or

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[19] Burr, 38.

accidental) discovery of convergence—by emphasizing or perhaps even exaggerating the sources' difference—the more these discourses embellish the impression of internal coherence.

Although other cases might not have the same number or diversity of witnesses, a variant of this "calculation" approach can also be seen in many other smaller cases: the phenomenon of *account convergence* is then followed by attending to *credibility convergence*, and then mingled with *authority convergence*. When the elector and the governor incorporated themselves into the narrative statement, they lent their own authority to the final judgment.

Narratively, account convergence represents something like a pinnacle event, accumulated and synthesized from earlier moments of mystery, puzzle, and denial. The main event was the collapse of a hero, reputationally and physically, with execution as the final, unsettling resolution.

The narrative format implies many points of evidence that argumentation does not deliver—such as the tone and words that demonstrate unqualified endorsement, and the tone of caution that the narrator assumes. They may not be evidence in a legal sense, but they still bolster the trustworthiness of an idea. In some other cases, we see that the identity of the accusers may involve one's own family members, spouses, and friends—people who have knowledge and long-standing relations with the accused—telling stories consistent with the multiple dimensions of an accused's history, motive, and so forth. These flavorful, qualitative details captured in narratives complement the "colder" arguments regarding legal violations.

Backstage Processes and Internal Coherence

Compact symbolic structures only hold up insofar as the surface validity of individual facts is not challenged. The internal coherence formed by "magical" correlations and illusionary convergence, however, could be broken by the suspicion of dishonesty. This process often entails realizing that certain systematic manipulation processes that may have taken place backstage have caused the extraordinary phenomena at the front stage to be produced.

We can use the Trier trial as a case in point. Deliberately kept hidden or deemphasized—and therefore filtered—in the archbishop-elector's statement was the information that Governor Johann Zandt von Merl was Flade's political enemy and that Flade might be widely disliked

("notoriously avaricious"). Once brought to attention, these acts of filtering raise questions as to whether there were backstage processes that went beyond the official documents, as a general attitude of bias seems to be evident. Continuing this line of thought, the audience may start to wonder what else might have been kept off the front stage. Were there characters Flade personally knew or informants inside the government persuading Flade to flee the city, foretelling his fate ahead? Was there someone who Flade had attempted to make a deal with in secret, hoping to save his life in exchange of disposal of his property? Did little boy Matthias really "being examined, did at once, without torture" when he testified? Did other witnesses providing incriminating information against Flade really not know what he looked like in advance?

Definitive answers to these specific questions, pertaining to any one specific case, will probably be never be found. But historical skeptics and contemporary historians have given us important clues that could plausibly explain—occasionally, even clearly demystify—such seemingly magical convergence and coherence between multiple accounts.

These clues pertain to a few backstage processes: (1) coercion; (2) discursive-elicitation structures; (3) informational leakage. These backstage processes contaminate the presumed independence of account givers' knowledge of one another.

Coercion, Seen and Unseen

Both physical and psychological coercion underpin many witch hunts. The word "torture" is an abstract concept in the witch-hunt literature; it encompasses all kinds of physical abuse and deprivation, even if they may not constitute "torture" in the official sense of the term. Food deprivation, boredom, the deprivation of sunlight, the prolonged deprivation of clothing or the means to keep warm in cold temperatures were some of the phenomena documented by witch-hunt scholars.

Prolonged exposure to stress and extreme uncertainty alone can break people. More mildly, presenting different kinds of incentives—positive or negative—as well as a carefully selected set of information or misinformation could induce psychological torment. Telling a subject that their own siblings and friends have confessed against them; that powerful or corrupt members in the community have already dominated the judicial process; or that they could avoid terrible suffering before, during, or after execution if they could demonstrate true repentance (by offering an honest

confession) could compel the will of many subjects. [20] Though they are not physical, these are acts of *coercion*.

Torture and other forms of coercion (social, political, and psychological) are only half-visible to the public. Court verdicts certainly publicize that torture was approved and used in a number of cases. However, the details of what went on behind the scenes in the torture chamber—such as the dialogue between the interrogator and the prisoner, or the way the torture was actually administered—were mostly hidden from the public, and even in internal documents.

Torture as a reluctant means toward truth. On paper, within the Holy Roman Empire, torture in the early modern period was treated with skepticism; it was considered a reluctant alternative when a voluntary confession was not attained, or if eyewitnesses were not forthcoming. For this reason, there were efforts to subject torture to the regulatory guidelines, such as those built into a legal code known as the *Carolina*.[21] However, those regulatory guidelines tended to allow considerable latitude for local interpretative and discretion, especially for exceptional crimes (*crimen exceptum* in Latin) such as witchcraft, for which normal conventions could be suspended.[22]

For normal crimes, the *Carolina* cautioned against the excessive use of torture—ideally it should only be applied on the same day.[23] In principle, torture should not be repeated, a position supported by demonologist

[20] In one Catalan secular court in 1627 in Barcelona, Spain, that yielded a "low rate of 'torture failure'," a woman (Joana Trias) "seated nearly naked" on a bench, was told by her torturer: **"You already know that you are sentenced to death** and to be tortured in order that you will tell the truth: with which persons have you used the art of witchcraft. Tell the truth; you do not want your flesh to be maltreated." Gunnar W. Knutsen, *Servants of Satan and Masters of Demons: The Spanish Inquisition's Trials for Superstition, Valencia and Barcelona, 1478–1700* (Turnhout, BE: Brepols Publishers n.v., 2009), 109.

[21] "The princes and magistrates of the hundreds of territorial states and independent cities of the empire had been powerful enough to force Charles V to include the 'salvatory' clause in the Carolina. According to this clause, the legislators of princedoms and free cities could choose whether to accept the norms of the Carolina in their respective lands or to replace them with their own laws." Johannes Dillinger, *"Evil People": A Comparative Study of Witch Hunts in Swabian Austria and the Electorate of Trier,* trans. Laura Stokes (Charlottesville, VA, and London, UK: University of Virginia Press, [1999]2009), 3. Johann von Schönenberg, for example, passed a *Witch Trial Ordinance for the Electorate of Trier*. He bound the judges and officials to the provisions of the Carolina." Dillinger, 36.

[22] Dillinger, 106–9.

[23] Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe. Fourth Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 76.

Martin Delrio. Although a judge was allowed to order repetition if needed, three repetitions was commonly viewed by legal experts such as Delrio to be the maximum, and those judges who permitted torture to take place beyond the third round were called "butchers."[24] If the subject could withstand torture, she or he, in theory, should be acquitted. Moreover, they should not be tortured again unless new, compelling evidence surfaced. To safeguard against confessions purely resulting from the use of force, legal procedures generally required that a confession would only be valid if the accused party willingly, freely, and voluntarily repeated an admission in court outside of the torture chamber.

Many localities in the Holy Roman Empire were indeed in conformity with these rules of judicial caution. It can be argued that the use of *any* torture, even within the norms stated in the *Carolina*, was excessive and unjustified, for even mild torture could yield false confessions. An implicit line of justification—one that survives today—is that the right amount of coercion would overwhelm those with psychological weaknesses to telling the truth, and the truth would subsequently be checked for details and coherence. The principle, in other words, is that people are not convicted *just* because of physical pain.

Creative disguises and recoding. These standards, however, were regularly breached or "creatively interpreted," as shown in the literature on witch panics. For example, per the spirit of the *Carolina*, torture was not supposed to be repeated, although it routinely was. The literary definition of "repeated" becomes irrelevant when considering that some applications of torture could be grouped together in the same sessions—such as an application of a thumbscrew, then of a strappado, and then of a thumbscrew with a strappado. Five applications of thumbscrews could be grouped together into one session.[25] Blatant violations of the Carolina—at least the law's spirit, if not also its semantics—also took place. Measured in number of applications alone, the highest record is perhaps that of Maria Holl of Nördlingen, Germany, who faced sixty-two applications of torture.[26]

The duration of torture is also worth discussing. Using himself as a standard, Jesuit Father Friedrich Spee deemed intense pain lasting a

[24] Friedrich von Spee, *Cautio Criminalis, or a Book on Witch Trials,* trans. Marcus Hellyer (Charlottesville, VA, and London: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 86.

[25] Alison Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives in Germany: Rothenburg, 1561–1652* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 45.

[26] Roper, *Witch Craze*, 50, 277.

quarter of an hour (fifteen minutes) to be quite severe. He believed that if the avid proponents of torture—many of them scholars of criminal law—were themselves "subjected to torture for even half of a quarter hour, they would at once cast all their wisdom and pompous philosophy to the ground."[27] Spee cited Pope Paul III's decree to prohibit administering torture for a long time, meaning about an hour. But at his day, even "the mildest judges (for it is not pleasant to talk about the harsher ones)…customarily use torture for a whole hour or two half hours."[28] Some local authorities rearticulated that repeated torture by dividing one hour of torture into separate days, or that frequent torture was performed "not by means of *repetition* but of *continuation*."[29] Elsewhere, torture sessions of ten to twelve hours were mentioned in historical documents.[30]

Therefore, when we see the wordings (codes) of "voluntary," "free" confessions made "without torture," it could mean that the subjects were repeating a confession "freely" outside of the torture chamber. And should the subject refuse to make such confessions, they could be dragged back to the torture chamber for the "continuation" of their torture. In some localities, torture could be "continued" day after day, involving months of detainment.

The methods of torture also reveal a split between front-stage impressions and actual events. Addressing the excessive use of force as a problem, the Catholic Church issued an instructional manual issued by a commissioner of the Holy Office (*Instructio pro formandis processibus in causis Strigum*, abbreviated as the *Instructio*) around the 1620s. Beginning with a preamble denouncing "their [some judges] terrible and unbearable methods of carrying out trials,"[31] it stated that the use of the strappado was only meant to hold a prisoner in the air, with their hands tied behind their back; it should not be worsened "by shaking, extra weight, or a block attached to the feet; the procedure was to involve only lifting the suspect by a rope."[32] Yet, such practices were common for those who were placed on a torture device, which often led to the dislocation of joints. Some

[27] von Spee, *Cautio Criminalis,* 85.

[28] von Spee, 76.

[29] von Spee, 93–94; see also Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt,* 207.

[30] Lea, *Materials,* vol. III, 1151.

[31] Rainer Decker, *Witchcraft and the Papacy: An Account Drawing on the Formerly Secret Records of the Roman Inquisition*, trans. H. C. Erik Midelfort (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, [2003]2008), 118.

[32] Decker, 121.

subjects were obviously crippled for life.[33] Levack noted that the severest torture device, called the *squassation*, was found to have weights ranging from 40 to 660 pounds.[34] There are other objects, such as an enigmatic "witch-chair" device mentioned by Lea that brought multiple subjects to "confession,"[35] which constitute some of the many colorful descriptions historians have painted about the backstage environment.

Narrative Shell and Other Institutional Elicitation Structures

Witchcraft stories did not freely flow from the mouths of the accused; many were systematically *elicited* according to certain protocols. This fact makes the backstage interaction between the interrogators and suspects exceptionally important in the detailed information about witchcraft that came to surface in "voluntary" confessions.

Suggestive questions. Leading questions or suggestive questioning were explicitly prohibited in the *Carolina*, and this prohibition extended to magical crimes. Contemporary research shows that suggestive cross-examination could implant false memories in subjects. By repeatedly questioning a person whether they had seen Isabelle at the hut, the image of Isabelle could then be potentially implanted into a subject's memory. The effect was most likely even more pronounced if the subject was senile, drugged (by themselves or by the torturer), deluded, sleep-deprived, psychologically stressed, or mentally ill.[36]

Fredrich Spee described an exchange between himself and a former judge. The judge recounted:

> When the accused were hanging in torture, having already confessed themselves, they were questioned about others. After they had persistently denied that they knew of any others, the judge would then ask whether they knew of Titia? Whether they had seen her at the sabbath? If a prisoner dared to answer that she really knew nothing bad about her, then the judge immediately turned to the torturer and said, 'Pull—stretch the rack.' Stretched, overwhelmed by pain, she exclaimed, 'Stop, stop, I know Titia, I know her, I won't deny it.' Then this denunciation was entered into the record. Next

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[33] von Spee, *Cautio Criminalis,* 76; see also Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt,* 207.
[34] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt, 4th ed.,* 76.
[35] Lea, *Materials,* vol. III, 1151–56.
[36] Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt*, 211–12.

the judge would immediately ask about Sempronia also… And so it went on until he extracted at least three or four names from each of them. [37]

It is not clear how many of these backstage actions took place. But if they existed, such methods would certainly explain why specific names—detailed congruity in empirical details—could be generated. And if such inquisitors worked in multiple regions, as Spee had stated, extraordinary congruity across regional locations could also be explained.[38]

Some historians who have examined first-hand primary documents acknowledge the general methods of suggestive questioning. An example is the famous Bamberg trial in 1628. Johannes Junius, the mayor of Bamberg, Germany, described in a letter to his daughter how he was pressured to give the appropriate names, streets, and details to his interrogator. Suggestive cues were given regarding what would count as appropriate. When the interrogator claimed: "The rascal knows one on the market-place, is with him daily, and yet won't name him,"[39] Junius guessed that it was one Burgomaster Dietmeyer and subsequently named him. He was also prompted to confess his crime in a similar manner, giving the interrogator the desired details.

Ordering of questions and narrative shell structure. In other words, there seems to be a certain conversational or discourse structure that runs in parallel to the suggestive questions themselves. Sociologist Hugh Mehan[40] had observed this kind of structure in everyday discourse between teachers and students and between parents and children. The structure begins with Initiation (I) that elicits a Reply (R). If a desirable response is provided, a positive Evaluation (E) is often given. If the response given is undesired, sometimes a negative evaluation is rendered. Another round of Initiation (I)—perhaps embellished with more clues—would usually be given, until ultimately a desired response was reached. Informal questioning and reply structure thus allowed a fruitful way for the subjects to "say" from their own mouths what was actually in the heads of the elicitors.

[37] von Spee, *Cautio Criminalis,* 79–80.

[38] von Spee, 79.

[39] Department of History, University of Pennsylvania, ed., *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History, Volume III* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1912), 84, https://archive.org/download/translationsrepr1896univ/translationsrepr1896univ.pdf

[40] Hugh Mehan, "'What Time is It, Denise?'": Asking Known Information Questions in Classroom Discourse," *Theory into Practice* 18, no. 4 (1979): 285–94.

While detailed transcripts are not available for these torture sessions that would allow us to analyze the elicitation structures, more light is shed from the questioning protocol.

The general ordering and list of questions appear to be designed to elicit enough common points that could be utilized. Kramer and Sprenger proposed some general instructions for questioning the accused and witnesses in their treatise *Malleus Maleficarum*.[41] Their instructions showed little restraint regarding what questions might be "suggestive." For example, one question suggested for witnesses was "whether he saw or heard Such-and-Such doing such-and-such thing." And after questioning, if a person knew about person X, the follow-up question would be "whether any of those related to him by blood had in the past been burned to ashes because of acts of sorcery or been considered suspect."[42] Regarding the accused, after a sworn oath, the first question listed was, "who are his parents and whether they are living or dead," then "whether they died a natural death or were burned to ashes." Lineage ties, in other words, were advised to be suggested by the questioner. Kramer explained to the reader that lineage was asked because it was a common practice among sorceresses to offer their babies to the demons, and therefore "the whole progeny is tainted." If the accused provided a correct answer, then it reinforced the idea that parents indeed offered their children to the demons.

By design, some questions were potentially going to elicit visually vivid images. One item that investigators prompted to question was: "how the effect that the child or domestic animal was so quickly affected with sorcery." A confessor must, then, create an explanation that is bound to be visually interesting. There are several more questions that immediately follow (see Table 3.2).

The ordering of the questions also helped to reveal how a visual "narrative" was created so much more easily by repeated questions. In modern-day parlance, the protocol was like a software program to help screenwriters or story developers create stories with considerably less effort. A *narrative shell structure* was embedded in the protocol to elicit empirical

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[41] Christopher S. Mackay, *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the* Malleus Maleficarum (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 513–24.
[42] Mackay, 516.

Table 3.2   Ordering of questions in *Mallelus Maleficarum*

Sequencing of questions
1 "Item. Questioned, 'And how is it that you said that she would never have a healthy day, and this is what happened?' she said."
2 "Item. If she denies everything, she should be asked about other acts of sorcery that were inflicted on other witnesses, for instance their domestic animals or children."
3 "Item. Questioned as to why she was seen in the fields or in the barn with the domestic animals, touching them in the way that sorceresses do, she said…"
4 "Item. Questioned as to why it was that she touched the child, and later it was not well, she said…"
5 "Item. Questioned as to what she was doing in the fields at the time of the storm, and so on about many other events."
6 "Item. What caused the fact that while she had one cow or two, she had a larger supply of milk than the neighboring women with four or six?"
7 "Item. Why does she remain in a state of adultery or as a concubine?"

information.[43] Several possibilities had already been set in advance, and rather than having the accused invent everything from a vacuum, the ordering gave the accused some choices regarding the paths and details of narrative development. The accused could choose to reject the last X, but then must choose Y, Z, or W. At the end, Kramer and Sprenger said that "she should be questioned several times about the articles for which she was denounced to see whether or not she maintains her story."[44] This mechanism of repeated questioning of the same witness helps to smooth out or eliminate incongruities.

It is not necessary that executioners or "witch-finders" have read and agreed with the *Malleus Maleficarum*. But historians have found at least limited evidence that these techniques had been applied in some witch trials during which congruent accounts occurred.

Below is the initial protocol against a woman, Anna Roleffes of Harxbüttel, also known as Tempel Anneke.[45] The court, after receiving

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[43] For a contemporary exploration of behind-the-scene interrogation practices, see Gary C. David, Anne Warfield Rawls, and James Trainum, "Playing the Interrogation Game: Rapport, Coercion, and Confessions in Police Interrogations," *Symbolic Interaction*, 41, no.1 (February 2018): 3–24.

[44] Mackay, 521.

[45] Peter A. Morton, ed., *The Trial of Tempel Anneke: Records of a Witchcraft Trial in Bruinswick, Germany, 1663,* trans. Barbara Dahms (Ontario, Canada, and New York: Broadview Press, 2006), 6–9, folio 2.

reports of prior trials, drafted up a list of sixty-six pre-structured questions, creating a shell structure for a co-constructed narrative between the interrogator and the accused:

41. Whether she didn't order Lüdecke Tau's wife to bring the head of a dead animal from Bortfeld into the house of *Inquisitin*,

42. What did she do with it, and what did she need it for,

43. Whether she didn't throw the head into the water so that when Hans Harves rowed over the spot, he should get the injury to the leg,

44. Whether she didn't offer to help them when dying befell the sheep in Harxbüttel,

45. Whether she didn't bring the dying amongst the sheep through sorcery,

46. How, and by which means, did she want to help the sheep,

47. Whether she didn't burn a sheep from the herd to powder in the oven, cooked something in a kettle, and administered it to the sheep.[46]

Anna Roleffes was brought from the interrogation room to the courtroom several times. Moreover, the court repeatedly revised the list of questions. While Roleffes rejected both of these incidents, she ultimately admitted to others in her confession. These questions were certainly leading and suggestive, yet she did not have to admit to every suggested possible crime that was built into the protocol. This detail is significant, since it shows the less mechanical process of extracting satisfactory confessions. Anna Roleffes' final formal confession made "without torture" included abusing the host, fornicating with the Devil, laming two other people's legs, killing a number of cows by divination, and miscellaneous other diabolical acts. She was ultimately to be "given mercy"—instead of being burnt by fire while alive—that "her head will be cut off with a sword and shall be burned together with the body."[47]

Undisclosed Informational Leakage

Informational leakage also helps to explain extraordinary account convergence. This explanation is less subtle: some details turn out to be similar or identical because the details had been circulated between people.

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[46] Morton, 7–8.
[47] Morton, 119–20, folio 44–45.

Several backstage channels could exist. First, rumors often circulated widely before an arrest happened, including some details regarding particular events. If the rumors contained details, then the accused could learn of them in advance.

Second, the accused were not necessarily isolated from others after their initial arrest. Sometimes, there were periods in which torture was applied on different days, and the accused were sent home for the time being. This system may allow the accused to find out about the rumors.

Lea reported accounts of "crafty and experienced spies" being imprisoned with the accused, and these spies could relate to them information, true or false.[48] Witnesses with a notary had been secretly dispatched to overhear how the accused interacted with alleged accomplices or spies disguised as sympathizers.[49] There were also accounts of torture taking place not in private, but in a place that was "semi-public, in the presence of advocates, notaries, discreet and experienced men who might wish to be present."[50] In one case cited by Spee, an interrogation happened inside a village hut, "where boys lay by the cracks in the door and heard everything."[51]

Third, there was a range of interactions that prisoners could have with others during imprisonment. Even if they often were placed in isolated cells, they interacted with the interrogators, the guards, the executioner, the executioner's wife, the scribe or notary, and various others.[52] Through his personal knowledge of the Holy Roman Empire, Spee—who was officially sent as a secret observer, therefore afforded the rare privilege of a look from the "inside"—argued that interrogators who know confessionary and denunciation statements deliberately questioned the accused "on the very same points and details [in the denunciation]…as if leading him by the hand."[53] The torturers, the prison warders, the court personnel—with or without the interrogator's knowledge—could leak the information to the imprisoned.[54]

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[48] Lea, *Materials,* vol. II, 527.

[49] Lea, 862.

[50] Lea, 862.

[51] von Spee, *Cautio Criminalis,* 111.

[52] There are variations from place to place about the system of imprisonment, interrogation, and torture. Sometimes the executioner was also the interrogator, but other times the executioner appointed one or two officials as interrogators. A notary was sometimes present.

[53] von Spee, 110.

[54] von Spee, 81–83, 110–11. See also H. C. Erik Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany 1562–1684: The Social and Intellectual Foundations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), 107–8.

Material Verification and the Loudon Possession Episode

Material evidence can be conceptualized as finding the knife that a murderer uses to kill a person—ideally a right-sized one fitting the wound, found hidden away and smeared with blood. The lack of this kind of evidence was not critical, but its presence could powerfully enrich and corroborate stories.

The common and routinized form was for a judge to find a witch's pot, charms, powders, potions, symbols, and ointments. If an accused had indeed made herbal potions, received powder from a healer, or had attempted to use mind-altering substances, then it was not difficult for the court to discover such substances. Otherwise, an unusual object or a leftover pot of soup could be named by the accused, under torture, in the hope of satisfying the interrogators. New inconclusive signs—strange symbols and carvings, for example—could be "discovered" during a search. They also could be outrightly fabricated or discursively distorted, and therefore fraudulent.[55]

Aside from extraordinary things, mundane objects—such as pins, feathers, animal teeth, glass pieces, or any hard objects being vomited, which seemed to be common in possession stories—were only extraordinary because of the *contexts* in which they emerged. They may have a weird or repulsive aesthetic to them, especially when they are combined together in certain contexts, but they themselves need not be extraordinary. Eva's cakes, and the narration of them, would be a good example.

Darr relates a case in 1582 in England in which an eight-year-old girl saw her stepmother (Ales Hunt) feeding milk to "two little things like horses" using a "black dish"; subsequently, a black dish indeed turned up after a search. A black dish was symbolically unusual; the color black was often associated with diabolical things, and the decision to use it for feeding animals adds color to the narrative. And if a "black dish" was also found in the possession of other accused witches, then a case of extraordinary correlation can be built. Horses may have been ordinary, but "two little things like horses" violated the typological boundary associated with animals.[56]

[55] Gustav Henningsen, *The Salazar Documents: Inquisitor Alonso de Salazar Frías and Others on the Basque Witch Persecution* (Leiden, The Netherlands, and Boston, MA: Brill, 2004), 88–95, 298–314.

[56] Orna Alyagon Darr, *Marks of an Absolute Witch: Evidentiary Dilemmas in Early Modern England* (Farnham, England, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 107.

In a similar manner, in the investigations overseen by the notorious witchfinder General Matthew Hopkins in England, if some creatures appeared near a prisoner's confinement, those beings could be interpreted as "imps" or "familiars." To make the phenomenon more real and alive, sometimes the accused were enticed to "summon" their imps in exchange for their freedom or more lenient punishment. In the case of Elizabeth Clarke, it was observed that "within half an hour" there appeared "a white thing in the likeness of a Cat." Again, a white cat would have been ordinary, but a "white thing in the likeness of a Cat"—a different code—would clearly more qualify as an extraordinary object. So would something with the "likeness of a rat" passing through a prison cell.[57]

Supernatural manifestation was sometimes noted in behaviors. Some prisoners' delusions from extended sleep deprivation and solitary confinement were interpreted as "night flight" experiences with the pagan goddess Diana. Some women who masturbated in jail were seen as having had diabolic sex the previous night from the Devil's secret visit.[58]

A special material (physical) evidence that carries corroborative weight is that of the Devil's mark. In much of continental Europe, it was believed that the Devil (Satan) liked to leave a mark on his servant-minion once a pact was formed. This mark was believed to be insensate; blood is not drawn when cut or penetrated. Variations exist as to whether this mark is in visible or secret places, as well as other properties. In England, the Devil's mark was much more commonly associated with a "teat"—which may stick out an inch from the body—that witches used to nurture their demonic imps by letting them suckle at them. Suspects who were tortured also often had such marks.

The Loudon Possession Episode

A kind of case supported by an array of colorful material evidence is possession cases, where people could see vivid symptoms from people who are purportedly afflicted. In the United States, perhaps the most well-known example is the afflicted girls in the Salem witch trials. Pertaining to continental Europe, one of the most well-known cases is the witch panic in Loudon, France. Around seventeen nuns were alleged to be bewitched in

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[57] Darr, *Marks of an Absolute Witch*, 145–49.
[58] Roper, *Witch Craze,* 59.

an Ursuline convent between 1632 and 1637. The accused was a priest named Urban Grandier.[59]

But what kinds of symptoms—that is to say, material evidence—were present? There was one account privately written by Monsieur des Niau, counselor at la Flèche[60] in 1634. In des Niau's account, the nuns communicated with multiple reputable witnesses in languages that were supposed to be unknown to the possessed. The languages spoken and heard included Turkish, Spanish, Italian, Greek, German, Latin, and that of a "certain savage tribe" in America.[61]

Because exorcism sessions were semi-public, at one point seventy-two witnesses testified at Grandier's trial, providing testimony about the nuns' possessions—including some medical authorities. Among other things, witnesses cited that the nuns were able to stretch their legs to such an extraordinary degree that some of them had "passed their left foot over their shoulders to their cheeks" or that their tongues "issued suddenly from their mouths, horribly swollen, black, hard, and covered with pimples"; one nun's face abruptly swelled up to "three times its normal size, and…her eyes instantaneously became as large as those of a horse," and within an hour, "suddenly, in an instant, returned to her natural state, which was that of a beautiful young woman." There were also accounts of nuns' uncontrollably disrobing and committing indecent acts (including self-abuse) in front of the audience; a nun even vomited out a written pact between the Devil and Grandier, purportedly containing Grandier's signature in blood.[62]

[59] See Robert Rapley, *A Case of Witchcraft: The Trial of Urbain Grandier* (Montreal and Kingston, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998); Levack, *The Witchcraft Sourcebook,* 252.

[60] "The following extraordinary account of the 'Cause Célèbre' of Urbain Grandier, the Curé of Loudun, accused of Magic and of having caused the Nuns of the Convent of Saint Ursula to be possessed of devils, is written by an eye-witness, and not only an eye-witness but an actor in the scenes he describes. It is printed at Poitiers, chez J. Thoreau et la veuve Ménier, Imprimeurs du Roi et de l' Université, 1634." "I believe two copies only are known: my own, and the one in the National Library, Paris. The writer is Monsieur des Niau, Counsellor at la Flèche, evidently a firm believer in the absurd charges brought against Grandier," Edmund Goldsmid, ed., *The History of The Devils of Loudun; The Alleged Possession of The Ursuline Nuns, and the Trial and Execution of Urbain Grandier*, trans. Edmund Goldsmid (Edinburgh: private printing, 1887–1888), 7, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100376836

[61] See Goldsmid, 27–28.

[62] Rapley, *A Case of Witchcraft,* 152–53, 155–56, 170–72.

Des Niau's account of Grandier's story illustrates why the Devil's mark ought to be seen as definitive evidence of guilt:

> A most convincing proof of Grandier's guilt is that one of the devils declared he had marked him in two parts of his body. His eyes were bandaged and he was examined by eight doctors, who reported they had found **two marks in each place**; that they had **inserted a needle to the depth of an inch without the criminal having felt it, and that no blood had been drawn**. Now this is a most decisive test. For **however deeply a needle be buried** in such marks **no pain** is caused, and **no blood** can be extracted when they are magical signs.[63]

The material evidence here was backed by the verification of the judgment of eight doctors, who were there to delineate natural from supernatural causes. Combined with other facts and material evidence, such as the pact being vomited out, from the testimonies of more than sixty people, many of whom were reputable (such as the priests and nuns, who symbolized religious devotion), the coherence of all pieces of evidence was overwhelming. It had led Des Niau to ask: "What criminals could ever be condemned if such proofs were not deemed sufficient?" Indeed, epistemically, it would be a challenge to find a better fitting idea than to explain the phenomena. Socially speaking, it would be hard to find a person in a situation to dispute such evidence resolutely.

Negative material evidence. Often adding to the credibility of these investigation institutions was the occasional display of negative findings. Material verification occasionally helped to undermine false claims.

One example, cited by Goodare,[64] concerns a thirteen-year-old girl in Württemberg, Germany, who confessed that she had taken some wine from the cellar of the mayor of Gerlingen to attend witches' sabbaths. Her case was dismissed when wine was not found in the mayor's cellar. Historians have documented further cases such as these.[65] All these cases were sufficient to suggest that the prosecution of witches was not always completely driven by blind prejudice and hatred. Many actors working

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[63] Collected in Levack, *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*, 258–59. The full text of the counselor's book is accessible at this website: http://www.sacred-texts.com/evil/dol/index.htm and http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/lookup?num=45282

[64] Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt,* 214–15.

[65] See Roper, *Witch Craze*, 75–77, 217, 219, 318; Wolfgang Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts: A Global History* (Cambridge, UK, and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004), 143.

within the rationalized institution had attempted to be systematically rational.

Possible backstage manipulations. So, if we do not believe witchcraft was the cause, what could have produced the front-stage impressions—the multifarious forms of material evidence—in the Loudon possessions?

Short of stronger proof, we can only rely on speculation as a tool to brainstorm possibilities. There were speculations that the knife used for pricking Devil's marks might have had a retractable blade.[66] A French writer and skeptic asserted that the surgeon who had pricked Urban Grandier, one of the alleged victims' brother-in-law, used a device that was dull on one end and sharp on another[67]—contradicting Des Niau's account that the examiner had "inserted a needle to the depth of an inch without the criminal having felt it, and that no blood had been drawn." Dumas also questioned the whole business of speaking foreign languages, recounting how the nuns clearly did not really know Hebrew, Gaelic, or other languages—just occasionally and pathetically trying to mimic single words in Latin, while avoiding having to say anything in Greek altogether.[68] The inaccurate reporting was probably responsible for the abnormal multilingual ability of the nuns, not the empirical events themselves. However, how these nuns could have other symptoms—such as the abruptly swollen face and the tongues covered in pimples—still begs explanation.

The secret behind the contortion performances was indeed mysterious. However, in another case in Germany, a young woman (Eva Elisabeth Hennigin) admitted to practicing, in advance, acts that looked like "convulsions and contortions and *Opisthotonos*" from moves she had learned from a ropedancer.[69]

What about the trick of vomiting a foreign object? Around 1606, a woman in England (Anne Gunter) admitted to hiding pins by placing them in her nose or deep into her mouth, so that when she sneezed or spat, they would be secreted at the right moment.[70] A twelve-year-old boy of Bilston, England, in 1620, was caught faking his "black-coloured urine"

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[66] William E. Burns, *Witch Hunts in Europe and America: An Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003), 66–67

[67] Alexandre Dumas, *Urban Grandier* (Project Gutenberg Ebook #2746, [1910]2004), http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2746 (accessed 22 January 2018).

[68] Dumas, xxxvi, xxxvii, xli, xlii, lxx.

[69] Lea, *Materials,* vol. III, 1482.

[70] James Sharpe, *The Bewitching of Anne Gunter: A Horrible and True Story of Deception, Witchcraft, Murder, and the King of England* (New York: Routledge, [1999]2001), 172.

by using black ink.[71] To perform a touching test, a girl (Elizabeth Pacy of Bury St. Edmunds, England, around 1662), blinded by an apron over her head, "would shriek out and open their fists; yet, if anyone else touched them they were quite unaffected." Only later when a real blindfold was used was it revealed that the girl was probably able to see through the apron.[72]

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[71] Andrew Seddon, *Possessed by the Devil: The Real History of the Islandmagee Witches and Ireland's Only Mass Witchcraft Trial* (Dublin, Ireland: The History Press Ireland, 2013), 104.
[72] Roland Seth, *Stories of Great Witch Trials* (London: Arthur Barker Ltd., 1967), 129.

Building External Coherence

External coherence encompasses the bridging of patterns or ideas pertaining to local cases with patterns or ideas pertaining to a broader set of cases. The bridging can be solid or tenuous, depending on the amount and strength of the bridging mechanisms.

As a starting point, activating the same set of preexisting knowledge, built on the same codes and coded things, can establish the basic precondition for external coherence. But more intricate bridging works need to be performed as it is necessary to discuss and work on the details of similarities and differences between things.

Sophisticated theories, treatises, and manuals are intellectual resources that played a central role in forging external coherence. They allowed individuals, particularly judges, to quickly establish similarities across cases, often borrowing the general ideas from texts and authorities to draw "parallels" between data and between ideas. They also helped judges to quickly process apparent contradictions, ambiguities, and differences. In effect, doing so helped judges to effectively mitigate theoretical contradictions that would threaten the specific case. In turn, these processes contributed to the overall integrity of the larger idea system, when the local interpretations do not contradict the larger body of ideas. An ideal scenario of maximal external coherence is a global-local unity of sorts, in which the ideas, voices, and data of the "global" level cohere and harmonize with those of the local level.

Relational Bridges: Thin Versus Thick Parallels

The words, ideas, and textual resources that bridge different bodies of data or ideas can be called *relational bridges* (or *relational bridging points*). Bridges can be established when people could cognitively connect two or more objects or ideas that are otherwise perceived to be unrelated.

In the context of establishing external coherence, seeing relational bridges between a local and an extra-local text or case does not necessarily mean seeing the text or case to be identical. Rather, a point of *relation* exists, and that relation is built on a point of *parallel* of sort. The parallel is based on the assumption that that the two bodies of data or ideas are not completely independent, but due to some principles of parallel operation they have particular *relational connectedness*. They may indeed be connected by their analogous similarities, or they can be connected by other kinds of relations.

Imagine a scenario where one person tells another that they are "long-time friends" in a context—say when they need the other's assistance, allowing all kinds of communication, feeling, interaction to flow. Upon a change in context, that person degrades the analogous relationship to an "acquaintanceship," asserting much more mutual independence and seclusion. These two statements evoke different parallels based on similarities with two classes of idealized mental objects within a culture.

In another scenario, if the Greek god Zeus indeed casts a lightning bolt onto Earth, the parallel relation there is not to say that humans are "the same" as gods, or that the two worlds' conditions have collided into one. Instead, the parallel relation is that what goes on in Earth—at least for one single event—is causally connected, that the outcome in one world could be causally explained by what goes on in another world running "parallel" to it. That relation is not treated as analogous but actual.

It is the *latter* kind of connectedness that was most relevant to the ubiquity of witch trials. Due to the perceived *actual* parallels between the supernatural and the natural, the data and ideas of local cases, *to a certain extent,* became conceivably applicable to other cases, and vice versa, if there is a common set of causes. Many efforts were conducted to establish and theorize specific points of parallels, bridging the local cases to a broader context.

Parallels can be built on incredibly thin connections—or *thin relational bridges.* The requirement is low: for example, one could simply make two things "look alike" and then invite the audience to attend to their similar

properties, prompting the audience to feel that the two things indeed "operate alike." Saying "money is just like cocaine" is an example. It accounts for the similarity in addictiveness but not their broad range of functions. People could use numerous analogies, proverbs, maxims, metaphors, or similes to create flash- or momentarily intersecting points of parallel, and in turn a momentary coherence.[1]

These thin relational bridges, however, could be supplemented with or bolstered by further works—with *thick relational bridges.* Thick relational bridges are not merely many thin bridges that add up in numbers; they are built with more enduring, complex, reinforced structures. When there are thick relational bridges, people could transpose the knowledge between different domains much more easily. In other words, rather than quickly looking at two things that "seem alike" and presuming they must "operate alike"—thus walking a tightrope cognitively—people could actually get into details of explaining why the two things are alike or are connected. They would, metaphorically speaking, be walking on a wide and solid bridge with ease and grace.

French studies scholar Virginia Krause discusses the ways individuals relate particular cases to the broader demonological corpus, which serve as bridges to various biblical, literary, and legal eruditions. Demonological writings set up numerous "parallel structures" (and methods to create such structures) that helped individual judges and actors to relate what happens in one case to other similar classes of cases, the missing gap or information from one party or one case could be "filled in" by another party or by general understanding derived from other cases at the other side of the bridge.[2]

Furthermore, numerous existing quotes, tales, and facts in the larger corpus could also be resources for problem-solving. Suppose one finds that some inconsistencies exist between an understanding of what witches

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[1] Philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce comments on the fast-and-loose character of inferencing built on the analogy: "the inference that a not very large collection of objects which agree in various respects may very likely agree in another respect." Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, Vol. I: The Principles of Philosophy* (Abbreviation: CP 1), eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), *CP 1.69.*

[2] To put it more formally: existing empirical understanding—understanding presumably backed by an amount of empirical data—could be transposed in order to interpret certain unresolved ambiguities; alternatively, the process could reinforce local ideas if they are also found everywhere else.

could do, or that some unresolved mysteries or contradictions have arisen. A wealth of past cases could then be consulted and referenced to determine how similar mysteries and contradictions were resolved elsewhere. This process evokes new, plausible explanatory hypotheses to resolve the existing case. Even if the individual actors in a location come up with this conclusion on their own, their findings are doubly reinforced by other cases.[3]

Consider one problem that had surfaced. If a convicted witch has children who were implicated in a trial, should the children simply be assumed to be free of diabolical qualities? By looking into past cases where witchcraft played out as a *hereditary crime*, Nicholas Remy's stated: "experience has shown that they [the children of witches] who have fallen into the power of the Demon can rarely be rescued except by death."[4] After reviewing a few cases to support his idea that the Demon seeks to corrupt the offspring of children, making them commit sin or execute witchcraft at an early age, Remy quoted this text:[5]

> The breed shows its descent;
> Degenerate blood reverts to its first type.
> (Seneca, *Hippolytus*)

Here, the universe of the Devil—as described in demonology—is made parallel to the universe of local cases pertaining to children raised by witches. Beyond simple quotations, this relational bridge was thickened by multiple precedents cited by Remy.[6]

Theorizing variations is especially interesting for the purpose of building relational bridges. The basis of the parallel relation could be one of correlation, of resemblance, of variance, or of derivative. Establishing the relation of a variance is to assert that the common cause that has a unifying

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[3] Virginia Krause, *Witchcraft, Demonology, and Confession in Early Modern France* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 34–35.

[4] Nicolas Remy, *Demonolatry: An Account of the Historical Practice of Witchcraft (Dover Occult)*, trans. E.A. Ashwin (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2008 [published originally in France in 1585 as *Daemonolatreiae*]), bk. II, ch. II, 94–95.

[5] Remy, bk. II, ch. II, 92.

[6] Remy, bk. II, ch. II, 94–95. Remy's narration includes a girl of seven years old named Jana, who had confessed that she had joined witches' nocturnal assemblies with her mother. Although she escaped formal prosecution due to her age, after her release she was again sought out by "the Demon" at night. Another example includes children who had reportedly killed their playfellows by hiding poison under their nails and then scratching others.

essence may show up in different forms. Taking sexual experience with the Devil as an example, as discussed by Remy:

> But all they who have spoken to us of their **copulations with Demons** agree in saying that nothing colder or more unpleasant could be imagined or described. At Dalheim, Pétrone of Armentières declared that, as soon as he embraced his Abrahel, **all his limbs at once grew stiff**. Hennezel at Vergaville, July 1586, said that it was as if he had entered an **ice-bound cavity**, and that he left his Schwartzburg with the matter unaccomplished. (These were the names of their Succubas.) And all female witches maintain that the so-called genital organs of their Demons are **so huge and so excessively rigid that they cannot be admitted without the greatest pain**. Alexée Drigie (at Haraucourt, 10th Nov., 1586) reported that **her Demon's penis, even when only half in erection, was as long as some kitchen utensils which she pointed to as she spoke**; **and that there were neither testicles nor scrotum*** attached to it.

To offer more cohering evidence, Remy goes on to say:

> Claude Fellet (at Mazières, 2nd Nov., 1584) said that she had often **felt it like a spindle swollen to an immense size** so that it could not be contained by even the most capacious woman without great pain. This agrees with the complaint of Nicole Morèle (at Serre, 19th Jan., 1587) that, after such **miserable** copulation, **she always had to go straight to bed as if she had been tired out by some long and violent agitation**. Didatia of Miremont (at Preny, 31st July, 1588) also said that, although she had many years' experience of men, she was always **so stretched by the huge, swollen member† of her Demon that the sheets were drenched with blood**. And nearly all witches protest that it is wholly against their will that they are embraced by Demons, but that it is useless for them to resist.[7]
>   * Remy added a footnote cross-referencing De Lancre.
>   † Remy added a footnote cross-referencing Bouguet's and De Lancre's experiences.

There is clearly a cohesiveness in the vivid details across cases, even though the actual details differ. Each differing description adds some partial understanding and empirical data to the general topic. Coldness, coercion, and discomfort are the common motifs. Varying in exact details, the more general idea is that sexual intercourse with the Devil is overall unpleasant,

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[7] Remy, bk. 1, ch. VI, pp. 12–14.

abnormal, and negative. The larger body of the idea posits that the Devil is duplicitous and full of false promises. The negative sexual experience is a derivative of the Devil's dealings with the seduced.

In summary, individual authorities were the immediate actors who made case interpretations and legal decisions, and they had considerable room to do so creatively. But an organized body of thought—that of "demonology" treatises—offered pre-organized, ready-to-use methods for them. With these tools, they could efficiently and elegantly synchronize different information, ideas, and authoritative voices with one another, rendering a harmonious account.

Multiple Voices and Multivocality

Another process of building external coherence is the organizing of "voices." In choral music, different voices of males and females are organized into soprano, tenor, countertenor, and so on. In empirical inferencing, "voices" that embody emotions, social positions, interpersonal perspectives, among other things, are often borrowed.

Theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, in exploring the concepts of "voices," articulated that "multivocality" can embody "the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other"; the voices can be aesthetically and sensationally distinct. [8] Borrowing from music, theorist Mikhail Bakhtin uses the term *polyphony* to describe how different voices could, without merging into one or strictly following one common scheme or rule (e.g., the rule of octave), complement one another in a state of plurality. Several distinct musical segments—made up of the diverse forms of monophony, homophony, and heterophony—could be creatively integrated to form a polyphony, without these forms ever needing to resemble one another.

Relating to the building of relational bridges in witch trials, each party on different sides of the bridge need not sing at the same frequency or harmonize themselves according to a common rule. Multivocal polyphonic formats (as an overarching coding format) could tolerate many epistemic styles, even minor contradictions that arise, even accommodating minor contradictions. Everyone from different social positions or institutional roles could play a part in the polyphony, exercising agency

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[8] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 18.

Table 4.1 Polyphonic coherence between parallel voices, adapted from Willumsen's *Witches of the North* [a]

More local discourse	Broader external discourse
Voice of witnesses	Voice of demonology
Voice of the accused	Voice of the religious authorities
"Raw" events, occurrences, observations	Voice of lettered persons (jurists, writers)
Voice of the judge	Voice of physicians
Voice of the executioner	Voice of outside "expert" interrogators (e.g., community of executioners)
Voice of the scribe	Voice of news media
Voice of the inquisitor/ interrogator	Voice of scientists
	Voice of political authorities

[a]Willumsen, *Witches of the North*

with autonomy. While disorganization is a risk—as perhaps arranged and coordinated by an invisible composer or author—a more complex and accommodating form of coherence is created.

A complete trial story, especially that of a mass trial, often involves an intricate web of voices. To help us visualize the diversity, we can borrow from Willumsen's characterization of actors representing difference voices (see Table 4.1).[9]

Each of these voices offers something unique—such as a different perspective, a different articulation, a different kind of detail—that another would not. The voice of the scientist, for example, would add a different contribution to the polyphony than the voice of a scribe. In some scenarios, these simultaneous voices may work like the voices of each individual blind person touching an elephant, thus offering an incomplete observation of a broader subject, but with far fewer contradictions. In a successfully unified account, these blind persons act more like a *de facto* division of labor, each offering a piece of information that complements another. Even if their articulations are different, the differences arguably enhance coherence if they are well synchronized. In the presence of noticeable epistemic gaps, playing a coherent polyphony from diverse voices helps to strengthen confidence.

[9]Liv Helene Willumsen, *Witches of the North: Scotland and Finnmar* (Leidenm, NL, and Boston, MA: Brill, 2013).

More importantly, an effective polyphony is often performed by people who are representatives of different epistemic communities, with different degrees of epistemic authorities. In addition to "convergence"—or synchronization—of empirical details, then, we also have a synchronization of authorities. In fact, since their authorities build onto each other, their synchronization gives the cohere idea *accumulated authority*. The unity in authority also creates such a mental force that it would be difficult for unorganized individuals daring enough to question or depart from their shared assumptions.

Preemptive Design and Secondary Elaboration

Aside from parallel structuring and multivocality, two other mechanisms essential to building external coherence are *preemptive design* and *secondary elaboration*. Both of them help to minimize and contain contradictions.

By *preemptive design*, I mean a design that can preempt contradictions to surface within an idea system. This can be accomplished by the very design of individual propositions or a group of interwoven propositions.

Consider the Devil's characteristics as an example. At the outbreak of witch panic in Germany, the Devil had been popularly associated with tricking women into sexual intercourse. But men too started admitting having diabolic intercourse in a German town—the Devil's sexual properties (that is to say, the propositions) expanded further to the domains of homosexuality and bestiality gradually.[10] The original design of Satan's properties as supernatural, odd, negative, and mysterious afforded such seeming departure from the original image. By being somewhat generic and vague, rather than resolutely specific, the advantage is resilience: such designs would be "built to last," so to speak.

Other alleged characteristics of the Devil's power include becoming invisible, changing shape, going through walls, transforming into animals, simultaneously existing in two locations (bi-location), and casting spells that would cause long-term harm (with imprecise duration). These ideas preempt most of the normal ways by which humans empirically refute and disprove propositions using principles of natural laws. Two witnesses who testify that the accused appeared in far distant locations did not necessarily indicate probable lying, as in the case of their testifying to an ordinary case of theft or murder. Witchcraft consists of *non-natural* constructs—that is,

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[10] Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 90–91.

it consists of *supernatural constructs*—for which the laws of physical sciences do not straightforwardly apply.

Overall, the many years of refinement of the concept of witchcraft helped to create a fine balance between elegance, vagueness, flexibility, and specificity in the ideas' designs, helping them weather stormy and turbulent conditions.

Secondary elaborations (or secondary explanations) are a set of propositions or pathways of thinking developed to handle the rise of forthcoming contradictions that—almost by anticipation—would come to the surface following the initial set of propositions. [11]

A simple illustration is this. If a person believed to be punctual in habit (initial, core proposition) has been observed to be late to work regularly (potential counterevidence), one may seek to explain the phenomenon by heavy traffic, sickness, exceptional emergencies, after-hour work tasks, and so forth. Even if the secondary explanations are not completely satisfactory answers, they often orbit around the initial propositions like a defense mechanism, serving to deflect, diffuse, or even resolve counterevidence or contradictions that emerge—making the initial propositions become almost *incorrigible*.

Parameters of Acceptable Contradictions

When applied to witchcraft cases, often a puzzling situation (e.g., caused by counterevidence) emerged, and a set of explanatory ideas formed in response. These ideas were somewhat contradictory to one another, and none was sufficiently satisfying in its own right.

To resolve the amount of contradictions, these contradictory ideas sometimes formed an *orbit of potential explanations* revolving around certain central, core theses. The secondary ideas might have ties to the core ideas, but they were never an indispensable part of them. They could not fully "resolve" or "answer" a problem, but they have enough evidential and intellectual merit to warrant consideration. Perhaps they have enough merit to work as a hypothesis; a more developed one may even warrant the status of a "theory" or a "school of thought." If one of these pathways of

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[11] The concepts here are borrowed from Melvin Pollner's and other ethnomethodological theorists' engagements with early anthropological studies. Cf. Hugh Mehan and Houston Wood, *The Reality of Ethnomethodology* (New York, London, Sydney, Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1975), 4–14; Melvin Pollner, "Mundane Reasoning," *Philosophy of Social Sciences* 4, no. 1 (March 1987): 35–54.

ideas is temporarily questioned or rejected, an alternative pathway of explanations could be put into work.

Within this orbit, secondary explanations operate within certain *parameters of acceptable contradictions.*[12] Certain internal disagreements were allowed, even quite significant ones. But these explanations must affirm the original ideas—the *core propositions.* Explanations that challenge the core proposition would present an unacceptable amount of contradiction. The core propositions are "defended," in a way, by those pathways of explanations within the parameter. Considerable work and evidence may be required to undo each of them resolutely, eliminating each of them as possibilities.

Figure 4.1 depicts a scenario involving several propositions pertaining to the witches' Sabbath.[13] The "incorrigible" and essential propositions are like the central nucleus around which the three pathways evolve, each with its set of derivative interpretations and accumulated forms of evidence. Believers of the idea system could choose one or another to explain an issue, or simply to leave open multiple interpretations.

Explanations within the orbit share a certain *symbiotic* relationship with one another as well as with the nucleus. Each pathway of thought was created due to the imperfection of others (and the imperfection of the nucleus propositions). Their co-presence increases the complexity of the idea system enormously as well as the difficulties in unraveling it. To thoroughly disable all defenses, the attackers may have to review and undo different lines of arguments, concepts, and pre-coded information.

The three pathways in Fig. 4.1 represent, hypothetically, three interpretations of the witches' Sabbaths. Suppose a court had problems actually finding the physical locations of the Sabbaths—where hundreds or even thousands of witches allegedly gathered. This problem could be explained by the theory that the Sabbaths were held in secret places, and they were so clandestine that they could not be easily found.[14] And if the Sabbaths were

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[12] In order to provide a terminology of more general use, *discourse* and *epistemic parameters* are the range of generally feasible and tolerated options for the people to produce and discuss ideas.

[13] Lancre's, for example, listed all three of these as possibilities, as well as witches simply going to the Sabbath on foot. And all of these possibilities that seem contradictory also could co-exist, according to his analysis. Gerhild Scholz Williams, ed., *On the Inconstancy of Witches: Pierre de Lancre's* Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et demons, trans. Harriet Stone and Gerhild Scholz Williams (Tempe, AZ, and Turnhout, Belgium: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (ACMRS) and Brepols Publishers, n.v., [1612]2006), 113, 109–132.

[14] Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe. Third Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 42.
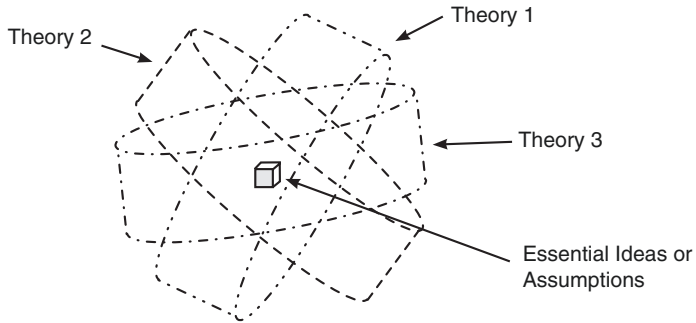
Theory 1: Night flight to the sabbath is an actual physical event.
Theory 2: Night flight to the sabbath involves the transportation of the spirit
          but not the body.
Theory 3: Night flight to the sabbath is a mental fantasy caused by the Devil.

Fig. 4.1 An orbit with three potential explanations operating within parameters of acceptable contradictions

so far away, there must be a means for so many witches to attend. But the belief that witches—partly associated with the image of "night witches" in classical literature—could transport themselves in the air through a fork or a broom, or that they could turn themselves into animals to evade villagers' notice, explained how attending the Sabbath could happen.[15] A husband of an accused could testify that he *knew* his wife lay beside him every night instead of attending the Sabbath. But this contradictory evidence could be countered by other elaborated claims—for example, that the accused had used magic to deceive the husband, tricking him by placing an object on the bed.[16] Other theories were also used as candidates for explanation, such as the Devil's ability to move body or spirit (or both), or that nocturnal adventures of many women were mental events caused by trickeries of the Devil.

On the surface, night flight by physical means may be "more absurd" than night flight in the mind or in spirit. But these two equally outlandish ideas provide a range of plausible possibility. Given that multiple ideas remained plausible, their collective presence allowed people to process contradictions within acceptable paradigms via different pathways; it tolerated unresolved contradictions—even transforming them into expanded

[15] Levack, 46.
[16] Roper, *Witch Craze,* 104.

possibilities. The believers might not need to resolve any specific point in particular within that zone/space. And in any given approach or theory they decide to momentarily opt for, there they could find a rich set of compact, elaborate symbols and accumulated evidence. If one disliked the relative conservative doctrines of Delrio or the *Canon Episcopi*, they could adopt the more aggressive stance of Remy—or the local stock of knowledge that coheres with these theorists in many aspects. The expansion of variant and possibility thus occurs within that parameter, a parameter that characterizes the epistemic community. They might even, in selectively rejecting the savage or backward approach of Kramer and Sprenger or village beliefs (e.g., the belief in the witches' bi-location ability), signify their relative moral or epistemic superiority.

The title of Pierre de Lancre's 1612 treatise, called *On the Inconstancy of Witches* (*Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et demons*), illustrates such an outcome of concept expansion. Written at a time when many major demonological writings were already published, Lancre often juxtaposed the differing opinions by demonologists in non-antagonistic ways, suggesting more than one possibility for the properties of the Devil. By stressing "inconstancy" as a theme—a synthetic idea—it deferred identifying the absolute, definitive manifestation of the Devil, using many possible pieces of evidence to elaborate on the ambiguity and possibility of what the Devil did or could do. The Devil had a penchant for branding witches with a Devil's mark "just as God marks the saints" but did not have to do so; sometimes, he erased or omitted making such marks, "depending on whether or not he thinks this would be more advantageous."[17] The demons might have the power to keep witches—or anyone—afloat when they are thrown into water, but they did not always have to do it: they did it "in order to deceive the world, and in particular to abuse the judges whom the Devil amuses with this madness [of a cold water test]."[18] The Devil might have considerable power to the extent permitted by God—even the power and strength to move mountains[19] or to "move and transport a specific measured weight with as much speed

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[17] Williams, 198–200, 203–4.
[18] Williams, 31.
[19] Williams, 126.

and with the agility of the angel",[20] but such power is enabled by God, is inferior to God's, and could be constrained by God.[21]

Should the core propositions as to why God may permit the Devil to inflict harm upon the innocents be questioned, Lancre considered several pathways of explanation.[22] For example, God may allow the power that witches use to kill children "in order to increase their sin and deepen their eternal punishment" (Explanation 1). God may foresee that unbaptized children will commit "enormous sins… were they to live, and because He does not want them to fall into even graver damnation" (Explanation 2). For baptized children, "Sometimes God permits such things to punish or test the parents" (Explanation 3), or "by their premature deaths they are protected from several more serious crimes already foreseen by God that the occasion and their age would have made them commit" (Explanation 4). Each of the above ideas is backed by particular stories or textual excerpts. Challenges of the core propositions could be deflected by debates regarding these explanations.

External Coherence with Competing Knowledge Systems and Authorities

At the height of the witch panics, a variety of epistemic authorities—the viewpoints of scholars, jurists, political figures, physicians, and religious authorities—developed cohering ideas on the subject of witchcraft.

As time developed, judicial caution generally increased. The paradigms of natural science helped to propel the trend by contributing to legal re-classification. Poisoning had often been linked to supernatural causes, but later poisons were increasingly recognized as physical agents, and the acts thereby became simple acts of murder. Psychological interpretations—such as melancholy and feeblemindedness—were also used to interpret cases in legal settings.[23]

The mindset of the law faculty had undergone a transformation in the late seventeenth century; eventually, a majority of them openly advocated

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[20] Williams, 109.

[21] Williams, 143.

[22] Williams, 143–44.

[23] H. C. Erik Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany 1562–1684: The Social and Intellectual Foundations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), 83–84.

against capital sentences or torture for witch cases.[24] The skeptics had gradually developed their own compact symbolic structures, accumulated evidence, and gathered various other epistemic furnaces that made it harder for witch hunts to achieve dominance. As Goodare notes, new demonological treatises after 1620—shortly after Lancre's *The Inconstancy of Witches*—were few and far between, even if old treatises were reprinted. Newer demonologists engaged in the topic of witch prosecution at a more philosophical rather than a practical level; their views on witchcraft merged more with medical problems, and they demanded far less punitive action against witches compared to earlier demonologists.[25]

Among the new wave of works published by skeptics, particularly noteworthy was the rise of "anticlericalism" in the seventeenth century.[26] These radical writers were important because they operated outside of the normal parameters of criticism. They were willing to challenge religious authority at large. As much as Spee's *Cautio Criminalis* (1631) was eloquent and critical, many critics of witchcraft, including Spee, never challenged the fundamental assumption of the existence of God and the Devil, nor did they openly challenge religious authorities. These new cadre of radical writers expanded the parameters of discourse—they did not rely on the same core propositions as their moderate counterparts. If they did not achieve a fully-fledged "paradigm shift," they at least succeeded in making Spee and others look more tempered and moderate.

Historians had cited the rise of other ideational movements and intellectual figures that might indirectly foster the decline of witch prosecutions. This new intellectual zeitgeist included individuals such as Isaac Newton, Thomas Hobbes, René Descartes, and other significant luminaries of the Enlightenment.

Although the new intellectual "revolution" did not specifically concern witchcraft, it nonetheless affected the idea system's efficacy indirectly. The same information encoded as "evidence" for the witchcraft idea system could alternatively be encoded by other idea systems. While the Devil and

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[24] The leading figures included Augustin Nicolas (1681), Christian Thomasius (1705), Adam Tanner (1626/7), Paul Laymann (1629), Johann Meyfart (1635), and Johannes Grevius (1624). For more details, see Levack, *Witch-Hunt,* 4th ed., 235–38.

[25] Julian Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 340.

[26] Exemplary works cited by Goodare included the writing by Charles Sorel (1630s), Johan van Heemskerk (1637), Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac (1654), and Balthasar Bekker (1691–1692). Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt,* 343.

his witches might be interpreted by demonologists as being able to commit maleficent acts *through* natural causes, a supernatural framework was no longer the primary or domineering lens to understand or solve a problem. Witch trials would be constrained by a variety of other ideas—the ideas of scientific rigor, "mechanical philosophy," judicial caution, medical understanding, and anticlericalism, built by the voices of polyphonic authorities—that were in direct or indirect conflict with them. This kind of challenge in external coherence inevitably affects internal coherence as well. As more and more people had the opportunity to use other methods to make sense of the same data and observed patterns, more competing thoughts were likely to have surfaced in the public domain, if not also within the minds of individuals.

Stepwise Inferences and Chain-Complexes of Ideas

Building an idea system requires many step-by-step processes: which data should be coded into information, which code to use, which relational bridge to activate, how to extrapolate secondary ideas from an initial one, and so on. These cognitive processes have a chain-like structure: the establishment of one chain enables one idea to be extended to another. An enormous, intricately structured chain-complex of ideas do not happen easily or perfectly; they are built and maintained by both routine and creative works.

This chapter is intended to capture several core dynamics. From an original idea, step-by-step idea-building processes could extend *very far*, connecting to many interlinked ideas. At the same time, the speed of operation could be *very fast* once these chains are established, enabling people to rapidly learn how to negotiate the entire structure. Missteps in one individual segment chain—even if they are "minor"—could create catastrophic chain reaction; in other words, things could go *very wrong* very fast, with very far-reaching consequences.

Two Types of Stepwise Inferencing

That ideas transfer through chain-by-chain "rational" processes has been theorized by Philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, who posited *deduction*, *induction*, and *abduction* as three inferencing types.[1] For our purposes, I am simplifying and combining these three forms of inferencing into two: *stepwise deduction* and *stepwise idea creation*.

Stepwise deduction means that once a person takes an epistemic step, it can lead to a "logical" or a "plausible" next step. Deduction includes step-by-step calculation, weighing, evaluation, and comparisons.

Here is an illustrative example: if killing one person deliberately warrants the death penalty, despite justifiable circumstances, what about the act of killing multiple babies, even if one takes account of possible extenuating circumstances?[2] Killing a witch convicted of serial killing, all else being equal, is a rather rational, next-step conclusion following a previously established premise.

Likewise, if an old man who has confessed to having practiced witchcraft for decades but only remembers five accomplices—"all dead and all more than six years ago" according to the verdict[3]—it would then be "logical" and "rational" to suspect that the person might be withholding information.

Stepwise idea creation means that once a person takes an epistemic point to be true, it can lead to the birth of a new idea based on the original one. People can do so by taking the cognitive steps of interpretation, guesswork (conjecture), speculation, extrapolation, or imagination.

We can consider how the establishment of this one fact generated a series of other ones connected to it: that having blood on one's hands potentially could lead to God's punishment. This idea had engendered the fear in judicial actors for being held responsible for the deadly prosecution of criminals. Attempting to deflect this responsibility, various judicial

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[1] Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. (Abbreviation: *CP*), Vols. I-VI eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) and Vols. VII-VIII ed. Arthur W. Burks (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), CP 2.96, CP 2.98, CP 2.100, CP 2.266–2.270, CP 2.774–2.778.

[2] Suppose killing a person is A, death penalty is D, and noble circumstance is C. The expression in syllogism is: A + C → D. Therefore, A′ + C′ → D. The prime symbol stands for a variant or derivative of an original form.

[3] Henry Charles Lea, *Materials Toward a History of Witchcraft* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939), vol I, 234. This passage refers to the Pierre Vallin of La Tour-du-Pin case in southeastern France in 1438.

bodies in medieval Europe had devised "judicial ordeals" tied to various divinity tests. Couched in meticulous procedures and explicit pronouncements, these divinity tests invited God to adjudicate worldly affairs, and which implicitly defer the responsibility of killing to God. When England adopted judicial "firing squads" in the late nineteenth century, the governing body arranged the mixing of blank shells with real bullets, so the exact individual responsibility for killing was never determined.[4] These inventive ideas are next-step derivatives that have roots in an original one.

Step-by-Step, Chain-by-Chain Constructions

The extreme treatment of the accused during witch trials owed their justification to numerous works of stepwise constructions of a massive chain-complex of ideas. Some witch trials permitted the application of painful procedures far harsher than for normal crimes, even when the subjects were elderly. Furthermore, some practices seem to have been utterly unnecessary for prosecutions—such as stripping, shaving, and pricking.

The Bizarre, Brutal Acts Toward Magdalena Bollmann

Historian Lyndal Roper captures both the brutality and bizarre qualities in the case of Magdalena Bollmann of Marchtal in Germany in 1747; the suspect:

> was tortured with thumbscrews, on the rack, and on the 'bock,' the bench on which she was stretched and whipped. She was stripped and shaved, and needles were inserted into areas around her genitals to see if she experienced sensation; they also hung her up and burnt her with a blessed Easter candle (a holy object to shield any magic) near her nose and under her toes.[5]

If we are to deconstruct the step-by-step, chain-by-chain constructions that led the idea system to warrant such cruel and unusual treatments, we would first find the chain to be very long.

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[4] James Q. Whitman, *The Origins of Reasonable Doubt: Theological Roots of the Criminal Trial* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 13–14, 17.

[5] Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 49.

Long Chain Extensions: Unto the Very Far

In the chain of empirical codification, when deconstructed, each idea—which we can visualize as an individual link—only has a limited amount of potential meanings that it can develop; its actual force is also bound by the strength of evidence it has. Linking and bonding ideas structurally gives each idea new potentials, while bolstering the integrity of the overall idea system that supports certain meta-units and abstract constructs. Each chain unit can do much more in a system of division of labor.

One can also envision that a chain-complex has certain loose sections. Suppose two links are disconnected, then such disconnection may exist as a "gap" in our thinking. In such a situation, an *intermediate (or intermediary) idea*—like a few new, cheap plastic links, or even a whole new section made of metal—can help to bridge the parts to preserve the shape of the whole complex. At an even more microscopic level, suppose the metal in one particular link is separating, filler metal—akin to small pieces of information—could also serve bonding functions.

The causal power of intermediary ideas. Suppose a few witch-suspects are observed to display unusual masturbatory behaviors in a jail or in a nunnery, the acts by themselves could only indicate so much about witchcraft. No intermediary ideas are present between masturbation and witchcraft. The act itself may indicate something unusual, but the referential distance to witchcraft would be too far-fetched to be reasonable. A suitable, hypothetical example (though not so hypothetical as I will show) for an intermediate idea would be "demonic possession." Individuals can then make this connection: that subjects masturbate unusually *because* of demonic possession. Each intermediate point may need more substantiation—having its own mass and weight, so to speak—in order for it to be a fastened point in itself. Therefore, "evidence" about symptoms of demonic possession might be solicited, making it easy for a subject to imagine a direct connection between demonic possession and masturbation (or sex, or social violation, more generally) on the one hand, and demonic possession and witchcraft on the other.

The more intermediate ideas a system contains, the more likely these ideas—even when held in reserve—could be candidates to connect ideas that otherwise would hit a dead end to their development. Sometimes individuals artfully connected disjointed ideas ingeniously; the corpus of the witch-hunt idea system contained many intermediate ideas that could

fostered such artful actions. However, certain institutions practically forged *intermediate actions* to make and fasten a variety of linkages particular to specific cases.

Torture was a great example. Many prisoners could not withstand torture and had admitted to something petty at first that was unrelated to witchcraft—for example, they harbored ill wishes toward a neighbor, or they consulted a magical practitioner once upon a time. But that first admission was an admission to character flaws, which delegitimized their credibility. The inadvertent creation of that intermediate idea (character flaw) legitimized new actions—the falling trust in the subject's previous and subsequent words as well as the need for them to divulge more detailed information that had not yet been elicited. Upon further questioning or torture, many suspects crossed an important line to admit to having aided the Devil or signed a pact. They might say that they were unwilling in their action—such as being beaten or tricked by the Devil, and they might not even know that their actions would have led to deaths, illnesses, and other misfortunes. Such admissions would reveal further character flaws. If they admitted to appalling deeds, even unwilling participation in them would be extremely damning. At that point, they had little credibility at their disposal other than to provide a satisfying account—the "true" and "frank" confession. After all, if a person is so evil as to eat babies, for example, then why should we trust any testimony they could provide in favor of their acquittal? This is one way in which a *chain reaction* could occur within a case, where an intermediate idea of character flaws finds new reinforcement with each step, and the fall from grace—one link more each time—engendered a further link of intermediate interrogation that yielded information justifying the harsh elicitation methods. The first admission of a character flaw, in other words, enabled a long chain of stepwise extension and relevant stepwise actions.

The implication of this chain construction goes beyond individual cases. On a broader scale, an ever-escalating abuse of torture could be justified. In other words, if *escalated* torture is shown to have worked to make a witch confess, then the need for escalation becomes an intermediary idea in itself. There are some subtleties involved, however.

For ordinary crimes such as murder or theft, even if they were considered despicable, punishment was rather mild and torture ended relatively quickly compared to the many cases of witch hunts. Brutally extracted confessions run the risk of being considered barbarous by the public. In ordinary people's understanding, more force certainly would extract more

confessed details about a case. It is natural that people would be automatically skeptical if they see a direct connection between the application of force and the confession. Not only would they question the subject's account, they would also question the legitimacy of the judicial body.

Comparing diabolical to heretical crimes, a heretic still maintained a mortal identity, and his or her power was understood to be quite limited. But a diabolic crime implied not only the possibility of great social damage—which in itself might legitimize more torture due to a greater urgency—but more importantly the power of supernatural entities was involved. The straightforward relationship between force and confession was obfuscated by sensational, intermediary ideas generated about the supernatural at every step. More torture yielded more confessions; more information about the unknown was produced, which, in turn, called for more intermediate actions. In this way, the appearance of barbarity was often masked by the veil of supernatural dramas.

Escalating torture often incites the *intermediate action* to grow the pool of information providers. Both ordinary and extraordinary crimes may involve suspects betraying their conscience and yielding a false confession, but in the case of ordinary crime, to do so would not prompt one to invent or support some powerful intermediary ideas. The conviction of a home burglary, for example, does not subsequently implicate more than several other individual collaborators at most. This dynamic played out very differently in mass witch trials, where suspects seemed to multiply at great speed with the application of torture (or the threat thereof), and with each confession, new intermediary ideas were created. This was fueled by the widely held belief that witches often behaved in groups, while the more insidious kind would repeatedly commit acts of diabolical treachery. Table 5.1 captures and models this self-perpetuating dynamic.

A particularly powerful example of an intermediate idea worthy of special mention is *the breaking point of witches*—the idea that witches needed to be brought to a "breaking point" for them to confess.[6] A witch's breaking point was different from that of an ordinary person's because of possible diabolic arts or the intervention of the Devil himself. The details that give rise to this idea come partly from textual interpretations, but partly from witch confessors who were tortured. Consequently, *the details yielded under torture could actively substantiate theories that justified further torture.*

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[6] See Roper, *Witch Craze,* 46–47.

Table 5.1 Stepwise dynamics in prosecutions of extraordinary crimes

Initial Torture		Increased Torture		Extreme Torture
↓		↓		↓
Initial Confession		More Confessions		Frequent, Full Confessions
↓		↓		↓
Intermediary Idea Generation: New Theories of Witches (including witches' properties and their breaking point)		*Intermediary Idea Generation: New Theories of Witches (including witches' properties and their breaking point)*		*Intermediary Idea Generation: New Theories of Witches (including witches' properties and their breaking point)*

Witch confessors not only had furnished the means upon which witches could commit crimes but also withstand torture! If a person refused to confess to an ordinary crime, the resistance might indicate actual innocence or the person's personal stubbornness and ability to withstand pain. But a competing intermediary idea was that criminal tricks could be used to mitigate the effects of torture.

There were slight variants of these conceptions. One version was that the Devil could help a subject to withstand torture—one alleged means included making subjects insensitive to pain; another was to make them "fall asleep" during torture. Yet another was that the Devil could cause witches to make certain statements during interrogation, and even recant their earlier confessions.

In the *Compendium Maleficarum* (1608), Francesco Maria Guazzo selected several cases borrowed from Martin Del Rio, Nider, Remy, and a book author and legal consultant called Loys Charondas le Caron (author of *Antichrist Unmasked*) to conclude that witches under the influence of the Devil may not feel pain during torture.[7] In one case he cited:

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[7] Guazzo's theory was the following: "It is a common matter for witches to escape the torture of the rack; for they overcome all the pain by laughter or sleep or silence." Francesco Maria Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum: The Montague Summers Edition* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, [1608]2012), 56.

> Near Amiens in 1599 a girl witch was imprisoned, who felt nothing when her feet were cruelly burned or when she was heavily scourged, until at the suggestion of a priest they hung about her neck **a waxen image of the Blessed Lamb**. Then, **by virtue of the sacred amulet, the wiles and guile of the devil were defeated**, and she began to feel the force of pain. Therefore it is clear that this **indifference to torture**, which even Tostado (*In Genesim.* XIII) recognizes, springs from no physical cause, but is due to the devil's work.[8]

The implication is very important. Whereas, for an ordinary criminal, successfully withstanding torture could be a sign of innocence, in this conception it could indicate supernatural intervention by the Devil on behalf of his minion!

Another intermediary idea along similar lines is that witches could make themselves insensitive to pain—or to faint, fall asleep, act delirious, and so forth—by using diabolic arts or even using natural means. The consumption of drugs prior to torture was frequently mentioned by demonologists. Henry Boguet argues that such substances were used by "more cunning witches"[9]—presumably in comparison to those less cunning witches who did not use such tricks and confessed frankly. On the one hand, the drugs could be made of something diabolical, such as an ointment that constituted a "Spell of Silence";[10] on the other hand, it could be something entirely natural—a drug made of a mix of common herbs, or "even salt dissolved in clear water"—that could help witches withstand torture. The witches could be acquiring any preemptive substances from prison guards who might be selling them to supplement their meager wages.[11] Witches did not always have to use mystical means to do harm; they could also use poisonous herbs—a natural means—to kill animals and people. It might be considered a "poisonous magic."[12] But witches were associated with being *skilled* at making poison and compelled to use their arts for evil purposes. For such witches, the breaking point theory might

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[8] Guazzo, 56.

[9] Henry Boguet, *An Examen of Witches* (New York: Dover Publications, [1619] 2009), 127.

[10] Boguet, 125. Boguet himself actually did not say that he necessarily believed in the spell of silence idea—a potentially superstitious belief—but he argued that "it is a fact that they themselves firmly believe in it" and that the Spell of Silence, so believed, caused the accused to "lose all feeling," 126.

[11] Boguet, 127.

[12] Peter G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Witch-Hunters: Professional Prickers, Unwitchers and Witch Finders of the Renaissance* (Stroud, UK: Tempus Publishing Ltd., 2003), 61.

not strictly apply. But raising the threshold of torture becomes more legitimate, as harsh torture had little effect on them anyway.

This leaves the question of how to overcome these diabolic arts of resistance?

The dominant theological opinion was that witch's resistance to torture could be overcome. Past cases gave evidence that *torture* could do the task, by first creating a crisis in the witch. At that point, the power of the Devil or the diabolic art would be overcome. A floodgate of confessional statements would follow soon after the "breaking point" was reached.

Indeed, if some accused parties withstood nearly the most serious of forms of torture available *and then* yielded an elaborate confession, they would almost be handing witch believers an exquisite gift. These high-quality subjects reinforced the ideas regarding witches' breaking points, and the harsher torture needed to overcome it. If the accused had also had previously enjoyed a respectable reputation, and had yielded an extremely persuasive defense initially, then the case could show that even such respectable people and persuasive defenses could not be trusted. This is particularly the case if their final confession accounts turned out to be well verified and extremely detailed, bearing remarkable convergence with other testimonies.

In fact, even the cases wherein an accused withstands torture and is set free could feed into the intermediary idea. Consider Maria Holl of Nördlingen, Germany, who was set free after a lengthy torture—after more than sixty applications.[13] One still could say that truly honorable characters could withstand exceptional torture, with her as a shining example.

The same goes for the accused who "voluntarily confessed without torture." While the phrase might just mean they do so in a court after being tortured, there were plenty of others who voluntarily confessed upon being threatened with torture. These subjects also strongly feed into the theory of witchcraft, by the information and ideas they provide. It is a different kind of horror altogether from supporting a theory of the breaking point.

Shall the suspects commit suicide during detention, instead of being brought to confession, an intermediary preemptive idea was often evoked by demonologists. Per these demonologists, the Devil often tries convincing witches to commit suicide, foretelling them the suffering ahead, and

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[13] Roper, *Witch Craze,* 277.

by doing so they make the witches forsake God and their own salvation.[14] If the suspects died during torture, sometimes the outcome was attributed to the Devil's deeds—perhaps "performed by the infamous Foe [i.e., Satan] to prevent them [the guilty witches] from receiving Grace from God through Sacramental Confession."[15]

In sum, all these intermediary ideas lurking quietly in the background could be evoked strategically depending on the need to extend or improve the chain-complex. Once put in motion, they do more than inspire cognitive actions. They inspire and justify a broad range of *intermediate actions*—encompassing various *physical* and *institutional* activities that are possibly as far-reaching as imagination itself.

Portal-Like Chain Extensions: Unto the Very Fast

A big idea complex might seem to take a long time to navigate. But this is not necessarily the case.

We think swiftly, and we think slowly. When we think quickly, it could be because the problems are so simple that they hardly warrant any cognitive labor; or that we are such lazy and hasty thinkers that we simply jump to conclusions. Yet, there is another scenario. After mastering a certain difficult craft—to the smallest detail—our knowledge becomes so clear and thorough, many difficult connections become so "self-evident," then the speed of processing difficult tasks becomes drastically less. Like a weightlifter trained to lift at 400 pounds asked to lift at 100 pounds, the easier tasks could be processed swiftly because they hardly take any work anymore. In the vast extension of an idea complex, speed may correspond to our *fluency* with the idea system, in addition to our own mental power. A combination of dexterity, techniques, and practices in codification contributes to our speediness in idea construction.

Speed is also tied to whether *cognitive portals* are cultivated.

Cognitive portals are a means akin to cultivated tunnels that enable the speedy transference from one point of origin to the point of destination,

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[14] Boguet, *An Examen of Witches,* 131–32.

[15] Christopher S. Mackay, *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the* Malleus Maleficarum (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 543–44.

with minimum impedance.[16] In scientific fiction, portals often enable subjects to suddenly transfer across space or time. Less magically, we can also imagine a secret pathway cultivated in a maze that enabled actors to suddenly transport from one place to another. Applying this metaphor to cognition, I mean pathways that seemingly enable people to exercise a "leap" in their thinking—skipping many steps—a process that is mystifying to outsiders. These pathways could also experience blockage by unpredictable changes or outside forces.

Cognitive portals can be located within individuals, without them being widely shared. These are *private cognitive portals. Public cognitive portals* are located in collective or public settings, understood and utilized by a number of listeners for collective, communicative, or social purposes. Then, *institutional cognitive portals* are built into institutions, serving institutional purposes. They do not have to be known in the wider public, nor are they only expressed in mental exercises. The flow of increasing forms of torture to extract more ideas that justified escalated forms of torture represented the existence of such an *institutionalized* cognitive portal.

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[16] The term "cognitive portals" here relates to the recent literatures on neural networks and brain connections in cognitive science. George Lakoff is a noted cognitive linguist who translates that work to the public audience. George Lakoff, *The Political Mind: A Cognitive Scientist's Guide to Your Brain and Its Politics* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 82–110. The actual origin of these terms, however, partly derived from Charles Sanders Peirce's description of the thinking process, which involve a chain-like structure, and partly derived from case analysis. For example, see Peirce, *Collected Papers*, CP 5.265, CP 6.305, CP 7.337. Cognitive-neuro scientists' research tends to focus on simpler thoughts and discrete thinking processes rather than on the large-scale chain-complex of ideas and integrative thinking process as engaged in this book (or as discussed by Peirce). Rather than relating this cognitive phenomenon to the brain, we may also relate to the discussion of literature in routine, in which cultural actors learn by repetitively practicing a certain route (or pathway, or pattern) of behavior, until they can do without the need to invest in cognitive work. This can be illustrated in the sample example of learning what one could do as a customer after one steps into a Tokyo sushi bar. Yutaka Yamauchi and Takeshi Hiramoto, "Reflexivity of Routines: An Ethnomethodological Investigation of Initial Service Encounters at Sushi Bars in Tokyo," *Organizational Studies* 37, no. 10 (October 2016), 1473–99. For a more comprehensive discussion of socialized and habitualized *practices*—including cognitive practices—see Frederick Erickson, *Talk and Social Theory* (Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014), 114–122.

In sum, Europe's witch hunts may seem to be driven by hasty actors who exercised imprecise, fast-and-loose association and faulty lines of reasoning filled with chasms and gaps. These possible actors notwithstanding, the phenomenon should be linked to those of more serious thinkers—notably demonologists—who practiced incredibly incremental, meticulous theorizing and information-gathering. Sometimes, much individual thinking had already been done by others. The hasty thinkers could afford to be so hasty because pathways had been cultivated for them, with exemplary role models serving as their guides. Discursive and institutional protocols could be disseminated to the public, making certain lines of thinking very easy to use and to follow. Their "jumping to a conclusion" and making "cognitive leaps" were not only systematically taught, but they were justified and protected by select manipulators of the idea system who cultivated various pathways and portals.

Extending and Multiplying Errors: Unto the Very Wrong

Gaps, errors, and misinformation inevitably exist in human reasoning. There are certain conventions of acceptability to flaws in reasoning processes—and in *codification* activities. Our interest here is how idea systems managed to create ideas that became extremely "wrong"—as in distorted and erroneous. Building on mechanical metaphors, the structural explanation in this chapter is admittedly partial. It focuses on how flaws do not necessarily emerge as a single phenomenon; flaws could transfer and multiply in successive steps of codification; dynamic effects could occur by way of subtle changes, as ideas are passed along a chain of compounding inferences. Figure 5.1 sketches several dynamics of distortion emanating from reasoning flaws.

In these graphic representations, each node on the left side represents a point where an idea begins. As it moves rightward, it experiences a point of transition or transformation—which can take the form of a re-representation, restatement, translation, simplification, rearticulation, or various forms of stepwise deduction and idea creation. A distortion caused by reasoning flaws could be introduced at each step: such as a misapplication of a text, a slight overstatement based on empirical patterns, or a small conflation of concepts. I use changes in shape, shade, and direction to represent such distortions.

Scenario A (Metaphor of Sound Amplification): Each node represents an 8.3 percent (of 100) subtraction rate. The final outcome is identified with extra shading. The numbers represent a decrease in volume.

100	91.7	83.4	75.1	66.8
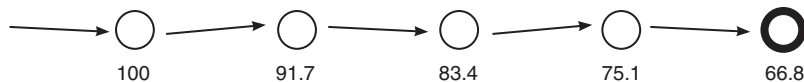
Scenario B (Metaphor of Prism): Each node approximately represents a 15-degree distortion rate in vector. The final outcome is identified with extra shading.

Original Vectoral Direction 0° East

New Vectoral Direction 60° South of East
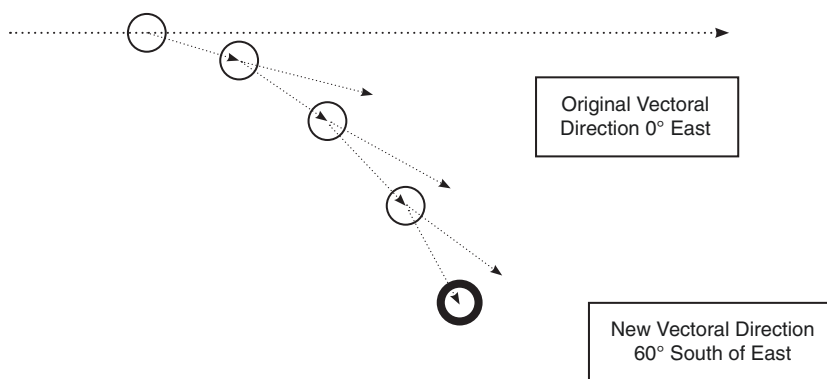
Scenario C (Metaphor of the Game of Telephone): The intermediary distortion of one node creates a complete distortion, represented in the change of shape from a circle to a triangle. The final outcome is identified with extra shading.
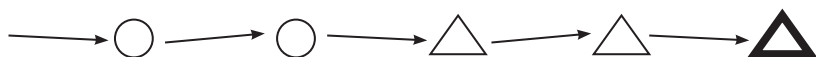
Fig. 5.1 Three linear distortion dynamics

Scenario A uses a sound amplification metaphor. If we have five nodes and four processes, and if an 8.3% (of 100) subtraction occurs every time a "step" is made in inferencing, then 66.8% remains at the end of the chain. If we are merely amplifying a sound, this 66.8% probably is not too damaging. And a device at the end of the chain that can reamplify the sound with additional gains can "correct" the distortion (caused by lowered sound volume).

Scenario B uses a prism metaphor that "distorts" the direction of the light by about 15 degrees—approximately 8.3% out of 180 degrees.[17] A totality of 60 degrees of distortion occurs after four successive steps. But two compounding factors emerge. First, we can imagine that at each new step, the new distortion seems to be slight—with about 91.7% of accuracy—but each slight distortion "adds" to a prior distortion. Second, the final directionality is at 120 degrees, rather than the original 180-degree point of the compass. While the directionality did not switch completely from east to south, it became closer to the south than to the east. And, every step that is "correct" afterward still adds to the error, a dynamic that is different from Scenario A.

Scenario C uses a metaphor of children's game of telephone. In contrast to Scenario A, we can imagine several people lining up and passing a message in the game of telephone, but one mischievous person at the third node deliberately changes the message altogether. The final accuracy would be at 0%. In fact, the outcome of 0% would be the same even when the chain is extended to twenty or more people passing messages, as long as only one person in the chain is mischievous. One hundred percent of distortion would be fully passed on, even if most people in the chain are 100% correct. We can relate the challenge of telephone to everyday organization. Often, the original intention and objective of higher-level decisions are simplified, lost, translated, and remodified as they pass through multiple meetings, committees, subcommittees, and interpersonal conversations to the point they can become a different animal by the time the "message" reaches the bottom level, and vice versa.

The Chain-Complex that Entrapped Magdalena Bollmann

Let us revisit the travesty of extreme treatments toward witches described by Roper, reflecting on how they are produced through many steps of inferencing along the structure of a chain-complex. Some step-by-step mechanisms that produced brutality have already been explored; we can

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[17] The exact numbers are admittedly arbitrary, since the numerical notations in vectorial directions are not quite comparable with that in a signal-reduction model. However, we may conceive of 180 degrees as "the opposite," hence representing a 100% starting difference.

now engage the step-by-step codification processes that cause the utmost bizarre treatments. The quality of certain key *intermediate ideas* greatly influenced the outcome. Because those key *intermediate ideas* were so bizarre and taken to be possibly true, so too were the "rational," stepwise responses invented toward verifying and handling them.

One intermediary idea was the Devil's marks—a coded thing in the idea system. This concept triggers many legitimate questions down the chain. If it is known that the Devil sometimes leaves physical marks on the body that could be used as empirical evidence, would it not make sense, as a next step, to search for them? And how do we search for them? What equipment would we use? What did the Bible indicate about the matter, and did past cases reveal anything?

Following these lines of thinking, shaving of witches' bodies emerged as a "reasonable" means of investigation: the Devil's marks could not be discovered unless the subjects were shaved all over. And once a suspect mark is identified, it could not be truly verified unless it was tested with needles. This is the reason for Roper's account of Magdalena Bollmann, who was subjected to needles to test for sensitivity, and the same reason Urban Grandier also had a needle "buried" into his body at least an inch. And in Bollmann's case, because weird marks were found around her genitals, the ultimate "conclusion" after multiple steps was to have needles inserted around her genitals, after being stripped and shaved.

The details from past confessions reinforced the justification for shaving—to remove the "spell of silence" previously mentioned.[18] As to why Bollmann was burned with a blessed Easter candle, the intermediary idea is that the candle, as a holy object, can counter magic; torturers who had burned it "near her nose and under her toes" had found abnormal responses.[19]

[18] Boguet, 126–27. See also Lea, *Materials,* vol. I, 332. Lea also notes: "a witch at Innsbruck said that if she could get a single thread of a garment of one under trial, she could prevent her confessing, even if tortured to death. Institoris [referring to Kramer and his colleagues] then tells the story from Caesarius of the heretics at Ratisbon who could not be burnt until a charm was removed which they had concealed in their armpits." The warning that even a "single thread of a garment" could prevent confession—an intermediary idea— demanded thorough unclothing and inspection. And because charms could be so small— could be hidden in the armpit—the "reasonable" approach, of course, was to shave future suspects' bodily hair, looking closely for charms.

[19] Here, we can perhaps imagine that burning such sensitive sites could cause a greater reaction than others, which made it look like the holy objects were warding off the power of magic.

Refraining from overspeculation, the general pattern is that one outlandish idea seems to, instead of existing in a static state, breed a complementary one, possibly followed by more. The chain of outlandish ideas that gradually emerges reminds us of the three aforementioned metaphors of distortion—where even minor distortions, occurring in particular manner within the chain, can drive an idea's development to unpredicted trajectories.

Initially, some of these treatments were posited merely as experiments, which would test out intermediate ideas. But repeated experiments yielded findings, which then gave a degree of substantiated proof to those ideas, solidifying them into fact-like constructs. The *Malleus Maleficarum* confidently recommended a method of using wax and holy objects: "put a drop of Blessed Wax in a chalice or cup of Holy Water and give it to them to drink three times on an empty stomach in the name of the Most Holy Trinity. By the Grace of God we have removed the sorcery of silence from many in this way."[20]

The minutiae of selecting the appropriate code and information could matter a great deal. The *specific* properties of things can evoke corresponding, *specific* treatments, and bizarre intermediary ideas can inevitably beget eccentric actions and ideas. Forcing a subject to drink slightly waxed water was not as damaging as burning them with a candle. Unfortunately for onlookers of history, Kramer and Sprenger were exceptionally creative in generating and then justifying eccentric ideas. For example, in the *Malleus Maleficarum*, they advised that the witches, upon arrest, be hoisted off the ground and put in a basket. Because from past experience and confessions they learned that: (A) "Quite often they have lost the sorcery of silence through such a method of arrest"—that is to say, the subjects started to confess when they did so. (B) Many witches about to be burned requested that their feet touch the ground. (C) When inquired further why they wished their feet to touch the ground, they answered that if they had done so, they would have freed themselves, killing many people with bolts of lightning![21]

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[20] Mackay, *The Hammer of Witches, 554*; see also Wolfgang Behringer, *Witchcraft Persecutions in Bavaria: Popular Magic, Religious Zealotry and Reason of State In Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 184–85.

[21] Mackay, *The Hammer of Witches, 525*; see also Lea, *Materials,* vol. I, 257.

The intermediary idea of demonic possession leads to the idea of exorcism as a handling method. And once we accept the idea of exorcism, a plethora of bizarre treatments can be defined as appropriate. Exorcism was a means to deal with nonhuman entities. The normal boundaries associated with dealing with humans were expanded as the definition was transformed to the realm of the supernatural. This could include drinking weirdly mixed alcohol, putting a mixture of "sulfur seasoned with galbanum, asafoetida, and rue" on live coals and holding it under a person's nose, or whipping a bewitched person's body part where the evil spirit is "caught and pinned down," while spraying "lustral water" at it.[22]

The recommended treatments do not have to induce any pain. For example, if the idea says that boiling "victims'" urine would cause a witch to exhibit signs of suffering, it would simply lead people to watch the witches' physical expressions closely while doing so.[23]

In summary, Magdalena Bollmann was entrapped in an idea system that had already developed into a vast chain-complex, containing many intermediate ideas. Such chain-complex was not built overnight or all at once, but through many years of accumulation across time and space, on elaborate treatises and the painful experiences of many subjects. The people and institution who led Bollmann into extreme, bizarre torture most likely did not only employ "reasonable" steps in thinking and codification. They also did so very quickly, as they were enabled by various cognitive portals that had been built into the idea system. The far-reaching, thundering "reasonable" steps people had walked include erroneous missteps. Such successive missteps were not entirely determined by walkers who *chose* their routes, but they were co-determined by those many actors who had cultivated those intricately connected pathways as possible choices.

[22] Peter G. Maxwell-Stuart, ed., *Elixir Jesuiticum* (1645), excerpted in *The Occult in Early Modern Europe: A Documentary History,* trans. Peter G. Maxwell-Stuart (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 50–51.

[23] Orna Alyagon Darr, *Marks of an Absolute Witch: Evidentiary Dilemmas in Early Modern England* (Farnham, England, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 186.

Ideas as Chemical and Biochemical Reactions

So far, we have relied on somewhat elementary mechanical metaphors in describing evidentiary driven idea systems.

Words such as "compact symbolic structures," "chain-like complexes," and preemptive structural "designs" evoke images from the domains of engineering and house construction. We have also borrowed the analogy of computer programming to explain "codification."

"Distortion" and "error" suggest a deviation from an optimally functioning machine. The principles of formal and informal logic and of the idea of accuracy are presumed—such as when discussing whether ideas are justified or not justified, evidenced or not evidenced, erroneous or not erroneous. Even "coherence" sketches out a line between arbitrary, fragmented versus intricate, integrated constructions.

Scientifically speaking, all these mechanical conceptions, while useful, do not fully convey the *dynamic* and *situation-dependent* qualities of evidentially driven idea systems. Humans see and make connections, and form objects and thoughts, dynamically and actively, as do the "evidential" relationships between data and patterns.[1] To complement our

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[1] The principles of phenomenological psychology (especially regarding "Gestalt principles") and ethnomethodological engagement with them are worth considering. Again, for an entry into the discussion, see Harold Garfinkel, "Ethnomethodological Misreading of Aron Gurwitsch on the Phenomenal Field: Sociology 271, UCLA 4/26/93," eds. Clemens Eisenmann and Michael Lynch, *Human Studies* 44, no. 1 (April 2021), 19–42.

current framework of understanding, this chapter primarily uses additional metaphors from chemistry (including biochemistry) to more comprehensively capture the operational principles of idea systems.

EMPIRICAL RIGOR: A PHYSICAL SAFEGUARD OR CHEMICAL POISON?

To begin our exploration, we can first examine the presumed virtue of the so-called empirical rigor in the operation of ideas and idea systems. Along the lines of a mechanical metaphor, more rigorous thinking is more respectable: it would produce more justified and accurate ideas, which would in turn produce better social outcomes.

The history of witch hunts has shown an alternative possibility. *More* empirical rigor, more evidence, and more systematic application of codes are also very capable of generating *worse* atrocities. Of course, it could be hoped that if only people had the "right" evidence and "more" rigorous procedures, then fewer atrocities would have resulted. This viewpoint, while partially valid, may miss a significant part of how idea systems fundamentally work—that a whole set of alternative principles may be part of an idea system's operation.

Let me illustrate this point by using a comparison which has been revealed by historians. In medieval Europe, around 1000–1200, the courts often processed crime allegations based on an *accusatorial* procedure. The general model was that crime accusations were initiated by private persons swearing on oath, providing evidence of proof. The judge's role was primarily one of an impartial arbitrator of disputes between private parties. High-status individuals with an impeccable reputation may clear themselves by taking a purgative oath—or by the means of compurgation— whereby other honorable persons of high status, or a number of oath-helpers, would testify to the defendant's character.[2] But if the accused was of lower status, or if there were insufficient witnesses willing to come forward, or if the private parties refused to resolve their dispute by oath, then alternative solutions might be sought. Such solutions did not concern further investigating a case or relying on a qualified judge's personal judgment based on the available evidence; instead, the judgment was most

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[2] James Q. Whitman, *The Origins of Reasonable Doubt: Theological Roots of the Criminal Trial* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 61–62.

often relegated, at least in name, to God. The two main forms of "divine" judgment were trial by combat (or battle) or by judicial ordeal.

Trial by combat—where, on some occasions, champions could be hired—was considered an acceptable way to settle certain disputes between high-status persons of equal rank; the premise was that God would be on the side of the winner. There were a variety of traditions regarding the exact forms and rules of the duel. Sometimes the accusers and accused could designate a warrior to fight on their behalf; sometimes both parties (or the combatants who fought on their behalf) were required to stake their lives in the process.[3]

Reserved for lower-status individuals, judicial ordeals were premised on the notion that God would reveal his judgment through certain signs. Common forms of ordeal included fire, hot water, morsel eating, and cold water—effectively various forms of the divinity test. The fire ordeals, for instance, involved subjects holding glowing iron bars with their bare hands or walking over red-hot ploughshare blades. Hot water ordeals involved the accused's arms being inserted into boiling water to retrieve an object. The morsel ordeal involved subjects swallowing dry bread and cheese without water. Signs of choking or vomiting as well as visible physical damage after a brief period were interpreted by the authorities as evidence of guilt.[4]

These procedures may be "rigorous" in some ways. The bread and cheese, boiling water, glowing iron, and heated ploughshares were all consecrated, with specific texts being recited. The amount of bread and cheese, the number of ploughshares, the number of days for the wounds to be examined, as well as the quality of armor in battles were all meticulously detailed—therefore making them seem nonarbitrary and consistent, regardless of the content of specific cases. As an indicator of seriousness, these rituals often required the representative of a group or a party to

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[3] Obviously, there were significant variations to the issues of disputes where these methods could be applied, the degree of involvement of judicial authority, the requirement of social standing of participants, and so on. Gwyn Jones, "The Religious Elements of the Icelandic 'Holmganga,'" *Modern Language Review* 27, no. 3 (1932): 307–13; F. J. Snell, *The Customs of Old England* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., [1911]2006), republished by Project Gutenberg (Salt Lake City, UT) on August 7, 2006 (EBook #19004): http://www.gutenberg.org/files/19004/19004-h/19004-h.htm; Whitman, *The Origins*, 78–79.

[4] See Whitman, 59. Many cases of witchcraft and sorcery were processed via ordeal, but more reputable social members sometimes could receive "trial by compurgation"; that is to say, they simply needed to ensure a required number of people to swear in support of the defendant's oath. Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe. Third Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 75–77; Whitman, 61–63.

perform the rituals *repeatedly*, invoking the name of God during oath avowal or consecration procedures.

There were other forms of "rigorous" procedures in the accusatorial model to guard against unjust prosecutions. For example, false accusations could lead to severe consequences. Moreover, on a personal level, it was a time when most people believed that lying under oath would surely entail foregoing salvation. Therefore, the textual recitation of an oath carried significantly more moral force and believed consequences than it would today. Furthermore, if an accusation was made that did not result in conviction, the accuser could be fined—or killed, in the case of judicial combat. "Random" chance potentially offered another form of protection. By the design of the divine tests, there was a good probability that some scalded or burned arms or feet would show sufficient signs of healing, and some of the accused would not choke after swallowing a morsel.

But these procedures—termed *accusatorial* in the historical literature—are not empirically "rigorous" in terms of finding out the nature of the case, providing an account with physical explanations of what happened with witchcraft. It was when the early modern period arrived in Europe (from late fifteenth to late eighteenth centuries) that a more modern form of jurisprudence gradually replaced the accusatorial model. This newer model was made up of *inquisitorial* procedures. Instead of being a somewhat passive arbitrator of conflict, the court was active in the inquiry and judgment of *facts*. An inquisitorial system relied on confessions, testimonies, and objective inspection as the primary sources of evidence.[5]

[5] The aforementioned accusatorial elements never completely disappeared. Trial by combat was still legal in England in the 1700s. In Sweden as well as Iceland in the early 1600s, the accused could still be acquitted if a total of twelve people agreed to testify under oath on behalf of the accused person. In the context of Iceland, this standard seemed to be more rigorous than a minor case, such as paternity suits, which only required six oath-witnesses. Bengt Ankerloo, "Sweden: The Mass Burnings (1668–1676)," in *New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology*, ed. Brian Levack (New York and London, Routledge, 2001), 306; Ruth C. Ellison, "The Kirkjuból Affair: A Seventeenth-Century Icelandic Witchcraft Case Analyzed," in *New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology*, ed. Brian Levack (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 113. It is also important to note that the terminologies "accusatorial" and "inquisitorial" used here do not have universally identical meanings in the literature. For example, Goodare, while also discussing the general paradigm transition mentioned above, used the term to describe the distinction between the "customary system" and the "Roman system" of law to be "accusatory" versus "inquisitorial." Julian Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 194–96. He wrote: "As a broad generalization, versions of the customary system were used in the British Isles, Scandinavia, Poland, Russia, and Hungary, while much of Germany, France, Italy and Spain used the Roman system—so called because it was based on the law of the ancient Roman Empire," p. 194.

Presumably, the active use of human reason to gather physical evidence and construct coherent explanations should have mitigated such atrocities. However, in practice, in some instances it helped, while, in others, not so much. Actually, on aggregate, the opposite was generally the case. These regulatory institutions that came with the accusatorial model are today, by most standards, epistemologically arbitrary and unreasonable, bordering on "superstition." Yet, as flawed as they were, they functioned as better safeguards against the arbitrary prosecutions of witches than what appeared in the slightly more "enlightened," "rational" early modern period. The rate of successful prosecutions was hardly comparable. According to Whitman, "most probands, our English evidence suggests, came through the ordeal [institutions] unscathed." Whitman attributes this phenomenon to the great reluctance of legal authorities and examiners to facilitate a wrongful conviction, which could lead to their own eternal damnation.[6] Another kind of problem may be created by the accusatorial model—the prosecution of *any* crime was difficult because it often relied on similar procedures, so that formal accusations of any crime were rendered very rare during medieval times.

A chemistry-like dynamic and operational principle appears to be present. The two kinds of ideas, which give birth to two institutions, interacted with the two contexts and produced two different kinds of chemical reaction. When activated in a particular form and context by particular people in a particular situation, varying "compounds" and "reactions" of sorts are formed. Some of the "same" chemical elements that are observed to cause explosive destruction or poisonous attack in one may have mitigating effects in another, with a slightly different context and arrangement. I use the metaphors *catalysts* and *inhibitors* to further explore these dynamics.

Catalysts and Inhibitors

Molecules are chain-complexes consisting of various substances—atoms, elements, or molecules—forming bonds together based on chemical force. Some chemical products, such as the toxin maitotoxin ($C_{164}H_{256}Na_2O_{68}S_2$), have an extremely extended structure, whereas others, such as the multi-purpose ammonia (NH_3), have a simple one.

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[6] Whitman, *The Origins,* 65.

Iron-based *catalysts* are generally needed to make ammonia industrially, as they accelerate the reaction between nitrogen and hydrogen (primarily by reducing the energy requirement for a reaction to occur). Without catalysts, NH_3 generally could not be formed by the simple copresence of N and H. The types and amounts of catalysts change the reaction processes, affecting their speed, forms, activities, and by-products, and thereby the possibilities of respective practical applications. By contrast, a reaction *inhibitor* could drastically decrease the rate of chemical reaction, principally by increasing the energy requirement for a reaction to occur. Depending on their applications, they can selectively allow some processes to occur, while inhibiting others.

Catalysts

From our previous discussions, we can see several ideas that had catalytic effects on the scale and activities of witch hunts. Their introduction greatly accelerated a change in the dynamic to the idea system, unleashing its potential at an impressive rate.

Torture. Ideas that legitimized and enabled severe torture, such as those that theorized the "breaking point of witches" and the "sorcery of silence," had far-reaching impact. They were not a formal part of the idea system concerning witchcraft; they could be added in or taken out by actors without, at least theoretically, affecting the integrity of whole idea systems.

But the torture these ideas enabled had unleashed thousands of pieces of information and ideas, both specific to local cases and to the idea system as a whole.[7] One line of chain reaction torture produces goes as follows. Torture created very gruesome symbols visible in the community. In so doing, it spread an atmosphere of pressure in the social space, which made conformity and confession easy. Those accused could simply abandon their resistance and confess in detail "voluntarily" if they were exposed to the potential for torture. A general pattern indicates torture's catalytic effects: places that disallowed torture had significantly fewer witch executions.

Repentance. Another exemplary catalyst was the idea that full repentance could help witches attain the possibility of salvation, even if they were to be executed. For this idea, the Church had stipulated that only

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[7] This is also to say that without the ideas legitimizing torture much of the information and data would not have entered into the idea system.

unrepentant witches were to be burned at the stake, one of the most excruciating ways to die; others might be offered a less painful means of death, or even a way to return to their community. This precipitates a chain of consequences. Such an idea makes burning seems more humane and justified; a thin veneer of kindness was overlaid to the otherwise naked cruelty. Second, proffering this idea provides incentives to the accused to confess fully and early. Such confessions, in turn, yielded a wealth of details and information as a result. In summary, even though the idea may be harmless in itself, its introduction to the idea system makes it a catalytic driver to sustain witch hunts.

Witch Sabbaths. The theory of witch sabbaths must be one with the utmost catalytic effect. The size of a sabbath could be in the range of fifty to several hundreds. In some cases, such as the French poet Martin le Franc, it was suggested that the attendance could be from 3000 to 10,000, and some 600 women had confessed to an intercourse with the Devil.[8] More exaggeratedly, a German news sheet claimed that 18,000 witches had assembled together "with the aim of devastating the countryside."[9] This idea steered the interrogation and torture efforts for a complete list of names of witches and participants in the sabbath—thus creating chain-reaction witch hunts and witch panic.[10] It suggested that if one witch was found, then, deductively, he or she would have knowledge of other witches. And if one witch witnessed many repulsive and despicable actions participated by some of them, it made it all the more urgent to reveal everyone involved in the network.

The aforementioned ideas each provided chain-like effects on their own, and their interactive combination is arguably more potent than their individual presence. The lack of one key catalyst, for example, could reduce the chain reaction considerably.

Agents as Catalysts. Besides catalytic ideas, there were also catalytic actions performed by catalytic agents. Exceptionally skillful, creative, and purposeful people—such as the demonological theorists and jurists—mixed various ingredients to create chemical reactions that would otherwise not have happened.

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[8] Henry Charles Lea, *Materials Toward a History of Witchcraft* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939), vol. I, 250.

[9] Peter G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Witchcraft in Europe and the New World, 1400–1800* (Basingstoke, UK, and New York: Palgrave, 2001), 61.

[10] Wolfgang Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts: A Global History* (Cambridge, UK, and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004), 59.

Surprisingly, a special class of subjects that has proven to be a catalyst in many witch hunts is children. [11] Certain qualities made children powerful catalytic agents: they are imaginative and susceptible to fantasy, and, moreover, their thoughts, their behaviors, and their words are largely unrestrained. One aspect about children could not quite be matched even by the most childish of adults. When children are in a social setting with a peer of others of approximate age, they interact with one another according to a distinct set of rules and protocols. In the institution inhabited by these peer groups, members often recreate their fantasies filled with visual details and did so somewhat naturally. After a "reality" is formed by their interactions, they are quite capable of deluding others as well as themselves regarding what is real. Aside from the animated details that they live by, and perhaps also a conflation between the real and the fanciful, there are other reasons that made children's testimonies seem trustworthy and credible to some. Children are not considered to be as calculative, self-sanctioning, and interest-driven as members of the adult world—and sometimes their testimonies quite clearly seem to be in conflict with their own interests, putting themselves and their loved ones in danger. But discarding these one-sided romantic pictures, pragmatically speaking, children are more vulnerable than adults in some ways, having less experience in life. They are more economically dependent, and potentially more easily subject to social and adult pressure. In the phase of early socialization and development, torture and intimidation may also have a stronger coercive impact on them. These factors make children's accounts such a damningly powerful tool.

The Blåkulla mass trial shows the way children's catalytic potential was deliberately activated and exploited. The largest waves of witch panic in Sweden took place in the 1660–1670s, during which time many people were accused of "flying" to a witch assembly at Blåkulla, a mythical island

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[11] Johannes Dillinger, *"Evil People": A Comparative Study of Witch Hunts in Swabian Austria and the Electorate of Trier,* trans. Laura Stokes (Charlottesville, VA, and London, UK: University of Virginia Press, [1999]2009), 104–6, Originally published as *"Böse Leute." Hexenverfolgungen in Schwäbisch-Österreich und Kurtier im Vergleich* by Paulinus Verlag/ Spee, Trier, Germany. Dillinger discussed the role of children starting chain-accusations in both the larger regions of the electorate of Trier after the trial against Dr. Flade, and in southern regions of Swabian Austria around 1594, as well as other cases. Their presence, both younger and older children, also added much force in the cases of Trier and Loudun. Of course, the role of children in the Salem Witch Trials of 1692–1693 in colonial America has been comprehensively examined.

where the Devil held his sabbaths. As many as several thousand people had appeared in court in total, many of whom were children said to possess a special ability to identify witches. According to the historian Ankarloo, many of them were essentially young orphans abandoned by their parents. Some of them were paid, and sometimes the witnesses enacted a "combination of begging and blackmail."[12]

> In the North about a fifth of the young witnesses provided more than half of the evidence. These energetic and vindictive children also displayed a marked conformity in their accusations, often directing them at local family groups.[13]

The children were under tremendous coercion and pressure, from both adults and their peers. Several of them appeared to be kept awake in "wake houses"—suggesting some minor form of sleep deprivation—"with constant prayer and hymn singing." The children began to provide similar and satisfying accounts to their questioners, "If anyone showed signs of hesitating and wanting to back out, he or she was immediately branded as a suspect by others."[14] They were labeled as "liars."[15] The overall, converging story was that they were blindfolded and abducted, and then taken to the sabbath. They could not see each other until they reached Blåkulla. In manufacturing their full stories, they made use of actual events they knew, such as the illnesses and deaths of people and animals, or marks on their bodies that showed signs of physical abuse.[16] Although the adults who exploited these children might be the *actual* catalyst, there is little doubt that children's own dynamics and qualities made many contributions in their own right.

Another catalytic agent was anyone—adult or child—identified as having a special ability to "see" specters and identify witches. Confessing witches and afflicted victims, among other exceptional individuals, were

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[12] Ankerloo, "Sweden: The Mass Burnings (1668–1676)," 302.

[13] Bengt Ankarloo, "Witch Trials in Northern Europe: 1450–1700," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Period of Witch Trials*, eds. Bengt Ankarloo, Stuart Clark, and William Monter (London: Continuum and Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 89.

[14] Per Sörlin, "Child-Witches and the Construction of the Witches´ Sabbath: The Swedish Blåkulla Story," in *Demons, Spirits and Witches. Vol 3. Witchcraft, Mythologies and Persecution,* ed. Gabor Klaniczay and Pocs Eva (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008), 102–3.

[15] Ankarloo, "Sweden: The Mass Burnings," 303.

[16] Sörlin, 104.

commonly believed to have such abilities. Their testimonies, in turn, helped to generate "spectral evidence" in court. This form of evidence, even in just corroborative capacity, was commonly admissible in many courts until the seventeenth century.[17] Where this idea of spectral evidence took hold, some of the accused were turned into "star witnesses"—akin to the role adopted by Tituba in the Salem witch trials.

Inhibitors

In contrast to a catalyst, the insertion of an *inhibitor* helps to paralyze, derail, or decrease the development or impact of an idea system.

Counter-magic. One such example is counter-magic. Once there are trusted methods to counter or limit diabolic power, witchcraft becomes much less fearful, which in turn mitigates panic and the sense of urgency to conduct executions.

Witches were barely, if at all, prosecuted in the Central Balkans. In the area it was believed that voluntary confessions "made to a priest, but also, it is said, to the earth or to the green grass, with an oath, three times repeated, never to practice witchcraft again," were sufficient. This practice causes witches to lose their supernatural powers, and they "can never recover them"—an idea that made forgiveness and acquittal considerably easier. In the same area, there were a variety of documented custom procedures that could prevent the babies of witches from being turned into witches themselves. One was for a grandmother or an older woman in the household to announce loudly to the whole village on a rooftop or in the courtyard, in exact wordings that vary by location, that a witch was born in the household. Another was leaving a newborn baby out on the street so that a passerby could give it a new name. Such societies offered ideas that allowed witches to almost seamlessly reintegrate into the community after rituals were performed. [18]

Catholic doctrine and exorcism. There was also a marked difference between Catholic and Protestant jurisdictions regarding the causes and treatment toward possessions. The Catholic doctrine allowed more leniency toward subjects possessed by the Devil because of certain built-in inhibitors.

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[17] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, *3*rd *ed*., 263.
[18] T. P. Vukanović, "Witchcraft in the Central Balkans I: Characteristics of Witches," *Folklore* 100, no. 1 (1989), 21.

For Protestants, possession was often linked to the theory that witches caused demons to possess people. There was at least partial moral responsibility from an ill intent—such as the intention to cause harm upon another person—that leads to an opportunity for demonic possession. Calvinists, in particular, linked sinfulness with moral culpability; that is to say, those who were tempted to sin were more likely to sign a pact with the Devil.[19] Protestants believed that subjects did not completely lose their free will during possession; because the possessed often spoke in two voices, it was an indication that the demon was within a person and in conflict with him or her. The solution of the witches' threat, and the punishment of deeds, therefore resided in formal witch trials. Prayer and fasting were recommended, even if they might not counter the fits perfectly—in which case possible blame was placed on individuals' persistent impurity.

For Catholics, there was a different understanding of possession. It was believed that the Devil had will of his own, and he possessed individuals by his own power. The possessed people were not necessarily witches. The moral responsibility primarily lay with the Devil himself. Instead of persecution, exorcism was often the solution—even if this practice was occasionally criticized, especially if it was undertaken without proper approval. As a result, there were notably harsher consequences for the demonically possessed in Protestant jurisdictions—and they were linked to witch identity—than those in Catholic ones.[20] This is to say, aside from organizational factors, certain interpretations of possessions in Catholic institutions served to inhibit witches' executions.

Counterinterpretations. A main source of inhibitor was a body of select passages from authoritative texts which made room for counterinterpretations. The *Canon Episcopi*, or simply the *Canon*, has a special place in such activities. Although the *Canon* declared that "bishops and their officials must labor all their strength" to eliminate witches from their parishes, it offered a harsh denunciation of people who reinforced false beliefs revolving around witches. The *Canon* stated that "some wicked women, perverted by the Devil, seduced by illusions and phantasms of demons" were convinced that they were indeed flying at night with the pagan goddess Diana, and it utterly mocked those who were deluded into treating such accounts as if they were actual events. It asked who has not had so-called

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[19] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt, 3rd ed.*, 206.
[20] Brian P. Levack, *The Devil Within: Possession and Exorcism in the Christian West* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

nocturnal visions while they dreamt, and why would anyone who was not "stupid and foolish" mistake such visions for actual reality. In conclusion, the *Canon* made a strong declaration:

> It is therefore to be proclaimed publicly to all that whoever believes such things or similar to these loses the faith, and he who has not the right faith in God is not of God but of him in whom he believes, that is, of the Devil. For of our Lord it is written 'All things were made by Him.' Whoever therefore believes that anything can be made, or that any creature can be changed to better or to worse or be transformed into another species or similitude, except by the Creator himself who made everything and through whom all things were made, is beyond doubt an infidel.[21]

Such strong wordings from an authoritative text facilitated many actors who wished to make counterinterpretations that still fall within acceptable parameters. Numerous skeptics had made use of the *Canon*, enabling skeptical voices from jurists and theologians to influence local courts, at least within Germany.[22] The widened discourse parameter permitted severe disagreement as long as the skeptics also reaffirmed their faith in God, the existence of Satan, and the necessity to root out witchcraft.

To use one illustrative example, an early skeptical thinker, Ulrich Molitor, argued, among other points, in his 1489 treatise (*De Lamiis et Pythonicis Mulieribus*), that the Devil created the mental illusions of sabbaths, that he could not beget children, and could not raise storms. There is a strong quality of inhibitor in these three ideas alone. Delegitimating the sabbath from discourse would prevent chain-reaction naming. Stating that the Devil could not beget children at least de-linked the children of witches from the Devil at some level. Finally, Molitor theorized that the Devil did not have the power to raise actual storms—and thus neither could witches. What actually occurred, according to Molitor, was that the Devil had some ability to know of an incoming storm and merely let the witch think that the storm was of their making. The political implication is important. Because storms had caused massive destruction to the economy and lives of the region, the idea of witches' role in causing them motivated many to identify and eliminate them. Without actual power, there would be less urgency—less "panic" emotions—to eradicate witches,

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[21] Lea, *Materials*, vol. I, 178–79.

[22] see Alison Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives in Germany: Rothenburg, 1561–1652* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 56; Dillinger, "*Evil People*," 65–66, 90, 138, 167.

especially in questionable cases, even if they still ought be prosecuted by heresy.[23] Finally, according to historian Maxwell-Stuart, Molitar concluded that Satan could be overcome by relatively simple measures: "All we need do is make the sign of the cross and his ability to exercise any power over us is rendered null at once."[24]

Poison or Medicine?: The Intricacy of Chemical Reactions

What makes catalysts and inhibitors so difficult to identify is that, assessed in their content, one is not necessarily distinguishable from another in terms of their merit or danger. It is akin to the principle of Chinese medicine, where one herb that has poisonous effects can also medically cure a disease.

The inquisitorial legal idea that catalyzed witch hunts was certainly not inferior to the accusatorial idea; only when it interacted with other elements did the idea become a catalyst. The idea of the sabbath, for example, is not necessarily any more absurd or contemptuous an idea than the belief that exorcism could drive out the Devil. It was only in the context of the witch hunt phenomenon that it became an important catalyst. Likewise, misogyny alone did not cause witch prosecutions. Most of the witches, prior to the sixteenth century in the Holy Roman Empire, for example, were actually men.[25] Neither was poverty in itself a powerful factor, or the respective religion of the people. It was highly dependent on a particular combination, a particular composite, or synthesis, that witches were stereotyped as poor, irreligious women who attended sabbaths and committed ungodly acts that threatened everybody socially.

The absence of one can be "made up" by another to achieve similar effects. For example, while England did not have the widespread concept of a "sabbath," seemingly "spontaneous" series of mass possessions could

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[23] Maxwell-Stuart, *Witchcraft in Europe*, 32–42.

[24] Maxwell-Stuart, 34.

[25] Maxwell-Stuart argues that the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* played a significant role in changing the identity of witch-suspects from men to women. The word "maleficiarum" was the feminine form of "maleficiorum," and a number of treatises before Kramer's publication had used maleficiorum as a masculine noun to refer to both men and women. Maxwell-Stuart, 30. The treatises and trials immediately prior to the mid-fifteenth century had a more equal, and sometimes even male-centered, gender emphasis. Maxwell-Stuart, 17–23.

still trigger a chain-reaction panic around 1600, with affirmation by the Protestant clerics who elevated witchcraft from an ordinary civil dispute into a spiritual crime.[26] Once torture was prohibited, swimming and a variety of "tests" and examinations took its place in England. The justification for stripping suspects naked upon their imprisonment—and walking them all night to prevent them from sleeping—was not due to the sorcery of silence. Such acts, though they might only occur in a particular time in England, were allegedly because, if witches were at rest, they could summon their familiars to frighten the guards.[27]

Situational contexts also matter. The same ideational practice—such as the doctrine of repentance—could encourage thorough confessions and moderate outcomes in one context, especially if leniency is seen to be extended to children and the accused are children. But if it is combined with the context of the theory of a breaking point, the result could be a long chain of denunciation and a personal death sentence. Many local people, we can assume, weighed these situational factors carefully and strategically as they developed their specific ideas.

Creative Agency: By a Hair's Difference

Exceptionally thoughtful individuals made a difference in organizing, using, articulating, and extending or suppressing idea systems. Some individuals fought to insist and privilege one interpretation or to use a few artful moves to turn a representation upside-down—by almost a hair's difference in interpretation sometimes. These exceptional agents know how to manipulate the codes and codification processes creatively and precisely, navigating the intricacies and complexities involved in specific discourse battles.

For example, the *Canon Episcopi*—which contained an inhibitor—could be and had been skirted around by creative interpretations, or a new adaptation using fresh evidence. A renowned Spanish theologian, Alonso Tostado, had argued around 1440 that the *Canon* only argued that a belief in Diana or Herodias as goddesses, or that people had ridden on

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[26] Malcolm Gaskill, *Witchfinders: A Seventeenth-Century English Tragedy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 29; see also Roland Seth, *Stories of Great Witch Trials* (London: Arthur Barker Ltd., 1967).

[27] Matthew Hopkins, *The Discovery of Witches* (The Project Gutenberg, [1647]2004), Quer. 8–9, The Project Gutenberg eBook, November 10, 2004 [eBook #14015] https://www.gutenberg.org/files/14015/14015-h/14015-h.htm

beasts, was inappropriate. Night-flying itself was possible if it entailed riding on demons in the shape of a beast, and the figures of Diana or Herodias could also be demons in disguise. They referred to some cases of women in Spain who were observed to have temporarily fallen into "a stupor, insensible to blows and fire," but upon awaking in a few hours recounted their experiences at the sabbath.[28] For Tostato, as long as one does not believe Diana to be an actual goddess, or the beasts to be ordinary animals, one was not being unfaithful to God. Indeed, technically, the *Canon* did not explicitly doubt the ability of the Devil to appear as a beast. After all, the *Canon* had affirmed the impressive effect of "illusions and phantasms of demons" on wicked women.[29]

The *Malleus Maleficarum* made the same defense as Tostado, but further elaborated it. Taking a different route, the *Malleus Maleficarum* questioned the thesis in the *Canon* that "witches cannot be locally transported because God does not permit it."[30] In an exercise of logic, Kramer simply challenged how one could conclude that God does not permit the Devil to do so with the Devil's servant when the Devil could already do so with the innocent. The *Malleus Maleficarum* asked: "did not the Devil raise up Our Savior, taking and setting Him here and there, as the Gospel testifies?"[31] Several other defenses against the *Canon* followed. Citing many "empirical" examples from cases, "who is so stupid that he would on these grounds affirm that all the acts of sorcery and harm committed by sorcerers are figments of fantasy and imagination, when the opposite is clear to everyone's senses."[32] Furthermore, the rigorous reasons between witchcraft proponents when comparing them to those of the skeptics should not be underestimated, especially if the skeptics sought to argue against the *Malleus* using fast-and-rough arguments and by strategically using the *Canon.* Rating argumentative rigor, the brief passage of *Canon* versus *Malleus Maleficarum* might very well end in a draw, and the *Malleus Maleficarum* was furnished with plenty of "empirical" data.

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[28] Lea, *Materials,* vol. I, 190–91.

[29] Lea, 178. See also Walter Stephens, "The Sceptical Tradition," in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. Brian P. Levack (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 113.

[30] Christopher S. Mackay, *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the* Malleus Maleficarum (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 300.

[31] Mackay, *The Hammer of Witches*, 296.

[32] Mackay, 301.

In summary, evidential processes in idea systems operate more dynamically than mechanical frameworks and metaphors usually afford. We can still consider the "science" of it, but this science is, in addition to its mechanical basis, contingent upon the precise combination of ideas applied in specific contexts.

A Five-Tier Model of Idea System and Ideological Creativity

Let us pause for a moment to consider some general characteristics of what we call "idea systems." This chapter posits a five-tier model that allows us to holistically dissect and inspect them, having taken into account their history, changes, and uses. The model encompasses (1) *believability,* (2) *resilience*, (3) *adaptability*, (4) *developmental potential*, and (5) *ease of use*. Readers can use this model to assess the conditions and qualities of multiple idea systems, irrespective of the specific forms and configurations of these systems. The model will also be adopted to assess the two other cases in this book, after engaging in more microscopic and chronological examinations.

Believability

With believability, ideas shift from a state of self-aware fantasies or faithful beliefs to "realities" perceived to stand for some actual truths. Thinkers express a degree of self-aware confidence, or taken-for-grantedness, toward these "realities."

The whole system of witchcraft ideas—driven by an empirical mode of codification—acquired its believability via the construction of *compact symbolic structures*. Many points of information were turned into coded things (e.g., mental images or objects) and then organized into the forms of arguments, stories, vignettes, and so forth. By intricate processes of rational deduction and calculation as well as stepwise idea generation and extrapolation, cohesive chain-complexes of ideas are formed.

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Such coherence was organized by ensuring contradictions are minimized to the greatest extent possible, while maximizing the corroborative authority that supports it. Backstage manipulations and defensive mechanisms helped to smooth out contradictions, making the ideas congruent. Voices from epistemic and social authorities often were "borrowed" to maximize credibility. When they were in *polyphonic* agreement, they represented multiple viewpoints, multiple methods, and multiple forms of human intelligence—as well as multiple data points—to support a theory or explanation grounded in empirical information and the employment of codes.

An important source of believability that I have not yet sufficiently emphasized can be captured through this term: *bad cognitive safeguards* (or simply *bad safeguards*).

Good cognitive safeguards can improve our thought processes by blocking off prejudices, lazy associations, illogical argumentation, unsubstantiated stories, and other lamentable sources of bias; here, epistemic rigor and self-critical attitude are some prime examples.

Cognitive safeguards that are "bad" tend to do these things only halfway—or are perhaps largely successful except for leaving a significant 10–20% room for error. The epistemic rigor and self-critical attitude may be exercised in a curiously uneven or compartmentalized manner.

In reality, such successful fakes sometimes formed the most critical junctural points of an evidentially driven idea system, or they could be thoroughly diffused throughout the idea system, rendering considerable believability simply by creating a snapshot appearance that certain rules are being rigorously followed and a great deal of intelligence and integrity is being shown. They are almost an obligatory part of an idea system that is driven by an empirical mode of codification. Without them, an idea system might not even be able to establish face validity.

An ostensibly righteous hypocrite can be more damaging—and always harder to discover—than a shameless liar. Having an acceptable modicum of rationality, reasonableness, and virtuousness can be worse than having none—if their function in the idea system is to camouflage the weakness or dilute its presence. Their broadened presence can make a bad idea system more believable.

Intentional or otherwise, the systematic discourses and ostensibly fair measures in the courts, and the elegant and persuasive writings of academics and popes, could serve to obfuscate a few problems. An initially impartial reader reading demonology treatises could be enormously impressed by the superficially "objective" attitude displayed in Delrio's eloquent critique of torture and Boguet's scathing criticism of the "swimming test"

and the "ducking stool,"[1] while Guazzo's and Lancre's deductive reasoning, intelligent rebuttal, creative yet meticulous exegesis, and encyclopedic comprehension of past cases and existing texts are equally formidable. The partially honorable qualities they display—the apparent attitude of kindness, sense of morality, and respect for evidence—all added believability to their accounts. Such "safeguards," however, advanced, instead of guarded against, the tragic admittance of bad ideas.

RESILIENCE

Resilient idea systems can withstand the onslaughts of internal and external contradictions. Contradictions emerge when constructed ideas clearly fail to match reality, when codes are seen to be inconsistently applied, when challengers backed with strong data sources question the "justification" of the symbolic structures being constructed, and so on.

Idea systems that had a sophisticated, *preemptive design* could keep contradictions from surfacing. A number of contradictions are dealt with in advance because the design pre-resolves or pre-explains them—before the skeptical questions are even asked. For example, the idea that witches could potentially have the ability to transform themselves into animals could address in advance empirical questions regarding why certain suspects were not seen at a particular location. Lancre's argument that Satan's feature is *consistently inconsistent* preempted arguments concerning the inconsistency across cases.

Contradictions often flare up in vehemently fought idea battles from opposing voices, speculations, and interpretations, locally and regionally. Powerful actors with overwhelming advantages could ignore, hide, or suppress these contradictions. But other than the use of force or an attempt to control every word that is said, informal regulation, along with a system capable of absorbing challenges, prevented these conflicts from irrevocably eroding the idea system.

A *discourse parameter*, often subtly placed in the background, often regulates what is being expressed in such battles. That parameter is an understood—and occasionally enforced—range of generally feasible and tolerated options for speaking and thinking; it sets a boundary line that battle participants should not cross. Because of this parameter, only ideas that do not confound, or perhaps are even supported by, the core propositions of an idea system are admitted into the battles. Such parameters also include a set of etiquette to be followed. When all subjects act within the

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[1] Henry Boguet, *An Examen of Witches* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., [1619]2009), 216.

parameter, challenges to authorities were limited, and battle participants could avoid consequential sanctions and maximize leverage. The result, however, was that no matter which side eventually won, the idea system's integrity was largely left unblemished.

Sometimes, such skirmishes even exploited new voices to reinforce the core ideas. "Contradictory" viewpoints could be placed into an orbit in which many *potential* explanations revolved around the same set of core ideas. Such potential explanations, unlike definitive ones, required considerably less effort and empirical materials to generate. At the same time, they drastically increased the effort, empirical materials, and intellectual sophistication required for challengers to disprove these potential explanations. They became obstacles preventing debilitating attacks upon the idea system, and they even absorbed the efforts and works of these actors for long-term defensive purposes.

Finally, assuring resilience does not mean the absolute rejection of any changes. An adaptive system also can enhance resilience. What is critical, however, is that the *rate* and *degree* of change are under control. Changes that are too drastic and too hasty could threaten the system's stability and cohesion—causing ruptures or implosions—instead of forming a more gradual, digestible modification.

ADAPTABILITY

A highly adaptable idea system can withstand environmental changes. This can take place in at least two ways. The first is akin to a camel that can accommodate extreme temperature changes in the desert without losing its composure, because its biological makeup is made for adaptation to these changes. Similarly, an idea system can be developed in a way that, despite marked changes in the environment (social, political, epistemic, discursive, etc.), the system can maintain its essential form.

The second way could be thought of as a bacteria that can take on new forms—such as forming thicker cell walls, changing their chemical composition, multiplying at a different speed, or even losing genes—in light of changes to acidity, temperature, radiation, or other aspects of their surroundings. In such a case, an idea system can be revamped and modified into significantly "new" forms that function effectively in new environments.

The empirically coded idea systems that drove the witch hunts manifested both means of adaptability. When it was readapted and then remerged in different European locations, the resulting idea system took on considerably different appearances, some even possessing key

differences from one another. The idea did not simply mold the culture dogmatically, but also expressed cultural interpretations and influences.

At the same time, it is also impressive, despite the variations, how similar some of the processes and outcomes were, even when some basic elements were put together into particular combinations. English witch hunts had a different flavor from the ones in France, of course. But core components and processes proved to create similarities in outcome despite the new contexts. This is akin to how the bacteria of *E. coli* still can cause diarrhea even after considerable mutation.

Some modifications seemed to be much more significant in effect.

In the Central Balkans or other locations, certain *inhibitors* (e.g., counter-magic, counterinterpretations) were built into the modification. Although the basic dynamics and propensity for causing calamities were still present, and the core propositions were never changed, by tempering panics the inhibitors mitigated the likelihood of calamities. Such an adaptation of the idea system is akin to a dose of antibiotics taken in conjunction with *E. coli*, which mitigates the diarrheic propensity.

If adaptation takes on the form of extreme mutation, it could entail losing the core features of the idea altogether. This is not to say, however, that dangers are necessarily restrained. An idea system that discards its core ideas after its mutation could still operate in a way that produced such effects. If we substitute much of the essence of witchcraft beliefs with other contents, many of the horrendous dynamics could potentially be replicated. We will return to this point at the end of the book.

Developmental Potential

Many idea systems have an undeveloped potential to expand and grow, or to improve and refine. The seedling of a lemon tree that has just sprouted is full of developmental potential. A mature one can yield many lemons, and it could keep doing so, on and off, for fifty years or more. At some point, the potential for the tree's development will meet its limits, depending on its innate makeup or its interaction with its environment. A dying tree, like a moribund idea system, can no longer be saved from changes and modification. Its developmental potential is exhausted.

The particularly dangerous form of witchcraft idea system began to mature around the late 1400s, a little while after the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* that coherently organized and synthesized some empirical precedents. The wave of German witch trials around 1490, with the Trier case being exemplary, demonstrated the idea system in robust activation and potency.

Being a "young" idea system, it had considerable room to grow in evidence, to improve on its composition, and to readapt in sites of application, forming new branches and bearing new fruits. Through the processes of refinement and expansion, the structural makeup of the idea system became more complex and extensive. It became connected to different sets of evidence (information), concepts (codes), and theoretical propositions (code relations)—as did a growing stock of quotes and figures. New testing methods were explored, and new puzzles and problems surfaced. Many differing theories were tested, with case experiences, so that those variants were documented and examined. More branches of defensive arguments had appeared to deal with the contradictions that had arisen. Such a pattern of growth lasted for at least several decades in Germany, until it peaked in its development and started to show signs of withering. Viewed from this perspective, the entire life of the idea system—from its "birth" to its "death"—spanned about 300 years.

Development could be stunted or halted for a variety of reasons. For a hypothetical lemon tree, the reasons might be changes in temperature, supply of nutrients in the soil, exposure to pathogens, and so forth. The tree could intentionally be subjected to having its roots girdled, its branches trimmed, or its life terminated entirely by an axe. Witchcraft ideas and discourse had, in fact, frequently been intentionally "stunted" in such manners. Especially where the idea system developed into a threatening scale, some central authorities proactively suppressed the usage of the idea system favored by aggressive witch hunt proponents.[2] The development of counter-ideas, such as science and medicine, as well as the increasingly vocal opposition of skeptics and revelations of backstage manipulation, also impeded its development.

Idea development might also come to a halt in the face of overwhelming *contradictions*. Cognitively, when contradictions became too much and too visible, the theories—even with defensive explanations—could become harder to maintain. Emotionally, seeing too much visible damage being done can also affect their adoption. Towns and regions that had not seen what witch hunts might, and did, entail, could grow into a fervor, yet the fear of the consequences of witch hunts could gradually rival the fear

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[2] For example, Behringer noted that in Dillingen around 1591, the government instructed its parish priests to "forbid the outcry against witches from the pulpit." Wolfgang Behringer, *Witchcraft Persecutions in Bavaria: Popular Magic, Religious Zealotry and Reason of State In Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 209.

of witches once witch hunts actually occurred, thus provoking a more careful, measured attitude.

Finally, stagnancy can also cause the idea to atrophy. Some ideas could primarily grow in scale because they were new and novel, thereby arousing captivating feelings, or if they showed their usefulness in daily necessities. When ideas lost their perceived freshness or usefulness, when information and procedures became too formulaic or redundant, people's attention could just be shifted to other things, such as newer cultural trends—for instance scientific inventions or political speculations. The whole idea system could subside in its development as a result.

Ease of Use

Socially effective idea systems, for them to be used and understood by the public, must be relatively easy to use in thinking and in communication. The codes, for example, could not be couched in an inaccessible language, such as how "angiomyogenesis," a bio-medicine terminology, represents "the regeneration of heart tissues." Modern institutions can afford to employ such inaccessible terminologies in compartmentalized settings. However, idea systems that are meant to be widely communicated and used operate much more easily by memorable and repeatable words and phrases—so too, should the quotes, stories, logic, and lines of arguments.

An effective idea system must allow discourse members to execute complex operations, such as the intricate chain-by-chain building processes. We have discussed the public, private, institutional, and institutionalized *cognitive portals* that were put into place, which often enabled thinkers to move through somewhat complex situations in a swift, continuous movement without undue effort, hindrance, or interruption. The idea system could assume an extremely complex form if necessary; but cognitive portals serve as a simplified, abbreviated "how-to guide" version—so easy to use that even an inattentive dullard or an average institutional actor could operate to an impactful extent.

The amazing clarity and simplicity of the witch concept, the vivid images, the fantastical folkloric stories, and stereotypical associations were not just relatively effortless, but actually sometimes entertaining, to operate. A story of a person rubbing ointment on himself, turning into a werewolf, and then killing a dozen cattle does not require much "explanation";[3]

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[3] Henry Charles Lea, *Materials Toward a History of Witchcraft* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939), vol III, 1512.

they are also excellent materials for rumor and imagination. With such qualities, the ideas could even be drilled into the minds of children, becoming their mental playthings. Argumentatively, even children could create "evidence" for the ideas. Especially with a few adults' assistance, they helped to create some compelling landmark cases of the era.

The New Revolution in China

Compact Symbolic Structures in a Futuristic Idea System

*Another thing I need to say pertains to the Great Cultural Revolution. I have made a mistake and created a trouble [*闯了一个祸*], which was the publicizing and mass-distributing of the big-character poster [at Beijing University].… Another one is the letter I wrote to Tsinghua University High School [*清华大学附属中学*]. Yet another is that I also authored a big-character poster of my own.…The Cultural Revolution movement happened within a short period. June, July, August, September, and now October—only less than five months.…The period has been very short; the trend and momentum have been very fierce [*时间很短来势很猛*]. Even I did not anticipate that after the mass-pronouncement of one big character poster [at Beijing University].… the whole nation would be shaken [*全国轰动了*].… Every school and every kind of Red Guards have been formed; Beijing itself has three or four command centrals. When the Red Guards rush forward, they rushed over all of you [*把你们冲得不亦乐乎*] (Mao Zedong, "Comments at a Central Party Work Conference". (October 25, 1966), CD. [*毛泽东,, "在中央工作会议上的讲话" (*10月25日*, 1966),* 光碟。*] Unless otherwise noted, the primary data come from Song Yongyi,* Chinese Cultural Revolution Database, 3*rd* Edition *(2002; Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press), CD. [*宋永毅*,* 中国文化大革命文库 第三版,*(2002;* 香港*:*香港中文大学出版社),* 光碟。*])*

China was effectively "carved up like a melon" by an alliance of Western powers in the late 1800s under the rule of the Qing imperial government. Coastal locations such as Hong Kong, for example, were leased to Great Britain in July 1898 for 99 years; in a similar fashion, Guangzhou Bay was leased to France, Qingdao to Germany, Macau to Portugal, and Port Arthur to Russia. At the same time, Japan was also repeatedly taking hold of Chinese territories, exerting its political and military might in the areas encompassing Korea, Manchuria, Jinan, Shanghai, Nanking, and Taiwan (Formosa).

The Chinese Communist Movement—as well as the Communist Party of China (CPC)—was founded in 1921 by Li Dazhao [李大钊] and Chen Duxiu [陈独秀] with the French concession of Shanghai, several years after the Russian Revolution (1917–1918). The CPC had initially collaborated with the Nationalist Party (also known as Kuomintang or Guomindang), which arose as one of the indigenous resistance movements against foreign occupation. In 1927, the Nationalist Party, led by Chiang Kai-Shek [蒋介石] (also translated as Jiang Jieshi), turned against the Communists. The Communists suffered significant military setbacks in the years that followed; the loss was signified by their eventual forced retreat to a remote countryside area called Yan'an, between 1934 and 1935. During this now legendary 6000-mile "Long March," the Communists had to escape amidst the Nationalists' aggressive military campaigns; the Communist troops were reduced from approximately 80,000 to 10,000. The Long March also established Mao Zedong [毛泽东] and Zhu De [朱德] as the main leaders of the movement. [1] During the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), the Communists collaborated with the Nationalists, which were supported by the United States, to combat the Japanese forces in China. During that time, the Communists gained significantly in power and popularity, which laid the groundwork for defeating the Nationalists when the Chinese Civil War commenced in 1946.

While the Nationalist Party had appeared to dominate much of the domestic political scene from 1928 until 1949 (when its forces were defeated by the Communists and then retreated to a territory now known

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[1] There were divisions within the Chinese Communist movement, and Mao Zedong was temporarily removed from leadership in 1934. Power was consolidated into the hands of Mao Zedong during the Yan'an Rectification Movement [延安整风运动] (1941–1945), shortly following the Long March.

as Taiwan), in reality the divided China was ruled by different factions of juntas—a state of warlordism [军阀主义]. Corruption, uncertainty, material deprivation, food shortages, and war pervaded China during that warlordist era. When the CPC defeated the Nationalist Party during the 1946–1949 conflict and founded the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, it was the first time that the nation's political power was visibly consolidated by a unified group of indigenous leaders. The nation of "New China" was born. During the initial phase of New China, the CPC represented a party that brought peace and ended much of the endemic corruption.

The Mao Era refers to the period 1949–1976, from the time the PRC was founded to the time that Mao died. The Mao Era is so named because—even though Mao receded from the political center for several years after the failure of the Great Leap Forward—he had returned to power, and his influence in policies, governance, and social movements pervaded from 1949 to 1976. Because in this book we are primarily interested in idea systems and their activation and operation, we therefore focus on a restricted set of events and campaigns during Mao's rule (see Table 8.1). The history of this period is unsettled, with obvious divides between Western and Chinese accounts. The timeline is not meant to be comprehensive; it is intended to anchor the reader's attention to the chronology of events to be discussed in the following chapters. To further organize the listing, I divide the Mao Era into six phases in Table 8.1. Each phase marks a certain cohesive dynamic, which faces a significant transition as it moves onto another phase.[2]

The first phase is between 1949 and 1952, a period of initial consolidation. Along with eradicating the problems of prostitution, civil disorder, and inflation in the cities, the PRC carried out a Land Reform campaign (1950–1952) in rural areas. Modeled after earlier experiments in Communist-occupied villages, the land reform essentially redistributed land ownership from the landlord class to the peasants. In addition, approximately one million landlords were executed. The New Marriage Law [新婚姻法] was passed on May 1, 1950, which eradicated arranged

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[2] Although it is hard to devise a set of satisfactory labels for these phrases, readers may conceive of them as: (1) the Initial Consolidation Phase; (2) the Policy Institutionalization and Experimentation Phase; (3) the Great Leap Forward's Acceleration and Failure; (4) Mao's Rebound and the height of the Cultural Revolution (CR); (5) Post-CR and the Demise of Lin Biao; (6) Post-Lin Biao and the Ebbing of Mao.

Table 8.1 A timeline of selected campaigns and events during the Mao Era, in five phases

Phase	Years	Key events
1	1949	Founding of People's Republic of China.
1	1950	The New Marriage Law was passed on May 1, 1950.
		Land reform: The Agrarian Reform Law (June 1950).
1	1951–1953	Three Antis campaign (1951), Five Antis campaign (1952), and Thought Reform campaign launched.
2	1953–1957	First Five-Year Plan.
2	1956–1957	Hundred Flowers campaign.
2	1957–1958	Anti-Rightist campaign.
3	1958	Great Leap Forward campaign launched.
3	1959	Mao resigned from the presidency (Head of State) of the People's Republic of China.
		Liu Shaoqi became president (Head of State) of the People's Republic of China, succeeding Mao.
		Lushan Conference.
		Peng Dehuai dismissed from office, succeeded by Lin Biao.
4	1963–1965	Socialist Education Movement was enacted. The movement included the Four Cleanups Movement and the campaigns to Learn from Comrade Lei Feng; Learn from the PLA; Learn from Dazhai for agriculture; and Learn from Daqing for industry.
		Lin Biao helped to mass-produce and widely distribute a book of Mao quotations ("Little Red Book"). China conducted its first nuclear weapons test on October 16, 1964.
5	1966	On May 16, 1966, the Standing Committee of the Central Political Bureau of the CPC published the historical document known as the May 16 Notification.
		The historic big-character poster was posted at Beijing University on May 25, igniting the Red Guards movement and the Cultural Revolution.
		Chairman Mao Zedong, at the age of 73, swam in the Yangtze River in July.
5	1967	Deng Xiaoping was sent to cadre school in Hebei.
		PLA restores order to the Cultural Revolution.
5	1968	Liu Shaoqi expelled from the Party.
		"Up to the Mountains and Down to the Villages Movement."
5	1969	Lin Biao named as Mao's successor; death of Liu Shaoqi.
		Sino-Soviet border conflict occurred from March to September.
6	1970	"One Strike-Three Anti" Campaign was launched.

Table 8.1 (continued)

Phase	Years	Key events
	1970–1971	Criticize Chen and Correct the Dynamic Campaign targeted Chen Boda in November. Aside from Chen, the "Lin Biao Group" was named and discussed, and a number of officials associated with Lin Biao were forced into writing self-criticism.
6	1971	Lin Biao died in plane crash, allegedly after a failed attempt to assassinate Mao.
6	1972	China received a seven-day visit from the U.S. President Richard Nixon.
6	1973	Deng Xiaoping returns as vice-premiere. "Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius" movement began.
6	1975	Counterattack Right-Leaning Winds of Verdict-Reversal campaign started.
6	1976	Death of Zhou Enlai (January 8, 1976). Deng Xiaoping returns to power. Death of Mao (September 9, 1976). Hua Guofeng becomes chairman.
	1977	Gang of Four arrested. Deng Xiaoping returns to power.

and forced marriage, as well as the concubine system. Concomitantly, Mao initiated the Three Antis (1951) and Five Antis (1952) campaigns[3] [三反五反运动] to eradicate the problems caused by government officials and the urban-capitalist class, respectively. The "Three Antis" pertained to the issues of government corruption [贪污], waste [浪费], and bureaucratism [官僚主义]. The "Five Antis" targeted bribery [行贿], theft or fraudulent acquisition of state property [盗骗国家财产], stealing and evasion of taxes [偷税漏税], defrauding and cheating on government contracts [偷工减料], and stealing the state's economic information [盗窃国家经济情报]. Additionally, a Thought Reform movement (1951–1952) was initiated to target the intellectual class. While intellectuals were deemed to be valuable resources for a country in which most people were still illiterate, it was believed that many did not hold the values needed in order to appropriately serve the country in revolution. Therefore, many of them were sent to special schools and camps for thought remolding, in addition to being subject to various struggle and public criticism sessions.

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[3] The phrase "运动" can be translated as either "campaign" or "movement." The two terms are interchangeable in this book.

The period 1953–1957 can be characterized as the second phase of the revolutionized China. This was the period when the first Five-Year Plan was developed. Collectivization was gradually implemented in the countryside, in which peasants at first combined their lands to work on larger fields—forming small-scale cooperatives. Income greatly equalized as peasants were largely paid based on their labor input; peasants were also allowed to cultivate private lots alongside their activities in the cooperatives. In terms of his ideological program, Mao launched the Hundred Flowers movement in 1956–1957. The movement initially encouraged everyone to candidly voice opinions and input on party policies, based on the idea of 'letting a hundred flowers bloom.' However, within only a year, the campaign was abruptly terminated, followed by an Anti-Rightist movement starting in 1957. Dissidents who had spoken out were punished, imprisoned, and silenced. The abrupt policy change was cast by Mao as a means to "entice the snakes out of their caves."

The third phase of the revolutionary years can be considered as the significant, bold measures taken by Mao with the intention of boosting China's development, which then experienced significant setbacks. This phase spans the years of the Great Leap Forward movement being launched in 1958, followed by one or two years of massive policy setbacks. The target of the Great Leap Forward campaign was intended to explosively accelerate the country's productivity and technology, a popular slogan being to catch up and surpass the United Kingdom within 15 years. It was believed by Mao that total collective mobilization in China toward audacious reform in production could achieve this aim. By 1958, small-scale cooperatives were abolished and merged into large-scale communes operated by the state. In these communes, the peasants were mobilized to work night and day to practice innovative agricultural efforts as directed by the party officials. In order to stimulate mechanization and industrialization, the campaign also directed the population to collect scrap pieces of metal to create steel in "backyard furnaces."

The campaign failed miserably. Most experimental practices simply fell flat, and they diverted much-needed energy toward projects that were completely unproductive. Severely aggravating the situation were the widespread behaviors of government officials in concealing uncomfortable information, fabricating facts, scapegoating enemies, and disallowing deviation and nonparticipation. Although many Great Leap Forward policies were moderated or even abandoned by 1959—that is to say, in around a year's time after the campaign was launched—the efforts proved to be too

late to prevent nationwide devastation. The exact statistics are hard to compile and are now the subject of intense debate.[4] However, more than 20 million people allegedly died, and industrial production declined by around 40% during the "Three Difficult Years" of 1958–1960. These damages were intermixed with and compounded by the major natural disasters of floods and droughts during these troubled years. While a still influential cultural figure, Mao lost a significant amount of power inside the Party. After the historic Lushan Conference in summer 1959, Defense Minister Peng Dehuai [彭德怀] was, more or less, indicted and purged following his open attack on Mao and the Great Leap Forward policies. He was replaced by Lin Biao as defense minister. Two months later, Mao himself stepped down as PRC chairman as a result of the situation. Although Mao retained his chairman position in the CPC, Liu Shaoqi— Mao's informal heir—succeeded Mao as the government's new chairman.

The fourth phase is 1961–1965, after Mao receded into the political backstage and then reemerged from it with renewed grassroots and political support. Liu Shaoqi, along with Deng Xiaoping, reversed many of the Great Leap Forward policies and programs after they took power.[5] Agricultural and industrial productivity recovered and rose rapidly within a few years under new economic reforms, though inequality also rose visibly between 1961 and 1965.[6] While new economic reforms took hold under the new leadership of the CPC, Mao cultivated new allies and support from the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which was largely operated and controlled by civilians rather than by state bureaucrats. He launched a

[4] Gao Mobo, *The Battle for China's Past* (London: Pluto Press, 2008). Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic. Third Edition* (New York: The Free Press, [1977]1999), 264.

[5] The reversal was beyond simply economic. The new leadership, for example, adopted a more open and welcoming attitude toward intellectuals, who were held in suspicion in the aftermath of the Anti-Rightist movement of 1957–1959. "The intellectual atmosphere also became more open, and different schools of thought emerged in the cultural field. In fact, another 'Hundred Flowers' movement, though not officially announced as such, began to develop and was allowed to flourish until the start of the Cultural Revolution. In 1962, more than three million Party members, who had been accused of rightist deviation, were rehabilitated after Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi had made major speeches declaring that the intellectuals were no longer considered 'bourgeois' but 'an integral part of the working class'." Barbara Barnouin and Yu Changgen, *Ten Years of Turbulence: The Chinese Cultural Revolution* (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1993), 15–16.

[6] Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic. Third Edition* (New York: The Free Press, [1977]1999), 266–267.

state-supported Socialist Education Movement [社会主义教育运动] between 1962 and 1965. A special feature of this movement was that it often encouraged criticisms of anti-revolutionary tendencies and behaviors of not only intellectuals, but also leading Party members and officials. To counteract the state bureaucrats (most markedly Liu Shaoqi) who seem to have been traveling on a capitalist road, the Socialist Education campaign glorified the revolutionary spirit of the Red Army, including a Learn from the Red Army [向红军学习] campaign in early 1963.[7] A critical figure in the PLA who collaborated with Mao was Lin Biao, who orchestrated the publication of the famous "Little Red Book"—a pocket-size booklet consisting of Mao's quotations—in 1964. The booklet was widely circulated and used in both classrooms and informal study sessions. Almost a billion copies of the work had been printed within just a few years, along with 150 million copies of Mao's *Selected Works* and an innumerable number of portraits, posters, and photographs.[8]

The fifth phase would be the first three years—the most turbulent times—of the Cultural Revolution. This period dated from approximately May 1966 with the "May 16th Notification" [五一六通知] to late 1968, when the PLA and Mao ended the turbulence. Essentially, it was a period in which Mao was reinstated to a position of power, and a series of campaigns were enacted to revolutionize the operation and everyday life of the country.

By late 1965, Mao had begun to escalate his critique of the Communist Party. A provocative incident in the fall of 1966 at Beijing University attracted almost 2 million young people to Beijing to meet Mao Zedong at Tiananmen Square on August 18 in an event organized by the Red Guards. Almost all professors were denounced to some degree, and some were killed or sent to labor camps. Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping—denounced as capitalist roaders and counter-revolutionaries—were effectively removed from power; Liu was officially expelled from the Party in

[7] An alternative translation of the campaign is Learn from the PLA. Associated with this effort is a campaign called "Learn from Comrade Lei Feng" [向雷锋同志学习]. Lei Feng, a PLA soldier raised as an orphan, died in a work accident in August 15, 1962, at the age of 22. A devoted practitioner of Mao's teaching who performed good deeds, he was portrayed as a model young citizen who devoted himself wholeheartedly to the people.

[8] Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic. Third Edition* (New York: The Free Press, [1977]1999), 281.

the fall of 1968.[9] Shortly after the first Tiananmen Square rally, the Red Guards spread their campaign from the city to the countryside, from universities to elementary schools, disrupting political, religious, cultural, artistic, family, and educational institutions everywhere they went.[10] Intellectuals, writers, and teachers were aggressively targeted. A drive toward cleansing counterrevolutionary elements and the "Four Olds" (old ideas, old cultures, old customs, and old habits) heightened revolutionary fervor to an unprecedented level. Books, artwork, and religious icons were ritualistically destroyed. Millions of people were affected by the violence and chaos—first carried out by a cohesive Red Guard movement, and then by chaotic, warring factions of self-declared, passionate revolutionaries; Party cadres also played their part when they fought for self-protection and institutional control. From late 1968, Mao, with the support of his revolutionary corps, steadily took over the government. By then it was also clear that the Red Guards were causing legitimacy and logistical problems,[11] and that they were precipitating intractable and factional strife. The Mao quote, cited in the beginning of this chapter, referred to the havoc fiercely ignited across the nation. At that point, Mao withdrew his support. Launching the "Up to the Mountains and Down to the Villages Movement" [上山下乡运动], in 1968, the Mao-controlled government orchestrated more than 12–16 million predominately middle-class city youths being relocated to the countryside, effectively dissolving the Red Guards. The reasons for doing so might also have had a strong

[9] Liu was placed under arrest in a terrible physical condition; it was revealed years later that he died of illness in 1969. Meisner, *Mao's China and After*, 320.

[10] Mao's Cultural Revolution Group, headed by Jiang Qing and Chen Boda, and Lin Biao's army assisted university and secondary school students in carrying out revolutionary activities at their respective locations.

[11] For example, schools and factories were still closed two years after the Red Guard movement. Unemployment became a common and visible problem in the city, in addition to chaotic and violent conflict among the people.

economic pretext,[12] but the stated objective then was for those youths to "learn from the farmers" to be reeducated.[13] Most of these youths were barred from returning to the city.

The fifth phase was from 1970 to 1976, which is characterized as a period during which Mao's political power was resecured and in which he gradually ailed in health. Around the same time, China faced pressure to redefine itself internationally. While the United States had been an arch enemy—as partially expressed in the wars in Korea and Vietnam—the relationship with the Soviet Union had rapidly degenerated, from diplomatic cordiality to military tension by April 1969.[14] Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai strategically formed diplomatic relations with the United States, which eventually led to the secret and official visits by Henry

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[12] A similar movement had also taken place in 1960, soon after Soviet relations with China had worsened, leading to a withdrawal of support and investment. The national revenue changed from around 10 billion yuan of surplus in 1957 to over 60 billion yuan of deficit around 1960. More than 10 million people were mobilized to solve the "overproduction" and unemployment problems by relocating them (and their surplus labor) from the city to the countryside. The Cultural Revolution undoubtedly played a role in increasing the national deficit. The decline was less severe this time around: from 20 billion yuan of surplus in 1966 to a 20 billion yuan of deficit in 1967. A third movement of "Up to the Mountains and Down to the Villages" took place around 1974, once again as nation deficit started to increase. Wen Tiejun, *Eight Crises: Lessons from China, 1949–2009* (Beijing, China: The Oriental Press, 2013), 48–69, 285–287. [温铁军, 八次危机:中国的真实经验 [Baci weiji: Zhongguo de zhenshi jingyan] (中國北京:东方出版社, 2013), 48–69, 285–287].

[13] cf. Meisner, *Mao's China and After*; Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 251.

[14] The relationship between China and the Soviet Union started deteriorating much earlier than this. In 1956, Nikita Khrushchev, who succeeded Joseph Stalin as Soviet leader, denounced Stalinism. The Soviet Union normalized relations with the United States in October 1959, and then sided with India over the Sino-Indian border conflict during the same year. The Soviet Union also withdrew technicians from China in 1960. See Meisner, *Mao's China and After*, 376–379. In 1964, Mao attacked Khrushchev for "peddling bourgeois ideology, bourgeois liberty, equality, fraternity and humanity, inculcating bourgeois idealism and metaphysics and the reactionary ideas of bourgeois individualism, humanism and pacifism among the Soviet people, and debasing socialist morality." In addition, Mao attacked him for "colluding with U.S. imperialism, wrecking the socialist camp and the international communist movement, opposing the revolutionary struggles of the oppressed peoples and nations, practicing great-power chauvinism and national egoism and betraying proletarian internationalism." Mao Tse-Tung, "On Khrushchev's Phony Communism and its Historical Lessons for the World: Comment on the Open Letter of the Central Committee of the CPSU (IX)," July 1964 https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/1964/phnycom.htm (accessed May 30, 2022).

Kissinger and President Richard Nixon in 1971 and 1972, respectively. In addition, Mao permitted many members of the former Communist Party cadres to return to power, even apologizing for the harsh measures taken against them during the Cultural Revolution. Both of these actions were strongly opposed by Lin Biao, Mao's informally chosen successor and one-time staunch supporter. Lin was systematically and discreetly disempowered from late 1969 onward and suddenly disappeared from public sight in September 1971. In July 1972, it was announced that he had failed in a coup d'état to assassinate Mao Zedong and had died in a plane crash while fleeing to the Soviet Union. For a brief moment in late 1972, Lin Biao was commonly defined as an ultra-leftist who was responsible for the excesses of the Cultural Revolution. In 1974, Mao and Jiang Qing launched a "Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius" movement [批林批孔运动], to urge villagers to denounce the two figures. Moreover, Confucius was criticized as backward and inherently antirevolutionary; Lin Biao—cast as a follower of Confucian thought—was additionally represented as disloyal, opportunistic, conspiratorially minded, Soviet-friendly, anarchistic, and "ultra-rightist."

Factional conflict escalated between Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping (who returned to power in March 1973) on one side of the camp, and Jiang Qing and three other associates known as the "Gang of Four" on the other. Deng and Zhao more or less carried out the normal operations of the government, with Zhao gradually falling out of the scene as his health deteriorated due to cancer. Jiang Qing made repeated attempts to seize power, including forming cabinets and leading new criticism campaigns targeted at Zhao and Deng. During these years, Mao curbed the power of the Gang of Four, which aggressively sought to expand their influence, while also publicly criticized Zhou Enlai repeatedly, subjecting him into self-criticisms, especially during official meetings organized by the Central Political Bureau.[15] Zhou Enlai died in January 1976; his national funeral on April 4 in Tiananmen Square—which Mao did not

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[15] The details of the events are hard to verify, but some biographical sources offer support of the actual happening. See "Zhou Enlai's Written Review of Foreign Affairs Work (Key Points)" (July 3, 1973), CD. ["周恩来对外事工作的书面检讨(要点)" (7月3日, 1973), 光碟。];

Xu Zhong, "The Whole Story of Criticisms Against Zhou Enlai's Caused by Kissinger's Second Visit to China," Zhou Enlai Memorial Site, People's Daily Online. [徐忠, "基辛格二次访华引起的周恩来被批事件始末" (4月17日, 2020), 人民网。] http://zhouenlai.people.cn/n1/2020/0417/c409117-31677974.html (accessed May 24, 2021).

attend—turned into a spectacular two-million-citizen gathering and memorial, including vocal criticisms of the Gang of Four and public expression of discontent. The funeral was deemed a counterrevolutionary event and was broken up on April 5. Shortly thereafter, Deng Xiaoping was again removed from his position. Mao died in September 9, 1976, naming Hua Guofeng [华国锋] as his successor. The Gang of Four were arrested by the Party on October 6, 1976, which officially ended the era associated with Mao's reign.

The Mao Era of 1949–1976, from the time People's Republic of China was founded in 1949 to the time Mao died, does not have a unified history, and it is not the objective of this book to develop an authoritative one. This era introduces a pattern of keen interest for this book. The vision of a Communist movement was one of maximal liberation—of building a rich, egalitarian, harmonious society, eradicating suffering for all citizens. Yet, despite some positive outcomes and accomplishments in literacy, food security, foreign affairs, equality, development, and so forth, the Mao Era was also marked by recurring, episodic moments of chaos. How did an idea system rooted in liberatory purpose and proclamations *also* create the dynamic of chaos that, in Mao's own words, had gotten "the whole country…shaken" as it did in 1966–1968? A key part of the answer lies in the unusual inherent quality of an ideational mode of codification; while the normal activation of this mode may be safe and useful, the abusive activation of it could be dangerous and uncontrollable.

AN IDEAL VISION AS PREEXISTING KNOWLEDGE

The idea system revolving around the Chinese Communist Revolution, particularly the efforts led by Mao, was not based on the dynamics located in traditional folk beliefs or indigenous religion. Neither was it founded on established empirical knowledge. Rather, it was based on an entirely new vision—one of a total revolution to establish a social order not impeded by oppression in the economic, political, or cultural realms.

This vision of an unprecedented order, not realized due to existing arrangements, takes its form from what social theorist Karl Mannheim called "utopia."[16] The utopian vision was not baseless; the revolutionary movement imbued a *theoretically grounded* vision in the public, using it to

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[16] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (San Diego, CA, New York, and London, UK: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1936), 192.

serve the purpose of preexisting knowledge. This theoretical vision was certainly informed by the works of Karl Marx, but Mao's *original adaptation* of Marx's ideas was just as important.

Theoretical Contents

Karl Marx had initially theorized the eventual collapse of capitalism and the arrival of a highly advanced, classless society he called communism. For Marx, industrial capitalism, a necessary stage in the history of the humankind, would push human productivity to new heights, principally through the advancement of productive technologies, yet in the process also concentrate such technologies—the means of production in society—into a very limited number of hands and decrease the need for human labor. The increasing destitution of the proletariat class was, for the capitalists, at the same time a decreasing market for who they could rely upon to absorb the growing number of products they could produce with increasingly fewer laborers due to these advancements in technology. Such irreconcilable contradictions would become more serious the more capitalism developed—until the system would "burst asunder" and give rise to an entirely new one, in which all means and outcomes of production would be widely distributed to the people (via a government controlled by the proletariat). This society, then, is essentially "classless" because the "private property" among citizens is substantially equal; in fact, resources are managed and distributed akin to the logic of "communal property" observed in past communal societies—except the productivity is now considerably more advanced. Such a state of "communism" could reconcile the intractable contradictions in capitalism, delivering both freedom and productivity to the humankind in a sustained manner.

Vladimir Lenin had modified, or arguably "adapted," Marx's theory in one important respect. Marx had believed that a truly Communist society could not be developed until capitalism had reached its most mature stage—until it had proliferated across the globe and had penetrated virtually all locations and cultures. Lenin, in contrast, believed that a Communist Revolution could take place before capitalism reached such a stage. As such, a state like Russia—which was essentially an agrarian society—could initiate a Communist Revolution by having a group of elite, educated, revolutionary intellectuals (that is to say, the "intelligentsia") organizing a vanguard party. This vanguard party would take over the state apparatus, thereby seizing control of the private properties and means of production

previously controlled by a few. The party could then encourage rapid modernization by employing the most productive means, thereby rapidly transitioning the country from an agrarian to an industrial society. Eventually, such a state would reach a state of communism without needing to go through the long, painstaking years of letting capitalism develop and ultimately collapse.

Mao Zedong principally modified Lenin's interpretation by his focus on the role of the rural peasants. The Russian Revolution placed its emphasis on the vanguard party, and it largely contained its ideological molding and remolding among the intelligentsia in that party. Peasants' consciousness-raising was only marginally considered. Mao's approach, in contrast, considered peasants to be pivotal to the Communist Revolution. As such, Mao attempted to conduct ideological molding and remolding not just among the urban elites, but also within the peasant class. Mao was generally skeptical of intellectuals or a vanguard party for their tendencies to be disconnected from the masses. His strategy was to bring in peasants to play a leadership role in the Party, train them in the practices of criticism and self-criticism, and symbolically convert their social status into practical, "intellectuals" of sorts—a kind that possesses the real-world knowledge necessary for social liberation as well as a history of physical and spiritual endurance. These ideas led him to attempt broad-based rural development, rural education, and rural-urban integration. Mao believed that mobilizing the peasant class would allow it to expedite the transition toward a highly advanced state of communism, much more so than the Russian strategy, which underestimated the potential resources and energy that could be offered by the rural peasants—the national majority.

Although other Party members' and scholars' writings were also read and discussed—such as Liu Shaoqi's *How to Be a Good Communist,* published in 1939—the historical turn of events would show that Mao's words had an incomparable authoritative status compared to the other revolutionaries. It was *his* vision of communism, *his* theory of social action, *his* definition of correct interpretation, *his* reading of controversial situations that became socially "incorrigible." His thoughts rendered a specific Chinese phrase, literally "Mao Zedong Thoughts" [毛泽东思想], that revolutionaries referenced, and it was distinct from the body of thoughts of other left-wing thinkers such as Marx, Hegel, or Lenin. Mao's superb ability to rationalize and theorize events, combined with his legendary role in history and personal charisma as well as the ritualistically evoked

songs and slogans, was pivotal to the authoritative status of his interpretations.

While the revolutionary idea was very much rooted in theories and theoretical interpretations, the idea system itself certainly did not manifest itself in the form of dry theories and propositions. In both speech and writings, Mao integrated historical and theoretical insights to interpret current events, often mingled with incredible humor and provocative, poetic metaphors.[17] His "whole" idea might be too complex to be truly comprehensible by the general population (excepting the educated intellectuals), but his "general" ideas were often circulated in snippets—frequently quoted out of context in conversations, denunciation rallies, pronouncements, documents, and so forth.[18] What was instituted for most of the public was a sense of vision, a promising and theoretically rich image of the audacious communist revolution to be carried out in China.

COMPACT SYMBOLIC STRUCTURES: BASED ON FITTING IMAGES

Like the ideas related to witches, the ideas defining the revolution also take the form of mutually shared and enacted symbolic structures made up of information. Revolution-related ideas are also formed from *coded information*, but the epistemic process is less about clarifying the ontological status of empirically uncertain things that have purportedly already existed, like verifying whether people could indeed use ointments to turn themselves into werewolves. Rather, a set of *hypothetical* and *idealized* events, objects, and principles is often presupposed at first—and much of the aim

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[17] Although revolutionary interpretations were often infused with poeticism, it should be noted that the Chinese language itself, in its ordinary form, is also figurative and poetic. The simple word "thing" [东西] could be translated as "East West" in Chinese; the word "fire" [火], when written, looks like a fire. Proverbs and idioms are not only numerous but are also tied to numerous cultural and historical references. The poetic quality built into the ordinary language, however, remains somewhat latent until it is subject to purposeful analysis. This book tries to neither over-exoticize nor underplay the role of the Chinese language, admittedly a difficult task. For a background reading regarding the nuances in Chinese-English translation, see Binhua Wang and Jeremy Munday, eds., *Advances in Discourse Analysis of Translating and Interpreting: Linking Linguistic Approaches with Socio-Cultural Interpretation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021).

[18] Lu Xing, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: The Impact on Chinese Thought, Culture, and Communication* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press. 2004), 122.

is to realize these often not-yet-existing ideational constructs into certain arrangements. The epistemic process heavily involves showing and theorizing how a set of preconceived, quintessential codes could *prospectively*—reasonably, rationally, justifiably, and so forth—be fitted with qualified materials (people, events, things) in the domains of pre-coded information.

For example, *does a specific person's conduct generally fit the code of a revolutionary?* In this instance, the *image* of an idealized, pure type of "revolutionary conduct" is first evoked; a thinker within the idea system then matches or fits that image with the concrete conduct manifested by a specific person.

The building blocks of the idea system, driven by an ideational mode of codification, seem to be heavily guided by various *fitted images* (or *matched images*), as I will shortly demonstrate.[19]

The fit with the quintessential, ideational images (codes) was recognized to be potentially imperfect. And if one set of pre-coded or coded information is proven to be ill-fitted for a quintessential image, another set could be sought to take its place. For example, if one revolutionary project is proven to be insufficiently exemplary of the principle of the Revolution—looking too dissimilar to it—another project can serve as an acceptable substitute. It is also recognized that the information itself is subject to change. For example, a person encoded as "revolutionary" could devolve over time; at the same time a not-quite revolutionary person could potentially be molded so that their behaviors and characters could *become* fitting to the ideal images. Ideals are the most pertinent to the operation of the idea system. The typical concept of empirical evidence in law and

[19] This concept is known by some as "visual similes," and the techniques of image-association are widely employed in both propaganda and modern advertising. The essence in presenting is to *make one thing look like another* (X is like Y), and gradually visual similes can potentially become "visual metaphors" (X is Y)—that *one thing is used visually as if it is the other*. For a brief explanation, see Joost Schilperoord, Alfons Maes, and Heleen Ferdinandusse, "Perceptual and Conceptual Visual Rhetoric: The Case of Symmetric Object Alignment," *Metaphor and Symbol*, 24, no. 3 (July 2009), 156–158. I at once find Gustave Le Bon's problematization of visually based thinking of "the crowd" to be inspiring and unsatisfying. The inspiring aspect is how Le Bon connects visual thinking activities with problem-solving, in ways that have extreme consequences to society. The unsatisfying aspect is a style of theorization that neglects complex cognition in actual society, an issue that traditionally concerns ethnomethodologists. This case analysis hopes to address issues of "complex cognition" within the patterns of visual thinking that Le Bon notices in several parts of his analysis. Cf. Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York: The Viking Press, [1895]1960).

science—as in a *referential grounding* of ideas of being tied to a demonstrably stable, verifiable ontological status with coded objects, pre-coded information, and happenings—plays a secondary role.

These fitted images substantiate ideas in a different way than the case of witch hunts we have examined. Because the empirical referents are not presumed to be fixed but instead malleable, much more inaccuracy is permitted. The "falsified" empirical relations do not threaten the idea system in the same fashion. If "Satan" and his "witches" are suddenly revealed to be mere human fraudsters, and they confess in detail to all the tricks and malign deeds they had caused, showing how extraordinary things were actually produced, then the whole idea of witches and witchcraft—the entire code system of alleged empirical things—would fall apart. In contrast, the idea system that rests upon a set of idealized constructs could conceivably remain intact even if an original set of pre-coded information is proven to be somewhat "false"—such a falsehood could be rectified by finding an alternative set of pre-coded or coded information that is more fitting to the quintessential images.

What structures or structural components are the worldly objects, people, and events (as pre-coded or coded information) supposed to be fitted to? They fit into an overarching narrative about what the Revolution fundamentally entailed,[20] and where China had found itself at this point in history. The story of the Revolution, including with it the key figures and key episodes of challenges, was well propagated. The Revolution was an *unfolding drama*; it did not just begin and end in the past; it was actively ongoing in its mid-stages. The task of the Revolution could scarcely be considered completed so long as people were not truly liberated. A great deal of intermediary work still needed to be performed.

Philosopher Kenneth Burke had proposed a "dramatism" approach to analyzing accounts of people's motives using a pentad of five concepts: the *act* (what was done), *scene* (when or where it was done), *agent* (who did it), *agency* (how is it done), and the *purpose* (why is it done) of human

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[20] Although this book does not process the cases using the theory of Algirdas Julien Greimas, his narrativity and semiotic theory, including his actantial model and theory of narrative grammar, can prospectively open up deeper discussions regarding how social actors in all of our case studies use various narratives to shape dialectics in the social world. See Algirdas Julien Greimas, *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory*, trans. Paul J. Perron and Frank H. Collins (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

Table 8.2   Ideational codes in an overarching narrative of the Revolution

	Ideational codes in the revolution
Act (*what was done*)	Revolutionary acts (e.g., helping the nation, supporting Chairman Mao, fighting against the enemies, learning by practice)
Scene (*when and where it was done*)	Revolutionary battlefields toward "advanced communism"
Agents (*who did it*)	Protagonists, antagonists, enemies, and others in categories.
Agency (*how it is done*)	Armed battles, struggle sessions, criticisms, reforms, studies, training and preparation, labor; courage, collectivist unity and spirit
Purpose (*why is it done*)	Achieve advanced communism, an ultimate state of liberation from oppression and exploitation

actions.[21] We can use this model to systematically analyze the scheme of codification of an ideationally driven idea system built on fitted images.

Table 8.2 depicts the overarching narrative of the Revolution. This narrative, we must note, is idealized as an ongoing event, a story that while rooted in its past is still being written. The structure of codification allows various coded things and pre-coded information—in the past, present, and future—to fit into the drama. In symbolic interactionist terms, this drama can generate ideas that are highly meaningful. The kinds of "facts" (pre-coded or coded information) being discovered did not have to be extraordinary in themselves; but with the application of codes and subsequent connection with the drama, extraordinary ideas that looked egregious could be created, but mainly because they were *spoken* and *depicted* into being extraordinary. For example, the act of running away from or giving food to an enemy soldier when they invaded, or a random act of corruption, could be fitted with extraordinary meanings once connected to the narrative of the Revolution.

The Mao Era idea system largely operated by people eliciting local examples that fit with or measure against (a) the image of a nationally known example, or (b) the model idea as depicted in a theoretically legitimate text, statement, or analysis. In other words, the overarching narrative does not contain all the contents; the contents of the unfolding drama come from local examples that "fit."

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[21] "But be that as it may, any complete statement regarding motives will offer some kind of answers to these five questions: what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he [they] did it (agency), and why (purpose)." Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1945), xv.

Table 8.3 A basic model of an ideational mode of codification

Idealized images or ideas (in the overarching narrative)	Fitting images or ideas (in four localities)			
	L1	L2	L3	L4
A	A′	A″	A‴	A‴‶
B	B′	B″	B‴	B‴‶
C	C′	C″	C‴	C‴‶

When Mao and his associates in leadership positions waged a new national campaign, each of them suggested the coming of a new event and a new scene, caused by some new problems and obstacles, or that a change in priorities or past interpretations. The masses were then to participate, with creativity and agency, in constructing the concrete, fitting images. The localized campaign experiences, then, became a critical part of the national campaign experience. Table 8.3 uses prime (') symbols to demarcate how the overarching narrative represents an original form for its different components, whereas different localities were in charge of creating fitting images—variant forms—of the larger narrative.

To give a concrete example, Table 8.4 depicts the revolutionary moment around 1966–1969, when the public identity of President Liu Shaoqi became drastically redefined into an enemy of the people, which acted as a catalyst for various localities to execute the Revolution locally. There was only one Liu Shaoqi, but there were many who might look or behave like him, who might have sided with him against Mao, and who might also be in a highly comfortable position within the Party. Furthermore, how revolutionaries struggled at the headquarters was different from how local revolutionaries did so as individuals and collectives. In some ways, it was up to the local participants themselves to create their local versions of a revolutionary campaign that resemble the national, idealized one.

The principles of "informational density," "compact structures," and "justification" that applied to compact symbolic structures in Europe's witch hunts also apply here, albeit in a different form. Rather than vivid details that would demonstrate the empirical manifestation of witchcraft, here vivid details people may provide about the *matching imageries* would be valuable for the idea system. Provided with enough dense information, the match ought to be self-evidentiary.

Rather than a compactness in evidence that would demonstrate a web of causal linkages, in the case of the Revolution a compactness in ideas among

Table 8.4 Recalibration of fitted images after President Liu Shaoqi was redefined as an enemy during the cultural revolution campaign (1966–1969)

	Overarching narrative	Specific national campaign: exemplary images	Locally fitting images
Act (*what was done*)	Revolutionary acts (e.g., helping the nation, supporting Chairman Mao, fighting against the enemies, learning by practice)	Liu Shaoqi's attempt to moderate and change the meaning or target of campaigns	Identify all cadres who are "fitting" the image of Liu Shaoqi as a revisionist and traitor
Scene (*when and where it was done*)	Revolutionary battlefields toward advanced communism	Revisionists who attempt to alter the doctrine by making counterrevolutionary interpretations	Local revisionists who attempt to alter the doctrine by making counterrevolutionary interpretations
Agents (*who did it*)	Protagonists, antagonists, enemies, and others in categories	Revisionists and traitors, two-faced, revolutionary guise, hidden enemy	Local revisionists and traitors (e.g., particular scientists, writers, intellectuals)
Agency (*how it is done*)	Armed battles; struggle sessions, criticisms, reforms, studies, training and preparation, labor, courage, collectivist unity and spirit	"Unmasking" the hidden identity via struggle sessions, open criticisms, removal from bureaucratic power, arrest	"Unmasking" the hidden identity of locals via struggle sessions, open criticisms, removal of local officers from bureaucratic power, arrest
Purpose (*why is it done*)	Achieve advanced communism, an ultimate state of liberation from oppression and exploitation	To counter the revisionist assault and reclaim territories	To counter the local revisionist assault and reclaim territories

fitted images and their relations is more important. That is to say, comparing to a person who can only comprehend a single thread of ideas and express a few quotes by Mao, a person familiar with different bodies of revolutionary writings, various historical precedents and figures, and the profound connections among them activates the true potential of the idea system.

"Justification" primarily pertains to the *fit* of idealized images or ideas. "Proof" as an activity would be used to measure the level of deviation from the grand vision and narrative, deriving from such measurement one could then projectively theorize the causes and effects.

Clear Categories and Categorical Aggregates

Two features in particular were distinct about the revolutionary idea system's operation: (a) the use of *clear categories*, and by this principle it also involved (b) the use of various *categorical aggregates*. Both features are pivotal in supporting inferencing activities that built upon fitted images (which form more complex ideas).

Categorical Versus Continuous Thinking

No society has been able to function without categories. But not all embrace the use of "categorical thinking"—at least not to the same extent employed by the Revolution directed by Mao.

By categorical thinking I am here contrasting it with "continuous thinking." Continuous thinking is practiced to envision permeability between categories, such as those arranged in a spectrum. Continuous thinking incorporates probability into the core of its mental models, and it is tolerant of ambiguity and hybrids.

These two modes of thinking have their respective strengths and weaknesses.

Obviously, detailed categories have allowed, for example, biologists to classify different types of bacteria. But simple categories can be more useful in some contexts. Humans could process natural colors that have a wavelength between 400 and 700 nanometers, but their discrete classifications have enabled the use of simple three-color traffic lights. Morally speaking, without moral categories it is hard to even say what is "right" and "wrong" if they are just part of a spectrum of behavior, are "relative" to some other reference, or if every case is ridden with ambiguity, hybridity, and situational and perceptual dependence.

Categories often become instruments of symbolic rituals. In symbolic rituals, categories need to be clear. If categories lack sharply defined boundaries—being too flexible and permeable—then the symbolic, moral message behind the rituals would not be distinct.[22] The extensive and repetitive use of labels—a set of quintessential images, functioning as codes—is a characteristic of the Cultural Revolution. It trains people to think discretely, sometimes even when the information and stimuli are mixed, muddled, or ambiguous. Discreteness, though coarser, is more prone to action. It is easier to take action against someone who is a

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[22] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (New York: Free Press, [1915]1965), 13–20, 191–204, 317–321.

discrete "capitalist roader" than against one who is perhaps a "49% capitalist roader." Yet both representations could be created by the same information.

Thinking in categories is also dangerous. It prompts actors and institutions to encode information into already existing categories, thereby almost inevitably foregoing a large amount of ambiguity and nuances.

Political categories. The Revolution's idea system implanted a wholly new set of codes—a new set of clear-cut political categories (and quintessential images) to classify the world.

Two major kinds of political categories were implanted. One is *moral categories* (related to moral categorization) which explain and specify the relations between the sacred and the profane. This is most obvious in the construction of classes of enemies in the Revolution. Another kind is *instrumental categories* (related to instrumental categorization) that facilitate the instrumental execution of sacred ends. This is exemplified by the types of pests that need to be managed to facilitate agricultural production.

Enumeration and *gradations* are sub-practices of categorization. They help to develop sub-codes within a code—or subclassifications within a classification—on the one hand, and streamline different classes of codes into an elegant, nonredundant, well-demarcated, and organized format on the other.

Enumerations are not simply the numbering and listing of items. Instead, as per Cartesian methods, enumerations of ideas mean a great deal more: they are "a partition of the simple natures."[23] By highlighting the essence of a thought in its simplest form, it simultaneously contributes to clarity and focus. It establishes relationships of equivalence and differences (distinctiveness) between things. Moreover, at its best, enumeration helps to capture the essence of a whole, complex program without omission. In Descartes' words, "in every case to make enumerations so complete, and reviews so general, that I might be assured that nothing was omitted."[24] Therefore, when moral categories are enumerated and divide the world into discrete types, and when such categories were mutually exclusive and all-encompassing, it facilitated people to think and act according to

[23] Kurt Smith, *Enumeration*. ed. L. Nolan (The Cambridge Descartes Lexicon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 237–239. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511894695.093

[24] René Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (New York: London: Macmillan; Collier Macmillan, 1986), part 2. [eBook #59] https://www.gutenberg.org/files/59/59-h/59-h.html

narrated situations.[25] When enumeration is successfully carried out with a strongly moral doctrine, it carries a force because of its elegance.

In Buddhism, there are the "Four Noble Truths" and the "Eightfold Path." We know of the "Ten Commandments" and the "Seven Deadly Sins" in Catholicism; in Protestantism, we find the "Five Solae," and in Islam the "Five Pillars." These concise enumerations signified organized, instead of random, relations, which automatically increased their legitimacy.

Gradations specify a hierarchical order. Throughout the Revolution, the Party classified peasants' class backgrounds into rich peasants, middle-rich peasants, middle peasants, middle-poor peasants, and poor peasants, where only the rich or middle-rich peasants were struggled against. They had a higher potential for being exploitative, brutal landlords in the pre-1949 era. Those peasants whose family backgrounds had always been "poor" were, in contrast, considered to be from "good" class backgrounds. They were the previously exploited class, and after the Revolution they were given some exclusive privileges, if not simply respect. An easy way to envision a literally "revolutionary" change was to empower the "poor" or "poorer" peasants against those from "rich" or "richer" backgrounds. Regarding the classification of enemies, "historical" counterrevolutionaries were constant suspects; "active counterrevolutionaries" were targeted for prosecution, subject to varying degrees of punishment and confinement. Ordinary "rightists" who did not commit major misdeeds and expressed the will to reform might be subject to demotion and political study sessions; the harsher treatment was to commit them to reform schools (the "Laojiao center" or "Labor education center"). Those who were labeled as active counterrevolutionaries were subject to the much severer types of units ("Logai camp" or "Labor-reform camp").

In the Revolution, except for those classified to be the severest offenders, most offenders were considered to be "reformable"—and some might even be depicted as "victims." Thus, there was a system of magnitude and proportion built into the idea system, which was to control excess, enact "justice," and ensure the actions taken toward deviants were "fair" and maximally beneficial for the entire Revolution (productiveness, distribution, class relations, etc.). Clear-cut demarcations made such systematic efforts much easier.

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[25] By mutually exclusive, I primarily mean that a distinctive quality is assigned ideationally. In practice, crossovers and overlaps could occur. In the Five-Antis campaign, one could certainly commit corruption *and* bribery *and* counterrevolutionary activities. But fitting into each type creates a specific image that conveys a distinct meaning.

Aggregation

Whereas categories construct classes (codes) in the process of codification, aggregation covers a diverse range of processes but primarily involves the filtering and rearranging of both pre-coded and coded information toward the creation of new classes of "facts" (mental objects). The formation of such new patterns or objects (so-called facts) could then be used as "data" to substantiate ideas.

Before being organized as data, a pool of pre-coded information—even if it has the potential to support an idea—exists in a rather disordered, fragmented state. Until it is aggregated, it does not facilitate the development of crisp, clear meanings.

Aggregation could take many forms, from an elaborate investigative document embellished with numerous details to a one-pager or one-liner, or even to just a "score" or a "label." In fact, a chain of aggregation could be developed, wherein an original lengthy summative document is summarized and resummarized until it becomes a crisp representation of a few key patterns or facts. We can see this in the cases of Anna Fessler and Urban Grandier, wherein a wealth of information was progressively "aggregated" by different parties. Aggregation is hardly a neutral activity; it involves subjective interpretations, and it is an activity in which *filtering* (legitimate or illegitimate) inevitably takes place.

In the cautionary stories about the Revolution, a case often began as coarse accusation or suggestion of a person fitting a category *prospectively*. In the next stages of the event, as people bring forth more "empirical" information to discuss the case, people aggregate various information into mental objects and propositions. Even though the discussion may involve "empirical investigation," the key point often lay in whether the accusers could mobilize the new, fitting aggregate characterization to be accepted by the public or by the institution. Re-interpretation of existing information (including re-extrapolation of information) and new application vof codes are a vital part of idea construction.

Categorical Aggregates as Filters

Whenever clear-cut ideational categories are applied to certain aggregated information, a heavy filtering process occurs.

Table 8.5 depicts how a post-filtered revolutionary reality (Reality 2) is a much more organized and non-convoluted reality than its pre-filtered counterpart (Reality 1).

At the end of the first row, the element "A" becomes emphasized and organized, because it has the most frequent appearances among

Table 8.5 Aggregate categorical filter and pre-filtered and post-filtered realities

Reality 1 (Pre-Filtered, Pre-Aggregated)	Categorical Filter	Reality 2 (Post-Filtered, Post-Aggregated)
ALSISSSAAAAAAASD HIWNQURANLCL Qweerwexzbvhhjl		AAAA 0000000000000 0000000
ZZZZZZZDDDHCSD HIWNQURCNLCLD Trbxddjnssefawqdf		ZZZZZZDDDCC 0000000000 00000

Upper-case letters = Potentially Relevant
Lower-case letters = Negligible Relevance
0 = Flattened, Leveled Representation

Uppercase letters = Potentially relevant
Lowercase letters = Negligible relevance
0 = Flattened, leveled representation

potentially relevant factors, whereas elements that are fewer in appearance or have negligible relevance are either given a highly flattened, leveled representation ("0") or filtered out of the final representation altogether.

The second row depicts a slightly more complex scheme. More than just the most frequent element "Z" can be included in the final representation; "D" and "C" are also included. However, in this case, an unfair distortion might have occurred by the use of aggregation, because "H" and "L" are potentially relevant elements that have emerged twice, but unlike element "C" they are excluded in the final representation.[26]

Many organizations, including schools, businesses, and hospitals, use these filtering devices to sharpen institutional functioning. Individual students, business workers, or patients may have their "progress" assessed by the use of these filters. When they are functional, these filters expedite and streamline processing; when they are dysfunctional, they can filter out complex reality in a way that leads to poor or unfair judgments. But even in the functional scenario in which the filtering serves admirable functions to service the world of practical reality, epistemologically it is always somewhat disturbing to see Reality 2 treated as the *only* reality that there is, whereas information in Reality 1 is obliterated out of existence after Reality 2 is derived. This "problem" is not exclusive to the Revolution case, but to all systems of ideas.

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[26] An example of flattened representation would be "de-identification," such as referencing a previously personalized figure simply as "a person" or absorbing it into a broader category, such as "all current cadres."

In any event, the Revolution was designed to fit the world into ideational categories. Some forms of aggregation include certain truisms, idioms, slogans, or metaphors that could facilitate analogic thinking. There were also the activities of summative enumerations, assessments, and projections. In the European witch hunts, such activities existed, but they were relatively peripheral to the idea system since the empirical aggregation played a predominant role. In the Revolution, the use of these devices—with subjective judgment—was *essential* to the heuristic activities, and they were used—by the masses and institutional officials alike—in great frequency.

The Idea System in Basic Use

One example shows the general way in which Mao put the idea system into practice in practical contexts. We will use an excerpt from Mao's remarks during a meeting in 1964, when he was conducting the "Rural Village Socialist Education Movement" [农村社会主义教育运动], which involved the "Four Cleanups."

The Four Cleanups movement [四清运动] had a slight shift in its public expression. Initially, the movement belonged to "Small Four Cleanups," directed toward (1) accounting, (2) warehouse, (3) finance, and (4) work points [清理帐目, 清理仓库, 清理财务, 清理工分]. The items sounded technical rather than political, but they were directed toward government officials in rural areas, especially corrupt local officials. Later, the campaign morphed into the "Big Four Cleanups," focusing on "thoughts, politics, organizations, and economy" [清思想, 清政治, 清组织, 清经济], and it had larger and more explicit goals that went beyond the local level.[27]

[27] Guo Yuhua, *The Narration of the Peasant: How Can Suffering Become History* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2013), 169. [郭于华《受苦人的讲述: 骥村历史与一种文明的逻辑》(香港: 香港中文大学出版社, 2013), 169.] The actual event sequence was more complex. Initially, Mao issued a "First Ten Conditions" document [前十条] in May 1962. Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping then issued a document to control excess, called "Post Ten Conditions" [后十条] in the September of 1963. Displeased with this policy action, Mao mobilized to revise the general policy in a meeting in early 1965, inscribed in a policy abbreviated as The "Twenty-Three Conditions" [二十三条], which replaced the "Post Ten Conditions." The Twenty-Three Conditions were explicit in defining the campaign as one that seeks to stop those who are in authority [当权派] who adopt a capitalist road.

Zheng Hui, and Lin Yunhui, *Sixty Years of State Affairs: Politics* (Hunan: Hunan People's Press, 2009). [郑惠、、林蕴晖, 《六十年国事纪要:政治卷》(湖南:湖南人民出版社, 2009).] Xiong Jingming, Song Yongyi, and Yu Guoliang, "Cultural Revolution: Recollections, Reconstructions, and Reflections," *The Chinese University of Hong Kong Research Center for Contemporary Chinese Culture Journal 6*, (2018). [熊景明、宋永毅, 餘國良 "中外學者談文革", 香港中文大學中國文化研究所當代中國文化研究中心集刊 六, (2018)。]

The forum transcript included ten points of discussion. The following excerpt reproduces five of these for an illustrative examination.

2. We have not engaged in class struggle for ten years. We did it once in 1952 and once in 1957. And these were only done in bureaucratic departments and in schools. This time we must carry out the Rural Village Socialist Education Movement well, using at least three or four years. I said three or four years at the least; it could also be five or six years. In some places, the plan is to complete 60% this year. Do not rush; *intending to rush could have the opposite effect to reaching the destination* [欲速则不达]. Of course, this is not to say that the work can be sluggish; a problem is that the movement is already started. Henan [河南] is too rushed. Saying that this movement is the second land reform; the depiction makes sense.

4. If a test point has failed; it is not surprising. The work has to carry on even if it fails. Special attention should be given to summarizing the lessons from failure.

…

7. The *ox ghosts and snake spirits* should be let out. Them coming out halfway would still not work; they would retrieve back to where they were. …

…

9. (Some people say that university professors go to the countryside to carry out the four cleanups, saying that they did not know anything.) The intellectuals (or "knowledge elements") actually have the least amount of knowledge. Now that they have admitted defeat. Professors are not as good as students, and students are not as good as peasants.

10. Others have handed over their machine guns, so let's stop arresting them. Arresting them is to pass on the contradictions to the higher ups. The higher ups do not understand the situation. So it is better for them to be placed in the supervision by the masses.[28]

In this forum, which took place in 1964, Mao was updating people on how to act in the new scene. First, he set a scene of "class struggle" campaigns, comparing them with the ones in 1952 and 1957. Loosely defined, class struggles of all kinds had been instituted during the emblematic land reform era of 1950–1952; campaigns in the domains of journalism, culture, government, education, and the arts were encompassed. The 1957 class struggle Mao was referencing, I presume, was the Hundred Flowers movement of 1956–1957. Theoretically, the Great Leap Forward

[28] Mao Zedong, "Interjection at Handan Siqing Work Symposium (Excerpt)." (March 28, 1964), CD. [毛泽东, "在邯郸四清工作座谈会上的插话(摘录)", (3月28日, 1964), 光碟。]

campaign between 1958 and 1960 could also be characterized as such; in an abstract sense, it was an effort to increase production in order to surpass the productivities of external enemies. But in this instance, the "class struggle" was selectively related to the pictures in 1952 and 1957, when the Three-Antis, Five-Antis, and Anti-Rightist campaigns took place. The imageries revolved around identifying and dealing with internal enemies rather than increasing production. The point of the aggregate statement, "this is just like the times A and B," was to set the context and the scene that was the most appropriate for people to relate. It focused people's attention to certain images and not others.

The use of numbers here is not meant to be precise. "At least three to four years, if not five to six," was an aggregate depiction conveying Mao's intention that it was not to be a short campaign that would end in a few months, that he felt that a good effort could not be rushed, or perhaps he was saying that in order to convey an intimidating impression for the cadres.[29] This time frame was so broad as to encompass the whole movement, but at each location the timing depended on the specific circumstances. Mao had said that it could be half a year in some places, and for some places the work would take much longer—and it took about that long to execute a reform correctly. [30]

"We plan to finish 60% by this year" was not a precise statement, even if it involved a specific percentage. How much campaign progress had been made was undefined, but it was a rough percentage in the view of Mao in terms of completion. It was not clear why Mao thought that it would need so many years to complete the rest of the "40%" of the

[29] If Mao's words are to be taken literally, he most probably meant that a good effort needed time. He referenced the first land reform, which also took three and four years. He explained that when some people are surrounded, they feel nervous and that could yield messy results [你一围攻, 他一着急, 就乱来]. Therefore, they needed time to be persuaded. Mao Zedong, "Speech at Hangzhou Conference" (May, 1963), CD. [毛泽东, "在杭州会议上的讲话" (5月, 1963), 光碟。]

[30] In another discussion, Mao urged the current movement participants fighting the current "annihilation battles" [歼灭战] to learn from those who had participated in the "annihilation battles" of early-day revolutionary armies. These early revolutionaries and Red Army members took more than a decade to process what they had learned and to finally enact the land reform. The time frame of the whole movement should be at least four years, even though some places could be shorter. He emphasized that the efforts should not be rushed, otherwise the enemies under pressure could execute fakeness [弄虚作假] successfully. Mao Zedong, "Interjection While Listening to the Report" (March 24, 1964), CD. [毛泽东, "在听取汇报时的插话" (3月24, 1964), 光碟。]

campaign; but we could extrapolate from this depiction to mean that, in Mao's view, substantial progress had already been made by resurrecting unfinished campaigns deserted in prior times, so that the works that had been performed in the past year had led to substantial progress.

The instruction not to rush—evoking the phrase "*attempt to rush may work against reaching the destiny*" [欲速则不达], a Chinese idiom—was generally wise advice. But he had clearly been displeased by the slow pace in other places, so he added to the instruction, "not to go slowly, as the movement has already started," to counterbalance a previous depiction. On the one hand, there was a problem of the movement being stalled or stagnated.[31] However, on the other, there was also the problem of the movement being too rushed. These opposite depictions, then, were meant to address both of his points.[32]

Mao briefly approved of the current movement through the image of the "second land reform." This was meant to be a sign of praise. The first land reform was deemed to be successful and instrumental. The image of the two movements could be similar: they were drastic, experimental, and had the purpose of removing a domineering class from power. It had a damning significance: if the land reform movement targeted the landlord classes, the Four Cleanups movement essentially equated some government officials' deeds with those of the landlords. Mistakes might also be made, and the actions might seem extreme, but at least the intention, reasoning, and outcomes were generally valid. The scale of significance

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[31] Mao Zedong, "Speech at Hangzhou Conference" (May, 1963), CD. [毛泽东, "在杭州会议上的讲话" (5月, 1963), 光碟。]

[32] The critique of the execution at Henan [河南] being too rushed carries some unclear meanings, but overall it probably meant that he thought the movement was not executed properly. Mao could be referring to the fact that the effort was not thorough enough and therefore entailed some fakeries, or the efforts might be imprecise or excessive. In one statement, Mao named a couple of cadres [陈光、戴季英] in Henan who wouldn't change, "scolding the mother after eating a meal-full." [吃饱了饭骂娘].

Mao Zedong, "Speech at the Ming Tombs on Military Affairs and Training of Successors" (June 16, 1964), CD. [毛泽东, "在十三陵关于地方党委抓军事和培养接班人的讲话" (6月16日, 1964), 光碟。] In another text, Mao seemed to consider that Henan's efforts had been stalled and obstructed; even though there was noticeable progress, the process was still not completely smooth. Mao Zedong, "Speech at Hangzhou Conference" (May, 1963), CD. [毛泽东, "在杭州会议上的讲话", (5月, 1963), 光碟。]. Elsewhere, he urged more cautiousness in carrying out the movement.

Mao Zedong, "Central Government's Instructions on Speeding up Rural Socialist Education" (May, 1963), CD. [毛泽东, "中央关于抓紧进行农村社会主义教育的批示", (5月, 1963), 光碟。]

might be comparable to the first land reform for the revolutionary movement.[33]

If one test case fails, then the idea that one should try again and learn from the mistakes was generally wise advice. The other expression also involved an approximation of sorts; it is an analogy to "*ox ghosts and snake spirits*," another folk idiom. The snake imagery stands out more than the ox: Mao's point was that if the target (snake) is not completely exposed, it would retreat entirely. The specific description expressed Mao's view at the time of how events would generally transpire in the given situation, and people could comprehend the idea because it "looked like" it could conceivably happen.

In the ninth point, Mao made a general statement that intellectuals have no knowledge, and "now they had admitted to defeat" [现在他们认输了]. A few individuals with university positions admitting to ignorance could be the empirical basis for this. Such an abstract representation was not necessarily false, even though they could be depicted in other ways. But in fitting the information into these exact imageries, Mao depicted a situation of limited progress for the movement. The characters in the overarching narrative were re-specified: a reverse hierarchy—in knowledge and in revolutionary virtue—was depicted in characterization. Peasants held more knowledge and other attributes that benefit the Revolution than did students and professors, in that counterintuitive reverse order.

In the tenth point, Mao offered some advice to those executing the cleanups: if others hand over their machine guns, then let's not arrest them [人家把机关枪都交出来了，就不要再逮捕他了]. This is a peculiar form of imagery if it is applied to wartime, and it contains its inherent wartime morality. It presumes the point of the battle is not to kill the other person, but rather to defeat them, making sure that they no longer have the power.[34] And, without being stated explicitly, an overuse of power at the wrong time could have unnecessary, undesirable effects—most obviously, discouraging others from handing over their guns, thus uniting

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[33] This comparison to the first land reform is clearer in another statement. He stated that the Four Cleanups campaign is "the biggest struggle since the first land reform" [这是土改以来第一次大斗争]

Mao Zedong, "Speech on the Four Cleanups movement at the Central Conference" (May, 1963), CD. [毛泽东，"在中央会议上关于四清运动的讲话"，(5月，1963)，光碟。]

[34] I interpret this statement to mean that once an official is suspended from power, it is not necessary to arrest that official. And "supervision by the masses" could conceivably mean that the officials who were suspended from regular work would just return to their home community, perhaps even taking up another job, hence "being supervised by the masses."

enemies that would otherwise have surrendered. In this case, Mao specified what the problem was: doing so would "[pass] on the contradictions" [把矛盾上交] to the higher-ups who were less knowledgeable than the masses. The meaning and reasoning here are very inexact,[35] but the general meaning is cohesive: for *whatever* reason, Mao advised people not to arrest officials who were removed from power. That was the point in focus. And the actions to be placed on such categories of people were also provided: for them to be "supervised by the masses" [放在群众中监督]. The details are not mentioned, but the image given is clear enough to instruct people what to do "in general" as a next step. Institutions could make a reasonable interpretation based on the bare instruction and then formulate specific guidelines and actions accordingly.

I admit to making guesses in my interpretive "translation." The reason is not because of a linguistic deficiency. Mao's utterances often carried a degree of vagueness that simply *requires* guesswork. The exact meaning was frequently unclear, with the statements often being so broad, so aggregated. Nonetheless, this is not to say that these statements had no meanings at all. The visual images in each statement were cohesively fitted into an aggregate form that could be vividly imagined. A whole movement, like live beings, was being recklessly rushed, was 60% done, that there were ox ghosts and snake spirits being enticed, and that the enemies had possessed and had handed over machine guns. These aggregate depictions could not be stated to be false or unreasonable. No matter what takes place empirically, what exact move or policy was being made, these details were to be fitted into the unfolding drama of the Revolution, the details of which were to be reinterpreted and redefined. Mao exerted his control through providing an ultimate interpretive authority for the ideationally driven idea system.

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[35] The reason could indeed just be a case of differential knowledge. However, it could also be a matter of strategic consideration. Senior officials could perhaps stall a case, manipulate the legal process, rule in favor of those officials, or prosecute harshly out of fear or in exchange of personal security. Alternatively, Mao might also think that some officials targeted were arrested with an exaggerated pretext, or that if the scale of prosecution became so big and the punishment so severe then it would threaten the whole movement itself. For example, he had expressed that too much resistance might cause production to drop, and such a group could affect the lower and peasant classes. So he urged the process of discussion to be slow, and not to discuss everything at once; the discussion should be integrated into a consideration of broader range of everyday affairs, including sanitation and farming.

Mao Zedong, "Instructions when listening to reports" (November 1964), CD. [毛泽东, "在听取汇报时的指示" (11月, 1964), 光碟。]

Enumeration

Mao guided the idea system using elegant enumeration. These enumerations were not simple empirical summaries. Enumerations helped him to achieve several ideational functions, namely to (1) *focus* diffused actions, (2) *organize* disorderly thoughts, including priorities, (3) *clarify* murkiness or contradictions, (4) *unify* a synthetic theme, and (5) *simplify* complex ideas. Enumeration brings forth the most relevant and essential aspects of things, organizing them into a concise order. While it is not a given, enumeration can render complex ideas into more easily visualizable, memorizable, and communicable forms, such as increasing the ease in generating posters and organizing actions.

The Party campaigns made use of enumerations to tie together several of the most relevant priorities. Although this is not unusual for any bureaucracy, when they were practiced in the Revolution, the enumerations were often meant to fit into the plot of the overarching narrative.

Take the "Three Antis" and "Five Antis" campaigns of 1952 as examples. The Three Antis were:

Anti-Bribery and Corruption [反贪污]
Anti-Waste [反浪费]
Anti-Bureaucracy-ism [反官僚主义]

The Five Antis were:

Anti-Bribery [反行贿]
Anti-Tax Theft and Tax Evasion [反偷税漏税]
Anti-Skimming on Labor-Work and Materials [反偷工减料]
Anti-Stealing and Cheating the Nation's Property [反盗骗国家财产]
Anti-Stealing the Nation's Economic Information [反盗窃国家经济情报]

The first three items directed the activities toward the government. Once the movement was set in motion and the internal bureaucratic apparatus was shaken up and under control, Mao shifted—or more precisely—expanded the categories toward private entities. Doing things the other way round would not have worked as effectively, as government cadres could well protect private entities.

The Three-Antis were corruption, waste, and "bureaucracy-ism" (there may not be an exact translation for this). The enumerated principles fitted together in a specific way. Attacking "bureaucracy-ism" helped to retain the revolutionary movement's legitimacy and spirit, righting the institutional priority. "Corruption" and "waste" were charges that were not exactly targeting counterrevolutionaries, but corruption was serious enough to warrant officials being investigated or even arrested or removed from office. "Waste" was a slightly lesser charge, but it carried some symbolic values when read together with other items. It conveyed an ethic of asceticism, contrasting officials whose personal or official practices were seen to be outwardly non-frugal. It also legitimized the movement to investigate financial and budgetary documents and records, forcing bureaucratic transparency so that wrongs and wrongdoers could be "exposed."

The Five-Antis campaign also imbued synergistic meanings into the way that the items were arranged. Rather than individualized bureaucratic problems, they symbolically contrasted the *general* behaviors of some people who unethically maximized their profit or private interest and behaviors that considered, prioritized, and defended the interest of the public and that of the nation. And by placing the five items in the same "class," they thus collaboratively form a cohesive mental image, with some interesting practical implications. The charges of "bribery" and "stealing or cheating government property"—noticeably milder wrongdoings—would then be struggled against alongside those who were "stealing or cheating economic information." For the symbolic connection, a crime such as bribery would thus be suggestively connected to an international context (or counterrevolutionary context), warranting that the offenders be "deposed." In order to avoid being affiliated with a crime of such magnitude, many private companies became incorporated, or they donated or sold off a large part of their profits to the government—thus transferring the means of production into the hands of the state. The remaining private economic enterprises became much more passive and tempered in their behaviors of profit-making, information-gathering, risk-taking, and politicking. The impetus to conduct trading with foreign or internally suspect partners, for example, might be tempered if they could be symbolically associated with "assisting others in stealing the nation's economic information." While the symbolic association is not the same as symbolic equation (a subject we will discuss later), the very inclusion into the campaign

suggests that the wrongdoing warranted a great deal of priority at that moment.

Enumerations sharpen people's focus on a clear set of targets that were easy to remember and communicate—and ideally easy to understand. The items themselves often provided inherent coherence and legitimacy. Morally speaking, some enumerated categories in earlier campaigns contained moral truisms, which, at least on the surface, were hard to argue against. Who could, for example, argue against eliminating corruption and waste? In such a case, it is difficult to oppose a campaign if it makes intuitive sense. And by being clear and enumerated, they add force to actions, helping to direct actions by agents of a moral community. And with a "classification template" being offered, institutional officials and the mass movement could enact more streamlined treatments—connecting moral ideas to ground issues in the same way, sharing approximately the same framework, and using a standardized set of language and classification schemes.

Instrumental enumerations had a less direct connection in terms of their truisms. They functioned to address more complicated and nuanced matters. There were the policy doctrines and documents that involved enumeration: the "First Ten Conditions," the "Twenty-Four Conditions," and even the "Sixty Conditions." Such policy codes were complex, and they did not become memorized slogans. In other words, these enumerations did not serve the purpose of building *fitted images* the same way that moral enumerations did. They provided more concrete definitions and guidance—and by doing so providing a more concise, actionable course of principles to an otherwise broad organizational agenda. Akin to workplace manuals today, they sometimes perform a "checklist" function to ensure that the campaigns were conducted appropriately and thoroughly through procedural steps. Still, these instrumental enumerations embellished the Revolution with a neat, organized, civilized, and technical appearance. The simple nature of a rationalist appearance adds some moral weight—a form of "rational-legal" authority[36]—to the actions, as it stands against the appearance of arbitrary actions.

Assessments, calculations, and projections. Communication in the Mao Era often involved numbers in assessments, "calculations," and projections. These numbers were often vague numbers, hypothetical numbers,

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[36] See Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), 212–222.

or target numbers. They might be "broadly accurate," and they made intuitive sense, but their primary roles seemed to be to paint a broad-stroke picture, and then direct the actions taken accordingly.

For example, regarding the Four Cleanups campaigns, Mao assessed the progress as being too slow and ineffective. In a verbal statement,[37] he had used "annihilation battle" as a metaphor, and then contrasted this with how unnecessarily slow it was for people to use 40 days to learn about documentation before they enacted any actions:

> how to fight the fight against annihilation? A county of 280,000 people concentrated on 18,000 people. After two months of un-opening, they learned about documentation for forty days…. I think it is a cumbersome philosophy. I don't advocate that kind of learning. It is useless to look at it without doing it.

Mao advocated learning from experience. He stated an approach: "use one day to study the documents, start conferencing in day two, and make a decision in about a week's time" [文件一天就读完了，第二天就议，议一个星期就下去]. He then cited a 21-year-old security guard of his who claimed that he had learned nothing during the 40 days; he found it more useful to learn about documentation for 7 days, and then started to learn from practical experience—the practical experience of working with the lower and peasant classes. All of these were somewhat hypothetical numbers that came out of abstract aggregation.

Another set of numbers Mao cited regarded the size of work teams. He said that having 18,000 work team members from a county [县] of 280,000 was too many. He asked:

> Why not rely on all 280,000 people in that county—the good ones? For every 28 persons there is a bad one, but there are still 27 good ones. If there are two bad ones, there are still 26 good ones. Why not rely on them? There is no reason why 10,000–20,000 cadres had to take a full month, or even two, to work on a campaign and still for the campaign to be unaroused… If the people were relied on correctly, about 10–20 people are enough…. We did not carry out the Revolution the same way it is now…10,000–20,000 to work on one or two small counties—rain falling like buckets—and the campaign was still unaroused after several months.

[37] Mao Zedong, "A Speech on the Four Cleanups Movement" (January 3, 1965), CD. [毛泽东，"关于四清运动的一次讲话" (1月03, 1965), 光碟。]

This statement shows how numbers and general descriptors were generally used. He also described the specific situation as "*cold cold clear clear*" [冷冷清清], an expression conveying a state of desolation. Another figure he liked to refer to was the enemy being a minority. Two out of 28 were referred to earlier, and later in Mao's speech he said that village members should be informed right away that minor cases—like "*small thieves small pilferer*" [小偷小摸]—are not the targets. The extremely serious cases to be targeted are the "extreme minority."

In summary, although numbers and numerical descriptors were used, precision was not their feature, nor was it really the point. They were either an aggregated form of pre-coded or coded information to build fitted images, or they themselves worked as a form of fitted image to generate ideas. In the former case, imprecise numbers at least purportedly relate to a specific empirical reality (i.e., the domain of *happenings*); in the latter case, they related more to ideational, imaginative scenarios. In both cases, they give abstract ideas much more concrete footings, thus forming more solid fitted images. Mao used them creatively to re-specify and modify the unfolding narrative.

Escalation, Redirection, De-escalation

Mao used these image-like, figurative devices skillfully to escalate, redirect, and de-escalate situations. Already, we can see how he sought to escalate and speed up the Four Cleanups campaign. At some point, when the campaign took off and achieved results, he expressed his contentment with the progress through a metaphor:

> The more corruption is uncovered the happier I am. Have you ever caught lice [你们抓过虱子没有]? At first there are many on the body, as you scratch and catch more of them the happier you get. [抓得越多越高兴][38]

At the same time, Mao had also urged restraint and slowdown for the Four Cleanups. He had previously stated that the efforts "should not be rushed." He had also asked campaign participants "not to look for ants in

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[38] Mao Zedong, "Speech at Hangzhou Conference" (May, 1963), CD. [毛泽东, "在杭州会议上的讲话" (5月, 1963), 光碟。]

places where there are no ants" [没有蚂蚁的地方不要硬找蚂蚁].[39] On another occasion, he urged that the campaign should stop after a certain degree: "The toothpaste cannot be squeezed too tightly. Some places only have 18 residing families; when there are no lice, must the lice be caught?"[40] He asked.

Although the Revolution involved many acts of brutality, Mao also emphasized the need to not to simply kill everyone or exert the harshest penalty possible. He had urged the Four Cleanups campaign to "leave an exit path" [留点出路] for people to come clean and correct themselves, and be reformed by the system under supervision.[41] Proportion was often a part of the theme of Mao's directives. The approach, Mao articulated, was always to unite the vast majority (95% or more) in a class struggle. For most of those 95% majority, they would merely need some persuasive education, and in the event that they had committed minor errors, they needed to "wash hands and take baths"; the bottom line is they should be mobilized to unite against the authentic enemy, which is a minority.

Mao had also conveyed a sense of proportionality to the general handling of wrongdoers, at least when he perceived an excess. Specific to executing the Rural Village Socialist Education Movement, Mao explained: "do not grab the braids, do not use the stick, do not put the cap on, and additionally do not chase or coerce, do not beat or scold" [不抓辫子, 不打棍子, 不戴帽子, 还要加上不追不逼, 不打不骂]. He added that as long as people honestly admitted to their mistakes and committed themselves to correction, "then count them into the 95%." This again provides another sense of the figurative nature of precise numbers. He added a metaphor that those whose hands and feet are dirty [手脚不干净] indeed should be criticized, but "after a bath, they still need to work," probably referring to the need to keep them for their usefulness in economic production, instead of incarceration.[42] As for physical violence, Mao instructed: "Do not hurt (or injure) too many people, but a minority of people need

[39] Mao Zedong, "Central Government's Instructions on Speeding up Rural Socialist Education" (May, 1963), CD. [毛泽东, "中央关于抓紧进行农村社会主义教育的批示" (5月, 1963), 光碟。]

[40] Mao Zedong, "Speech at the Small Symposium of the Central Working Conference" (December 20, 1964), CD. [毛泽东, "在中央工作会议小型座谈会上的讲话" (12月20日, 1964), 光碟。]

[41] Mao Zedong, "Speech at the Small Symposium of the Central Working Conference."

[42] Mao Zedong, "Central Government's Instructions on Speeding up Rural Socialist Education."

to be hurt. A group of good people need to be rewarded and encouraged; a small minority of bad people need to be handled."

Taken together, we can see how Mao used fitted images and figurative devices—not concrete descriptors—to urge caution and to instruct how to institute corrective methods. Mao also played with opposing imageries on the topic of hurting (or injuring) people physically—and by doing so he achieved painting a dynamic "balanced" picture.

Several years later, Mao continued to scale up the movement—up to the point of the onset of the Cultural Revolution. Many cadres were already affected; in fact, whole governmental departments had been paralyzed or taken over.

MAO ZEDONG: The real four types of (rightist) cadres are only one, two, three percent.

ZHOU ENLAI: Now the ones identified have far, far exceeded this figure.

MAO ZEDONG: Exceeding is not to be feared, in the future vindication [rectification] can occur! If some of them could not work in their local places, they could be transferred elsewhere to work.[43]

At that moment, even though it was brought up that the number of the rightists had exceeded his numerical target and depiction, it was not judged by Mao to be a problem. Vindication and redress were systematically built in as a mechanism since the early days of the Revolution. The idea conveyed is that not only could individuals be corrected, but—even if mistakes should preferably be avoided in the first place—the system could also correct itself if mistakes were made. At that revolutionary moment and situation, the course of action and its momentum were not to be curtailed.

At the onset of the Cultural Revolution, Mao gave a gesture to moderate the excess dynamics, at least slightly. Mao had criticized the vulgarities of the forms of struggle as lacking in content and being low in level. Regarding some ubiquitous posters on Beijing that said "Smash the Heads of Dogs" [砸烂狗头], Mao commented: "There are not so many heads of dogs; these are human heads" [哪有那么多狗头, 都是人头]. He further

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[43] Mao Zedong, "Speech at the Report of the Central Working Conference."

criticized the jet-plane stance used in struggle sessions. He publicly urged the comrades to be "more civilized," raising their forms to a higher level.[44]

As the Cultural Revolution waged on, it eventually demanded intervention by Mao to stop the ongoing clashes. This was most noticeable when the conflict at Tsinghua University came to a three-year stalemate between different factions. The two main battling factions were the Sky [天派] and the Earth [地派]. The episode was tense, involving 1000 people being injured, about 30 permanently maimed, and 18 dead at the university.[45]

In a face-to-face meeting with some of the movement leaders on July 30, 1968, which lasted about five hours, Mao criticized them for fighting.[46] Fitted imageries were put to work. Mao said that in the Cultural Revolution, a "minority" of university students were not engaged in struggles—and if they were, they were struggling with each other physically [武斗]. Mao told the leaders:

> now workers, peasants, warriors, and residents are not happy. The majority of the students are not happy; even those students who support your faction are not happy. You all have separated from workers, separated from peasants, separated from military teams, and separated from the majority of students [你们脱离了工人，　脱离了农民，　脱离了部队，　脱离了居民，　脱离了学生的大多数].

"Separate from the Masses" was an image that ran counter to the revolutionary idea of uniting the masses, participating in the collectivist ideal, rather than alienating them. Mao continued: "The masses does not like [to fight] a civil war."

Calling them "little generals" [小将] who have committed mistakes, Mao suggested unification: "Hope you all won't separate into Sky and

[44] Mao Zedong, "Instructions on Methods and Forms of Struggle Sessions" (February, 1967), CD. [毛泽东, "关于斗争方式方法问题的指示" (2月, 1967), 光碟。]

[45] Kuai Dafu [蒯大富] was a student of chemical engineering at Tsinghua, a gifted agitator who led a movement that mirrored that of Beijing University around the same time in 1966. In June of 1966, Kuai Dafu was labeled as a "fake leftist, real rightist" (「假左派, 真右派」) by Wang Guangmei [王光美], the wife of Liu Shaoqi. This verdict was overturned three months later. In fact, perhaps he came to fame because Mao had named him one of the five main leaders in February 1967. In 1968, the organization Kuai had led (清华大学井冈山兵团) went into physical, armed conflict with an opposing faction.

[46] Nie Yuanzi, Kuai Dafu et al., "Chairman Mao's Instructions on Stopping Arms (Delivery of Key Points)," (July 30, 1968), CD. [聂元梓、蒯大富等人"毛主席关于制止武斗问题的指示 (传达要点)" (7月30日, 1968), 光碟。]

Earth factions. Just create one faction, why the need to create two?" [希望你们不要分天派地派, 搞成一派算了, 搞什么两派]. But before he did so, he issued a severe threat. He announced that a national pronouncement would be made, whereby "whoever continues to commit the violations of beating up the PLA soldiers, obstructing traffic, killing people, or committing arson, would be committing crimes [犯罪]. If a minority refuse to listen and change, insisting against correction, they are bandits [土匪], they are Kuomintang [国民党], and therefore need to be surrounded, and if they continue to resist, annihilation [歼灭] will be executed."

Taken together, we see step-by-step, escalated fitted imageries being laid out. Fighters who are "separate from the masses" were one image, but a more problematic one was "civil war" participants. At this point, they were still acknowledged as fighters *among* the revolutionaries. But Mao's ultimatum was to redefine who they were, according to steps of severity. The fitted picture of "criminals" no longer classifies their actions to be revolutionary; "bandits" even suggests an anti-revolutionary image, and Kuomintang was an outright enemy identity. The threat to surround the enemy, and, if they resist surrender, then annihilate them was a battlefield metaphor used only against an enemy in wartime. Ultimately, several university movement leaders co-issued a statement that summarized Mao's words, the interjective statements by Vice-Chairman Lin Biao, their own acceptance of the criticism, and their pledge to carry out Mao's instructions. The whole episode took around one year to completely fizzle out.

Mao also subtly recharacterized or reinterpreted a situation or person, usually at a certain time he deemed to be appropriate, in order to moderate the punishment received by those who were struggled against. These re-fittings of imageries are more subtle because they sometimes still contained a re-criticism, but the new criticism might be milder, which warranted him to suggest an improvement of the treatment of such figures. To some old cadres who were removed from power from the beginning of the Revolution (in a minor event dubbed "February Adverse Current" [二月逆流] by Mao in February 1967, Mao issued a statement saying that: "Regarding all the old comrades and family members related to the February Adverse Current, do not criticize. Work on improving the relations with them." [47] This generous acquittal was possibly due to his own

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[47] Mao Zedong, "Statement about Not Criticizing Old Comrades and Relatives Related to the February Adverse Current" (January 3, 1969), CD. [毛泽东, "关于不要批判于 '二月逆流' 有关的老同志及家属的批语", (1月03日, 1969), 光碟。]

admission that many excesses were committed in the beginning of the Cultural Revolution—as expressed in the statement of "mistake and trouble" that opened this chapter.[48]

Even if he was not sincere, Mao had redefined the priority of the movement—to move away from criticizing the old cadres. He characterized the Adverse Current participants as being people who might be re-formable— or even if they do not change, they should be tolerated in the new context. This "war" situation looked different now.

In a lengthy speech given in late 1968,[49] Mao noted that "In the world there is always left, middle, and right. If there isn't a right, where does your left come from? Every faction is left, I do not agree" [世界上总有左中右。没有右，你左从哪里来呀?没有那么绝。统统是左派，我不赞成]. Based on this truism, he even left room for rightists, or those who participated in the Adverse Current, to be part of the "nine main representatives" on the conference table; among the left-middle-right division, they could represent the right. Although this sounded like an incredibly precarious position to take, in the specific context the main point was that more tolerance could occur, the treatment of those labeled "rightists" could improve, and that they still had a possible use inside the Party. He explicitly used the example of paying only 20–40 dollars a month to these cadres to be too excessive a punishment, rendering them unable to support their families. Deng Xiaoping was portrayed as unthreatening, and Mao used the expression "separate from the masses" [脱离群众] and "swinging goose-feather fan" [摇鹅毛扇子] to emphasize that he was not an active threat, therefore Mao expressed reservations about the call to remove Deng from office.[50]

Mao reemphasized the general philosophy of rehabilitation and inclusion—that people must also be "accurate" in their prosecutions, using evidence. Even for the two individuals [翦伯赞、冯友兰] he named as examples of "big intellectuals" (or "big knowledge elements") who were releasing poison [放毒的], Mao's method was not to kill them. The first

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[48] Mao Zedong, "Comments at a Central Party Work Conference" (October 25, 1966), CD. [毛泽东，"在中央工作会议上的讲话" (10月25日，1966)，光碟。]

[49] Mao Zedong, "Speech at the Closing Session of the Twelfth Plenary Session of the Eighth Session of the Chinese Communist Party" (October 31, 1968), Transcript. [毛泽东，"在中共八届扩大的十二中全会闭幕会上的讲话" (10月31日，1968)，记录传抄稿。]

[50] Mao also actively sought to lessen attacks against Deng Xiaoping on other occasions. For Mao's reasoning, see Mao Zedong, "Comment on Deng Xiaoping's Letter" (August 14, 1972), CD. [毛泽东，"对邓小平来信的批语" (8月14日，1972)，光碟。]

job was to criticize them, and the second to ensure that they keep their lives [一批二保], giving them "a bowl of rice" to preserve their lives [给他们碗饭吃] and then have them reformed by laborers, peasants, and soldiers [叫他们受工农兵再教育]. All these evaluations of concrete individuals had a symbolic purpose: these examples helped to create extremely concrete pictures symbolizing the appropriate action to subtly different kinds of people, with subtly different purposes, depending on the timing.[51]

In March 1971, a campaign had been waged to target Chen Boda [陈伯达], a high-level cadre believed to be in the same camp as Lin Biao. Several people had been severely criticized for being collaborators of Lin Biao. Mao reviewed the self-criticism statements of some main leaders. He declared that they were well written, and therefore what mattered was their future practice, which was to be observed.[52] In his evaluative comments, Mao noted that some people had boarded a "ship of thieves" [贼船], or a bandit ship. The metaphor originated from a popular Chinese expression. The rough meaning is that one might climb onboard a ship of thieves by mistake, and by the time one realizes the mistake it is already too late as the ship has already sailed. This involved Mao characterizing that these people had been traveling on Chen Boda's or Lin Biao's bandit ship for a long time, and since then had "walked the wrong line" [走错了路线]. Although Mao still criticized these actors for making severe mistakes, at the same time he had created an image that provided a fitting

[51] On another occasion, Mao emphasized that room should be created—and some paid employment should be given—even to those who occupied an unfavorable role in the Revolution, even if the crime was as serious as serving as informants for foreign countries [s] and forming a "secretive anti-Party club" [秘密反党小集团]. He was against killing counter-revolutionaries. The premise was that a clean confession needed to make, and then, upon successful corrective measures as observed by the Party, they would be forgiven and recategorized—in the public system of representation. Again, despite the nuances I have discussed in the previous chapter, Mao made room for potentially reversing the verdicts for some [平反], going as far as dramatically saying that if all judgments were proven wrong later, then all verdicts could be reversed [全错全平]. Mao Zedong, "Speech at the Tenth Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee" (September 24, 1962), CD. [毛泽东，"在八届十中全会上的讲话" (9月24日, 1962), 光碟。]

[52] Mao Zedong, "Comments on Huang Yongsheng, Qiu Huizuo, and Li Zuopeng's Review Letter" (March 24, 1971). [毛泽东，"对黄永胜、邱会作、李作鹏的检讨信的批语" (3月24日, 1971)。]

reason to possibly excuse them from the most severe penalties.[53] This metaphor was found in several self-criticism statements, as well as a party policy document approved by Mao.[54] The Party document specified that even those "comrades" who had been "more deeply trapped," who had "committed severe directional mistakes" after having boarded a bandit ship, if they correct their mistakes and "return to Chairman Mao's revolutionary line," then the Party ought to "politically, ideationally, organizationally organize them and trust them." The bandit ship was an amazingly apt metaphor for the moment.

There were also moments when Mao used fitted images to clarify priorities. One example concerned the concern of "going through the backdoor" [走后门] around 1974. The problem was nepotism—people were using connections with cadres in power to circumvent policies and gain unfair advantages. Mao responded to a letter from a high-level cadre, notifying him of the concern, commenting that the whole issue was "connected to several million people." He added that "among those who enter through the backdoor there are some good people, and among those who enter through the front door there are bad people"—a fitting image. And because the timing coincided with the "Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius" campaign, dealing with this issue might dilute the ongoing campaign [有可能冲淡批林批孔].[55] A battle scenario was connotated, with the backdrop of the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign being the central battle at that moment.

The Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius project was waged by Mao's wife Jiang Qing around 1974. In that campaign, both Deng Xiaoping, who Mao had repeatedly defended and who had risen to power since 1972, and Zhou Enlai were discursively attacked. Zhou was portrayed as being like a

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[53] Jin Chongji, *Biography of Zedong Mao, 1893–1949,* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 1996), Chapter 38: Lin Biao incident. [金冲及《毛泽东传, 1893–1949》(北京:中共中央文献研究室, 1996), 第38章:林彪事件。]

[54] The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China forward to the Sichuan Provincial Party Committee, "Request Report on Continuing the Action against Lin Chen's Anti-Party Group" (General Office of the Communist Party of China [1972] No. 14, March 23, 1972). [中共中央批转四川省委, "关于继续开展反对林陈反党集团斗争问题的请示报告" (中发[1972]14号, 3月23日, 1972)。]

[55] Mao Zedong, "Letter to Ye Jianying" (February 15, 1974). [毛泽东, "给叶剑英的信", (2月15日, 1974)。] An official document reiterates this point after several days. "Notice of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Problem of 'Backdoor'" (General Office of the Communist Party of China [1974] No. 8, February 20, 1974). ["中共中央关于"走后门"问题的通知" (中发「1974」 8号, 2月20日, 1974)。]

follower of Confucius.[56] Mao intervened when he observed the tendencies and directions to be directed for private power gain, led by Jiang. Mao instructed[57] people to avoid "forming arbitrary connections" [乱联系], specifically not to abuse slogans that could liberally link to problems and things to the Lin Biao line, and then "infinitely escalate them to higher plane" [无限上纲]. One such slogan was "Upward Hanging Downward Connecting" [上挂下联], used by investigators to expand their scope of investigation. Another illustrative slogan was "Having Routes Any Time, Any Issue, Anywhere" [时时、事事、处处有路线]—presumably meant that cadres had been accused of forming connections and cultivating routes with others—on anything, anywhere.

In that moment, Mao escalated his discursive actions toward his wife Jiang Qing, on several public occasions.[58] Creative imageries were used. Jiang was described as trying to form a "Four-Person Little Sect" [四人小宗派]—a concise number leaving people to guess who the other three were (which he later called the "Gang of Four" [四人帮]). Memorably, he said to Jiang Qing in a political meeting: "Don't set up two factories. One is called a steel factory. The other is called a dunce cap factory, putting a dunce cap onto people at every turn" [不要设两个工厂，一个叫钢铁工厂，一个叫帽子工厂，动不动就给人戴大帽子。]. The most severe criticism was articulated when Mao explicitly stated what he guessed her ambition was—that she wanted to be "backstage boss" [后台老板] who told a member of her sect, Wang Hongwen [王洪文], to be the Politburo Committee Chair and herself play the role of CPC chairman—taking Mao's place; that is to say, thus controlling the entire political machinery of China. These vivid analogies were not merely humorous attacks. Such depictions would be utterly damning for any other person other than Jiang Qing, though Mao dulled the impact of the remarks somewhat by

[56] Barbara Barnounin and Yu Changgen, 2006, *Zhou Enlai: A Political Life* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2006), 301.

[57] "Opinions on the In-depth Development of the Criticize Lin Campaign — Summary of the Twenty-third Plenary (Expanded) Meeting of the Third Session of the Beijing Military District Committee of the Communist Party of China, December 30, 1972" (Document of the Party Committee of the Beijing Military Region [1972] Party No. 58, December 30, 1972). ["关于深入开展批林整风运动的意见——中共北京军区委员会三届二十三次全体(扩大)会议纪要，一九七二年十二月三十日"（北京军区党委文件[1972]党字58号，12月30日，1972）。]

[58] Mao Zedong, "Criticisms on 'Jiang Qing'" (1974), CD. [毛泽东，"对'江青'的几次批评" (1974)，光碟。]

adding phrases like "please pay attention to." These clear stances and image classification, made in critical moments, probably had curbed the most serious discursive attacks launched against Zhuo and Deng.

As we will see later, Mao was hardly the only one who mastered the techniques to maneuver the idea system. Many actors who were involved in key moments of conflict also vied to propose certain correct interpretations, assigning gradations, and those interpretations involved using certain labels. Mao was outstanding in his moral and political authority. Measuring by creativity and skill, however, Mao would meet his match.

Totality as Internal and External Coherence

Both the European witch hunts and the Revolution operated on a highly coherent set of ideas integrated with information.

This chapter specifically highlights four structural design features of the revolutionary idea system. Aside from (A) operating on *fitted images* (a form of *coded information*) based on a unified set of quintessential categories (codes), the idea system was (B) *totalistic*—ideationally and institutionally, (C) *purity-focused*, and therefore pollution-conscious, and (D) *outwardly collective and public*.

These features, in compound configuration, worked synergistically to make all codification processes and outcomes within specific localities cohere. They also brought these internally coherent ideas into harmonious alignment with "external" voices, information, and epistemic paradigms (science, economics, the arts, etc.).

The word external has been put in quotation marks because the revolutionary system was largely enclosed; it was all-encompassing, on the one hand, and it tended to either absorb anything external into the internal sphere, or, on the other, it eliminated it from public view altogether. The key to forging extraordinary coherence, however, should not be simply viewed in terms of brute acts of silencing, repression, and violence. A negative focus would dismiss over half of the picture. Rather, we should see both the positive and negative activities of idea constructions and maintenance. Doing so can help us to understand how it was possible for the idea system to forge extraordinary coherence with the proliferated

fitting of images (and information) existing at all levels everywhere, performed by a variety of social actors on all kinds of matters in society. Since we have already discussed the first feature of fitted images at length, this chapter will explore the other three, and then consider how they might handle contradictions that emerge or could emerge.

Totalistic: Ideationally, Spiritually, and Institutionally

As can be inferred from previous examples, the revolutionary idea system aimed at achieving totality in many senses. It exhibited an ambition in *ideational totality*—the goal of developing totalizing idea contents to comprehensively envelop and reorient social life. Entailed in this endeavor, then, is to develop an all-embracing knowledge system that could essentially encompass anything and everything by the Revolution. In theorizing "liberation," for example, the idea system became conceptually tied to culture, identity, and personal activities—not just to politics. The idea system might not explain why the sun may rise or the rain may fall, but all scientific knowledge could potentially be viewed as relevant to the agendas of the Revolution. The idea system might not explain how one should organize a family dinner, or how to fight a mountain tiger while hiking, but one could perhaps relate these seemingly disparate topics to revolutionary theory, to lessons from Chairman Mao, or to imageries in revolutionary stories.

Connected to ideational totality is *spiritual totality*. The spirit of the Revolution incorporates everything and is superior to all other spiritual forms. The nobility of revolutionary figures was placed above that of personal projects and friends and families. This can be seen in a popular saying: "爹亲娘亲不如毛主席亲，天大地大不如党的恩情大," literally translated as "Dad dear Mom dear is not as dear as Chairman Mao; sky big earth big not as big as the Party's grace and kindness."[1] This phrase most likely originated from a song written in 1966 and was popularly circulated between 1966 and 1971.

Hand in hand with ideational totality and spiritual totality is *institutional totality*, which means that state power was activated in such a way

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[1] The songwriter Li Jiefu [李劫夫] was linked with the Lin Biao incident, and the song was banned from circulation and performance after 1971. He himself was imprisoned in late 1971.

that the Revolution covered virtually all regions, in every village, in every part of the system. The state eliminated—or at least severely curbed—the autonomy or existence of civic or intermediary institutions as well as any oppositional political parties. Schools, families, factories, farms, media, science, and technology were all streamlined and instrumentalized, according to the state's revolutionary objective.

The arts arena exemplifies such a transformation. Mao had encouraged combining "revolutionary realism" and "revolutionary romanticism" in art. A new artform which featured workers, peasants, and soldiers as the main protagonists emerged; the themes involving historical heroes, legends, gods, ghosts, and love stories gradually became taboo, especially after the Cultural Revolution began in earnest. Chinese operas, usually centered on traditional tales, were deemed to be old/feudal, and refashioned to express and promote the heroism and sacrifice of past and present fighters. These "model" performance and production pieces aimed at providing model character and behavior—they were impressive, and they were highly popular.[2] The production of alternative arts and entertainment institutions—such as those connected to the "old" Chinese culture, or the hedonistic yet avant-garde entertainment scenes in Shanghai during the warlordist era—was largely halted and suppressed, or simply placed out of sight, during most of the Mao era.

Purity-Focused and Pollution-Conscious

One special feature of the ideationally driven idea system was an appetite for symbolic purity, clarity, exclusivity, and cleanliness. Eradicating impurities was embedded in the themes and slogans of the Revolution.

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[2] The first five model Peking operas emerged in 1967; they were *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* [智取威虎山], *The Red Lantern* [红灯记], *On the Docks* [海港], *Shajiabang* [沙家浜], and *Raid on the White-Tiger Regiment* [奇袭白虎团]. As historian Paul Clark notes, these grand, refined productions, which had tremendous box-office appeal, met with audiences who were often eager to watch new reproductions and renditions of them. They crowded out the production of many other non-model prospective opera projects simply because their quality could hardly be matched. While a discernable level of autonomy and diversity still remained in the arts after 1949, 1964–1966 seemed to be a turning point. The Cultural Revolution campaigns had a lasting effect, influencing the content and style of productions well into the mid-1970s, despite the efforts to rejuvenate and restore a more open and diverse art scene at that time. See Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 18–57, 197–202, 213–214.

Many societies have subtle forms of ritual around purity and impurity, especially when categories and norms are transmuted and transgressed.[3] What made the Revolution distinct was the "rational" character of the purposes of their rituals, involving explicated, systematic methods to deal with polluting elements.

In each campaign, there was intense theorization to explain the underlying causes of social ills, to identify targets, and to clean, quarantine, or get rid of the polluting targets altogether.

There were measured gradations of problems and counteractions; different cleansing (or simply cleaning) mechanisms corresponded to different kinds of violations.[4] Laziness or minor character vices could be "cleansed" by confessing in a regular study group. Borrowed from the Soviet tradition, CPC members routinely practiced vocal criticism and self-criticism in meetings.[5] This format was perceived to be useful because it drew out conflict and negative emotions from within the group, and dealt with them directly instead of letting them fester and accumulate. Impure elements were to be symbolically destroyed: the accused may confess a violation, a misunderstanding may be clarified, or a sanction—such as punishment—could be administered to settle an issue. Serious moral offenders were subjected to "study sessions" organized at various organizations and most often elaborate confession or self-examination statements[6] needed to be produced. More polluting elements were subject to quarantine after their exposure.

These classes of people were subject to programs and mechanisms of *purification*. Killing and purging were supposed to be the last resort when dealing with forms of pollution. Ideally, rule-violators should be subject to successful reeducation and reformation, and many events and records could be constructed to demonstrate the *conversion* of subjects—such as

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[3] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London and New York: Routledge, 1966), 3–4.

[4] Lu Xing, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: The Impact on Chinese Thought, Culture, and Communication* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 42–46.

[5] Lowell Dittmer, "The Structural Evolution of "Criticism and Self-Criticism," *The China Quarterly 56* (October–December, 1973) 708–29; Philip F. Williams and Yenna Wu, *The Great Wall of Confinement: The Chinese Prison Camp Through Contemporary Fiction and Reportage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 32, 110.

[6] These statements are commonly called 悔过书, 书面检讨 or 检查.

through a reclassification. Landlords handing over their estates to the state might also warrant reclassification.

There were also more formal corrective institutions during the Cultural Revolution.[7] These spaces hosted the impure elements that needed to be purified. They were organized by a model known as "Re-education Through Labor"—pronounced *Laogai* [劳改] or *Laojiao* [劳教]. "Prisons" were generally known by the name of *Laogai camp* [劳改营], and a lesser version of which was the *Laojiao center* [劳教所]. There were also special study classes [学习班], which could be held at a certain time and place every day or night. The guiding philosophy of these institutions was that the harsh lifestyle of demanding manual labor in farms, mines, and factories—combined with intense study group sessions—could help people such as rightists and intellectuals eliminate anti-revolutionary thoughts and habits.[8]

Other than targeting individual "knowledge elements" and rightists, purification was imposed on whole categories of people, such as "landlords." Even cadres were not immune. Expressing the criticism that many party cadres were "three-door cadres" [三门干部]—that is to say, "leaving family door, entering school door, and entering office door [出家门进学校门，出学校门进机关门]—Mao supported the sons and daughters of urban bureaucrats entering into "cadre schools." [9] Such schools resembled the reeducation labor camps of Chinese prisons, except with a less demanding workload and somewhat more emphasis in political study. Depending on the specific schools, they enrolled people from bad class background or normal official cadre members in the government.[10]

For the few most severe culprits, they might face immediate execution, a death sentence with a two-year reprieve, or long-term imprisonment in

[7] See Philip F. Williams and Yenna Wu, *The Great Wall of Confinement*.

[8] Philip F. Williams and Yenna Wu, *The Great Wall of Confinement*, 107–118.

[9] Mao Zedong, "Speech at the Central Working Conference" (June 6, 1964), CD. [毛泽东, "在中央工作会议上的讲话" (6月6日, 1964), 光碟。]

[10] Xing Lu, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: The Impact on Chinese Thought, Culture, and Communication* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 42–46;

Lowell Dittmer, "The Structural Evolution of "Criticism and Self-Criticism." *The China Quarterly 56* (October-December 1973): 708–729; Alexander Casella, "The Nanniwan May 7th Cadre School." *The China Quarterly 53* (January-March1973): 153–157; James C. F. Wang, "The May Seventh Cadre School for Eastern Peking." *The China Quarterly 63* (September 1975): 522–527; Fen Sing-Nan, "The May 7 Cadre Schools in the People's Republic of China: 1968–1976." *Administration and Society 18*, no. 1 (May 1986): 29–43.

a labor camp.[11] Struggle sessions [批鬥大會] often entailed rough treatment, acts of humiliation, and even beatings.[12] In such instances, mass incivility might not aim to purify the individuals, but—fitting with classic anthropological conceptions—the purification was directed toward clarifying and strengthening the collective morality, partly by clarifying the boundaries, using the subjects as symbolic examples.

Lastly, purification was not only directed at people. For example, one purification treatment Mao directed at the Chinese operas in 1963 was to stop paying salaries for producers and workers who reinforced classic, traditional, "feudal" themes—the ones which revolved around "emperors and officials, talented and beautiful couples" [帝王将相, 才子佳人].[13]

Outwardly Collective and Public

One fascinating feature of the Revolution was how things were displayed publicly, out in the open. This may be a by-product of Mao's strategic approach, one that relied on a mass movement as its basis. Thoughts were not supposed to be kept private, including confessions and corrections. Neither were people's lives! All who occupied a place within society were actors inside a revolution. Their words and deeds, whether they were conscious or not, had symbolic power and implications toward how the Revolution would progress. The Revolution relied upon them to act publicly to help fight the revolutionary battles. This is captured in a statement issued by the Party Central Committee during the onset of the Cultural Revolution:

> [We] need to fully utilize formats like big-character posters [大字报] and big debates[大辩论], carrying out big noise, big release [大鸣大放], so that the masses could clarify the correct viewpoints, criticize the wrong opinions, expose all the ox ghosts and snake spirits. Doing this can make the grand

[11] Zhang Ning. 2008. "The Political Origins of Death Penalty Exceptionalism: Mao Zedong and the Practice of Capital Punishment in Contemporary China." *Punishment and Society 10*, no. 2 (April 2008): 117–136.

[12] Xing Lu, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: The Impact on Chinese Thought, Culture, and Communication* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 140–142.

[13] Mao Zedong, "Criticism about theatre" (November, 1963), CD. [毛泽东, "对戏剧界的批评" (11月, 1963), 光碟。]

masses elevate their awareness in the struggle, improve their abilities, discern the right from wrong, distinguish the enemy and ourselves."[14]

Less about punishment and violence, "going public" was instead critical of the themes of mass mobilization and mass education. Carrying a flyswatter on one's belt during the "Eradicate the Four Pests" campaign, for example, helped to replicate a depiction of a military frontline, in however minor a way this might be. There were some differences: such acts, according to the parents of a memoir writer, were more ubiquitous in the cities than they were in the rural areas. In the village, the campaign was taken less seriously; eradicating sparrows was mostly relegated to children.[15]

Going public—through "exposure"—helped to create "data" in a public symbolic system. The actors who asserted a fit of images did not necessarily have the final say, or a definitive say in the matter, or at least it was, purportedly, not meant to be so. But they created debates and discussions about the fit, enacting various local settlements, solutions, and experiences that could service the education of revolutionaries of other locations, in addition to the local revolutionaries. In other words, "publicizing" emphasized learning on a collective level, not just a private one. By encouraging a culture of exposure, and then subjecting contradictions to mass criticism, it opened up channels that might have otherwise been kept hidden by bureaucratic secrecy, corrupt organizations, or any powerful individuals behind closed doors. In summary, collective learning and exposing actual situations (data) were ostensibly two functions of the highly "public" character of the idea system.

Many behaviors were dramatic, symbolic enactments. They produced the scenes and events of a revolution. During the land reform process, a frequently enacted visualized display was a mini, do-it-yourself museum (or exhibit) of the landlord class. After a landlord's home was ransacked, local party members reorganized all the properties to create a tableau of the landlord's wealth, highlighting their decadent, counterrevolutionary lifestyle. The landlords served as purified "examples" of class enemies in the public consciousness. These acts were devised to educate the masses

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[14] "Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Proletarian Cultural Revolution" (August 8, 1966). ["中国共产党中央委员会关于无产阶级文化大革命的决定" (8月8日, 1966)。]

[15] Wang Youqin, *Victims of the Cultural Revolution: An Investigative Account of Persecution, Imprisonment, and Murder* (Hong Kong: Open Books, 2004), 99. [王友琴《文革受難者—關於迫害、監禁與殺戮的採訪實錄》(香港:開放出版社, 2004), 99。]

who had not mastered the concept and revolutionary consciousness behind the revolutionary situation.

Such symbolic techniques were later institutionalized and pushed with full vigor during the Cultural Revolution. Struggle sessions [批斗大会] often involved dunce caps, placards, a "jet-plane" posture, and some kind of dirt being symbolically smeared on the transgressors. Wearing a tall cap [戴高帽] had been associated with the status of honor, part of the uniform worn by prestigious officials in past dynasties. As a form of humiliation, the dunce caps that were on the subjects were made of paper. The placards labeled the subjects' identities, like "ox ghost snake spirit" or "counter-revolutionary," along with their names. The wife of Liu Shaoqi had experienced such a session when she was forced to reenact a scene of her wearing a traditional long Chinese dress associated with the upper class [旗袍] and wearing a string of ping-pong balls on stage—ironically mimicking the pearls she used to wear.[16] Black ink, a symbol of dirtiness, was often smeared on the subjects being publicly paraded. Half-shaved haircuts called "yin-yang head" [阴阳头] were given to some subjects, producing an unpleasant and dehumanized appearance—a practice that had some deeper roots in traditional China. During denunciation, many of these subjects were forced to stand on the chair and bow to the audience, symbolizing their apology. Some had their arms held by two guards at the back, which was called a "jet-plane mode" [喷气式]. A jet-plane stance was not only uncomfortable but also signified a state of total subjugation.

Preemptive Design and Secondary Elaboration

Many problems, wrongdoings, setbacks, inaccuracies, limitations, and other forms of contradiction had emerged. These were countered with defensive mechanisms. These mechanisms preempted, countered, or managed these contradictions.

To utilize the model we have used to analyze the European witch hunts, Figure 9.1 maps out *an orbit of potential explanations* revolving around certain core theses. The core, nucleus propositions may be put as, *on aggregate, Mao and the revolutionary project he idealized are correct*. Other secondary explanations, while they may contain insufficient evidence or

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[16] Anne F. Thurston, *Enemies of the People: The Ordeal of Intellectuals in China's Great Cultural Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 123.
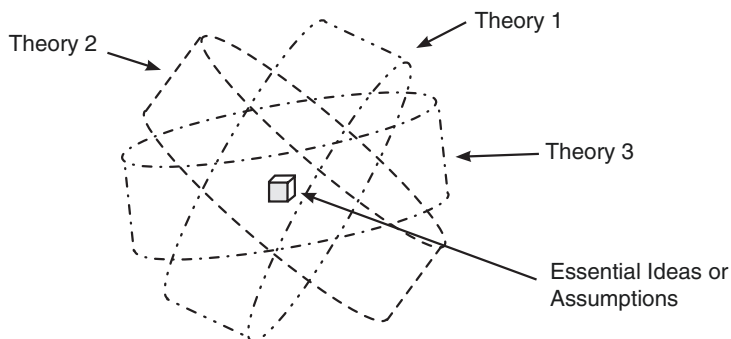
Explanation 1: We all make mistakes.
Explanation 2: Experiential learning and reflection help us to correct mistakes.
Explanation 3: On aggregate, the gains may be greater than the losses.
Explanation 4: Imperfection and unfortunate losses are inevitable.

Fig. 9.1 An orbit with four potential explanations operating within parameters of acceptable contradictions (regarding shortfalls in the revolution)

contradict one another, served defensive or even reinforcing functions for the overall idea system.

The first common interpretation was that *the Revolution embraced individual mistakes*. Relatedly, a second proposition was, *learning from mistakes was a consistent, core feature of the Revolution*. True revolutionaries, unlike those who were stubborn, also actively sought to correct their mistakes. However, they did not necessarily do so by reparation or apology. Instead, they achieved this by enacting the correct actions with a proactive attitude. We have seen the emphasis on extensive reflection and correction in previous examples; even Mao himself resigned from PRC chairmanship after the Great Leap Forward, at least in part due to his admission of the mistake he had made. This is to say, not only were there theoretical ideas intended to support the points, but there were also many fitted images backing them.

The third interpretation was based in a form of cost-benefit analysis, to say that *even though there were losses, on the aggregate the gains were greater*. Such claims render more detailed calculations, of which aggregation played an important part. But the advantage was that shortfalls would be "wiped" away by the gains during the calculation. Another interpretation is that *imperfections and unfortunate losses are inevitable*. This latter

conception was bolstered by the metaphors associated with wartime situations, wherein unpredictability and imprecisions pervade decision-making. Or, if a situation involves novices learning their ropes, mistakes are expected. Given these circumstances, imperfections and shortfalls are, in a sense, understandable and forgivable.

The Chicken Lot Example

One revealing example of handling imperfection can be seen in a simple story reported in the *People's Daily* in 1967, titled "The Whole Family Learns from Book of [Mao's] Quotations."[17] The story began when some privately raised chickens were observed to have wandered out of their private lots. A production team member called Luo Xian [罗仙] saw them and also let her own chickens out of her lots to be fed on the public lot. Another member of the production collective saw the behavior and complained to her husband. During dinner time, the husband recited a quotation from the book, asking his family to follow: "Comrade Bai Qiu En's selfless spirit to serve others is shown in his extreme responsible behaviors at work, as well as his extreme ardor toward comrades and the people."

The husband asked, by letting the chickens out into the public lot and eating the collective grains, "What kind of thinking is this? Does it conform to Chairman Mao's teaching? [这是什么思想?符合毛主席的教导吗?]" In response, the wife admitted that she thought others had let their chickens out deliberately and so she followed suit. "This shows that I still have selfish intentions, and have not learned from Comrade Bai Qiu En's selfless, altruistic spirit." The son then chimed in and said, "Mother! Your actions were not correct. Even if others do it, we still should not! This is selfishness for self-gain [自私自利]." Seeing Lo humbly accepting the son's criticism, the husband said, "Tonight we have achieved practical learning from *Chairman Mao Book of Quotations*, having learned it well and applied it well. Now let us eat dinner."

This model example illustrated how the first and second defensive explanations came to work. Initially, mistakes were committed. Individualism prevailed for a moment. But, as a result of reading Mao's quotation books and seeing a model comrade's selfless behavior, people learned to improve themselves. They also came forward to admit their

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[17] "Quotations for the whole family," *People's Daily* (Beijing), January 4, 1967. ["全家学语录", 人民日报(北京), 1月4日, 1967。]

faults, having others correct their thoughts. And it was *because* of the open learning and criticism approach that greater revolutionary consciousness was achieved.

The Tsinghua University Example

A brief example illustrates the third and fourth defensive explanations. In the long meeting with student leaders in 1968, at which Lin Biao and Zhou Enlai were also present, Mao had assessed the excess of the Cultural Revolution, following the "Hundred Day War" in Tsinghua University.[18] Physical confrontation had led to numerous deaths and injuries, as well as the acts of beating, torture, and interrogation. In the meeting, Mao frankly admitted that he was responsible for inventing the dunce cap and parade rituals during the early land reform process. Some approaches had been taken to further extremes by the likes of Kuai Dafu, as exemplified by his inventing and using the jet-plane mode. The following reflections then took place:

MAO ZEDONG: Jinggangshan's [井冈山, the faction headed by Kuai Dafu] methods are not good, I mean Commander Kuai's Jinggangshan. Having killed four people, injured a total of fifty—this kind of influence on society. I am not looking at one person [but the whole situation]. The damage is the least, the least, the least [我也不是看一个人, 损失就最小最小最小].

LIN BIAO: Worth it… The damage is the least.

ZHOU ENLAI: Vice Chairman Lin said it well. The damage is the smallest, the smallest. The achievement is the greatest, the greatest [损失最小最小, 成绩最大最大].

MAO ZEDONG: If any worker is going to you later, you should adopt a welcoming attitude. Do not adopt Kuai Dafu's methods.

Upon admitting the severe flaws, Mao, Lin, and Zhou all used aggregation to assess the situation, concluding that the damage was already kept to almost the minimum ("the least"), in relation to the positive effects the

[18] Mao Zedong, "Talks when meeting the 'Five Leaders' of the Red Congress" (July, 28, 1968), CD. [毛泽东, "召见首都红代会'五大领袖'时的谈话" (7月28日, 1968), 光碟。]

measures had on society. Also connected to their first two defensive propositions, Mao demonstrated that if mistakes were identified then they should to be corrected; having learned from the past errors exemplified by those committed by the Kuai Dafu.

Overall, these four propositions served preemptive functions. When problems and contradictions surfaced, they were ready to be efficiently processed. Perfections were to be strived for, from courageous experimentation, proactive learning, and self-correction. Campaigns like "Learn from Dazhai" and "Learn from Lee Feng" that fundamentally implied learning from model cases were far better than imperfect and average cases—and even these model cases were not posited to be complete, and thence extra improvement and experiments were needed. School and study sessions encompassed open criticisms and self-criticisms; even otherwise good leaders subjected themselves to these practices concessionally. The idea system, due to these mechanisms, was largely preempted from breaking, becoming incredibly resilient.

Detailed, Rigorous Thinking in a Complex Chain of Elastic Codes

Fitted images were essentially produced by codes being applied to information. With the codification being ideationally driven, the Revolution relied on a set of codes with the quality of being *highly elastic*. This quality had widespread significance to all detailed, step-by-step inferencing activities.

THEORIZING ELASTICITY: USING ELASTIC CONSTRUCTS

By the term elastic, I mean a quite distinct quality. Different codes have different attributes in terms of their *referential parameter*—the way signs could tangibly be tied, pegged, or referenced to objects.

Highly concrete concepts (codes) tend to have a narrow range of qualified referents; once institutionalized, they can be convenient tools to create unified intersubjectivity and stable standard definitions. Codes that are highly abstract may be tied to a much wider range of qualified referents, and there is more room for disagreement over the referents' qualifications, gaps, sense of arbitrariness, and so forth.

To illustrate the abstract-to-concrete spectrum, we may consider the differences between three words: "justice," "mammals," and "donkey." Justice is obviously the most abstract of the three. We could not "touch" it physically. Without concrete elaboration, justice is forever a vague image, and one with fuzzy boundaries. A mammal, in contrast, is physically tangible enough to be touched. However, the touch is extremely partial.

When one touches a mammal, one does not touch all kinds of mammals—monkeys, hippopotamuses, dolphins, dogs, and so forth—all at once in a way that truly represents the referential boundary of the code. The objects that "mammal" references can thus be very concrete and discrete, unlike justice. But such objects are not singular. The qualifying referents are concrete and varied in range. Donkey is the most concrete code of the three. When one touches a donkey, one simply touches a donkey. The referent is the most singular, clear, and unified.

Elastic codes fit into the abstract-to-concrete spectrum *flexibly*. Elastic codes can potentially be more concrete or abstract, depending on their use. This is somewhat akin to elastic bands that can potentially expand or contract, depending on their use during a given moment. While there is a "normal state" or "normal shape" to which the elastic codes refer, they can be temporarily expanded or stretched beyond that normal shape, a shape that may stay in place for a while or transform.

Such stretching, however, requires work, as does the maintenance of the stretched shape. Suppose the original meaning of a code revolves around a more concrete core, the referential parameter that temporarily extends would forge more distant relations from the original core. So long as the extension is within a tolerable limit, it is still always possible to revert back to an original state, substantiated by more "classic" definitions and examples. A continual presence of forces would need to keep a stretched definition "in shape," or else the parameters and shape would experience reversion.

Elastic Constructs Versus Visual Symbols

Visual symbols can also make the flexible crossing between the concrete and the abstract. In the context of a United Nations meeting, the concrete symbol of a flag may "represent" the idea of a legitimate national entity recognized by its peers in the meeting. But *elastic constructs*—that is to say, things encoded with elastic codes—differ from visual symbols in a few key ways.

First, in the case of elastic constructs, the fitting of abstract ideas into concrete information is only a *temporarily borrowed relation*; the acts to establish the "fitting" often require more work than visual symbols do.

Once instituted in a stable institutional environment, a Japanese flag—a visual symbol—consistently stands for the Japanese nation (rather than other peer nations within the institutional field, which have their own flag symbols to represent them). Although the envisaging of the nation may differ, the link between the symbol and the referent (the nation) remains the same. In the case of elastic constructs, elastic codes require repeated stretching activities, work, and force in order to maintain the referential relationship with a certain set of information.

This point highlights a second difference: more *effortful, continuous works are often required* to establish stabilized meanings of elastic codes and elastic constructs. This is due to the temporariness in meanings. The visual symbol of a national flag has a relatively stable referential relationship with a set of intended objects, at least within an institutional field. But consider the act of benevolence toward a person. This information must be explicitly represented (encoded) as an act of "comradeship," with some deliberate effort invested, in order to show that it is an act of comradeship within the scene of a revolutionary battle. The relations need to be continuously specified and re-specified, with a considerable amount of renewed, deliberate effort—with the ongoing emergence of new information, within new situational contexts.

Third, elastic constructs more effectively convey specified meanings at a *conscious* level than visual symbols. Visual symbols, as well as tacit metaphors and idioms, have more embedded and tacit relations with the intended referents. However, once being forced to explicate the relations—such as questioning a citizen regarding the exact relationship of a flag and why it must stand for a set of meanings—the magical "representational" quality of the flag is often lost. Arguments and narrations would be of much more practical, representational use. Elastic constructs, already embedded in—or ready to be used in—arguments and narrations, are thus significantly more suited for meaning explication at the conscious level.

Related to the aforementioned point, elastic constructs had the unique power of *making things into equivalent statuses*, making one thing temporarily "become" another thing (or equivalent to another thing)—and thus treated as another thing. Because of such a quality, people could equate the concrete and the abstract at a *conscious* level, where the relations are *explicated* in *detailed*, specified terms. People could use elastic constructs to direct things in a much more precise, targeted, detailed manner than

they could use with visual symbols or metaphor constructs; bureaucracies could even "bureaucratize" these constructs into their operation.[1]

From Resemblance to Equivalence

Resemblance means to "look alike." This does not, however, mean the objects have to be exactly the same. They just need to look sufficiently alike, with some kind of overlapping features, to belong to the same "type"—the same family. But the process of resemblance is hardly automatic, or inherent, in the features of objects themselves. In many cases, they need conscious, deliberate cognitive and verbal efforts ("language games") to make it clear what those overlapping features actually are. I, a human, could suddenly be grouped into the family of "struggling wild animals" by people playing the game of pointing out my overlapping features with other animals struggling to thrive in the wilderness.[2]

Equivalence does not therefore literally mean certain things being the same in every aspect. It principally means that they can be seen to belong in the same "family" or "type" that, by their identifiable overlapping features, have certain equal properties. In this sense, equivalence here differs from mathematical equivalence, where the things (represented as numbers) to be weighed and calculated are exactly identical. It is closer to the notion of *substantial equivalence* in the modern-day usage of the term—as in genetically modified crops may be substantially equivalent to their counterpart after they are incorporated into market products.

Equivalence can be in *essence* or in *function*. *Essential equivalence* means that the two may be believed to share enough *essential* properties, therefore warranting the same class of assumptions and treatments. A court may rule that the punishment issued for one murder case is the same as another because the nature of the two cases is *essentially* similar and therefore equivalent, even though the exact actors and actions differ. *Functional equivalence* implies that one can practically substitute the

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[1] To qualify my statement: some visual symbols embody elastic codes, and vice versa; for example, "democracy" as an elastic concept and the American flag as a visual symbol are intertwined. My effort here is to highlight the distinctiveness of elastic codes is to showcase certain distinct properties are essential to the building of elaborate, complex ideas at a conscious level within an idea system.

[2] For the discussion of "family resemblance" (in German *Familienähnlichkeit*), see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations. Second Edition*, trans G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1958), paragraphs 66–77.

other—such as cane sugar versus coconut sugar, even though their compositional essence could be different. Essential equivalence almost always implies functional equivalence, but functional equivalence can explicitly divorce itself from any notion of essential equivalence.

Substantiating Elastic Constructs with Evidence: The Case of Peng Zhen

In this section I use the case against a high-level party official, Peng Zhen [彭真], to illustrate how, through stepwise inferences, the act of an official was stretched to an extreme symbolic meaning. This state of stretched meaning was in turn reinforced by more detailed research.[3]

It should be noted, however, that the relationship was performed in reverse. Rather than a flow of physical evidence congealing into accepted ideas, here we see that, chronologically, a set of ideas were propagated first, and subsequently research was conducted to provide proof of those ideas. Detailed equivalences were drawn at the later, research stage.

In 1966, a few months before the release of the "May 16th Notification," high-ranking Party official Peng Zhen headed a five-person committee charged with handling a controversy surrounding a play, *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* [海瑞罢官]. The main dispute revolved around whether the play was revolutionary or anti-revolutionary. Mao took a clear side, critiquing that the play analogized Peng Dehuai [彭德怀] as Hai Rui, who was dismissed from office in 1959 after he openly attacked Mao at the Lushan Conference.[4] Peng, representing the committee, issued a directive in February 1966. The document was consistent with the critical side, but it largely directed criticisms and debates surrounding the play to an academic discussion instead of a political discussion, or at least it could be interpreted in this way.[5] Mao criticized the committee's decision in April

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[3] Former Beijing Municipal Party Committee Mao Zedong's Thought Red Flag Corps, et al., "Peng Zhen's Decaying Life Crime" (September 15, 1967), CD. [原北京市委机关毛泽东思想红旗兵团等，"彭真的腐朽生活罪行" (9月15日，1967)，光碟。]

[4] "Outline of Various Opinions on the Issue of 'Hai Rui Dismissed from Office," *People's Daily* (Beijing), December 15, 1965. ["关于《海瑞罢官》问题各种意见的简介"，人民日报(北京)，12月15日，1965。]

[5] The document is known as the February Outline [二月提纲], the full name is the Consolidated Summary and Outline Submitted to the Central Government by the Five-People Committee [五人小组向中央的汇报提纲].

1966, immediately before the Cultural Revolution went into full force.[6] Although there was considerably more going on alongside this incident, Peng Zhen was implicated in Mao's criticism of this particular incident and then subsequently imprisoned.

Mao applied a set of codes fitting to Peng Zhen in an interview:

> **Even a needle cannot penetrate into Beijing**; not a drop of water can drip into it. **Peng Zhen tries to shape the Party using his worldview**, objects will develop in the opposite direction to him [彭真要按他的世界观改造党, 事物是向他的反面发展的]. **He created his own conditions for a stage collapse**. It is a certain event, revealed in an accidental occasion, proceeded step by step. Not everyone learns about constraint from history's lessons. It is the rule and rhythm of class struggle, unmoved by people's consciousness and will. Every time someone in the Central Politburo **creates ghosts** [搞鬼], I call upon localities to attack them, asking **the Monkey Suan Wu Hung to** *create havoc in the Sky Palace* [referring to the ancient fable] and to disturb those protecting **the Ultimate Sky Emperor** [叫孙悟空大闹大宫, 并要搞那些保玉皇大帝的人]. Peng Zhen is a minor figure who has blended himself into the Party, not one with special ability, one who could be pushed down by one finger. "*The West Wind's Fallen Leaves Fall in Changan*" [西风落叶下长安]. Please ask comrades not to worry endlessly. Dust cannot be gone without being swept away, class enemies cannot fall down without bringing struggles [灰尘不扫不走, 阶级敌人不斗不倒].
>
> …Phenomena could be seen, essence is hidden. Essence would be expressed in the phenomenal forms [现象是看得见的, 本质是隐蔽的。本质也会通过现象表现出来]. **Peng Zhen's essence has been hidden for 30 years**.[7]

Mao depicted the situation visually using image-constructs, with Peng Zhen fitting into such codes. The constructs—like *the Ultimate Sky Emperor*—did not provide details about the specifics of what he was referencing; but the depictions they form were *just concrete enough* to convey to social participants the gravity of the situation, and Peng Zhen's

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[6] Prior to the committee's release of its first report regarding the controversial play, Mao reviewed a draft and expressed an ambiguous attitude—even praising Hai Rui in some occasions—which might have been interpreted as a sign of tacit approval. Yan Jiaqi and Gao Gao, *Turbulent Decade: A History of the Cultural Revolution*, trans. and ed. D.W.Y. Kwok (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996), 24–25.

[7] Mao Zedong, "A Conversation Related to Peng Zhen" (April 29, 1966), CD. [毛泽东, "关于彭真的谈话" (4月29日, 1966), 光碟。]

acts—far from an isolated case of incompetence, cowardice, or corruption—represented a much bigger problem.

To help make better sense of the quote, some Chinese references should briefly be explained. "Even a needle cannot penetrate into Beijing" means that the Central Politburo in Beijing has become so closed off to outside influence that other actors, like the revolutionaries and himself, could no longer influence it. Peng Zhen was then depicted as symbolic of the cause of the problem—that he had, as a minor figure, attempted to change the Party according to his personal worldview. By distantly employing an historical-materialist mode of thought, "objects" or naked material conditions would eventually overwhelm subjectivities. Hence, Peng Zhen had "created his own condition for a stage collapse." The Chinese expression of "creating ghosts" in this context roughly means conspiring or executing secretive plans. But since the supernatural reference was made, Mao further related the revolutionaries to a supernatural context. He used a popular classic Chinese novel—translated as *The Journey to the West* [西游记]—in which the main character and protagonist Monkey Suan, who had developed the utmost supernatural power, managed to cause great disruption in the Sky Palace where the supernatural emperor, officials, and various deities resided. Mao emphasized that Peng Zhen was just a minor figure—so he was not *the* ultimate sky emperor.

Mao used a sentence from a poem he had written to analogize Peng Zhen's inevitable and impending fall—to the many leaves that fall in the city of Changan when the wind starts to blow during the autumn season. The exact intention of the poem is never clear, but we can see this usage is consistent with the theoretical perspective of historical materialism, and it also fitted Peng Zhen's image in that a leaf was not significant in the long run, just as Peng Zhen was insignificant, and just like leaves that fall in the autumn, the Revolution, standing for the natural law and forces, would cause Peng Zhen to fall. Mao deployed another image at the end, juxtaposing class enemies and dust. Sweeping the likes of Peng Zhen from power thus resembled the sweeping away of dust—that actions should be taken in order for the problem (the dust) to go away.

In just a few sentences, Mao had fitted Peng Zhen, his actions, and the overall situations according to a rich mixture of images. Each time he evoked an image, a set of stepwise inferences was made. If Peng Zhen was dust, then it should be swept away. If he represented a figure in the Sky Palace, then the revolutionaries ought to disturb the deities high above in the same manner as the protagonist of the novel. And if Peng Zhen helped

to create a situation where even water could not penetrate the well-insulated bureaucracy in Beijing, which was keen on creating ghosts, then the revolutionaries should break it open. Such relational strategies drew a set of resemblance relationships, which then allowed an equivalence to be drawn between situations and acts. Each step of the creative use of analogy, in other words, allowed a specific set of logics and ideas to be transferred and applied to the case of Peng Zhen and to cases like that of Peng Zhen.

Aside from Mao, Lin Biao and Chen Boda had also participated. In some ways, they outdid Mao by using similar methods to draw more liberal and extreme equivalences, making Mao's original statements comparatively moderate in comparison. They also elicited more events and other "aggregated facts" to substantiate their ideas.

In an official speech delivered to a major government meeting,[8] Lin Biao diagnosed the current political situation by citing that we lived in a time of political change, that since 1960, "within the pool Latin America capitalist countries there were 61 political changes, successful incidents numbered 56, those that involved killing the heads numbered 8, keeping them as puppets numbered 7, removing them from power 11… Altogether, within six years there were 11 incidents per year."

This situation was used to frame the situation of China, which was also undergoing political change. It had won the Revolution and developed a party, matured through years of leadership under Mao. But Peng Zhen and another figure, Luo Ruiqing [罗瑞卿], had seized much of the political and governmental control. While Luo had taken over control of the military, Peng had seized considerable control as the Party Secretary. "While tall Luo's arms are long, Peng Zhen's are longer" [罗长子的手长, 彭真的手更长]. And this is because as Party Secretary, Peng Zhen and his group of associates working underneath him also exercised considerable control in the departments of media, propaganda, arts, films, public relations, broadcasting, and publishing—sectors which are key to winning ideological wars. For 16 years, noted Lin, they had not occupied the ideological trenches in the battlefield, and if the trend continued, "people would not vote for us, not vote for Chairman Mao, but vote for them." And if a battle were to ensue, they would pick up their gun-weapons [枪杆子] and their pen-weapons [笔杆子]. It was therefore important they

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[8] Lin Biao, "Talk at the Expansion Meeting of the Politburo" (May, 18, 1966). [林彪, "在中央政治局扩大会议上的讲话" (5月18日, 1966), 光碟。]

discover and eliminate "representatives of the capitalist class, the time bombs, the landlines" in advance, or else, when the opportunity comes—perhaps compounded by a natural disaster, a war, or the death of Chairman Mao—a counterrevolution would take place and the nation of 700 million might be in chaos; this would be a big problem.

Lin further juxtaposed Peng Zhen with certain traitors and ambitionists who were "fake revolutionaries," "fake Marxists," and "fake Maoists." A noted expression was that Peng Zhen's approaches had superseded Wong Ming's [王明]. Wong Ming refers to a figure who had advocated following an "internationalist" direction to develop a communist revolution. Aside from differences in between Mao's and Russia's revolutionary visions, during the anti-Japanese war, Wong Ming had attacked Mao for not genuinely collaborating with the Nationalist Party to drive out the Japanese, a supposed priority at the time. In this evocation of Wong Ming, Peng Zhen was equated to a person who had departed from Mao's approach and betrayed the people.

Lin cited Peng's overt appraisal of the Nationalist Party leader Chiang Kai-shek in around 1938, saying that Chiang was "the person with the best political perspective," that Chiang was "the firm center of the anti-Japanese war," and it was wrong to erect barriers to the Nationalist Party. He said that Peng Zhen pretended to be anti-Wong Ming but actually supported Wong Ming in Northeast China. Refusing to listen to Chairman Mao's instructions, Peng contemplated peace in the time of battle, hoping to make peace with Chiang, and did not think of fighting, hoping to win the battle at the negotiation table alone. At one point, perhaps as a strategy to expedite his scheme, he tried to concentrate his forces into one defining battle to fight the enemy, a reckless move that would decimate his forces. Per Lin's accusation, Peng had used "adventurism" in the military as a cover for his "surrenderism" in politics. In the process, Peng was attempting to form his own network and power base, facilitating the development of some local forces that ended up becoming bandits, not controllable or penetrable by the Party—almost like his own private army. A very ingenious expression was that Peng Zhen had created the "Bonding of the Three in the Peach Tree Forest" [桃园三结义], an allusion to the Three Kingdoms period in China (around AD 220–280), where three

people who had formed a brotherhood bond in a peach tree forest ended up establishing Shu Han, one of the kingdoms.[9]

Chen Boda—the person later characterized as navigating the "ship of thieves" [贼船]—charged that after the "Twenty-Three Conditions" were released, Peng Zhen had protected landlords, the rich, the counterrevolutionaries, the rightists, and other bad people. And during the Socialist Education movement, Peng used the production as the "big hat" to restrict the movement, saying that the movement suppressed production, and in doing so protected against the "Four Types." Chen used a quote from Lenin: "Just as the class that has been overthrown has not died yet, a new capitalist class is growing new counterrevolutionaries." He further added:

> During the rule of the Qianlong Emperor [乾隆] there was a publication entitled *A Biography of Two Officers* [贰臣传]. It spoke about the events revolving around the Donglin Group [东林党]. [Russian officers] Suslov, Mitin, Eugene were the "Two Officers." [10] They were nurtured by Stalin but later ran away with Khrushchev [赫鲁晓夫]. Some people forget everything when their hearts are smoked and clouded by benefits and positions. Peng Zhen has been giving these people official positions and fulfilling their wishes, working and running for them.[11]

Peng Zhen's identity was not only formed by informational details but also by the codes—the images—that he could be fitted into. These representations by Lin Biao and Chen Boda built a threatening image—one that stretched far beyond the "dust" image fitted by Mao. Luo Ruiqing was a powerful party cadre and Peng Zhen was equated with him—with even more extensive influence than him (his arms are longer). Nikita Khrushchev's crime was the derailing of the Russian Revolution. Seen in the global context, if Peng Zhen is like Khrushchev, then he was an actor

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[9] Lin Biao, "Talk at the Expansion Meeting of the Politburo" (May, 18, 1966), CD. [林彪, "在中央政治局扩大会议上的讲话" (5月18日, 1966), 光碟。]

[10] The "two officers" in this context is a play on words with several meanings. It could mean officers who have their own agendas independent of the emperors and who act in their own interest. It could also have the specific meaning by the Qianlong Emperor to those Ming Dynasty officers who surrendered themselves and subsequently work for the Qing Emperor.

[11] Chen Boda, "Chen Boda's Speech at the Expansion Meeting of the Politburo" (May 24, 1966), CD. [陈伯达, "陈伯达在中央政治局扩大会议上的讲话" (5月24日, 1966), 光碟。].

derailing the envisioned global communist revolution. In the hands of Lin Biao and Chen Boda, Peng Zhen's identity was linked to both Luo Ruiqing and Khrushchev in a particular, temporary structure.

If we line up the images and implicated meanings, we can observe how step-by-step escalation could be performed through drawing equivalence with an increasingly criminal image, the mildest one being a corrupt sell-out disguised as a Marxist, but who is nevertheless just a minor figure. Progressively, the images could be multifarious: a hidden Chinese traitor, a sneaky Russian spy, a dangerous commander practicing adventurism to destroy his own people, an insider cadre controlling the government—even up to a significant counterrevolutionary figure of historical importance, who could derail the entire global revolutionary project. Each kind of figure has a concrete person or two representing the idea—for example, Wang Ming, the "Two Officers," Luo Ruiqing, and Nikita Khrushchev—to which Peng Zhen could be equated.

In fact, an escalation is easy to make based on these labels. If one can envisage a "traitor," one could imagine the context of the Russian Revolution or the Nationalist Party; one could then see the implications for the global revolution. These preestablished linkages acted as *cognitive portals*, a topic we will cover shortly.

Because the idea system was primarily driven by ideational interpretations, only minimal physical evidence was needed as the basis to form such interpretations. But it should also be noted that the characterization was not completely arbitrary or without evidence. As Lin Biao said, Peng often cited Mao in his judgments when he advocated actions different from those which Mao desired. One could find such evidence in the document regarding the *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*. Peng Zhen had also stated that the Socialist Education Movement only needed to conform to the Twenty-Three Conditions, instead of involving extensive prosecutions as they had done. Peng defended his decision of not prosecuting cadres during the Four Cleanup Movement through the use of Mao's statements:

In the past, the Chairman had talked about killing pigs. He said it in Jinci [晋绥]: it does not matter whether it is a white pig or black pig, after killing one you will learn how to kill a pig [不论白猪黑猪你杀一个就会了]. Later, it was called the dissecting the sparrow [解剖麻雀]. The sparrow is small,

but the liver and gallbladder are all there. It is not necessary to dissect all the sparrows (to understand the inner workings of the sparrow).[12]

The issue was not that Mao had never actually expressed such words. The issue was rather that if one was to judge which side Peng Zhen truly consistently took during the Mao-era Revolution, it was likely that Peng Zhen mostly sided with the established cadres instead of Mao, and one could find evidence to support such actions.

In addition to evidence based on Peng Zhen's stances and actions, many "crimes" detailed from Peng Zhen's lifestyle were published in a Red Army Newspaper article, consisting of around 10,000 Chinese words, in September 15, 1967.[13]

In the two opening paragraphs, Peng Zhen was described as a "leader of counterrevolutionary revisionism" [反革命修正主义的头子], "big traitor" [大叛徒], "big political ambitionist" [大政治野心家], "criminal who has committed flagrant crimes against the Party and the people" [对党、对人民犯下了滔天大罪的罪犯], and a "thoroughly rotten, obscene shameless feudal noble" [腐朽透顶、荒淫无耻的贵族老爷], who squandered the nation's resources remorselessly and lived his life like a decadent capitalist. These are all elastic codes, each with a core meaning and classic example that could be "stretched" in such a way that Peng Zhen could be equated to it.

The main body of the article involved a listing of facts, which the article depicted as an effort of "accounting" Peng's misdeeds. Unlike professional financial accounting, for which a standard of extensiveness as well as objectivity is expected, the newspaper's political accounting was highly interpretive. Complex, irrelevant, or inconvenient information was filtered out. Extensive, concrete descriptions of Peng Zhen's deeds were embellished with editorial remarks and other linguistic devices, like prefixes and suffixes, which left the damning caricatures unambiguous. In other words, information was often already coded into fitted images when they were presented. This can be seen as the subheadings of the article; the deeds

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[12] Peng Zhen, "Comrade Peng Zhen's Speech on the Four Cleanups Movement in the Hebei Hall of the Great Hall of the People (January 21, 1965), CD. [彭真, "彭真同志在人民大会堂河北厅关于四清运动的讲话" (1月21日, 1965), 光碟。]

[13] Former Beijing Municipal Party Committee Mao Zedong's Thought Red Flag Corps, et al., "Peng Zhen's Decaying Life Crime" (September 15, 1967), CD. [原北京市委机关毛泽东思想红旗兵团等,"彭真的腐朽生活罪行" (9月15日, 1967), 光碟。]

(information) were already coded ("*decayed* lifestyle," "*wasteful* renovations," established "*palaces*," etc.):

(1) Three Wasteful Renovations and Moves [挥金如土三修彭公馆, 劳民伤财三移临时窝]

    (2) Establish Walking Palaces in Many Places [到处设行宫]

    (3) Seize Nation's Expensive Plants to Decorate Private Courtyard [强占国家名贵花木, 装饰彭贼狗庭院]

    (4) Flinging Away People's Money for Self, Renovating Interior Living Space [挥霍人民万余肥了自己, 彭贼室内设备富麓堂皇]

    (5) Decayed Lifestyle, With Choosy Eating and Drinking [生活腐化、讲究吃喝]

    (6) Holding Banquet for Lee Chung Yan [宴请李宗仁] [A Former Nationalist Party General and Vice President of Republic of China]

    (7) Ugly Form of Cat Playing with Hag Wife [彭霸天和妖婆张洁清玩猫的丑态]

Each set of information underwent skillful encoding before it became a fitted image that was at once a piece of evidence. Less inflated, extreme codes were sometimes assigned to information at first, but then such coded things could in turn be aggregated and then repurposed to fit into more inflated, extreme codes. Being "choosy" was one such earlier characterization. This deed could then be depicted as being an attribute of a "bourgeoisie," and then this "fact" could be fitted into a more inflated code like "anti-revolutionary" (since the bourgeois class is inherently anti-revolutionary). Alternatively, it could simply stay at the less-inflated level of code; the fact could simply be used to evidence Peng Zhen's "individualism" and personal decay. As a whole, the various forms of "evidence" listed in the document flexibly supported a range of images that could be used by Peng Zhen's critics, as long as those critics put in the effort to draw the necessary equivalence that temporarily matched the stretched definitions.

The actual information—consisting of descriptive details of behaviors and objects—is too voluminous to reiterate here. Some details of lavish spending would not be considered a crime, nor are they necessarily even lavish by today's standards. These include the ownership of quality sofas, curtains, private courtyards, and certain food dishes like silver fungus and ginseng. Considering the context of the 1960s China, however, even fresh milk was a rare household item; most people drank milk derived from powder. Moreover, habits such as eating fresh chicken, fish, and eggs all the time would certainly qualify as lavish for the period.

To further put things into perspective, the article described that the monthly salary for Peng Zhen was 400–500 Yuan. According to the article's account, eating alone was around 300 Yuan per month for five people (some of their children were regularly off at university), about seven to eight times higher than regular families of the same size. The article even listed some of the food his family consumed. Here, some items are rare foodstuffs that required special people to procure and used special methods to prepare, like the Chinese softshell turtle [王八, or 鳖] or aged Shaoxing wine [绍兴酒] that was a hundred years old. Even during the Three Difficult Years, these eating habits were largely maintained, and he also sent his relatives and extended family such delicacies.

There were other usually exorbitant expenses cited, at least relative to his salary. For example, one radio at his house cost 1400 Yuan, and another 2000 Yuan. His fancy wall lamps had allegedly been changed three times, four of them costing a total of 1424 Yuan. His three desks cost 1000 Yuan each. He constantly changed his furniture and interior decorations, which cost a lot more still.

Among the highlights of this lavish lifestyle were the three renovations and moves of his residence ("mansion"), likely to have been funded by public expenses. These events occurred in 1959, 1964, and 1965. The original house for seven people had 970 m² or 10,441 ft² and 48 rooms. During the innovations he built a large courtyard, added a second level to part of his house, built a conference room that could accommodate a hundred people, and so forth. These projects totaled more than 200,000 Yuan, an amount equivalent to the purchase of more than 2 million pounds of food, and they represented "the blood and sweat of a hundred-thousand laboring citizens." While he had to live in temporary arrangements during renovations, he was often dissatisfied with them. In 1965, he had requested switching those residences three times within five months.

In 1964, Peng was moved to a national guest house. Because he felt that the second floor was too hot, he requested that the person in charge relocate a willow for him. Even though the ministry staff told him that the tree would not last long if it was planted in the wrong season, Peng insisted that they try and that "it is not a big deal if it cannot last." "Uprooting and planting the trees required a 20-ton heavy crane and a 15-ton large truck; the process took half a month and six trees were planted." For convenience during recreational walks, Peng also requested that several crooked paths be renovated in the apple forest, and for this reason, "several people sweated their backs and worked for more than 10 days to complete the

task." He also requested the construction of a porch next by a fishing spot by the lake, "furnished with large rattan chairs and recliners for the whole family to enjoy." "He also went to a Beijing hotel to acquire the foreign-made air-conditioner used to cool foreign guests and placed it in his own bedroom. Later, the air-conditioner was claimed by him and moved to Peng's house. He is a truly 'hard-to-satisfy old aristocratic lord' [难伺候的贵族老爷]. As long as he says a word, see how many people are running for him. He is really an official who has been thoroughly soaked in the bourgeois stench."

It was also cited that, during his third move in 1965, he moved from the national guest house as he thought that the hot water tank in the underground room would be too noisy. Even though the engineers and officials inspected it and thought that the soundproofing was good, he still requested that the water pump be moved out of the underground room. He only stayed there for two to three months. But among other renovations, another big porch was constructed, which took half a month and cost around 6,000 Yuan. He is 'authentically a blood-sucking ghost' [地地道道的吸血鬼], only cares about his own enjoyment, and has neglected the country's interest and the people's pain."

There are additional descriptions of the renovations he made to his residences, including in 1959 when he renovated his pathways in his courtyard three times. For the 100-meter pathway, the first time he changed it from a flat to a stony pathway so that it would absorb less heat from the sun, the second time to rectify some minor flaws, and the third time to increase the slope. In 1965, he also renovated his front door appearance "three times."

Some cited behaviors blatantly violated recent political directives. These included enjoying audio recordings of forbidden, classic plays at his house—even inviting drama schools and individual performers to play at his house on a regular basis. Such acts were described as "advertising feudalist, decayed modes of thinking," and an act that was "publicly opposed to Chairman Mao's reform directive." His personal conduct was also criticized. The article described how, "Sometimes he was so immersed in the films that he would re-watch the same ones two to three times; he would play Mahjong until three and four in the morning; he would take sleeping pills and then eat his late-night meal, sometimes he falls into deep sleep like a dead pig before he finishes eating it, so that public servants and comrades have to carry him to his upper-floor bedroom. During the day

Bandit Peng takes big naps, not working while every month he takes in 400-something Yuan of salary; it is truly deplorable to the extreme."

The article cites his use of political positions to fulfill his wants. His ping-pong table, the article states, came from the 26th National Ping-Pong Competition and was acquired through the National Sports Ministry. Some of his plants were sourced from the Beijing Garden and other gardens using his political power, like his boxwood trees which came from the Summer Palace [颐和园], and were originally available for public view. Allegedly he used "inspections" as an excuse to watch forbidden movies for enjoyment. He had forced some neighbors to relocate in order to expand his house. The chandelier at his house was taken from the Great Hall of the People, and then plated with a layer of nickel. Insertion of editorial remarks and markers (prefixes and suffixes) serves to make the concrete ties explicit, fast, focused, and clear. To call service personnel, there were electric bells [电铃按手] installed all over his house, totaling about thirty. His willful insolence showed how he was "authentically a high-level parasite" [地地道道的高级寄生虫].

A particularly telling account was Peng's family playing with their cats:

Since 1957, Bandit Peng [彭贼] and Hag Zhang Jieqing [妖婆张洁清, Peng's wife], similar to Wall Street capitalist big bosses, have been playing with a cat. Hag Zhang Jieqing said that the "cat eating mice is unsanitary," therefore they let it drink milk and eat fish for breakfast every morning. Bandit Pang would not forget the big patterned cat when eating dinner. They even prepared a special towel for the cat's use; the cat has a special sleeping chair covered with a silky mat. They required all the cat-related tools and its bedroom to be kept clean, often requesting special services by people to service the cat for them, to bathe it, to groom its hair, or just to take it to the cooler porch during the hot summer…. They often let the cat watch movies and television, take pictures with it, and so forth. To help the cat watch television, service personnel would bring in a tall chair. They treat the cat as intimately as if it is a son or a daughter…

… When they are not doing revisionist counterrevolutionary activities, they seek low-level, capitalist decaying forms of pleasure seeking [寻找低级下流的资产阶级寻欢作乐的腐朽方式], interacting with their cat several times a day. When the cat is gone for some time, they hurriedly inquire about it, and when the cat comes back, Hag Zhang Jieqing holds it in her arms, saying in a full demonic aura while stroking it [妖气十足地边摸边说]: "Little Flower where have you been? You must be hungry. If you are not back we will not rest assured…." Bandit Peng laughs ceaselessly at her side.

He plays with the cat even at night, saying: "Go find your Brother Yang (Bandit's Peng's fourth son) to play, and together sleep with your Brother Yang!" Looking at this pair of counterrevolutionary revisionist chieftains, just how shameless they are, truly makes the people vomit.

Such efforts of "accounting" did the practical work of matching information to substantiate stretched meanings that were derived from elastic codes. Information was married with descriptors (e.g., "Bandit Peng," "Hag Zhang Jieqing") to form coded things (fitted images). Making them *resemble* other fitted images were acts to form equivalences; in the quote, "capitalist" was the subject of resemblance. "Capitalist" was mentioned explicitly twice, once at the beginning reference to "Wall Street capitalist big bosses, and once in the phrase 'low-level, capitalist decaying forms of pleasure seeking'." In the second paragraph, the writers did not see playing with the cat as necessarily the same as being counterrevolutionary, as is evident in the phrase: "When they are not doing revisionist counter-revolutionary activities." The cat-playing might just be a problem of despicably low state of spirituality—with the fitted image of a hag of a "demonic aura" serving as an associative sign. But when cat-playing was tied to the code of "Wall Street capitalist big bosses," the act still became thematically and causally tied to other acts of the abuse of social resources and positions of power—that is to say, cat-playing could take place *because* of power and resource abuses by the whole class of Wall street capitalists, which stood in the way of the Revolution. The coded image of a revolutionary, then, was temporarily stretched to include one who condemned the disgusting act of cat-playing.

The creation of each fitted image implied a specific gradation of a crime or problem. There is a minor nuance, however. Viewing the document in full, one can find that various gradations of crimes or problems implied by various codes are evidenced by a corresponding set of attributes and data. Each item of fact could often substantiate more than one elastic code—the details of his ideologically suspect cat habits could fit into both the codes of "feudal noble" and "decadent capitalist" of which Peng Zhen was equated. Therefore, the assignment of code is inexact, allowing some room for readers to interpret the information differently and arrive at a different way to assign an appropriate code. Yet, with the information and a range of codes given, readers would most likely find that even if the severest label did not fit, a lesser one could certainly do so.

The writers of this document were clear about their own interpretation of the matter, however. They sought to fit Peng Zhen with the utmost damning, extreme characterization, and they applied effort to stretch the meanings of codes and to draw equivalences. They depicted Peng Zhen's behaviors and deeds to have enough equivalence—essentially and functionally speaking—with some of the worst counterrevolutionaries in history. This can be seen in the concluding part of the document, in which the authors declared that even "*killing by a thousand cuts, burning his corpse and flinging away the ashes*" [凌迟处死, 焚尸扬灰] would not resolve the revolutionary people's resentment toward him. They advocated: "Let us use a thousand threads of vengeance, ten thousand threads of resentment to create the most intensive bullets, turning them into the fiercest flames, shooting them at Peng and Liu's counterrevolutionary revisionist groups and their backstage supporters Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, burning them to ashes" [让我们把千条仇, 万条恨, 铸成最密集的子弹, 化成最炙烈的火焰, 射向彭、刘反革命修正主义集团及其后台刘少奇、邓小平, 把他们烧为灰烬].[14]

OTHER CREATIVE INFERENCING

The Peng Zhen case illustrates some typical inferencing activities afforded by the use of elastic codes. To gain a more comprehensive understanding, let us explore a few other cases, which also serve to illustrate such activities.

Forging Connections: Cognitive Portal and Chain-Like Complexes

In our exploration of the European witch hunts, we found that *cognitive portals* were being built into inferencing mechanisms. Essentially, after certain intermediary ideas were established (through pre-cultivated pathways, acting like portals), a person could blaze through them during thinking and speaking. Cognitive and discourse pathways could be institutionalized in a social population. From an outsider's point of view, *shocking leaps* were made from premises to conclusions; while from the point of view of social members who were well socialized, the step-by-step

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[14] Peng Zhen was not in fact killed and lived until he died in 1997 at the age of 94. However, he was removed from office and did not return to power until 1982, serving as the secretary of the CPC Central Political and Legislative Committee [中共中央政法委员会] under the Deng Xiaoping administration.
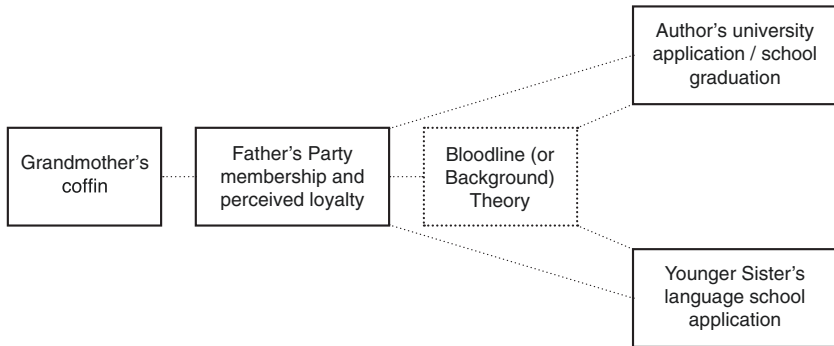
Fig. 10.1 Steps of connection between events and meaning over the coffin dilemma in *The Little Red Guards* (1992)

connections came rather naturally and intuitively. These portal-like connections could even be observed in detailed, intense argumentation.

Elastic codes made connections between ideas a relatively easy process. Because of their elastic qualities, the gap between one coded thing (which is elastically coded) could be elastically stretched to the point that at times seemed to be seamlessly connected to another elastically stretched coded thing, which could then be further stretched to connect to yet a third elastically coded thing. In the case of Peng Zhen, this point was played out in the rather seamless ideational connection between the fitted image of a "hard-to-satisfy feudal lord," to a "blood-sucking ghost," to a "capitalist," and then to a "counterrevolutionary." The autobiographies I have examined contain other memorable examples. Even though biographical and autobiographical sources are less reliable than other textual sources, they help us see how the cognitive pathways were plausibly laid out in "everyday" scenarios.

In *The Little Red Guards*, author Wenguang Huang told a story of his grandmother's obsession with being buried in a coffin rather than being cremated. Coffins and ground burials were banned because it was considered a waste of land and other resources as well as being tied to outmoded cultural beliefs. His grandmother—or a general reader encountering the Cultural Revolution—did not understand why two girls' applications to universities were at risk by their grandmother choosing a coffin.[15] But these connections were seamless to anyone else. Figure 10.1 reconstructs the steps of connections people saw in the idea system:

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[15] Huang Wenguang, *The Little Red Guard: A Family Memoir* (New York: Penguin, 2012), 49.

Whether the grandmother procures a coffin or not—which heavily involved the father in carrying out the act—would necessarily affect the father's status. If policies were enforced, not only would the coffin likely be confiscated and destroyed, the father—a Party member—might face disciplinary action from within the Party. The "ordinary" act that is normal in our society had an extraordinary meaning in the context narrated in the book: it would signify an outright challenge to the state's directive, which had incorporated it as a revolutionary plan.

The author's sister had planned to receive a college education. *Because* there was no entrance examination, it required not only a good "family background" but also inside connections. The author was applying to the Xi'an Foreign Languages School, a boarding school supported by the state. Specifically, *because* the school dealt with foreign languages, it understandably had "stringent political requirements."[16] Therefore, while from an outsider's perspective these cognitive linkages might seem outlandishly odd, the ideational connections—and the institutional connections they embodied—were obvious to most people described in Huang's memoir.

Using Deep Theories: Example of a Volleyball Match Incident

Elastic codes could be stretched to encompass the domain of everyday life, penetrating into extremely microscopic details. Therefore, with appropriate activation, elastic codes can shape and regulate daily lives.

One organizing device for elastic codes was deep, yet abstract theories. These theories were "taught" to the masses in school, study sessions, and in print media. In order to educate the masses to comprehend and use such theories accurately and effectively, the theories were often taught in a manner via scenarios of real-life application. I use a 1969 article discussing a volleyball match incident as an example. What is noteworthy is that this incident was reported in a certain secondary school's journalism unit.[17]

A brief summary of the volleyball match incident is as follows. A team (Team #1) of students were playing volleyball at the school entrance. A

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[16] Huang Wenguang, *The Little Red Guard: A Family Memoir* (New York: Penguin, 2012), 53.

[17] Extracted from a secondary school's journalism unit. Red Guards of Secondary School. Dagu Secondary School Reporting Group, "A Controversy Provoked by a 'Volleyball'," *Cultural Revolution Historical Materials Series Vol. 2(2)*, ed. Li Zhengzhong (Taiwan: Literary Times, 2016), 392. [中學紅衛兵。大沽中學報導組, "一個'排球'引起的爭論", 文革史料叢刊第四輯第二冊(二), 李正中輯編(台灣:蘭台出版社, 2016), 392。]

student from the second team (Team #2) took the ball and then threw it toward the head of a Team #1 classmate. The ball bounced toward the road and was then burst by a car running over it.

Theories—more precisely, "Mao Zedong Thoughts"—were applied to determine the scenario as a group exercise. The scenario of one team no longer having a ball to play with was discussed as a "contradiction" that had emerged. To find out the deep causes of the problem, an idea initially emerged and then was largely ruled out—that it was Team #1's fault to play volleyball at the school entrance, a location situated close to the road. A counter-opinion was accepted: that the act of throwing the ball aimed at a classmate's head was an expression of "anarchism"; this internal cause—not an external one—was indeed the problem. From this example alone, we can see how the physical events (as pre-coded information) were imbued with revolutionary significance after a series of stretched, elastic codes (e.g., contradictions, anarchism) were applied. More cognitive processes could then continue down the chain.

Proceeding from this conclusion, the ball-thrower conducted a self-criticism as well as an apology. In an internal discussion, Team #2 agreed that compensation was needed; it was part of Mao Zedong's teaching. Giving their own ball to Team #1 was proposed as a compensative act, but it was not an ideal one, as it would deprive Team #2 of the opportunity to play. One person made an alternative proposal—to have Team #1 and Team #2 share the ball. But this solution soon experienced a challenge. The reason was that Team #2 was never properly compensated the loss of the volleyball. The "public" appearance of objective and reasonable might contradict the "private" motive of self-interest. The seeming "Oneness" being produced was superficial; it did not resolve the contradiction. One person even suggested that this idea dangerously reflected Liu Shaoqi's poisonous theory that mentally melted the distinction between the public and the private—though this idea was soon criticized as having elevated the matter to too high a level.

The concepts that became catchphrases in these discussions were "Combine Two into One" and "Divide One into Two." Although their exact origins were unstated, these are most likely remote, creative derivatives of Hegelian dialectical theories. Johann Fichte, an interpreter of Hegel, proffered a triadic model of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis in an attempt to explain Hegel's ideas. This model was adopted in various ways. Mao carried a post-Hegelian style in his theorizing. The original state of a thesis was that of unity (i.e., the state of "Oneness"), but due to its

imperfection it is bound to create the other—another incubating antithesis—that contradicted the thesis (i.e., a state of "Twoness"). An anthesis—"the other"—can be temporarily suppressed, but another wave of oppositional thesis would most likely surface again due to the inherent imperfection of the first thesis. Only if a significant new idea comes forth to "resolve" the contradiction dynamic, creating a new thesis (in the form of "synthesis") would a new and improved state of unity ("Oneness," or "Oneness 2.0," if we may) come about.

Using this form of language and thinking, a solution was reached between the two teams. Team #1's representative learned of Team #2's idea of compensating them their own volleyball, and then proceeded to offer another suggestion, citing Mao's teaching about selflessness and Lin's emphasis of human character. The representative stated that Team #1 decided not to play volleyball, and instead played something else—possibly something that could be played with a smaller ball—since the main purpose of playing volleyball was achieving collective health.

Team #2 was reported to be touched by the action, as Team #1 had remedied the situation by not attempting to "Combine Two into One," but instead "Divide One into Two"—which would then "divide out" the *private* selfishness so the outcome was a harmonized state of *public* betterment. If we apply the thesis-antithesis-synthesis model, the contradictions between thesis and its antithesis—that is, the inappropriateness of the ball thrower, the lack of a ball, the inappropriateness of sharing one volleyball or giving away one's ball as compensation—were resolved by a superior solution. The article concluded that in the process of resolving the contradictions, by applying Mao's teaching, the participants had educated themselves about the profound process of actualizing the Revolution, a lesson about the productive use of political theory toward a classless society.

The secondary processing of revolutionary "facts" was hardly smooth sailing. There was so much room for differences in how to process these ideational facts—a point we will follow up in the next chapter. But for the moment I seek to illustrate that interpretations—resolving conflicts and stretching meanings—were not performed in an arbitrary manner. Nor was the interpretative process and outcome only mediated by power from the government or from preestablished Party positions. Instead, actors in this case sincerely tried to harvest wisdom by applying abstract theories and teachings, solving the problem in concrete and unifying ways that would be better than with the absence of such ideas.

Assessing the Great Leap Forward at a Time of Terrible Aftermath

Compared to the several autobiographical anecdotes we have reviewed, Mao's assessment of the Great Leap Forward uses information more cohesively and extensively in forging connections, using theories, and making calculative judgments.

By January 1961, the Great Leap Forward campaign had evidently failed. With Mao stepping down, Liu Shaoqi became the PRC's president in April 1959. In the following few years, several meetings were convened to assess and recalibrate the nation's economic policy. At the CPC plenary meeting in January 1961, Mao—still acting as Party chairman—produced some figures. It can be seen that these figures, as physically verifiable facts, amounted to an aggregate picture of the international situation—asserting as a forceful premise:

> West Germany produced 34 million tons of steel last year, Britain 24 million tons. West Germany in 1956–60 increased production by 15%. France produced 17 million tons, Japan 22 million tons. But their productive rate was accumulated from the work of many years, and still they could only produce that much. We have only worked for a few years and have produced 18 million tons. We need to do consolidation work this, next, and the year after. Spend several slow years, in a sturdier manner, and then go up further. Target should not be too high; make the quality go up. Let imperialism say that our Great Leap Forward has experienced a stage-collapse. This is more advantageous to us. Do not go for the vanity and experience actual damage [让帝国主义说我们大跃进垮台了, 这样对我们比较有利, 不要务虚名而受实祸]. We need to increase quality, have more specifications, variety, strengthen management, increase labor efficiency rate.[18]

The statement assessed the international situation more broadly, stating that there was an improvement, particularly in the area of Tibet where incidents had largely ceased. The international anti-China problem [反华问题] had also eased up a little following the 1960 Moscow Conference.[19] Mao advocated conducting more research and inspection on the ground [搞调查研究, 检查工作]; he later reiterated that such effortful, practical

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[18] Mao Zedong, "Speech at the 9th Plenary Session of the 8th CPC Central Committee (1)" (January 13, 1961), CD. [毛泽东, "在中共八届九中全会上的讲话(一)" (1月13日, 1961), 光碟。]

[19] Mao Zedong, "About Anti-China Issues" (March 23, 1960), CD. [毛泽东, "关于反华问题" (3月23日, 1960), 光碟。]

research in the future could help people to learn from past mistakes.[20] In this particular speech, Mao emphasized that working officials "should use their own eyes" and not any others' [要用自己的眼睛去看(不是用别人的眼睛)] to assess people's and agricultural conditions. He assessed that the Party had lost touch with the local situation in the past few years, and he outlined how the research work could be divided and organized. Now that they have "detected the right direction, everyone should proceed accordingly." "Do not only say bad things about other people. Where there is a mistake in their work, if they correct it then do welcome them" [不要只讲人家坏话, 有的地方工作有错误, 人家改了, 就要欢迎人家]. Characteristic of his style, Mao's instructions were vague yet nonetheless concrete enough to signify the general picture of things, including how things should move forward. This slightly positive representation, consisting of a series of implicit premises, diffused a grave situation.

In a similar speech delivered several days later, Mao expressed that the steep production had "exceeded expectations"; the point was that in terms of [production] *quality* there was a need for a leap [在质量上好好跃进一下], but a leap in production *quantity* was not to be pursued. Mao highlighted that imperialists and revisionists [帝国主义者、修正主义者] had characterized that the Great Leap Forward had collapsed on stage [大跃进垮台了], but "let them speak that way" because "if they said we were good then it may actually not be good." He further projected that with a revised plan in seven years, they would be successfully chasing Britain and Japan. Mao stated that practical experiences were important, and while "we" had experience in "battles and struggling landlords," in the area of construction more experience was needed.

The right rhythm and pattern of things always needs several attempts in order to be found. We only wish we would be different from a democratic revolution which took 28 years to be successful. Actually, 28 years is not that long. Many countries' political parties were born in the same year as us, and they still have not succeeded yet. Is 20 years of experience enough for construction work [搞建设是不是可以二十年取得经验]? We have acted for 11 years so far. Let us see if nine more years is enough. I had once wanted to shorten the time a lot, but it looks like it is not going to work. Anything

[20] Mao Zedong, "Speech at the Expanded Central Working Conference" (January 30, 1962), CD. [毛泽东, "在扩大的中央工作会议上的讲话" (1月30日, 1962), 光碟。]

that is not known and understood, you cannot change it [凡是没有被认识的东西, 你就没办法改造它].[21]

Going further than the last statement, Mao generated a new premise—an aggregated fact—of a *relative progress*. This point was supported by comparing China's progress to a group of similar nations—those that had become independent in recent years.[22] In turn, this aggregated fact helped Mao to portray those who criticized the Great Leap Forward at this juncture—thus generating another extrapolation: "If they said we were good then it may actually not be good." And, predominantly based on the assessment of past performance—which were largely aggregate figures, even if numbers were mentioned—Mao made the empirical projection of China surpassing Britain and Japan in seven years.

Such forms of post-hoc assessment and diagnoses were not only made by Mao but also by other officials, at least in public documents. They, too, operated in the same style of assessment using aggregated facts and general-level assessments. Liu Shaoqi, for example, opened a speech by saying, "Now that every aspect of contradictions—the contradictions in the industrial and agricultural sectors, in culture, education, and other aspects—are centrally shown in the problem of food supply. To summarize: everyone needs to eat" [现在各方面的矛盾, 工业、农业的矛盾, 文教和其他方面的矛盾, 集中表现在粮食问题上。总而言之, 人人都要吃饭]. While saying that what they have discovered is not a "one-finger problem" [一个指头的问题], they were expressing that a serious problem had indeed occurred. The one-finger reference was a repeated expression used by Mao to assess situations; Liu's refutation of which was thus an indirect disagreement with Mao, at least symbolically. Liu leaned more toward another aggregate depiction, one that was voiced by Hunan peasants [湖南农民], stating that the situation was 30% natural disaster, 70% human-made disaster [三分天灾, 七分人祸]—which the one-finger versus nine-finger depiction belittled. After addressing areas that needed to be improved, Liu summarized: "These past few years, our accomplishments

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[21] Mao Zedong, "Speech at the 9th Plenary Session of the 8th CPC Central Committee (2)" (January 18, 1961), CD. [毛泽东, "在中共八届九中全会上的讲话(二)" (1月18日, 1961), 光碟。]

[22] Mao is likely referring to the couple of dozen Asian, Middle Eastern, and African nations that were newly independent and decolonialized around the 1940s and 1950s—including Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, India, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Liberia, Libya, and other nations which were represented in the Bandung Conference of 1955.

are still great; problems are not few, and some places have piles of problems. But if we are determined, we can solve the problems, and I think our future is still bright. Therefore, three sentences can be summarized as: 'Accomplishment is great; problems are not few; future is bright'" [成绩 很大, 问题不少, 前途光明].[23]

Liu attributed the problem not to Mao or to the Great Leap Forward policy idea, but instead to the lack of experience [经验不够]. He advocated that "decreasing production" was a solution, and he compared it with Soviet Union: "The Soviet Union decreased production after the land reform, we did not do so after our land reform. Their cooperative reform led to decreased production; ours did not." Here, Liu expresses that the Soviet Union had their experience—experience of a setback. The decreased production in this particular instance was then depicted as comparatively normal—if not better—than the Soviet Union. He advocated that, due to the "experience" of starvation (no rice) that comrades had generally found, several kinds of plans needed to be stopped, including building railroads that are "tens of thousands of kilometers," and the many production factories, facilities, and hostels that had opened.[24]

In another meeting,[25] Liu said that a socialist country, according to Mao and to Marx, was already a leap from capitalism in terms of historical stages. Liu calculated that if China could produce 14 million tons of steel by 1970, then it would surpass the pace of progress achieved by the Soviet Union. Liu stated that the slogan Great Leap Forward should be retained, since it was a good spiritual target to strive for [奋斗目标]—and one should know by 1970 whether such a leap is achieved. Overall, Liu offered a significantly more moderate projection than Mao, and he stretched the positive horizon to a considerably longer term.

In a meeting,[26] Deng Xiaoping reinforced Liu's and Mao's points summarized earlier. Deng elaborated that "we" had received plenty of positive and negative experiences for three years, and that it was now time to adjust. "People have scolded mother internationally. Let them scold [国际 上骂娘, 就让他骂]. Quantity is not important… the key is to actualize the

[23] Liu Shaoqi, "Speech by Liu Shaoqi at the Central Working Conference" (May 31, 1961), CD. [刘少奇, "刘少奇在中央工作会议上的讲话" (5月31日, 1961), 光碟。]
[24] Liu Shaoqi, "Speech by Liu Shaoqi at the Central Working Conference" (May 31, 1961), CD. [刘少奇, "刘少奇在中央工作会议上的讲话" (5月31日, 1961), 光碟。]
[25] Liu Shaoqi, "Speech by Liu Shaoqi at the 18th Supreme State Council" (March 21, 1962), CD. [刘少奇, "刘少奇在第十八次最高国务会议上的讲话" (3月21日, 1962), 光碟。]
[26] Deng Xiaoping, "Deng Xiaoping's Remarks When He Met with all the People participating in the Central Working Conference" (October 23, 1961), CD. [邓小平, "邓小平在接见参加团中央工作会议全体人员时的谈话" (10月23日, 1961), 光碟。]

Three Red Flags [三面红旗][27] in the long term." We see here that Deng, as well as Liu, was, to some extent, "parroting" some aspects of Mao's speech, while also elaborating and putting in their own style, their own little creativity. Deng further added: "The facts have proven: our leap is correct; the Great Leap Forward is also correct. A growth of 25% is a great leap forward! [增长百分之二十五就是大跃进嘛!] Our problem is that we have moved a bit too fast. The Great Leap Forward is possible… Our target still cannot be too high… This and next year our agriculture still cannot go up, but hopefully there is an average year when we no longer need to import food. Currently, labor production rate has continuously improved, and the masses' activeness has largely increased. Now we are experimenting using production teams to calculate production, and the result is good" [现在正在试验以生产队为基本核算单位，效果很好]. Deng further sets a hypothetical target to seven years—completing twenty years' worth of tasks within seven years, and by the end of it resolving all basic problems with food and clothing, while developing heavy industry.

To conclude, although there were variants to Mao's depictions, the style and approaches were very similar. To boost morale, the political officials operating within the idea system often cited figures that might not be very detailed in public meetings. The pre-coded information itself could flexibly be transformed into aggregated facts; sometimes, such information was aggregated and then aggregated again. Combining these "aggregated facts" with the use of elastic codes, these officials also constructed various "coded things"—some of which are highly visualizable—which together supported ideas derived from further secondary processing.

Upon receiving officials visiting from Guinea[28] in August 1965, one Guinean official mentioned that he was impressed the last time he visited China in 1960, and between 1960 and 1965, China further acquired a great leap forward [中国在一九六年至一九六五年又获得了大跃进]. Mao responded, "There was no great leap forward, only a small improvement

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[27] The Three Red Flags [三面红旗] was part of the second Five-Year Plan. It was an umbrella plan of socialist construction that encompasses three elements. The first is the General Route [总路线]—which Mao characterized as "and lots, and fast, and good, and efficient" [又多、又快、又好、又省]. The second element was Great Leap Forward [大跃进], and the third was People's Commune [人民公社].

[28] The visit included the education minister and the attorney general, named 贡代塞杜 and 法迪亚拉, respectively. I am unable to find an appropriate translation of their names in English. Mao was primarily in dialogue with the attorney general in the document. Note also that, by 1965, the worst problems had subsided and agricultural productivity had recovered.

[or a tiny step ahead] [没有大跃进小小的进步].” [29] Another degree of aggregate depiction was expressed in this instance. The difference between a great leap forward or a tiny step ahead was a matter of aggregated fact, one stretched to fit into an image, not a specific figure—especially if the Great Leap Forward could be modified to a project with an indefinite time horizon. Just like “approximately correct” and “approximately incorrect” could be hard to delineate, the lines between a “great leap forward,” a “tiny step forward,” a “tiny step backward,” and a “great leap backward” have no obvious definitions.

But when definitive definitions were not forthcoming—due to the way aggregate depictions merged with revolutionary codes—criticizing the Great Leap Forward became an interpretive choice. Given the way in which the idea system worked, this choice could have dangerous implications for the critics. In one case, a high-level Party official Chen Yun [陈云] who had criticized the Great Leap Forward was himself criticized several years later as—among a long list of other misdeeds—“having crazily attacked Three Red Flags, having become a hurried pioneer [or vanguard] to revive capitalism.” He was described as having “splashed cold water” on the Great Leap Forward. Chen was then linked to Peng Dehuai, the most vocal and symbolic critic of Mao over the Great Leap Forward, for his “right-leaning opportunism”—that when “we” experience trouble, “he deemed it was the right time to become anti-Party, anti-socialist, and then worked together with Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, and other domestic class enemies to attack the Three Red Flags, the socialist system, and enacted a crazy counterattack toward the revolutionary route-line represented by Chairman Mao.”[30] His attack on the Great Leap Forward became an act being fitted into an elastic code (“right-leaning opportunism”)—which in turn was transmitted into a cognitive portal; from then on its significance was escalated quickly, ultimately being equated with the highest form of crime.

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[29] The Chinese phrase “进步” means “improvement,” but in literal terms means “progress in a step.” Mao was likely to be expressing a pun intentionally. Mao Zedong, “Remarks during a Meeting with the Guinea Education Delegation, the Attorney General and His Wife” (August 8, 1965), CD. [毛泽东，“接见几内亚教育代表团、总检察长及夫人时的谈话” (8月8日，1965)，光碟。]

[30] Beijing University of Political Science and Law, Commune of politics and law's main guard of Mao Zedong's Red Guard, bombing Chen Yun team, “Complete Reckoning of Counter-Revolutionary Revisionist Chen Yun's Heinous Crimes” (February, 1967), CD. [北京政法学院，政法公社毛泽东主红卫兵，炮轰陈云战斗队，“彻底清算反革命修正主义分子陈云的滔天罪行” (2月，1967)，光碟。]

Destabilizing Contradictions and Implosions I: Synchronic Contradictions

Let us now consider why the revolutionary idea system came to fall apart.

A successful idea system runs on a state of minimal equilibrium, a balance between *cohesiveness* and *contradictions*. The revolutionary idea system had its strength in being ideationally cohesive, encompassing, adaptative, and meaningful. But it also had a characteristic: it repeatedly allowed "contradictions" to accumulate and multiply and could not resolve them internally, satisfactorily, and speedily.

Such contradictions seemed to be internally irresolvable *by design*. Often, the internal means of resolution met their limitations, upon which external means were called for to "resolve" a dispute. A typical scenario is an external authority intervening to impose one definition upon the situation, taking a clear side, or to deescalate a confrontational situation before it got out of hand. But when the power of these external agents became fragile or unstable, previously unresolved contradictions would resurface, and the idea system would exist in a state of strain and weakness, facing challenges of the present as well as of the past.

Such patterns recurred cyclically, and intensified over time, during the years 1948–1979. Initially, contradictions could be contained internally or by an external authority. Over time, however, it became ever more challenging to contain the idea system's internal contradictions; even on the "aggregate" level, the idea system failed to cohere. When the external epistemic authorities were factionalized, they created aggregate-level attacks, often leading to definitional collapse on the aggregate level,

alongside the extreme negation of epistemic authorities of all sides by one another. Near the end of Mao's era, neither definitions within, nor authorities upon, the idea system easily cohered, regardless of the work and effort put into "stretching" the boundaries of elastic codes. The core propositions were affected. Although Mao successfully maintained control of his reign, the strength of the idea system that guided the revolutionary movement had weakened considerably.

A Catalogue of Elastic, Approximated Categories

To trace the problem of implosive contradictions, let us reconsider the proliferation of elastic codes in China during the Mao era. Parts of these codes had predated the founding of the PRC, while others were fine characterizations that developed after 1949.

The most widely read publication during the heyday of the Chinese Revolution was *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* (1964), commonly known as the *Little Red Book*, prepared by Lin Biao. A casual search in the quotation book would reveal a shocking number of "-isms," reproduced in Table 11.1.

This catalogue of words that end with an "-ism" constituted a scheme of categorization. They constituted a stock of *intermediary ideas* (or *intermediate ideas*) introduced into the populace and polity; epistemologically, they are elastic codes that enable social actors to bridge pre-coded information (filtered or unfiltered) into categorized things to more effectively service the making of ideas. They are elastic in that each "-ism" had very concrete symbols to signify it, and one could apply these codes to new information, given effortful *interpretations*.

Table 11.1 A collection of intermediary ideas, as elastic codes, in the *Little Red Book*

修正主义 (revisionism), 教条主义 (orthodoxism), 经验主义 (experience-ism), 帝国主义 (imperialism), 官僚主义 (bureaucratism), 冒险主义 (risk-takingism), 右倾机会主义 (rightist-opportunism), 自由主义 (freedomism), 自由放任主义 (free-indulgence-ism), 小资产阶级个人主义 (petty-bourgeosie individualism), 个人第一主义 (individual-first-ism), 主观主义 (subjectivism), 宗派主义 (sectarianism), 个人英雄主义 (individual-heroism), 风头主义 (public-fame-ism), 本位主义 (self-position-ism), 封建主义 (feudalism), 命令主义 (commandism), 军阀主义 (militiaism), 享乐主义(hedonism), 不承认主义 (denial-ism), 尾巴主义 (tail-ism), 唯心主义 (idealism), 唯物主义(materialism), 美帝国主义 (American Imperialism), 官僚资本主义 (bureaucratic capitalism), 机会主义 (opportunism), 国际主义 (internationalism), 爱国主义 (patriotism)

Each code connotes a level of gradation in the spectrum of revolutionary-counterrevolutionary significance. "Tail-ism"—the idea of abasing yourself to the enemies like dogs who wag their tails—would be less serious than "Revisionism," but of course the two can be combined.

The uses of words were often artful and measured. An insider who had participated in a factional battle made this statement to an interviewer, explaining:

> To write a good poster you first planned it out on typing paper. You decided the target and the tone of the poster. It was essential to decide the tone, **how high** to go. This was called ***ding diaozi*** [定调子] **(setting the tone). We'd compile a list of X's crimes and then decide what he should be: a "contradiction among the people," a "counterrevolutionary element," a "three-anti element," and so on. If the target was a cadre, we usually called him "a capitalist roader,"** but we also had other labels, such as **"royalist," "opportunist," or a "refuge for ghosts, freaks and monsters."** Two or three of us planned the poster, and then we got the best character writer to write out the text of the poster. Every faction has its own *xiucai* [秀才], a scholar who had great command of the Chinese language and of Mao's writings. We used Chinese brushes, paper and ink from the office, finished the poster, and then sought out the proper spot to paste it up. Some of the posters were true works of art, both in appearance to the eye and in content. Too bad they have all been destroyed.[1]

Even the aesthetics of the poster were made to visually coincide with the perceived crime of the individuals. The matter of which gradational category (a potentially fitting image) to assign was not just a question of evidential information. "Evidence" was readily available; the same behavior could be fitted into a broad spectrum of "tones." Although there were institutionalized pathways and precedents to follow, they were still very subjective, artful decisions.

This quote stresses the role of *competence* in taking part in the revolutionary discursive institutions.[2] A speaker knew how to assess particular acts of particular targets, deciding which "definitions" and "gradations" fit, and how to form linkages between ideas and "facts." The phrase *xiucai*

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[1] B. Michael Frolic, *Mao's People: Sixteen Portraits of Life in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: Harvard University Press. 1980), 170–171.

[2] For a basic overview of the concept of interactional, communicative, and linguistic competence, see Frederick Erickson, *Talk and Social Theory* (Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004), 12–14, 122, 153–154.

[秀才] historically refers to a kind of local, scholarly student with semi-professional status in feudal society. In this case, the *xiucai* was analogized by the interviewee to those who have above-average competence to participate in revolutionary discourses.

Basic Origins of Unresolvable, Built-In Contradictions

A main origin of the revolutionary idea system was that, owing to the repository of elastic categories that were in place, there were increased possibilities for making multiple possible, reasonable, logical deductions that were incompatible with one another.

Take Kuai Dafu, the student leader in Tsinghua University, and his followers as an example. After Mao took a stance on the issue, a question immediately followed: Exactly how guilty should he and his followers be, and what label and gradation should be applied? Kuai was a rather militant figure in Tsinghua, a violent and overt defender of Mao and the Revolution. Most of Kuai's followers executed covert orders from Kuai and did not know the exact goals, except that they were intended to defend against Chairman Mao against the powerful "reactionaries" who were "encircling" him. One accuser called Kuai a "counterrevolutionary schemer"; this accusation was in reference to the allegation that Kuai took out a pistol on the day of the major incident at Tsinghua University, where shooting and armed conflict involving grenades had taken place. The main idea was that Kuai Dafu's order had deliberately incited the events. Another accuser said: "Kuai couldn't hide his hatred of Mao Zedong Thought."[3]

Kuai Dafu was also accused of being a counterrevolutionary based on his order to denounce Premiere Zhou Enlai and propagate the idea that everyone else besides Mao and Lin Biao could be overthrown. The accuser's logic, somewhat creative, was this: "If all of Mao Tse-Tung's real support could be undermined, the Chairman would be isolated and the Cultural Revolution wrecked." Suddenly, attacking Zhou Enlai became encoded into an act of undermining Chairman Mao's real support. Likewise, Kuai was also charged by another accuser with starting "a new campaign to overthrow revolutionary committees everywhere," thus attempting "a second seizure of power in the country." Others saw him as

[3]William Hinton, *Hundred Day War: The Cultural Revolution at Tsinghua University* (New York: Monthly Review Press. 1972), 277.

transforming from an honest revolutionary in 1966 to a counterrevolutionary later on, developing dissatisfaction with Mao and the Cultural Revolution headquarters' approaches.[4]

Kuai Dafu did the deeds that he did; but how should he as a person and his acts be "summarized"? Using elastic categories and filtered information liberally, the opposite summaries could be reached.

Like all categories, each elastic category, which possesses core meanings, also has a broad and wide *proximal zone of meaning*. The meaning of a code could thus be "stretched" from the core to the outer boundary of the proximal zone, and then subsequently equated. After an act or a person is successfully encompassed by the category (by theoretical labeling or forceful assignment, for example), the act or the person is then treated as resolutely, clearly, and perpetually belonging to that category "all along." The very process of approximation or aggregation—which would reveal potential nuances and ambiguity—disappears from sight. The fitted image (as a coded thing) presents itself with clear, unambiguous meaning, therefore inviting the use of social and emotional forces associated with that code.

Consider Fig. 11.1. It would have been ideal, albeit unlikely, if someone could distinguish "Left" and "Right" in the same way as they could distinguish between "ants" and "elephants," given that the relations between the two are discrete and unambiguous (Scenario #1). Things that do not fit into left or right would be "Neither Left nor Right"—even if their proximity to each category of things was close.

It would also not be particularly problematic if a society inherently accepts that two categories overlap (Scenario #2). A simple example would be that the offspring of parents from two families represent a member of both families, or two religious denominations with a set of shared beliefs. In this nonexclusive arrangement, the distance between the two sets of core meanings may be closer than exclusive ones, and certain overlapping and intertwining relations are acknowledged. But during heated scenarios in the Revolution, if something was observed to be "Both Left and Right," it was deemed to be a negative, and dangerously unacceptable, classification. Per the purity-driven dynamic, the idea system favors the eradication of rightist elements altogether.

The contradictions increased dramatically in Scenario #3, where elastic categories were employed. Completely discrete categories were assigned

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[4] William Hinton, *Hundred Day War*, 282–283.

Scenario #1: Exclusive Categories

Outside Area: Neither Left nor Right

Dotted Area: Proximal Zones of Meaning
(Approximately Left and Right)
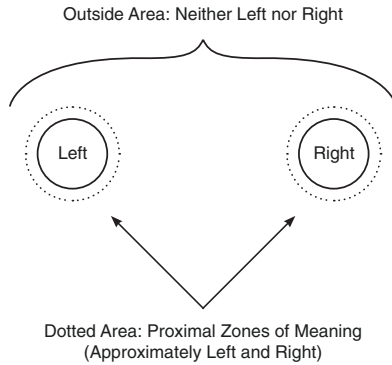
Scenario #2: Non-Exclusive Categories

Middle Area: Both Left and Right

Outside Area:
Neither Left nor Right

Dotted Area: Proximal Zones of Meaning
(Approximately Left and Right)
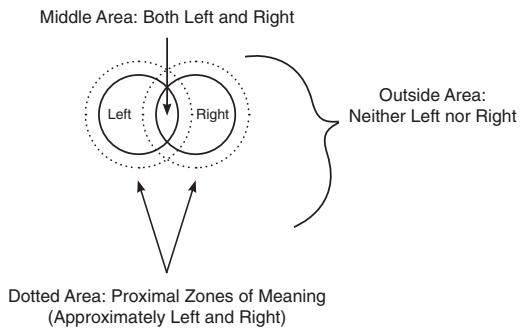
*Scenario #3: Elastic Categories and their Proximal Zones
of Meanings*

Approximately
Left

Approximately
Right

Left   Right

Zone #1: A Variant of
Left that Embodies the
Approximately Right at
the Tangible Level

Zone #2: Both
Approximately
Left and Right

Zone #3: A Variant of
Left that Embodies the
Approximately Right at
the Tangible Level
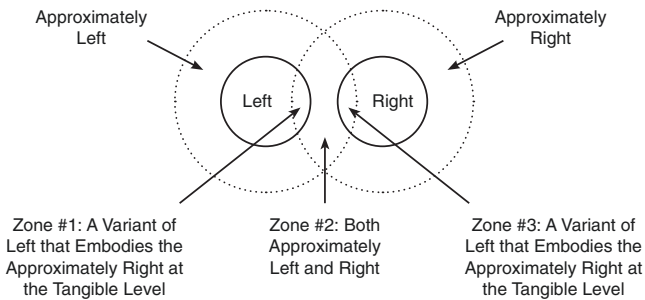
Fig. 11.1   Exclusive categories; nonexclusive categories; approximated categories

for things (people, events, patterns, etc.) that were roughly approximated; patterns that are fuzzy or ambiguous were processed through a discrete mode of thinking. Gradational mechanisms, while helpful in smoothing out the rough edges, were not sufficient in containing the contradictions.

Consider the contradictions that could surface during inferencing in Scenario #3.

If equivalences were allowed to be drawn liberally—and challenging equivalences were sanctioned—then the coded things within Zone #1 are both Left and Right. And if Left and Right are considered exclusive, then a contradiction occurs.

Assigning discrete, gradational categories could be a mechanism to minimize contradictions. Suppose a person exhibiting Zone #1 qualities is assigned the gradational status of being "easily reformable," then an open self-criticism could probably resolve the issue. Being classified into Zone #2 would imply a much more serious intervention, and being classified into Zone #3 crosses into the dangerous category of potentially non-reformable, even if the person is not yet classified as the extreme Right.

However, the main problem lies in the liberal drawing of equivalences. Equivalence means a state of things being equal. When things are *equated* liberally—often by people without an ethic of measure and proportion, perhaps drawn in successive steps in a portal-like structure within a chain-complex of ideas—the "mathematics" or "logic" in the calculation or deduction could easily fall apart.

Table 11.2 represents a sequence of calculation and deduction in six steps. Let us presume category A is associated with the meanings of good and meritorious, and category B with the bad and criminal. A reasoner seeks to categorize things (people, events, patterns, etc.) that are normally placed in category A into category B.

Table 11.2 Sequential equivalences with elastic categories and resulting contradictions

	Step 1		*Step 2*		*Step 3*
→	Category A = A-Expanded	→	A-Expanded = B	→	B = Level-1–10 Criminality.
	Step 4		*Step 5*		*Step 6*
→	Category B = B-Expanded	→	B-Expanded = A	→	B = Level-1–10 Merit

Category A = Bad (Criminal)

Category B = Good (Meritorious)

The first step the reasoner could make is effortfully stretching and thus expanding the boundary of a category A. The second step could be to *equate* certain things in an opposite category, B—the boundary of B may or may not be expanded—asserting that those things fall within category A. The third step could be to assign a concrete gradation as to how wrong or criminal that thing or person is, perhaps on a scale of 1–10. Through this inferencing strategy, a reasoner can make positive aspects look as negative as possible. While a criminality scale of 8–10 may be unrealistic to achieve, the classification of criminality scale 1–3 may be a tangible task.

Parallel to the aforementioned sequence, another reasoner might seek to make certain things (people, events, patterns, etc.), otherwise considered as bad and criminal look as good as possible. Through a similar strategy but in a reverse direction, this reasoner could fit the things to effortfully stretch or expand category B, drawing broad equivalences, and then fit things into category A. On the concrete gradation of goodness, the bad, criminal elements could perhaps receive a new classification of 1–3 on a scale of goodness and merit.

The exact skills and efforts put into stretching and equating as a whole determined what conclusions are to be reached, at least temporarily. I am not discussing all the things in pragmatic circumstances that determined the reaching of final conclusions, such as power and certain subtleties of details. Instead, I am seeking to point out how it is always very *plausible*, with a *normal* level of skills and effort, to derive oppositional conclusions. It was an even greater challenge to classify subtypes and concrete gradations stemming from the same set of original information.

The nightmare scenario could easily be imagined, before we cover some real, historical cases.

Imagine there is an intense contestation over "leftist" and "rightist" labels in factional battles—between faction X and faction Y; the debate would involve at least the following possibilities.

- X is a leftist (of various gradations) and Y is a rightist (of various gradations).
- Y is a leftist (of various gradations) and X is a rightist (of various gradations).
- Both X and Y are leftists (of various gradations).
- Both X and Y are rightists (of various gradations).
- Neither X nor Y is a leftist (of various gradations).
- Both X and Y are leftists (of various gradations) and rightists (of various gradations).

Adding to the difficulty of the precise assignment of categories and gradations, committing a "mistake" in such an assignment could have conspicuous implications for oneself and for others. Interactive expressions at a given moment could be "evidential facts" (pre-coded information with evidential value) about one's attitude and identity—on which other social actors could create an image fit. In other words, much pre-coded information was created *in the moment* of interpretive discourses; this potential evidence self-multiplies during the process of discourse. The level of challenge could best be illustrated in concrete, historical cases, and the intelligent and artful discourse participants played a colorful role in exacerbating contradictions.

The Case of the Background Theory Debate

As soon as the Cultural Revolution was set in motion in 1966, Mao had to adjudicate between different factions—not only for political reasons but also for intellectual ones. To describe how challenging these political and intellectual tasks were, I will analyze a particular case revolving around "background theory."

The debate revolved around a policy-related question that could be expressed as follows: *To what extent, if at all, should class background be considered a factor for advancement?* Rather than manifesting itself as a technical, bureaucratic matter to be resolved, in 1966, this question incited ideological conflicts in which many of the participants took a side.

At first, the intense debate pertained to "bloodline theory," "Background Theory" (as an essay), and "solely-background theory." The major participants were Yu Luoke [遇罗克] who wrote a piece titled "Background Theory" [出身论], and Tan Lifu [谭力夫], who had taken credit for having written a couplet [对联], which may be awkwardly translated as "Father Hero Son Good Man; Father Anti-Movement Son Bad Guy" [老子英雄儿好汉, 老子反动儿混蛋].[5] This couplet aroused considerable conflict. It implied that the individuals whose family backgrounds were classified badly (e.g., having a "landlord" class background) would also be "bad," thus warranting inferior treatment. And, conversely, those whose

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[5] 反动 is customarily translated as "counterrevolutionary." I choose to translate 反动 as "anti-movement," and 反革命 as "counterrevolutionary," as I think that although the meanings of these phrases are approximately the same, the former is slightly less explicit than the latter phrase in reference to the idea of "counterrevolutionary."

families were classified to be good (e.g., a "red" class background, or a "red" element) would also be good, thus warranting superior treatment. This couplet provoked intense infighting among the youth, who inevitably came from different family backgrounds.

On August 6, 1966, Jiang Qing,[6] at Tianqiao Theater [天桥剧场], suggested correcting the couplet as: "父母革命儿接班, 父母反动儿背叛"; this new couplet may be awkwardly, literally translated to "Father Mother Revolutionary Son Continues; Father Mother Anti-Movement Son Betrays." The idea was that even the children of counterrevolutionary parents may be willing to betray and go against their parents. Jiang further claimed that part of the previous phrase, "Father Hero Son Good Man" [老子英雄儿好汉] actually originated from an old Beijing opera titled *Liánhuán Tào* [连环套], probably alluding to its ties to outdated, feudal cultures. More critically, Chen Boda[7] remarked a couple months later that those who advocated this theory were akin to the exploitative individuals who sought to perpetuate their position by adopting a bloodline theory [血统论] to suppress those from the working and peasant classes. It was an attempt to use "school-ism" [宗派主义] to replace the Party's principle of classlessness—throwing out the latter principle "beyond the clouds in the nine-level sky" [抛到九霄云外]. Jiang Qing clarified her position on November 14, 1966. She explicitly criticized labels such as the "Five Red Types" and "Black Seven Types," asserting that they endangered the Revolution. She was clear that the old slogans were wrong.[8] However, she was more ambiguous regarding the possibility as to whether class background should be relevant at all, saying that "we need to see their ingredient-composition, but not rely too much on them." Her view involved two further "theories"—"has-ingredient theory" [有成份论] and "not-only-ingredient theory" [不唯成份论]—but she reconciled them into one, asserting that ingredients can be considered but should not be the sole, exclusive basis for consideration. By the end of 1966, the original couplet was equated with bloodline theory, and therefore more or

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[6] Jiang Qing, Wang Renzhong and Kang Sheng, "Speech by Jiang Qing, Wang Renzhong, Kang Sheng to Secondary School Students in Beijing" (August 6, 1966), CD. [江青、王任重、康生, "江青王任重康生对北京中学生的讲话" (8月6日, 1966), 光碟。]

[7] Chen Boda, "Chen Boda's Speech at the Central Working Conference" (October 16, 1966), CD. [陈伯达, "陈伯达在中央工作会议上的讲话" (10月16日, 1966), 光碟。]

[8] Jiang Qing, "Jiang Qing Meets with Representatives of Secondary School Students in Beijing to Discuss Class Lines" (November 14, 1966), CD. [江青, "江青接见北京中学生代表谈阶级路线" (11月14日, 1966), 光碟。]

less defined as "anti-movement." Tan Lifu was arrested on December 18, 1966.

A twist appeared when Yu Luoke published an essay titled "Background Theory" on January 18, 1967, under the name "Beijing Family Background Problems Research Group," in a secondary school newspaper.[9]

Both Tan Lifu and Yu Luoke received a rapid boost in fame, and then quickly became targets and were delegitimized and arrested.

Tan Lifu, first arrested on December 18, 1966, was released on May 29, 1967. He was relatively lucky, as he managed to join the Red Army as a command officer in 1970, after being assigned to a reeducation farm in 1969. By defending family lineage and background, Tan Lifu was associated with protecting privileged cadres and anti-Cultural Revolution elements, which were, by implication, anti-Mao.

Yu Luoke was arrested on January 5, 1968, and put to death on March 15, 1970. By defending social mobility by individual actions, Yu was associated with muddling class-consciousness and being anti-movement.

On April 14, 1967, Qi Benyu [戚本禹] labeled Yu Luoke's "Background Theory" essay a "big poisonous weed" [大毒草]. His reasoning was that it erased class route-lines, preventing discourses about the existence of exploitative classes, preventing people from forming the "outer ring" of the movement that encircled the enemy, therefore thwarting the war precipitated by the Revolution. (Qi Benyu was himself removed from office on January 13,1968, due to a prior offense.) More details of this will be discussed later.

So why were the debates so vicious, and the definitions given to others so exaggerated? To answer this, we need to look at the nuances in the discursive activity.

The first activity was how positive and negative images were created by both sides. For Tan, those who sought to equalize relations between people of all backgrounds were more or less vengeful descendants of the previously oppressive classes. These classes were rightfully persecuted during the early Liberation and became part of the underclasses thereafter. They were the antagonists of the revolutionary situation—now seeking to regain their status and power by undermining the current prestigious classes largely consisting of Party cadres. For Yu, the opposite was true: many existing Party cadres who sought to *prevent* equalization were the

⁹ Beijing Family Background Research Group, "Background Theory" (January 18, 1967), CD. [北京家庭出身问题研究小组, "出身论" (1月18日, 1967), 光碟。]

antagonists. The children whose parents had previously been persecuted and had therefore been oppressed since birth were the protagonists. They now sought to topple the current oppressive class, primarily consisting of Party cadres who wished to protect their own positions.

Second, creative "equivalences" were aggressively made in speech and writing during the period, a few of which we have already cited. Tan *equated* the antagonists with being representative of the landlord and the capitalist classes; they were children who inherited the habits and tendencies of their revolutionary-less parents, tending to go against the descendants of those who were more Red. Tan also *equated* existing cadres with active, authentic revolutionaries. In complete contrast to this, Yu *equated* the existing cadres with corruptness, with Peng Zhen, and with a revisionist class that sought to corrupt the Party and erode the movement from inside. The protagonists sought to counteract these actors, and were therefore the active, authentic revolutionaries (see Table 11.3).

Third, both sides constructed the identities of the attackers, citing details of what their attackers did and said at the moment as a form of evidence. While the quarrel started with mere implications, they soon became overt depictions. One such common depiction was to depict their attackers as attacking the Revolution itself, and therefore—per further equivalencing—attacking the accomplishments of, or even actively undermining, Mao. By the end, it was not that one side was pro-Mao and the other against, but rather that both sides had been constructed as anti-Mao actors, whereas they had constructed themselves as pro-Mao. The diametrically opposite but dually present identities were elaborately constructed; they were contradictions that called for urgent clarifications and resolutions.

Table 11.3 A model of aggressive equivalences in the background theory debate

	Tan	*Yu*
Positive	*Existing Cadres* = Revolutionaries = People with Red Backgrounds	*Persecuted and Underprivileged Underclass* = Revolutionaries
Negative	*Persecuted and Underprivileged Underclass* = Landlords and Capitalists	*Existing Cadres* = Corruptness = Peng Zhen = A Revisionist Class

In an original essay published on January 18, 1967,[10] Yu used statistics to elaborate—though it is understood that these are aggregated statistics, a form of filtered information. The argument was as follows: Suppose the Black Five Types—the landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, and rightists [地主、富农、反革命分子、坏分子、右派; abbreviated as 地富反坏右]—constituted approximately 5% of the Chinese population, then their descendants would be several times more prevalent. The majority of the people had an ambiguous status and did not specifically belong to the Red Five Types—workers, peasants, business people, students, revolutionary soldiers [工人、农民、商人、学生、革命军人; abbreviated as 工农商学兵]. They might have been the sons and daughters of intellectuals, having a convoluted family history, middle-class family, and so forth.

A provocative escalation then took place. Yu argued that the system, "influenced by look-left-actual-right anti-movement route-line" [由于形"左"实右反动路线的影响], precluded youths with such backgrounds from joining the military or any central part of the bureaucracy. They assumed those of a different class to be born guilty, considering them "little dogs" [狗崽子]—thus depriving opportunities for those who "betray one's own family, protect the Central Party, protect Chairman Mao, and join the Red Guard." During this period of their rule, many innocent youths had "died in an unnatural death, drowned in the solely-background theory's abyss" [溺死于唯出身论的深渊之中]. Responsible parties must pay attention to the matter, and expose those who "appeared like they have adopted a calm, comprehensive Eclecticism are actually cruel and hypocritical" [而那些貌似冷静和全面的折衷主义观点实际上是冷酷和虚伪].

Yu further argued that the people claiming that both background and performance factors were taken into account were, in practice, making an excuse to advocate the importance of backgrounds. He said that there were few correlations between background and performance. This statement might make more sense if we consider a "fact" (pre-coded information) cited in an editorial remark of the document that, for certain agricultural villages, when selecting students to advance from elementary to primary school, backgrounds could account

[10] Beijing Family Background Research Group, "Background Theory" (January 18, 1967), CD. [北京家庭出身问题研究小组，"出身论" (1月18日, 1967), 光碟。]

for as much as 60%, with performance only 20%, learning achievement 5%, and other aspects at 15%.[11]

Later in the statement, the argument became increasingly extreme. Yu called those in power to be "counterrevolutionary revisionists"—they are "animals in the same hill" [一丘之貉]. They have used an extreme-left facial appearance to eradicate the class route-lines [阶级路线]. They brought in "old lord of capitalist-class authority" [资产阶级权威老爷] into the Party, giving the Red Five Kinds special privileges while prosecuting innocent, property-less classes (or proletariat) of bad backgrounds. This was akin to engaging in a "acute, complex class struggle" [尖锐复杂的阶级斗争]. They deepened and expanded the problems and contradictions, engaged in the cruel acts of "uprooting," humiliating "debates," as well as "bodily searches, insulting scolding, detention, beatings," and so forth. Their actions had demoralized many youths, dissuading them from joining revolts; they "could not invest all their energy into the movement," having neither the capital to be in the Revolution nor the condition to revolt. They generally reduced the scale of the revolutionary team, which "fit into the intention of the anti-movement route-line" [正中了反动路线的下怀].

In another statement,[12] Yu sought to engage with counterarguments made by other texts. One argument was interesting, and a similar version was later, to a large extent, legitimized by the authorities when Yu was prosecuted. The argument was that the point of class divisions and hierarchy was to move and organize the property-less classes [無産階級, which is also commonly translated as "proletariat class"] into the class camp; "it is at the political level, not the body level, eradicating the sons and the grandchildren of the exploiting class" [在政治上, 而不是在肉体上, 使剥削阶级断子绝孙].

Yu argued that if they were to retake power, it was from that of the capitalist or revisionist class-lords [如果真的是夺权, 那也是向资产阶级老爷夺权]. These people positioned themselves as the real "left"—even more left than anyone in "class route-line" battles—because "the left" was defined by the Party, but they never yield the proper rights to authentic

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[11] The information was "pre-coded" in the sense that revolutionary codes were not applied to the information to be discussed *at the moment* they were stated.

[12] Yu Luoke (Beijing Family Research Group), "We Have a Responsibility to Defend the Highest Directive—to Refute Bu Shuming" (January 27, 1967), CD. [遇罗克 (北京家庭出员问题研究小组), "我们有责任捍卫最高指示——反驳步曙明" (1月27日, 1967), 光碟。]

revolutionary youths [都不给真正革命的青年以权利]—so that others never had the equal political opportunity to become part of "the left," putting them into a ready-to-surrender position [让他们处在准备投降归顺的地位上]. They merely labeled some individual youths who were not them as enemies and then engaged in a so-called "class struggle." Many of those who prosecuted were from a class with capital, and who now also had power. By "only acknowledging human-made class struggles," neglecting the objective formation of new classes, those people practically supported "a classic model of class-struggle-eradication theory" [典型的阶级斗争熄灭论].

Using a mock dialogue format,[13] Yu contended that even Tan Lifu and those who opposed his essay acknowledged the existence of many incidents of oppression and the deprivation of opportunities, but they still insisted that they were reasonable. A contrast was made in the end that, although everyone's thinking was essentially anti-movement, those who acknowledged the facts were at least honest, while those who denied such realities lacked courage; they were "thorough, double-sized, big hoodlums" [透顶加双料的大混蛋].

In an article he published on February 27, 1967,[14] Yu drew further linkages, particularly drawing equations to Peng Zhen and feudalist, bloodline theory, charging that the oppression of those with bad class backgrounds most frequently occurred during the era under the reign of the Pang Zhen group, before the Cultural Revolution commenced. He further argued that old committees had practiced the anti-movement, "solely-background theory" line—which "in an undebatable manner explains the kinds of un-releasable knot tied by revisionists and bloodline theory" [這都無可辯駁地說明了修正主義集團和血統論結下了怎樣的不解之緣].[15] Therefore, the attempt to create this line of linkages and equivalencing may be represented as follows:

[13] Yu Luoke, "A Dialogue on 'Background Theory': Turning Cases" (February 2, 1967), CD. [遇罗克, "《出身论》对话录:翻案篇" (2月2日, 1967), 光碟。]

[14] Beijing Family Background Research Group, "Talking About the Divide" (February 27, 1967), CD. [北京家庭出身问题研究小组, "谈鸿沟" (2月27日, 1967), 光碟。]

[15] Beijing Family Background Research Group, "The New Counterattack of the Theory of Bloodlines—Refuting 'The Poisonous Weed "Background Theory" Must Be Eradicated'" (March 6, 1967), CD. 北京家庭出身问题研究小组, "反动血统论的新反扑——驳'大毒草《出身论》必须连根铲除'" (3月6日, 1967), 光碟。]

*Peng Zhen Group = Solely Background Theory = Revisionists = Bloo
dline Theory*

Further equivalences were subsequently drawn.

Yu stated that most of them "refused to admit the Peng-Zhen Group had discriminated against youths with bad backgrounds," and those who reluctantly admitted to it only did so to a limited extent—that they were only discriminated against at the onset of the Cultural Revolution. And if no one had brought it up, they probably would not even concede to that point in "a year or so." He alluded that, regardless of intention, these people had once been the "ghosts that serviced the tigers" [为虎作伥]—a Chinese idiom alluding to the myth that if a tiger eats people, they would turn into ghosts that service the tiger.

Yu elaborated his argument with visual details pertaining to bloodline theory. He said it was "very fashionable" in slave societies. He cited a story in Ancient Greece wherein the two sons of an old man acquired two victories in the Olympics, and then both sons carried their father to parade around Olympia. Many people yelled at the father: "Hey, you are so fortunate, why don't you die? Do you want greater fortune? Do you want to be a god?" Upon hearing the remarks, their aged father was so happy that he died. This anecdote was meant to portray the absurdity of bloodline theory; Yu editorialized: "Your sons are the champions. What does that have to do with your business [你儿子是冠军, 碍得着你的事吗]?" This equivalence was made to a slave society [奴隶制社会].[16]

Yu then related the discussion to historical Chinese examples, such as an emperor called Shun [舜], who kept covering up the fact that his own father had tried to kill him several times. Implicitly bridging to the present, Yu said: "Probably he was afraid of people knowing that his father was anti-movement, and then concluded that he was a hoodlum. It was therefore better not to say anything." Yu moved on to use examples from feudalism, which he said institutionalized and elevated "family connections"—such as the connections between monarchs and officials and between fathers and sons—to the realm of high-principled morality. One story was of a son who knew that the father had stolen a sheep and then reported him to the governmental authority. A sage who knew about it then wildly shook his head [大摇其头] and said that doing so was not correct. In another story, an emperor, Liu Bang [刘邦], who had founded the Han Dynasty, was actually once a bandit. When he visited his brother's

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[16] Beijing Family Background Research Group, "Talking about the Divide."

house, he often duplicitously obtained meals from him. However, one time, his brother insisted that the rice was not yet fully cooked and refused to share it with him. While debating whether to grant his brother a feudatory lord position, even though he was never really qualified, eventually bloodline theory prevailed, so he granted it to him but with the contemptuous feudal title "Leftover Rice Lord" [剩饭侯].

Yu further cited a Ming Dynasty penal practice, literally called "Eliminate Door Ten Clans" [灭门十族], reserved for the most exceptional offenses; it meant that a particular person's father, mother, all relatives, even relatives of relatives—spanning ten levels of personal connections—have to be put to death along with that person. Alongside cruel measures of social control, feudalist societies also promoted a pamphlet called *Twenty-Four Filial Relations* [二十四孝]. The basic content consisted of twenty-four stories of past precedents that highlighted the meaning of filial relations. Yu related this to the Communists today. The logic was that if the father is not a good man, the son has to nonetheless say that he is, and then respect him as though he is a hero. Some of them were "studying the *Twenty-Four Filial Relations* too much." Those who promoted bloodline theory should use history as a mirror and look at themselves, to see if "there is a bit of similarity between them and historical relics." Again, he reiterated that "today the son of the capitalist is no longer a capitalist, and those who had a revolutionary family background have inversely become the animals who share the same hill with the five blacklisted types."

These acts of extrapolation and processing—much of which involved building specific image resemblances and equivalences—became "evidence" of Yu's counterrevolutionary activities. Among other things, they indicated the conflation of "background" and "solely background" theories.

Through the use of a few quotes from Marx and Engels, Yu summed up his denunciatory remarks on bloodline theory, and then advocated that "we must use class theory to substitute bloodline theory." In so doing, he created a dichotomous, either-or distinction: the actors who supported the "Background Theory" thesis were on one side, and the actors lining up from the other side, in whatever guises or names they used, attacked class theory and appeared to accept bloodline theory. Yu took a clear side in this battle: the meanings of family, lineage, and family virtues should be largely dismissed and replaced by (revolutionary) virtues of the *person*. The lines of equivalence Yu construed of the two theories may be laid out as follows:

(1) Bloodline Theory = Privileging Family over Revolution = Feudalistic
(2) Anti-Bloodline Theory = Privileging Family over Revolution =
    Revolutionary

A very telling problem emerged when both camps equated their opponents with Peng Zhen. Let us consider the two main lines of reasoning mapped out by Yu, who authored the "Background Theory" article, and those who were criticizing that article. Admittedly, the use of terminologies by these actors could appear to be very convoluted to today's reader, as indeed was the case for discourse participants back then.[17] The important point, however, is to recognize how the symbolic meaning of "Peng Zhen" was stretched so liberally to the point of him being equated with oppositional meanings, and, relatedly, how one could elevate "being just like Peng Zhen" to the level of revolutionary crime through incremental, step-by-step discourse processes.

Author(s) Attacking the "Background Theory" Essay, Exemplified by Tan Lifu
        Peng Zhen = A cadre who was secretly "recruiting from the surrendered and taking in traitors" (pre-coded information) = Over-privileging children of former capitalists = De-emphasizing class backgrounds = Acting against Party and Revolutionary objectives = People who are Pro "Background Theory" [Essay]

Author(s) of the "Background Theory" Essay, Exemplified by Yu Luoke
        Peng Zhen = A corrupt cadre who looked left but perpetuated unjust class dominance (pre-coded information) = De-emphasizing performance *[= Solely-Background Theory = Revisionists = Bloodline Theory]*[18] = People who are Anti "Background Theory" [Essay]

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[17] Here, "Background Theory" refers to the essay authored by Yu. This is a confusing point, since the point of the essay was to relate Peng Zhen to bloodline theory, and in so doing Yu argued that bloodline theory was essentially "solely-background theory"—in an article titled "Background Theory." The confusion over these terminologies was a feature of historical events; it is confusing even to those proficient in the Chinese language. The opponents of Yu mistakenly thought that, given its title, the article defended the use of class background, thus advocating a position similar to bloodline theory. This book's approach is to present these nuances and complications as they had happened.

[18] This sequence of equivalence placed in brackets was explained earlier in this chapter, and they were expressed in the same set of texts.

Yu first sought to establish this pre-coded information into a fact: that Peng Zhen—or more precisely, Peng Zhen's group—was serving the interests of corrupted cadres, that "Peng Zhen's group had discriminated against youths with bad class background" [彭真集团歧视过出身不好的青年].[19]

Once this "fact" was established, it would then be "reasonable" to link—by aggregation—an unspecified group of people who had secretly joined Peng Zhen's private camp. Who were the people being recruited in this way? In this context, Yu was referring to many current cadres who previously came from the "prior capitalist classes"—the Five Black Kinds; they had made their way into the organizational ranks through the assistance of Peng Zhen. They continually attempted to preserve their privileges. They favored the de-emphasizing of individual performance and instead accentuating backgrounds in institutional considerations. This position, as we have explained earlier, was linked and equated with bloodline theory in a stepwise sequence. Therefore, those who attacked his essay "Background Theory" resembled the supporters of bloodline theory, hence being anti-movement in their own way.

Because of their official "left" appearance—being associated with the Party—Yu used an expression of "Looked Left Actual Right" [形"左"实右] to describe such people: "What appearance may resemble such people who were actually right—a leftist appearance!" He further accused the critics of his essay to be trying to "reverse Peng Zhen's case"—or, more vividly, "crying innocence and injustice on behalf of the Peng Zhen line" [为彭氏路线喊冤叫屈].[20]

One piece of aggregated, pre-coded information played a key role in the formation of such ideas. Yu countered his attackers' assertion that Peng Zhen's group "treated those with youths with bad backgrounds discriminately well" [优待出身不好的青年]. Yu did not simply dispute this "fact" (pre-coded information in an aggregated form), he also asserted the opposite by claiming that Peng Zhen *oppressed* such people.

Yu's opponents alleged that after the initial land reform, Peng Zhen was "recruiting from the surrendered and taking in traitors" [招降纳叛],

[19] Beijing Family Background Research Group, "Talking about the Divide" (February 27, 1967), CD. [北京家庭出身问题研究小组，"谈鸿沟" (2月27日，1967)，光碟。]

[20] Beijing Family Background Research Group, "The New Counterattack of the Theory of Bloodlines—Refuting 'The Poisonous Weed "Background Theory" Must Be Eradicated'" (March 6, 1967), CD. [北京家庭出身问题研究小组，"反动血统论的新反扑——驳'大毒草《出身论》必须连根铲除'" (3月6日，1967)，光碟。]

a common Chinese idiom.[21] Yu claimed that the critics misinterpreted the original Politburo document containing the wordings, arguing that such critics were swapping the concept of "ingredients" with "family backgrounds."

> Who told you that the Peng Zhen Group favored young people of bad backgrounds? Is it reality? Not so! Is it a Politburo document? The Politburo has indeed published a leading article about Peng's resignation. **However, the surrender and betrayal referred to here is not about family background, but about ingredients. It was pointing to Peng Zhen having recruited some shameless traitors, anti-movement authorities, metamorphic elements, slaves and running dogs—where is the reference to backgrounds?** [可是, 这里指的降和叛, 不是出身, 而是成分。指的是彭真招降了一些无耻叛徒, 反动权威, 蜕化分子, 奴才走狗, 哪里说的是出身?] Therefore, the flower-ridding warriors' simple minds are confused again [头脑简单的除花勇士们又迷惘了]. Peng Zhen is recruiting some capitalist class elements; how could he oppress and persecute the sons and daughters of the exploiting classes? If you are confused about this, then you can answer this a bit from this: the capitalist class anti-movement line carrying out the "Father Anti-Movement Son Bad Guy" scene. This has not been forgotten, right? Is it true that the children of the exploiting classes have indeed been oppressed and persecuted, right? Let me tell you that **this just proves that the revisionist group and the vast number of sons and daughters of the exploiting classes are not in the same class domain, just as the majority of good-background youths and the revisionist group are not in a class domain** [恰好证明了修正主义集团和广大的剥削阶级子女不是一个阶级范畴的, 正和广大的出身好的青年与修正主义集团不是一个阶级范畴的一样]. So, who told you that the Peng Zhen Group favored young people who had bad backgrounds?
>
> It is not any others: it is the Liu-Deng route-line [刘邓路线]. It is Liu-Deng's route-line directing their mouths and tongues [指使他们的喉舌]. The so-called newly reorganized *Beijing Daily*, tells you that when one opens the newspaper, did not Beijing University's Kong Fan [孔繁] yell

[21] Using the same idiom, Yu had also said that administrative cadres within factories were often reluctant to hire or promote people with bad class backgrounds, fearing that doing so would amount to "recruiting from the surrendered and taking in traitors" [招降纳叛]. Beijing Family Background Research Group, "The New Counterattack of the Theory of Bloodlines—Refuting 'The Poisonous Weed "Background Theory" Must Be Eradicated'" (March 6, 1967), CD. [北京家庭出身问题研究小组, "反动血统论的新反扑——驳'大毒草《出身论》必须连根铲除'" (3月6日, 1967), 光碟。]

loudly about Liu Ping's[22] privileging "little dogs"? The first sound has been made since then. [23]

In this quote, Yu first sought to flip his opponents' aggregate, empirical depiction on its head. He claimed that the document wording specifically referred to Peng Zhen having recruited certain "ingredients" into his camp and not certain "backgrounds." These ingredients were not based on class but rather on certain actions. "Shameless traitors," for example, were not a class; they could come from any of the social classes. Peng Zhen was recruiting shameless traitors into his group, not people from particular backgrounds. Viewing this issue more broadly, we can see that Yu was questioning the critics' way of aggregating information as well as their subsequent acts of idea-building based upon such mistakenly aggregated information.

At this point, Yu merely depicted his opponents as being stupid and confused. He used an apparent contradiction to prove his argument: that the opponents were saying that Peng Zhen was recruiting some capitalist class elements [资产阶级份子] to actively "oppress and persecute the sons and daughters of the exploiting classes." If "exploiting classes" are equivalent to "capitalist classes," then it would indeed seem contradictory that Peng Zhen would recruit members *as a class* just to oppress and suppress the sons and daughters who belong to their own class. It made much more sense that Peng Zhen was recruiting certain *ingredients*, and they acted as

[22] Liu Ping [陆平] was Beijing University's president and a noted Party official in 1966. Kong Fan (孔繁) was on the faculty of the Philosophy Department at Beijing University. Li Haiwen, "The Relationship between the First Poster and Kang Sheng and Cao Yiou (3)," *People's Daily* (Beijing), March 4, 2011. [李海文，"第一张大字报与康生、曹轶欧的关系(3)"，人民网(北京)，3月4日，2011。] Kong Fan was initially part of the Cultural Revolution committee in 1966 organized by Nie Yuanzi [聂元梓], before his separation from Nie's faction, allegedly because of differences in perspective. In one meeting, however, Jiang Qing explicitly said Kong Fan and another person called Yang Keming [杨克明] represented how "Liu Deng Route was Realistically Manifested in Kong Fan and Yang Keming" ["你们学校刘邓路线具体表现在孔繁、杨克明身上"].

Mu Taichong (ed.), "Notes of Conversations between the Central Cultural Revolution Group and Peking University Representatives," *Remembrance 155*, Peking University Cultural Revolution Album 9, (2016): 73. [慕太冲(责编)，"中央文革小组接见北京大学代表谈话纪要"，记忆 *155*，北京大学文革专辑9，(2016):73.]

[23] Beijing Family Background Research Group, "The New Counterattack of the Theory of Bloodlines—Refuting 'The Poisonous Weed "Background Theory" Must Be Eradicated'" (March 6, 1967), CD. [北京家庭出身问题研究小组，"反动血统论的新反扑──驳'大毒草《出身论》必须连根铲除'" (3月6日，1967)，光碟。]

a group to oppress and suppress populations to their own benefit. And the demographic was precisely those youths with good performance but bad backgrounds, a population which Yu sought to defend.

After pointing out the contradiction in the opponents' claim, Yu identified the original culprits as the followers and supporters of the Liu-Deng route-line. By using the phrase "mouths and tongues," Yu implied that those who sided against him (and the Background Theory essay) to be part of the Liu-Deng route-line; the lead critics were self-conscious propagandists, and their supporters were helping them. Implicitly, then, Yu was creating a gradation of "coded things" for his opponents, with the mastermind being a more active counterrevolutionary and the helper being a lesser one.

To make the next idea-building step, Yu likened (or equated) the people in his camp to those of Lenin and Mao, by saying:

> Lenin was born in a landlord's family, but he received good revolutionary influences from his brother and sister. Chairman Mao, citing his memory, also said that although his father was a rich peasant, he had many good influences from his mother and the employees at home.[24]

The equation here helps to build an even direr consequence for his opponents, by implication. If this premise is established successfully, then attacking children from bad class backgrounds would potentially be akin to attacking Lenin and Mao!

Another gradation within elastic categories could be inferred. Being fooled into attacking Yu's essay temporarily might be forgivable. They might serve as the mastermind's mouths and tongues unknowingly. Consciously doing so, after the program is revealed, however, would make them look like a central idea-maker in the Liu-Deng route-line. Further nuances and cognitive distinctions could also be inferred. For example, if a case of resemblance with elastic categories could not be drawn with complete success, a less aggressive double-negative category might be applicable. In semiotic terms, something that is "not not an apple" cannot automatically be taken to mean that it is an apple.[25] His opponents might not be counterrevolutionary or anti-movement, but their actions—based

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[24] Beijing Family Background Research Group, "The New Counterattack of the Theory of Bloodlines—Refuting 'The Poisonous Weed "Background Theory" Must Be Eradicated'."

[25] In a foreword to Greimas's On Meaning, Frederic Jameson explains how "the negation of the negation" position within a Greimasian "semiotic square." Fredric Jameson, foreword to On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory, by Algirdas Julien Greimas, trans. Paul J. Perron and Frank H. Collins (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), xiv–xvi.

on the way Yu depicted them—could plausibly be classified into the double-negative categories of "counter-counterrevolutionaries" or "anti-anti-movements." Without stating specific events and scenarios—by just using ideational encoding, aggregate depictions, and step-by-step inferencing—Yu succeeded in subjecting his opponents to these plausible, unfavorable classifications and cognitive positioning.

Yu offered to use an alternative set of elastic categories that also conformed to the revolutionary code. Instead of family backgrounds, he favored the scheme made up of left, middle, and right—which mirror Mao's distinctions.[26] Saying that "Worker-peasants' sons and daughters have left, middle, and right distinctions," and those "stubbornly execute capitalists' anti-movement line" should be attacked by all children of all classes. He said to his opponents that "You all are treating striking at the anti-movement route-line as striking worker-peasants' children" [你们把打击反动路线当成打击工农子女].[27]

After establishing this intermediary idea, Yu used it to make an elevated claim of his opponents' crime. Near the end of the essay, Yu observed that the opponents acted "with the intention of continuing the persecutions of those youths who come from bad backgrounds, to incite conflicts among people of good and bad family backgrounds, to turn history upside down, to reverse the case on behalf of Peng Zhen, and to erase and kill the rhythm of class struggle" [它是要广大的出身不好的青年继续受血统论的迫害, 它是在挑拨广大的出身好的革命青年与广大的出身不好的革命青年的关系, 它是在颠倒历史, 替彭真翻案, 它是在抹杀阶级斗争的规律].

His opponents were also attackers of Jiang Qing. The concrete expression Yu used was them "attacking comrade Jiang Qing by *filling the mouth with sand and shooting it at the shadow*" [含沙射影炮打江青同志]. The idiom used here refers to a particular mythical creature that can shoot sand from its mouth at human shadows and cause sickness in people. It is commonly used to refer to those who make indirect verbal attacks against others. Combining with the expression "cannon-firing" [炮打] was a clever choice of words, because it was much more vivid than simply "indirectly"

[26] Mao was also more lenient toward those classified as "right," at least after his movement had gained the upper hand. For example, he said that "we need all people—left, middle, right—to be connected. To single out a unit and cleanse it all—I have opposed to this approach" [我们要各种人, 左、中、右都要发生联系。一个单位统统搞得那么干净, 我历来就不赞成]. Mao was here referring to an episode in which the Pro-Red Guards movement had taken over two main newspapers. Mao conferred his position that the organizational leaders' former workers did not need to be removed. They could still occupy their former work positions and be supervised by the masses [留在工作岗位上, 让群众监督].

[27] Beijing Family Background Research Group, "The New Counterattack of the Theory of Bloodlines—Refuting 'The Poisonous Weed "Background Theory" Must Be Eradicated'."

attacking Jiang Qing—conveying the serious implications and the dynamic actions of its opponents. At the same time, these assertions were just simultaneously both broad and constricted enough to be defensible based on the available information. In addition to emphasizing the agency of his opponents, Yu concluded that they had the intention all along—"they were totally not only fantasizing about destroying the one 'Background Theory' essay but were holding *wolf's son wild heart*, conspiring to realize the aforementioned series of ugly, malevolent objectives" [他们完全不只是妄想消灭一篇《出身论》, 而是怀着狼子野心, 企图实现上述一系列丑恶目的]. To summarize, after a long series of equivalences, boundary extensions, stepwise inferences, as well as pauses and interruptions, Yu finally built complex and comprehensive linkages—cognitive and visual—between the attackers of his essay and the active enemies of the Revolution.

Countering Yu Luoke's Essay. Some attackers of Yu might have indeed confused background theory with bloodline theory, just as Yu described. But they also had some counterpoints based on creative, and seemingly valid, associations.

First, the opponents brought up some empirical depictions made by Yu:

> Please listen [from the "Background Theory" author]: "The current Revolutionary cadres' sons and daughters in terms of school performance are average and right-leaning [中等而且偏右的]. The most proactive ones are often those with bad backgrounds. Regardless of whether their proactiveness is real or fake, the heavy responsibility of the Revolution [is not falling] on their shoulders." These words are truly *one needle see blood*; indeed, the human world has the *Green Frost Sword*! [真是一针见血, 真是人间还有青霜剑呀!].[28]

The opposing authors quoted how Yu used class backgrounds to make aggregate depictions. All children of the current cadres were depicted as if they were one homogenous group—all of them "right-leaning" and not performing exceptionally well academically. This classification approach contradicted how he sought to de-link class background (family socialization) and revolutionary elements, as previously cited. The expression *one needle see blood* [一针见血] highlighted the concise and pointed character of Yu's attack, just as using just one needle can draw blood from an opponent. The *Green Frost Sword* reference is somewhat unclear. On the one hand, it can generically refer to a legendary ancient Chinese sword. But on

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[28] Tsinghua Secondary School Red Guard, "Comment on "Background Theory'" (January 21, 1967), CD. [清华附中红卫兵, "评《出身论》" (1月21日, 1967), 光碟。]

the other it can also refer to a classical Beijing opera in which a bride used her family sword, the *Green Frost Sword*, to assassinate a villain responsible for the death of her former husband. If the latter reading is accurate, this reference is likely a sarcastic remark about how Yu was conducting class revenge just as the bride had conducted revenge.

Class revenge is the intermediary idea Yu's opponents tried to develop: it would be an act that targeted current cadres in order to reverse the ruling relations before the current set of cadres had assumed power. To bolster this idea, Yu's opponents also picked up on a statement by Yu, which allegedly, verbatim, stated: the sons and daughters of the exploitative class are oppressed by Revisionism "the most" [剥削阶级子女是受"修正主义"压迫最深的].[29] The wording "the most" was the incriminating part, since it portrayed their oppression to be *worse than others*.

The opponents conceded that those whose parents are high-level cadres have "unforgivable weaknesses," a consequence of which was that they became "seriously separated from the masses." But they welcomed the Cultural Revolution that made them see the weaknesses. However, rather than being constructive, the opponents stated that there was a minority of people—here implicating Yu Luoke—who disagreed with the Revolution and took this opportunity to "scrape the Yin wind, let off the sneaky arrows, instigate divisive relations everywhere, spread rumors and incite events" [刮阴风, 放暗箭, 到处挑拨离间, 造谣生事]. To suppress the Red Guards and children of the revolutionary cadres, they were leading certain organized groups that had an unclear vision of the truth, "ransacking, confiscating, killing, beating, and scolding, wishing them die so they can then be happy." They are "using the name of criticizing capitalist anti-movement line to actually enact class revenge" [他们这是借批判资产阶级反动路线之名, 行阶级报复之实].[30] We could see how the author, based on conceptual and empirical aggregations and other chain-like equivalencing processes similar to the ones used by Yu, stretched the meaning of Yu's acts until the ideas linked to the highest state of emotional and moral implications were reached.

There was a further way in which the opponents effectively subverted the purportedly innocent, enthusiastic, and pro-Revolution image of the

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[29] These exact wordings were not present in the essay we have reviewed, but had appeared elsewhere. Beijing Family Background Research Group, "Background Theory" (January 18, 1967), CD. [北京家庭出身问题研究小组, "出身论" (1月18日, 1967), 光碟。]

[30] Tsinghua Secondary School Red Guard, "Comment on "Background Theory'" (January 21, 1967), CD. [清华附中红卫兵, "评《出身论》" (1月21日, 1967), 光碟。]

"Black Five Types" painted by Yu. They asked, if the Black Five Types' children were the true revolutionaries, and they were oppressed in the school the most, then it should follow that they should be the first ones—not the Red Five Types—to fight the capitalist classes—by which Yu's opponents most likely were referring to the Black Five Types (including their own parents). However, during such moments, it was the Red Guards, primarily formed by Red Five Types,[31] who took the most initiative. And if the Black Five Types' children were refrained from doing so only because they had such low self-esteem due to being oppressed and persecuted, then why was it that when they encircled and struck at [打击 围剿] the Red Guards, they were so proactive and confident?[32]

In truth, perhaps some children of the Black Five Types were indeed grouping together, and engaged in some form of strategic, collective action to advocate for their interests. But these acts were liberally escalated into the most severe crimes using a series of inference processes, based on a few logical inconsistencies and discursive choices that surfaced during the debate.

In another critique,[33] Yu's opponents explicitly pointed out that it had only been seventeen years since the liberation. Given this context, suggesting the previously revolutionary cadres—and their sons and daughters—to be non-revolutionary could be seen as "extreme efforts to smear and kill the impact of class background, spending particularly bitter-hearted efforts on wording like 'elements' and 'backgrounds.'" Yu's opponents asserted a "fact" (pre-coded, but filtered information): that even after the Liberation, although those with Red backgrounds were proportionately much better off, in actuality there were still plenty of sons and daughters of former landlords and capitalists going to college and leading a select lifestyle. And they even attended college in higher numbers than the sons and daughters of working-class workers and middle-poor peasants [工人和贫下中

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[31] The Red Guards had many factions. But the earliest faction—the "Old Red Guards" [老 红卫兵]—that initiated the movements were primarily constituted by Party cadres' sons and daughters—those of the "Red" classes (Yin Hongbiao. 1996. "Ideological and Political Tendencies of Factions in the Red Guard Movement," *Journal of Contemporary China* 5(13): 269–280.)

[32] Tsinghua Secondary School Red Guard, "Comment on 'Background Theory'" (January 21, 1967), CD. [清华附中红卫兵, "评《出身论》" (1月21日, 1967), 光碟。]

[33] Beijing Family Background Research Group No. Three, "Both 'Solely Background Theory' and 'Background Theory' are Anti-Marxism-Leninism and Anti-Mao Zedong's Thought" (February 27, 1967), CD. [北京家庭出身问题第三研究小组, "《唯出身论》和 《出身论》都是反马列主义反毛泽东思想的" (2月27日, 1967), 光碟。]

农]—who had a significantly larger population size. These inequalities endured *because* of the influence of their backgrounds. Casting the author of the "Background Theory" essay as an opportunist, Yu's opponents stated: "'Background Theory' uses the name of criticizing 'solely-background theory' to actually sell 'no-class-difference theory' [无阶级差别论], 'no-class-contradiction and no-class-struggle theories' [无阶级矛盾和无阶级斗争论], openly and pointedly opposed to Chairman Mao's great mobilization call of 'never forget class struggle' [千万不要忘记阶级斗争], and use it to desensitize the caution of the property-less class toward the capitalist class, in order to make a call to all those with bad backgrounds, using the name of actively participating in the Cultural Revolution to wage a new, savage attack against the property-less class."

The debate came to a close with Qi Benyu's intervention. Qi was a secretary of both Mao Zedong and Jiang Qing and a member of the Central Cultural Revolution Group [中央文革小组]. His authoritative statement on April 14, 1967, expressed that the "Background Theory" essay had the quality of a "big poisonous weed." Specifically, it involved using "a capitalist point of view to attack bloodline theory, as a means to arouse anti-party sentiment and actions against the party." Qi claimed that people were equating background theory and bloodline theory, and by doing so were seeking to "*muddy the water to catch fish*, doing so to incite people" [混水摸鱼, 进行煽动]. Here, Qi was using a common Chinese idiom, referring to a scenario where when the water was muddy, the fish would close their eyes and swim randomly, thus providing a greater opportunity to catch them. Qi stated that the actual position by the Party was to only *partly* consider background to be the case, and always offer people the prospect of advancement. The essay conflated the policy with bloodline theory deliberately, with anti-Party intentions.

Interestingly, Qi Benyu linked Yu Luoke to Peng Zhen—that "Background Theory" essay in essence represented "Peng Zhen Anti-Party Group's distorted idea about 'emphasizing performance'" [它实际上就是彭真反党集团所歪曲的"重在表现"]. It swayed people against joining the encirclement [煽动不要做外围] of the enemy, but in actuality they used the capitalist-class perspective to attack bloodline theory in order to sway a portion of youths toward being dissatisfied with the Party and into attacking the Party [煽动部分青年对党不满向党进攻]. "It is a

big poisonous weed. I hope comrades will not be deceived!"[34] He further urged that attacks should be directed toward the "Liu-Deng Route Line" [刘邓路线] in a unified fashion. Thus, the process should be open to the majority of ordinary members who were fooled and could be changed by processes of criticism. They could use a different approach toward the leaders [头子] and the stubborn elements [顽固分子]. This gradational distinction, as we can see, mirrored Yu Luoke's.

[34] Qi Benyu, Zhang Chunqiao, and Xie Fuzhi, "Speech by Qi Benyu, Zhang Chunqiao and Xie Fuzhi When They Met with Representatives of Beijing Middle School" (April 13, 1967), CD. [戚本禹、张春桥、谢富治, "戚本禹张春桥谢富治接见北京中学代表时的讲话" (4月13日, 1967), 光碟。]

Destabilizing Contradictions and Implosions II: Diachronic Contradictions

So far, we have attended to the contradictions that became unresolvable during a given timeframe, due to the ways in which the actors developed and forwarded their ideas within that timeframe. We may call these *synchronically developed contradictions*. Now, we should turn our attention to *diachronically developed contradictions*. By this term, I mean contradictions that grow out of the interactions of people, events, ideas, and statements over a much longer course of time. Under certain conditions, over time, these contradictions could become more intense, and even harder to resolve.

Accumulating Diachronically Developed Contradictions

As stated, because many synchronic contradictions were not internally resolvable, they were "resolved" only temporarily, by forceful suppression or by the judgment of an external authority. With this process, a variety of imposed interpretations and secondary ideas were generated. Therefore, if the heavy-handed forces or authorities who "resolved" those problems became challenged, so too would the imposed interpretations and their associated by-products.

In the Revolution, not only did those external authorities become challenged, they also actually experienced a phase of *symbolic inversal*: those who were at the top suddenly found themselves at the bottom of the

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moral ladder. Relatedly, this drastic rearrangement called into question whether these people's past symbolic works—their classifications, their judgment, their imposed suppression—should be reexamined. Past irresolvable contradictions, in other words, might *resurface* from the ground up. And if a verdict of reversal was reached, say an all-out rehabilitation of groups of people was achieved, then a phase of *symbolic reversal* would occur—that is to say, the symbolic order that emerged later overturned the ones that had existed before.

This overturning sometimes took the form of a correction (including re-clarification). Corrective measures might seem to be too problematic, providing that they did not disrupt the core set of propositions and fitted images associated with the Revolution. Yet, as seen in the background theory debate, any new line of reasoning is likely going to be somewhat imperfect and vulnerable in itself. Moreover, given how confident, rigorous, and resolute the actors asserted these new ideas against the old ones, not only did they tend to disrupt the core set of propositions and fitted images of the idea system, they also laid the foundation for another round of disruption if they themselves are criticized and later overturned, in part due to their own imperfection and vulnerability. And when this happened, previously suppressed viewpoints and unresolved problems could then resurface, perhaps even acquiring new evidence. Thus, with each instance of major inversal or reversal, contradictions of past and present were compounded.

Within each set of existing, synchronic contradictions one could also find a reserve pool of previously suppressed (or unsatisfactorily resolved) contradictions being somewhat decompressed. The larger the pool of debates and histories the new ideas encompassed, the more potential there was for a new actor to harvest and organize these decompressed elements into diachronically accumulated contradictions that had an explosive presence on the front stage.

Series of National Dramas of Inversal and Reversal

In my judgment, such diachronically developed contradictions did not truly become threatening until around the end of the Cultural Revolution.

At the national level, the first instance of dramatic, symbolic inversal was seen in the first few years of CPC rule. A whole new world was introduced. Statuses were structurally inverted. Rich landlords were dragged

down; intellectuals were reformed and reincorporated; poor peasants and workers elevated.

In these processes, some contradictions inevitably started to accumulate, due to the inherent weakness of the idea system. Cases of "good" landlords and "bad" peasants, which must have existed in significant quantities, were potentially poorly served by the aggregate classification built into the idea system. The disservice was likely suppressed in the interest of the grander scheme of objectives: to stabilize a newly unified nation and to institute a new revolutionary order. These suppressed contradictions receded into the background within the idea system. However, they quietly entered a reserve pool of unaddressed contradictions.

The second comprehensive wave of inversal and reversal developed around the beginning of the Cultural Revolution era of 1966. [1] The Red Guards were mobilized to negate—and invert—the CPC cadres at all levels, including Peng Zhen and Liu Shaoqi. Although not as prominent as Mao, these cadres were placed on a pedestal as having been symbols of Revolution for such a long time. Liu Shaoqi—previously the president of China, author of *How to Be a Good Communist* and believed to be Mao's chosen successor—was turned into a reactionary villain in a matter of months. He was fitted with the images of "Look Left and Actual Right," "hidden enemy," and a "spy." Of absolute significance was that, by delegitimizing so many cadres, all their judgments, actions, and networks begged for reexamination and reverification.

The third wave came around 1970–1972. A good number of previously validated "true" revolutionaries—"Mao's children" who helped to restore Mao's power—were reidentified as conspirators, reckless ultra-leftists, or simply ignorant troublemakers. These figures tended to be the most radical and outspoken ones. The symbolic takedown of Kuai Dafu with Mao's assistance, the breaking up of the Red Guard movement using the PLA, and the policies to send urban youths (Red Guards) to the countryside were key events in this phase of change. Even if their contributions were partially acknowledged, and there might indeed be economic and social reasons behind the decisions accompanying the political motives,

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[1] Although reversing the Hundred Flowers Campaign and failing at the Great Leap Forward might have shown the failure of the Party's effort, I am inclined to think that the kinds of contradictions they bred were not significant. The Great Leap Forward's failure was largely interpreted in technical terms, not one of CPC leaders' characters. The Anti-Rightist Campaign that followed the Hundred Flowers Campaign was still rather easy to understand, being a first instance of a party reversing its own policy based on strategic interests.

the Red Guards' actions were excessive and ill-considered, and therefore could easily be seen as deserving of control and punishment. All the deeds performed by the young Red Guards, including all the attacks they had made upon old cadres, warranted reexamination. Previously suppressed contradictions were thus raised. And the harshness of rural life, coupled with some backlash and mistreatment against them, prompted many to ask whether the Red Guards were used up and then discarded when their usefulness ran out.

The fourth wave of symbolic inversal and reversal took place shortly after the youths were sent away. Lin Biao, who headed the PLA, allegedly died in a plane crash following a failed attempt to assassinate Mao. Lin Biao was not a simple follower of Mao. He was often seen as an "exaggerated" embodiment of Mao—a more vocal, more resolute, and more explicit spokesperson than Mao, and an acknowledged successor. He helped to publish and distribute the *Little Red Book*, instituting with it the daily recitation rituals in the household. Yet he transitioned into becoming an absolute villain and enemy of Mao almost overnight.

There were further orders or phases at the national level—for example, the denegation of Zhou Enlai, the reinstatement of Deng Xiaoping, and the rise and fall of Jiang Qing's statuses during the post-1972 Cultural Revolution years could all be considered fifth or sixth orders.

These diachronically compounded contradictions could have been mitigated by a variety of means—the most obvious one being to wait until sufficient time had passed for the collective memory of the events to fade from consciousness. The opposite had occurred, however. In later revolutionary discourses, they were evoked vividly at too fast a speed—with much intensity, data, and urgent relevance—before the collective consciousness could adjust. Old calculations were recycled into the forefront for each "new," synchronic debate, rejuvenating their lives as new ideas. Double negatives turned into their tripled and quadrupled forms. Such dynamics were detrimental to the effectiveness, or even the sustenance, of the idea system.

The Li et al. (or Li Yizhe) controversy. To analyze this distinct kind of contradiction of view, I will use another episode in the latter period of Revolution: the controversy surrounding "Li Yizhe," which started in Guangdong Province around 1973 or 1974—the period after the fall of Lin Biao and the advent of the Criticize Lin Criticize Confucius Movement.

Li Yizhe [李一哲] was not a person. It was a pseudonym of several coauthors: Li Zhengtian [李正天], Chen Yiyang [陈一阳], Wang Xizhe [王希哲], and Guo Hongzhi [郭鸿志]. In 1973, a 26,000-word big-character poster which spanned 67 pages was published in Guangdong. The essay written in the poster, which ostensibly criticized Lin Biao but was probably directed at the Gang of Four, incensed the movement leader Jiang Qing. Guangdong governments responded by holding several hundred criticism sessions attended by 10,000 people, ostensibly to publicly attack Li et al. Oddly enough, many of the struggle sessions were unlike others—taking a form close to a "real" debate format, wherein the main author Li Zhengtian often dominated the debate, or at least was given the floor to extendedly articulate his ideas.[2]

Here is the context in brief. Jiang Qing had intended to wage a mass campaign to criticize Lin Biao's assassination attempt. Another concurrent target was Confucius, deemed to be a promoter of feudal privileges and a slave system under the disguise of ethics and virtue.[3] Jiang tried to assert the connection between Lin Biao and Confucius, saying that he looked and acted like Confucius, and that he had promoted Confucianism. Jiang implicated Premiere Zhou Enlai by calling him "the chief Confucius of the Party" in early 1974.[4]

Other published essays at the time, by those with close ties and probably behind-the-scenes collaboration, also hinted at such similarities. The description of Confucius "having fallen ill in bed at the age of 71... and

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[2] Guangdong Editorial Board governed by Xi Zhongxun, "How Li Yizhe's Case is Redressed," *CPC News Network* (People's Daily, Beijing), February 04, 2008, http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/82819/115225/115240/6866055.html. [习仲勋主政广东编委会, "李一哲"案件平反始末", 中国共产党新闻网(人民日报, 北京) 2月4日, 2008, http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/82819/115225/115240/6866055.html.]

[3] One critic had charged that Lin Biao had attacked the first emperor of the Qin dynasty [秦始皇], who first unified China as a nation, but had committed the act of "burning books and burying students of Confucianism" [焚书坑儒]. The essay depicted that Confucianism was originally developed with the purpose of preventing "the implosion of the slave system" [阻止奴隶制度的崩溃] at the time. Jin Yunge, "Right Opportunism and Confucius Thought" (November 1, 1973), CD. [劲云戈, "右倾机会主义和孔子思想" (11月1日, 1973), 光碟。] Other critics articulated similar lines of thought.

[4] Barbara Barnouin and Changgen Yu, *Zhou Enlai: A Political Life* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2006), 301.

still struggled to get up from bedrest to see the king of the State of Lu"[5] was a thinly veiled reference to Zhou Enlai, who was in his seventies and had just been exhausted by cancer and its associated operations.[6] If the interpretations of these essays were true, Jiang Qing was attempting to draw the following chain of linkages, by forming resemblance and equivalence among them:

Lin Biao = Confucius = Zhou Enlai

But Li et al. established a different linkage. In their criticism of Lin, they linked it to the "Lin Biao System" [林彪体系]. And the Lin Biao System was specified in a way that would make it look like the leader of the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign—notably including Jiang Qing. The linkage was thus the following:

Lin Biao = Lin Biao System = Jiang Qing

Here is how Li et al. constructed the "Lin Biao System" as an aggregate target. The Lin Biao System was a coded thing with a highly elastic definitional boundary—potentially encompassing a wide array of objects upon being stretched while retaining a solid symbolic anchor:

> The reason why our "system" [体系] is scary is that we have proposed the "Lin Biao System" …. What is a "system"? It is all things relationally connected to a whole body—a total system. **The Lin Biao system is Lin Biao's set of theories; outlines and programs; route-lines; directions; policies; methods; Party style; academic style; literary style; and all things in the fields of politics, law, military, economics, cultural education that opposed the Party Central Committee and Chairman Mao, harmed the people, and poisoned the country. Six years ago, the complete establishment of Lin Biao's "system" undoubtedly destroyed or even**

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[5] "Even when he was seventy-one years old and was seriously ill in bed, he heard that the new landlord class of Qi State killed the slave master Qi Jiangong and seized the power, he struggled to get up, and wobbled to meet Lu Jun to repeatedly request for crusade." Peking University and Tsinghua University Critique Group, "On Confucius," *Red Flag* 1974(4), April 1, 1974. ["甚至在他七十一岁、重病在床的时候, 听说齐国新兴地主阶级杀了奴隶主头子齐简公, 夺取了政权, 还拼命挣扎着爬起来, 摇摇晃晃地去朝见鲁君, 再三请求讨伐。" 北京大学、清华大学大批判组, "孔丘其人" , 红旗 *1974*(4), 3月1日, 1974.]

[6] Xiao Jing, ed.), "Critiquing Lin, Kong and 'Zhou'," *People's Daily* (Beijing), March 27, 2012. http://history.people.com.cn/GB/199250/241321/17512482.html. [肖静(责编), "批林批孔批'周公'," 人民网(北京), 3月27日, 2012. http://history.people.com.cn/GB/199250/241321/17512482.html.]

replaced Chairman Mao's set [什么是"体系"?就是事物有联属关系的全体——全部系统。林彪体系就是林彪那一套包括理论、纲领、路线、方针、政策、办法、党风、学风、文风、作风，在政治、法律、军事、经济、文化教育各个领域对抗党中央、毛主席，祸害人民、流毒全国的东西。六年前，林彪那一整套"体系"的确立，无疑破坏了甚至取代了毛主席的那一套]. It was not until after the "September 13ᵗʰ" incident [referring to Lin's alleged failed assassination attempt] (it was a manifestation of the contradictions between Lin Biao's set with the Chinese people being radicalized to the point of being absolutely irreconcilable), Lin Biao's set of things began to be gradually destroyed and abandoned. Aren't these the historical facts? [7]

Upon defining the all-encompassing boundary of the Lin Biao system, Li et al. went on to describe this system's heyday period of influence. The details included the permeation of revolutionary activities with "religious color and atmosphere" everywhere, displacing everything else. People were asked to demonstrate "cumbersome loyalty and filial piety—early prayer, late atonement, assembly, assembly, shifting, buying and selling, writing, calling, even eating, etc… In short, let the word loyalty [忠] occupy one hundred percent of the time, one hundred percent of the space, and such this-is-'good'- that-is-'good' exercise is a 'Left!-Left!-Left!' competition, a race for 'the-most, the-most, the-most'" [而这个"好"那个"好"的运动，则是"左!左!左!"的比赛，"最、最、最"的竞争]. Many activities were condemned as "hypocritical," "ugly," "empty," or "opportunistic" in nature, and they—by encouraging expressions like "Revolution exploded from the depth of one's soul" [灵魂深处爆发革命]—replaced the more normal activities and patterns that existed prior to the Lin Biao system came into place. [8]

As per the specific description of how the Lin Biao System had amplified and then replaced Mao's system, we could see how Jiang Qing's political activities could be a natural "lookalike." This was not helped by Mao's criticism of Jiang Qing's deeds and behaviors—that she ran a "dunce cap factory," that she had a "knife-mouth," that she wanted to be a "backstage boss," that she should read more books, and so forth.

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[7] Li Yizhe, "Dedicated to Chairman Mao and the Fourth National People's Congress" (November 7, 1974), CD. [李一哲，"献给毛主席和四届人大" (11月7日, 1974), 光碟。]
[8] Li Yizhe, "Dedicated to Chairman Mao and the Fourth National People's Congress" (November 7, 1974), CD. [李一哲，"献给毛主席和四届人大" (11月7日, 1974), 光碟。]

Li et al. had further stretched and visually elaborated upon the meaning of elastic category, such as "the stubborn party who steadfastly support the Lin Biao System" [坚持林彪体系的顽固派] or those were "very reminiscent of all things during the days when the Lin Biao system reached its peak, the days of glory—the days when tens of thousands of citizens' heads fell to the floor, and they, within the 'total victory' had achieved everything—status, privilege, power…even the whips to drive and beat the slaves, they were all treasures bathed in glittering haloes, not allowing a bit of desacralization from slaves" [他们在"全面胜利"中得到的一切——地位、特权…乃至驱打奴隶的鞭子, 全都是闪着圣光的宝贝, 不容许奴隶有一点亵渎]. The Chinese society that existed was then like a "heaven" in which Lin Biao regulated and governed the social relations. By analogy, Li et al. equated these people's behaviors to those of supernatural deities who regulate the conduct in heaven, which did not match the image of revolutionaries—matching more with those who *pretended* to be revolutionaries.

Several sentences later, this critique was extended to the slogans of "anti-restoration" [反複辟] and "anti-tide-return" [反回潮]. Here is where the diachronically developed contradictions were brought to the forefront.

Initially around 1971, the term "restoration" seemed to specifically mean the restoration of capitalism. But by 1974, the term was likened to Confucius' attempt to preach order, manners, and virtue against rebellions or chaos, which, in effect, was pushing to "restore a slave society," "driving the vehicle of history backward."[9] Jiang Qing stated that there had always been people who wanted to create restorations in history, and when they do they tend to bring out the Confucius school.[10]

Jiang Qing was probably referring to the policy changes instituted by Zhou Enlai around 1972 to reverse some of the decisions and policies during the first three years of the Cultural Revolution, including rehabilitating and reinstating some high-level Party cadres and PLA officers, the most notable of whom was Deng Xiaoping in 1973, who had returned as

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[9] Peking University and Tsinghua University Critique Group, "On Confucius," *Red Flag* 1974(4), April 1, 1974. [北京大学、清华大学大批判组, "孔丘其人" 红旗 *1974*(4), 4月1日, 1974。]

[10] Qing Jiang, "Summary of Jiang Qing's speech at the Criticize Lin and Confucius forum" (June 14, 1974), CD. [江青, "江青在批林批孔座谈会上的讲话摘要" (6月14日, 1974), 光碟。]

vice-premier.[11] Coinciding with the timing of those cadres' return to power, previously suppressed forms of art production—those that belonged to the "dark lines"—seemed to have reemerged as a returning tide, as did "capitalist revisionism." One essay[12] described the pre-Cultural Revolution art scene (from 1949 to 1966) through a pair of matching classic idioms: "poisonous weed that grew in clumps, groups of demons and ghosts that danced chaotically" [毒草丛生, 群魔乱舞]. Art was used to serve a minority of people, promote the revisionist route-line, "rot and poison the masses, and serving as a warm bed to prepare the return of capitalism" [腐蚀毒害群众，准备资本主义复辟的温床]. The call to revalue and reevaluate [重新估价] artworks during the 1949–1966 years—that is to say, to reintroduce and reintegrate some of them into today's art institutions—was clearly an effort, mainly organized by rightists, to promote the return of anti-revolutionary elements.

To counteract this viewpoint, Li et al. used another way to define what happened during previous periods—hence another way of aggregating information. Li et al. pointed out that some critics who used the "anti-returning tide" slogan also described the "blood-boiling" [热血沸腾] and "red-fire era" [火红的年代] to be around 1971, and a period of returning tide and restoration around 1972. But Lin Biao had become the head of the opportunists within the Party [党内机会主义路线总头子] between 1966 and 1971. Lin Biao fell from the stage around 1971, and subsequently a "revival" started. The masses were already anti-restoration around 1966—and Lin Biao had inserted into the movement around 1969, pushed the restoration to its climax, and then stopped his involvement abruptly in 1972. Judged by the timing, then, the "anti-restoration" agenda was now in fact anti-anti-restoration [他们"反复辟", 实际上是反反复辟]. And it was the people who were oppressed by Lin Biao, or victimized by his system, that were now suddenly asked to stop. Once again, if these conceptual back-and-forth discussions sounded confusing, it was likely to be due to the double- and triple-negations that were being utilized.

[11] Barbara Barnouin and Changgen Yu. *Zhou Enlai: A Political Life* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2006), 278.

[12] Peking University/Tsinghua University Critique Group, "To Deny the Literary Revolution is to Restore Capitalism" (March 6, 1976), CD. [北京大学、清华大学大批判组，"否定文艺革命是为了复辟资本主义" (3月6日, 1976), 光碟。]

Li et al. used clever wordings to create a series of questions that rebut his critics. He asked:

> Is the internal unity within the party, the army, and the working class that was destroyed by Lin Biao's group not to be restored? Are not the "Three Major Styles" [三大作风] destroyed and abandoned by Lin Biao's group, and the "Three Major Disciplines" [三大纪律] and "Eight Attention Items" [八项注意] of our army's fine traditions not to be restored? Should we restore the true face of Party history and military history that have been beaten and distorted by Lin Biao's group to the point of being unrecognizable?
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> Should we restore the direction of "**Learning from Past Errors, Curing Illnesses and Saving People**" and "**Unifying—Criticizing—Unifying,**" [团结——批评——团结"的方针] which had been replaced by Lin Biao's group use of pressuring, arresting, beating, and killing? Should the literary and artistic creation policy of "**Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism Integration**" [革命现实主义与革命浪漫主义相结合], which was falsely changed by Lin Biao group's "From Objective to Subjective" model, be restored? Should the education policy direction of "**Virtue, Intellect, Body Comprehensive Development**" [德、智、体、全面发展], which was replaced by Lin Biao group's "Politics Impacts Everything" [政治冲击一切], be restored? A series of Party policies that have been trampled on by the Lin Biao group—**reliance on the working class and the poor, middle peasants**; the policies pertaining to **cadres**; the policies pertaining to **intellectuals**; the "**Up to the Mountains and Down to the Villages**" policies; the **overseas Chinese policies**; **various economic policies**....Should they be restored? Should the "**Five-Courage Spirit**" [五敢精神] that had been suppressed by Lin Biao group's geniuses be restored? Is it true the tens of thousands of **fake cases** from the central government to the local government created by Lin Biao's group cannot be rereviewed or overturned? Is it correct that **a large number of veteran cadres who have made these or those mistakes** but have been attested to be loyal to the party after long-term tests should not be used again? Is it true that comrades such as **Deng Xiaoping and Zhao Ziyang** should not be allowed to enter the Central Committee at all? Even if they are given an exit road, is it true that the caps should be in the hands of the "masses" and be ready to put on them at any time again?"

Many of these questions were simply rhetorical. The "Five-Courage Spirit" and similar non-problematic items need not necessarily be undone. But Li et al.'s central message, to rearticulate it using our terms, was that by their

aggregate statuses alone they were all part of the "Lin Biao System." These questions were meant to exploit the diachronically developed contradictions maximally, revealing how dysfunctional the idea system had become.

At that point, there were plenty of precedents of political forces that had organized reversals which had themselves been reversed, and the pattern seemed to be ongoing. In the description by Li et al., if one were then to take seriously the task of criticizing the Lin Biao System, in too many cases they had to deal with the awkward situation of "there is you in me, and there is me in you" [批到了林彪体系你中有我、我中有你的那些人头上了]. In other words, if one criticizes the other in aggregate terms, one may well be including oneself as the object of criticism.

The meaning of phrases such as "restoration" and "anti-restoration" became almost impossible to process. Intuitively, one could form the image of restoring the power being taken away from the people or true revolutionaries. But when so many parties seemed to be potentially qualified for these definitions as well as their opposites—at least the intuitive connection between the terms and the specific kinds of people they intended to refer to was severed.

Aside from the case of the Li et al. controversy, there were a number of concurrent examples taking place around 1972–1979 that also attested to the growing ills of diachronically compounded contradictions. One noted national case was the story of Li Qinglin [李庆霖]—a symbolic hero who came to fame in 1973 when validated by multiple sides and had subsequently become a prime symbol of counterrevolutionary forces by 1976.[13] Some interviews and autobiographies magnify these dynamics played out at the local, personal level, especially in the latter phases of the Revolution.

External Sources of Contradictions: The Accumulation of Counterimages

So far, we have discussed the *internal* contradictions—that is to say, contradictions that are generated within the processual workings of the idea system. Another kind of contradiction has *external* informational sources that people see in everyday contexts—external encounters, events,

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[13] Elya J. Zhang, "To Be Somebody: Li Qinglin, Run-of-the-Mill Cultural Revolution Showstopper," in *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*, ed. Joseph W. Esherick, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Andrew G. Walder (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 211–239.

incidents, evidence, facts, experiences, material conditions, and so on. These external elements departed from the fitted images of the acts, scenes, agents, agency, and purposes on which the revolutionary idea system depended. They made it harder for the "visualized" images to cohere and for reasonable ideas to form.

Although a sophisticated system of counter-ideas did not seem to be organized, fragmented pieces of counterinformation, counterimages, and counter-ideas appear quite frequently across the spectrum of sources that I have examined. They were very pronounced in biographical and autobiographical accounts published in Western sources, for understandable reasons. But they are also visible in a different way in many Chinese sources—with Mao's description of the "mistake and trouble" he admittedly created being one, and the act of redressing previously indicted persons being another. A precise assessment of how extensively these counter-elements actually impacted the dynamic of the Revolution is not the subject of my attention. My objective in this section is to explore the forms of externally sourced contradictions which could threaten the ideationally coded idea system. Admittedly, my sources in these areas are much more indirect, and my interpretations more subjective and uncertain. But within the data limitation I operate, I posit that there are four types of such external sources.

A. Technical Inefficiency and Limitation

The first source of counterinformation, counterimages, and counter-ideas emanated from technical weaknesses. Setbacks like the Great Leap Forward counted as one—as it affected the production and delivery of physical goods. Various pristine images attached to the Mao-led campaign ended up being "proven" to contradict actual production records and the suffering everyone experienced. To what extent this instance created a long-term impact is complex. After all, productivity and quality of life did recover and then improve continuously during the Mao era. Also, subjects could mitigate this contradiction in various ways. Seeing the good-faith efforts from the regime to acknowledge and rectify its error could help; Han Dongping recalled that the central government did send relief grain

to his village, which was located several thousand miles away.[14] Seeing the mistake and the solution as a collective process—of which they are equal participants with the regime—is another. Yet another is comparative perception. Those three years might have been horrible and difficult, but at least one older subject thought that the times before the Liberation (during the warlordist era) were worse than those three years. He *saw* the cadres in his village going hungry along with the rest of the villagers—in other words, they did fit the revolutionary image.[15] But we can be assured that if the regime had perpetually failed to deliver the physical goodness of the Revolution, the impact of the contradictions would have been severe.

What happened in the cultural domain is harder to distinguish. Of course, subjects who had little to begin with during times of war and chaos could be satisfied with the "new" collectivistic culture and its art productions. Even playing volleyball and raising chickens could be filled with broader cultural meanings. But by severely restricting and regulating the production of religion and art, it is likely that they do not provide a satisfactory replacement for some people, especially those who had once been rich, educated, and exposed to multifarious forms of entertainment, pleasure, food, art, and choices. Revolutionary arts and culture might satisfy existential anxieties, moral dilemma, humans' beautiful weaknesses *to an extent*. And the revolutionary objective could be so grand as to appear and feel all-encompassing and ultimate. But for the artists who wished to break through *all* boundaries that perpetually existed and for traditional artists who wished to pass on and develop traditions, the revolutionary paradigm could become an inescapable prison—a counterimage to what it presented.

B. Hypocrisy and "Other" Truths

Some subjects in the Revolution observed instances of hypocrisy; that is to say, how codes were forcefully imposed on non-fitting information. Even

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[14] Han Dongping, a statement made during the symposium titled "Rediscovering China's Cultural Revolution: Art and Politics, Lived Experience, Legacies of Liberation" (November 6–8, 2009, UC Berkeley Symposium on Cultural Revolution). Han, and other participants in the panel, also recalled progress in other areas—education and genera, for example—that offset the failure image. Han also stated that, as a point of comparison, before the Liberation famines were "commonplace" and bandits were ubiquitous.

[15] Chen Ruoxi, *The Execution of Mayor Yin and Other Stories from the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution*, trans. Nancy Ing and Howard Goldblatt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, [1978]2004), 9.

for authors who were sympathetic to the Revolution, corruptions by offi-cial cadres and Red Guard revolutionaries were observed. Author Bai Di recalled the luxurious food served in the cadre parties during the Three Difficult Years.[16] Other accounts contained many counterimages of the supposedly true revolutionaries, including Red Guard members who pocketed pearls and personal items during their ransacking missions; used their power to secure a free plane ticket for a friend by dishonestly claim-ing that she was "a "special observer" of the "revolutionary corps"; and how people of good connections could consistently have better tomatoes in the market.[17] Far more serious examples have also been cited.

Some subjects knew of other truths than the ones ostensibly being pro-moted. A typical example of such individuals are those involved in back-stage actions themselves. This included production team leaders and local commune participants who secretly knew that the numbers during the Great Leap Forward campaign were being artificially inflated.[18] This also included those who actively took part in manipulating information to prosecute political enemies, and were doing so in the name of Revolution. Deep in these people's minds, stocks of counterinformation, counterim-ages, and counter-ideas had mostly likely been seeded.

C. Relative Cruelty

The application of violence was uneven across geopolitical locations. One potential source of counterimage was from instances of serious cruelty—so extreme that they surpassed those committed by the "capitalists," "nationalists," feudal landlords, and other "enemies" that had been

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[16] Bai Di, Ban Wang, Lincoln Cushing, "Panel on Art and Politics in the Cultural Revolution" (November 6–8, 2009, UC Berkeley Symposium on Cultural Revolution), 44:40–46:00. Accessed April 28, 2019, https://www.revolutionbooks.org/p/rediscover-ing-chinas-cultural.html.

[17] Chen Ruoxi, *The Execution of Mayor Yin and Other Stories from the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution*, trans. Nancy Ing and Howard Goldblatt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, [1978]2004), 28; Xiaomei Martell, *Lion's Head, Four Happiness: A Little Sister's Story of Growing Up in China* (London, UK: Vintage, 2009), 6; Wang Chunqing, *You May As Well Sing, Brother: Seventy Years of Strange but True Stories of Adventure, Determination, Cruelty, Bravery, Survival and Especially Love from Inside a Chinese Village* (self-pub,. Chunqing Wang, 2014), 121.

[18] Xinran Xue, *The Good Women of China: Hidden Voices*, trans. Esther Tyldesle (New York: Random House, 2002), 348–349.

identified. Or they were so cruel that they surpassed what the Revolution ought to have looked like.

Wang Youqin collected and articulated a variety of accounts of cruelty, particularly directed toward intellectuals. To name just three, a mathematics professor from Beijing, Sun Meisheng [孙梅生], committed suicide by running toward a train. A witness remembered seeing his corpse at the funeral; the lower half of the body was essentially severed. The liver was exposed, and only one leg was left.[19] A female secondary school teacher of English in the city of Tianjin [天津], whose last name was Gu [顾], died because, after being beaten, a Red Guard poured boiling water over her head.[20] A 44-year-old male foreign language professor in Beijing died in the camp because he was forced to drink polluted water from a ditch beside a chemical factory. And in *Voices from the Whirlwind*, an interviewee recalled that an eight-year-old girl was dragged to face the firing squad, in front of a large dirt pit. Her father pacified her by saying "No, child… don't be scared. They're teasing you. Those men didn't really die."[21]

The extent of prevalence and selective representation may be debated, but multiple sources have pointed to the fact that these acts were not isolated. Individuals in China might "see" these counterimages in a more isolated manner. But at least in areas or institutions where extreme cruelty occurred—in a completely disproportionate degree to the deeds—a stock of counterimages would be accumulated. Even if they were organized against the Party itself, they could cause disillusionment toward the elegant Revolution narrative that the Party promoted.

D. Growing Personal Competence

Lastly, a major source of counterimage could come from an unintended source—from revolutionary education itself. While the first generation of Chinese had to be taught about the Revolution, the younger generation

[19] Wang Youqin, *Victims of the Cultural Revolution: An Investigative Account of Persecution, Imprisonment, and Murder* (Hong Kong: Open Books, 2004), 535.

[20] Wang Youqin, *Victims of the Cultural Revolution: An Investigative Account of Persecution, Imprisonment, and Murder* (Hong Kong: Open Books, 2004), 637.

[21] Feng Yicai, *Voices from the Whirlwind: An Oral History of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (New York: Random House and Beijing, China: Foreign Languages Press, 1991), 190.

learned to produce knowledge from the idea system itself, applying the discourse broadly. They could enter into dialogue fluently with revolutionary jargons, using them to frame the issues. They had learned to use language to arouse emotions. They had learned to unleash strings of accusations and idioms. Xiaomei Martell remembered being able to say, "Carry the proletarian Cultural Revolution to the end!" when she was about ten years old.[22] Revolutionary language was a powerful tool for mobilization.

The broad competence could contribute to disillusionment, when the magic that brought so much cohesiveness to the idea system started to wear off. In a vignette recalled by Wei Yang Chao in *Red Fire*, which took place in late 1967 when he was around 15 years old, Wei verbally dueled with the young shop assistant back and forth using revolutionary language and Mao's quotes as he sought to purchase a ballpoint pen. Requesting to see a variety of pens, according to the shop assistant, was an act equated with a display of "liberalism," which was to be combatted. Refusing to show a pen was equated by Wei with her not being "responsible to the people."[23]

What we saw was a desacralization of the revolutionary language. And such desacralization could only come about with the *competence* of using the idea system for codification purposes. If "on a question of two lines there is no room for compromise" could be referred to in a matter as trivial as purchasing a pen, one wonders how diluted the idea system had become, and if this dilution came from their realization that anyone with some applicational skills could make up their own ideas about the "Revolution" through words. External reality did not matter that much; revolutionary codes could be tied to things of little substance. Counterimages and counter-ideas could thus be accumulated by these subjects who had extensive firsthand experience with using the revolutionary registers.

[22] Xiaomei Martell, *Lion's Head, Four Happiness*, 46.
[23] Chao Wei Yang, *Red Fire: Growing Up During the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (US: Avant Press, 2017), 240–243.

CHAPTER 13

A Five-Tier Assessment

We can now use the five-tier model we have previously employed to assess the revolutionary idea system which helped to sustain the Mao era. This assessment will reveal some distinct qualities of an elegant idea system driven by an ideational mode of codification.

Believability

The Revolution was fundamentally based on enticing visions that seemed realistically achievable. It was conceived as an *experiment*—with an *envisioned* reality. But it is an envisioned reality that is not a matter of absolute truth but rather subjective choices to actualize a certain set of "values."[1] An analogy is an incomplete architectural plan of a marvelous house in which most people would want to live. The Revolution involved many truisms and "facts" that were cogent together. At face value, the revolutionary project was valid, moral, and sound. It was also beautiful in its intricacy, including within it certain aesthetic qualities. The theorizing works were elaborate and sophisticated; the ideas for social transformation were products of *reasonable* thoughts.

A scheme of grand-scale theories and quintessential imageries served as a beginning premise of the idea system. Various information and thoughts

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[1] Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), 24–26.

were then encoded, typologized, and secondarily processed according to the scheme. With so much of the project's believability lying within the value-based and aesthetic domain, objective observation and validation (based on correlative evidence) was rather complementary.[2] If things did not exactly fit or work, the plan and ongoing constructive actions could be modified. Doing so usually would not significantly affect the integrity (believability) of the large-scale architectural project.

What was essential to idea-building and idea-validation is the process of *resemblance*, which enabled actors to fit or match real-world information (more or less filtered) into a system of designated codes. The revolutionary idea system embodies a set of idealized *acts* (what was done), *scenes* (when or where they were done), *agents* (who did those things), *agency* (how they were done), and the *purposes* (why they were done). By fitting or matching specific information into these codes based on the principle of resemblance, specific *coded things* (in other words, *fitted images* or *specific mental objects*) are formed to sustain ideas pertaining to the Revolution.

Following these initial constructions of coded things, many advanced secondary processes could be put to work. As our case illustrates, believable ideas multiplied through narration, speculation, calculation, and comparison. A high level of intelligence and intellectualism was displayed in these idea-making processes; regrettably, the level of cognitive rigor also served as *bad cognitive safeguards*, giving the ideas a rational impression. The polyphonic voices of epistemic authorities from all areas of civil society, from the to the arts, played a part in further lending the idea system credibility, as did ordinary people of all classes and places.

Empirically speaking, ruling in the name of the Revolution had overall brought forth some material progress, some degree of stability, and some improvements in the status of some formerly significantly disadvantaged groups, such as women and peasants. In terms of values and ideas, there were also many messages, philosophies, and ethics relevant to everyday life and self-development. Whether and how much these actually improved people's inner morality or behavior was secondary to the fact that the honorable aim was there. To understand why the Revolution might be

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[2] The revolutionary idea system was not believable because it corresponded to an *already-existing* reality that could always be examined through the processes of empirical validation. If there were unchangeable facts and laws (natural or supernatural), they had not yet been entirely discovered. And discovering empirical facts and laws—or clarifying the statuses of empirical ambiguity—was not of the highest priority.

believable, one could not discount the potentially positive influences entirely simply by only looking at the negative cases.

To give a brief example of how the Revolution might imbue value relevant to orienting people's everyday life in a healthy direction, one secondary school Red Guard newspaper article (published on January 27, 1971 in Tianjin)[3] promoted the value of humility [谦虚].[4] A quote was featured on the first page: "Humility makes people progress in steps; Prideful Arrogance makes people fall behind" [虚心使人进步,骄傲使人落后], followed by several personal essays attesting to that theme. Even if the quote came from Mao, the value of humility was promoted and learned beyond that one quote, and it connected to people's everyday experiences and some worthwhile reflections and viewpoints.

In another issue of the newspaper (published on July 10, 1969),[5] the themes of perseverance and fearlessness, as part of the revolutionary spirit, were highlighted. A slogan emerged repeatedly was: "One, not afraid of bitterness. Two, not afraid of death" [一不怕苦,二不怕死]. In one of the personal stories provided,[6] a fire had started in a factory containing many chemicals, releasing noxious gases that made people nauseous. Several students nevertheless attempted to fight the blaze, "rushing to be on the frontline of the fire" [搶在了火场的第一线], and "fighting the battle courageously" [奋勇作战]. They formed a human chain to pass buckets of water from a nearby river to put out the fire. To stop it from spreading to other buildings, it was considered necessary to disassemble the roof. Although it was a dangerous task, as the roof was already unstable, one student exclaimed: "The more difficult the place is, the more one needs to

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[3] Organized by the Standing Committee of the Red Guards Congress of Tianjin Middle School or Organized by the Tianjin Middle School Red Congress, *Middle School Red Guards 90*, August 7, 1969. [天津市中等学校红卫兵代表大会常务委员会机关报、或 天津市中学红代会主办，中学红卫兵*90*, 8月7日，1969。]

[4] *Cultural Revolution Historical Materials Series Vol. 2(2)*, ed. Li Zhengzhong (Taiwan: Literary Times, 2016), 395–400. [文革史料叢刊第四輯第二冊*(二)*, 李正中輯編(台灣:蘭台出版社, 2016), 395–400。]

[5] Red Guards of Middle School. Dagu Middle School Reporting Group, "A Controversy Provoked by a 'Volleyball'", *Cultural Revolution Historical Materials Series Vol. 2(2)*, ed. Li Zhengzhong (Taiwan: Literary Times, 2016), 372. [中學紅衛兵。大沽中學報導組, "一個'排球'引起的爭論", 文革史料叢刊第四輯第二冊*(二)*, 李正中輯編(台灣:蘭台出版社, 2016), 372。]

[6] *Cultural Revolution Historical Materials Series Vol. 2(2)*, ed. Li Zhengzhong (Taiwan: Literary Times, 2016), 372. [文革史料叢刊第四輯第二冊*(二)*, 李正中輯編(台灣:蘭台出版社, 2016), 372。]

go" [越是困难的地方越是要去], and then he proceeded to dismantle the roof.

Frugality appeared as another lesson taught. While "being Chairman Mao's good children" sounds like a slogan endorsing personal worship, it also promoted substantively important virtues. One vignette reported by a certain primary school journalism unit (published in January 27, 1971) purportedly showed the essential meaning of being the chairman's children. Several primary school children, singing a revolutionary song in high spirits along the way, reached the house of Woman Li, who was related to a member of the military [军属李大娘]. They expressed their passion in their greetings during the visit. "Some helped her carry water, some swept the floor, some went outside to buy things, and they were actually 'fighting' each other to provide help. They became happier the harder they worked, and everyone had sweat covering their faces" [有的担水, 有的扫地, 有的去买东西, 你争我抢地忙了起來。他们越干越欢, 个个汗流满面], and a few Little Red Guards [红小兵] sang revolutionary songs. Upon experiencing this, the woman named Li said, "You all are indeed Chairman's good children!" To which the youngsters replied, "This is what we ought to do."[7] Whether this event actually occurred was largely irrelevant to the discussion. But the "believability" of the idea system was not conceptually dependent on documented empirical events, as was seen in the case of witch hunts, but instead on whether the norms and virtues were believed to be inherently worthwhile *and* at least partially achievable through revolutionary practice.

Resilience

The revolutionary idea had a preemptive design that helped to bolster its resilience. Proven success was not the most important feature that validated that idea system, and vice versa. Signs of progress could improve morale, but failures were expected and incorporated into the idea system. Lessons learned from trial and error were deemed to be an invaluable

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[7] Jian Guo Dao Elementary School Reporting Group, "You All Indeed are Good Children of Chairman Mao!" *Cultural Revolution Historical Materials Series Vol. 2(2)*, ed. Li Zhengzhong (Taiwan: Literary Times, 2016), 398. [建国道小学报道组, "'你们真是毛主席好孩子!'" 文革史料叢刊第四輯第二冊*(二)*, 李正中輯編(台灣:蘭台出版社, 2016), 398。]

factor in the ultimate success of the Revolution. Elaborations on how things could have been more effectively carried out were largely welcomed.

Mild exaggerations or distortions were also not a problem. In a battlefield, statements that increased morale might not always be accurate. Many categories were meant to be *actively* interpreted. Exaggerated interpretations, therefore, could not be straightforwardly "undone" by revelations of empirical facts. Gross distortions could be attributed to the individual meaning-makers rather than to the codification model itself. If verified, mistakes could be rectified by reclassification and rehabilitation. Again, human imperfection, as well as the interpretation on the part of the revolutionaries, was taken for granted. As long as a reasonable effort and good faith was demonstrated, minor demonstrations of flaws would not nullify the core propositions of the revolutionary project.

A tightly controlled discourse parameter further strengthened resilience. Information flow became severely restricted by a high degree of epistemic closure in its social institutions: schools, media, government, workplaces, and families. External threats to ideational coherence were therefore not a major issue during the majority of the Mao era. Internally, dissenting observations to the "norm" were often rearticulated very carefully. Many were "sugar-coated"—that is to say, heavily recoded to reaffirm the core propositions, such as the integrity of Mao and of the revolutionary project.

What really challenged the Revolution was when significant instances of *dissemblance* occurred, as well as when the very mechanism to create semblance fell apart. When semblance and dissemblance became too easy to produce, when extraordinary distortions brought forth the integrity of the actors, and when symbolic revolutionary figures were fitted with an inversed image, the meaning of codes became extremely muddled. The codification system then became much less resilient to internal implosion.

Adaptability

The revolutionary idea system was intended to be adapted to a diverse range of circumstances. The grand narrative structure of *acts*, *scenes*, *agents*, *agency*, and *purposes* needed to be continuously specified, respecified, and corrected in accordance to changing situations and events. Each national event, foreign battle, diplomatic engagement, and Party campaign was different in nature, but coherently tied to what was taking place in the overarching narrative. Many intermediary ideas were constructed by

the creative, skillful, step-by-step, procedural use of elastic codes. Elastic codes allowed people considerable freedom to create "fitted images." Resolving a volleyball game conflict, cleaning up the house of a comrade in need, and stopping the abuse of public funding were amongst the concrete events being recoded into great significance. Local people *constructed* new revolutionary images using local data, events, and circumstances as materials.

While the idea system was extremely adaptable to new projects and targets, it might even have been *too* adaptable—too *easily* adaptable—as the latter phase of the factional battles showed. Worthy of note is not only how *far* the categorical boundaries could be stretched and things equated, but also how *quickly* such processes could take place. When oppositional depictions could be created easily, and when the truthteller of yesterday became the reprehensible liar of tomorrow, the cohesiveness of images became hard to maintain. Stability and unity thus became increasingly dependent on force.

Developmental Potential

The grand revolutionary project had few limits to its potential development. In practice, almost all sites of possible applications seemed to experience quite exhaustive applications, as far as practical possibilities allowed. There were some differences between different eras of development, however. During the first fifteen years of Liberation, the state had control over the "high culture" institutions, but many local cultures and institutions survived in private spaces and had some presence in the lower rungs of social strata. The early, heated moments of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1969) further reduced the breathing or wiggle room of alternative cultural spaces; the revolutionary motif exploded into the realm of artistic expression and penetrated into the structures of everyday life. In this sense, each new revolutionary artform, and each way to extend the application of the Revolution to daily life, or new way to formulate a revolutionary idea, signified a new development. The revolutionary idea system could also be more effectively developed when positive evidence and the "image" of success were accumulated.

But the limits of this development could be seen in the inherent limitations of what the Revolution could do. Strains from overapplication could appear. If revolutionary duties overtook the tasks of learning, if revolutionary thoughts forestalled the emergence of better thoughts, or if revolutionary ideas were demonstrably incapable of guaranteeing against blunders and mishaps that came out of their applications, then the "development" phase of the revolutionary idea system had likely met a point of growth limit. Any further extension of ideas would in all likelihood produce as many counterimages as positive ones.

EASE OF USE

The post-1950 era was met with the introduction of a radically new "language"—a new revolutionary "register." The system of new vocabularies, concepts, and slogans opened up new ways of thinking to be formed in individuals and new relations to be formed between people.

The revolutionary register was power-efficient. In just a few words, it could evoke a totally important context, activating the utmost "emotional energy."[8] Through visually vivid images, one could decry an enemy as a "big poisonous weed," and, in the blink of an eye, then express: "History must not be turned upside down. Be careful that all of you will be crushed into pieces by the wheels of history!" [历史是绝对不容许颠倒的!小心你们会被历史的车轮碾得粉碎!] [9]

The ease with which "history" could be turned into a personified grand being, and then into a gigantic vehicle (probably operated on dialectical power), showed that certain things were institutionalized in society. Within the society a set of discursive portals existed in language that worked hand-in-hand with *cognitive portals* existing in thoughts. A large stock of truisms, quotes, and code words was in abundant supply, as was a plethora of common arguments and cognitive tricks. One could think of the presence of "shorthands" and "longhands" in the freeway of linguistic

[8] Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 35–45, 102–106.

[9] Beijing Family Background Research Group, "The New Counterattack of the Theory of Bloodlines—Refuting 'The Poisonous Weed "Background Theory" Must Be Eradicated'" (March 6, 1967), CD. [北京家庭出身问题研究小组,"反动血统论的新反扑——驳'大毒草《出身论》必须连根铲除'" (3月6日, 1967), 光碟。]

flow. *Discursive shorthand*, such as quotes and idioms, was used to deal with the necessity of speed—the need to create a high-density meaning quickly, often in the form of vivid imageries. *Discursive longhand*, such as depicting things using dialectical theories, was used to deal with the tasks of creating and honing intermediary ideas, which required more meticulous argumentation and informational processing. Once both of these tools were mastered, ideas could be generated and connected with relative ease. Cognitive gaps could be "ported through" almost seamlessly from one part to any other in the chain-complex of the idea system.

The War on Terror

Encoding the War on Terrorism

I believe both a free Afghanistan and a free Iraq will serve as a powerful example for millions who plead in silence for liberty in the broader Middle East… We've been challenged, and we've risen to those challenges. We've climbed the mighty mountain. I see the valley below, and it's a valley of peace.
—George W. Bush, Presidential Debate, 2004 ("Transcript: Bush, Kerry closing statements," CNN, last modified October 1, 2004.[1]

The codification activities we have encountered in the previous case studies are pervasive in the modernized, public political discourses of today, albeit in hybridized forms. They exist in hybridized forms, I purport, because today's powerful social actors have thoroughly mastered the techniques of both the empirical and ideational forms of codification, and the integration of these forms, creating synergistic usages. The aim of the following chapters is to render these manifestations more recognizable to the reader. The case in hand is the "War on Terrorism" (sometimes abbreviated as the "War on Terror") project enacted by the George W. Bush Administration following the 9/11 attacks of 2001.

I divide the case analysis in accordance with three phases, temporally arranged. The first phase, spanning from 9/11 to the war in Afghanistan,

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[1] https://www.cnn.com/2004/ALLPOLITICS/10/01/debate.transcript.19/index.html (accessed May 30, 2022).

relied heavily on ideationally driven codification. The second phase was the buildup to the war in Iraq, which involved significantly more activities of evidentially driven codification, primarily pertaining to the material proof of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) capabilities and ties to terrorist groups (and hence the tangible international threat). This section showcases how ideational codification was systematically and extensively commixed into evidentiary discourses. The third phase, presented in two chapters, pertains to two post-invasion scandals: the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal and the failure to attain physical stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) in Iraq.

Because parts of the early research have been previously published elsewhere, these chapters abbreviate these parts and focus more on unpublished materials. Readers are advised to consult the previously published studies for additional demonstrative details.[2]

From 9/11 to the War on Terrorism Script: Using the American Civil Religion

The events that transpired in New York City, Washington D.C., and rural Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001, had a deep and lasting impact on the American psyche. Having lived in an extended period of domestic peace, technological development, and economic boom since the 1980s—and having bathed in a general sense of national invincibility bolstered by the end of the Cold War around 1991—the U.S. experienced a series of shocking attacks on some of its most significant national icons. These events ruptured the existing beliefs and normal patterns of American life, generating the responses of panic, horror, confusion, and anger—revolving around not only individuals' physical safety but also the meanings of things in general; in sociological terms, the events represented a "breach" of the normal order.

[2] Gordon C. Chang and Hugh B. Mehan, "Discourse in a Religious Mode: The Bush Administration's Discourse in the War on Terrorism and Its Challenges," *Pragmatics* 16:1(2006), 1–23; Gordon C. Chang and Hugh B. Mehan, "Why We Must Attack Iraq: Bush's Reasoning Practices and Argumentation System," *Discourse and Society* 19, no. 4 (July 2008), 453–82; Gordon C. Chang, Kerstin Lueck, and Hugh B. Mehan. "Evidencing International Threat: Examining Iraq Survey Group's Post-Invasion Verification of Iraq's WMD Threat," *Journal of Language and Politics* 12, no.1 (January 2013), 29–58; Gordon C. Chang, "The Politics of Representation and the Social Order: In the War on Terror" (PhD diss., University of California San Diego, 2008), available for download at eScholarship: https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4xt6g5v1 (accessed May 30, 2022).

At this time of extreme ambiguity and uncertainty, the Bush administration presented a coherent representation of the events. I, with my coauthor Hugh Mehan, have termed this the "War on Terrorism script."[3] This script represents the advent of an idea system; it contained not only meaningful contents but introduced a system of codification.

A complete script, again according to Kenneth Burke's theory of dramatism, explains to an audience the *act* (what was done), *scene* (when or where it was done), *agent* (who did it), *agency* (how it was done), and the *purpose* (why it was done) of human actions. A repertoire has long been available to the politicians in the U.S., most notably its presidents, to form a cultural script (similar to a "grand narrative" or "overarching narrative"). Sociologist Robert Bellah argues that citizens in the United States of America, a secular nation with a constitutional separation of church and state, have historically been guided by a civil religion (or a "religion of the citizen").[4] The "American civil religion" is associated with the mythology represented in the Declaration of Independence, especially with the notions of liberty, equality, justice, and human happiness. It is also based on the conception of a supreme being above the nation.[5] Like the civil religions of other countries, it plays a role in reconciling the highest political authorities with the highest religious authorities of the nation in specific ways, thereby synchronizing the political and moral lives of citizens, particularly in times of national disunity, uncertainty, and challenge.

In the first stage of its response, when detailed information about the attacks was still scarce, the Bush administration managed to swiftly and elegantly fit information in accordance with the grand narrative. Let us review the rapid development of the War on Terrorism script.

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[3] The term, adopted by me, was originally suggested by Mehan. The idea of a script, on the one hand, aligns with Roger Schank's notion of a "restaurant script," and on the other also corresponds to a broader conception formulated by theorists such as Kenneth Burke, Erving Goffman, and others, who employ narratological and dramaturgical metaphors to analyze social constructs and social life. This concept intersects with the concepts of cultural toolkits, repertoires, and institutions within cultural sociology. Chang and Mehan, "Discourse in a Religious Mode," 6.

[4] Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," in *Religion in America*, eds. William G. McLoughlin and Robert N. Bellah (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company [1966]1968), 3–23; Robert N. Bellah, "Religion and the Legitimation of the American Republic," *Society* 15 (May 1978), 16–23.

[5] Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," 6, 10.

Days 1 and 2

President Bush's first-day pronouncements had already encoded the events programmatically. A plot with actors, notably heroes and villains, was cast. Just as the American civil religion suggested a liminal connection between the natural and the supernatural, so too did the War on Terrorism script.

In supernatural versions, the script encoded enemies as "evil" and the conflict as one of "good vs. evil." Natural versions described these enemies as barbaric and animal-like, or depicted them as possessing some essentialist characteristics—for example, the enemies "like" to terrorize, "like darkness," like "to hide in shadows," or are "cold-blooded" killers. This naturalistic description casts the conflict as being "civilization vs. barbarism." These two kinds of distinction were not separate. Repeatedly mentioning them back-to-back, and sometimes mingling together within short pronouncements, these distinctions became merged into the same system. The supernatural and the natural characterizations were bridged, the identifications equated. The stable set of core ideas and images also had the potential to become highly elastic; the boundaries of it could be stretched with effort. By design, this stock of knowledge—the War on Terrorism script—afforded numerous cognitive processes and activities to later be activated.

In his address to the nation on the day of the attacks,[6] Bush explained the events as "a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts," perpetrated on "our biggest buildings," by terrorists who are "evil" and display "the very worst of human nature," through the means of "mass murder" (as opposed to suicide bombings), because "we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world." He contrasted the evil *acts* with another set of good *acts*: rescuing victims, "caring for strangers and neighbors," and "giving blood," which occurred at the *scene* of "pictures of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, huge structures collapsing." The *agents* of these good acts were "all Americans from every walk of life" and "the best of America," who had the *agency* to "unite in our resolve for justice and peace." Their *purpose* was to "defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world."

The confluence of the natural and supernatural was bridged by an intermediary idea, involving an ideational construct called *terrorism*. "America

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[6] George W. Bush, "Address to the Nation on the Terrorist Attacks," Oval Office, The White House, *Weekly Compilations of Presidential Documents* 37, no. 37 (September 11, 2001), 1301–2.

and our friends and allies join with all those who want peace and security in the world, and we stand together to win the *war against terrorism*" (emphasis added), stated President Bush. "Good vs. evil" was a supernatural war, unlike the more mundane conflicts between states, such as "Germany vs. France" during World Wars I and II. This script promoted war not against *terrorists*, who are tangibly human and mortal, but also against *terrorism* itself, which is an abstract idea or concept. This concept could be related to the bureaucratic political institutions of the modernized world, yet part of it could be stretched to relate to the symbols pertaining to the supernatural world. And, without the need for many specific and empirical facts, a general explanation was already offered.

The 30 Days Following 9/11

While the basic building blocks of the War on Terrorism script were formed before September 12, the Bush administration solidified this script throughout the rest of the month of September by repeatedly elaborating and substantiating it with information. They primarily did so by applying the War on Terrorism script (a system of codes and codification) onto a wide range of ambiguous, and sometimes ordinary, events (pre-coded information). Those who were delivering sandwiches, drinks, and clothing were "*leading* the first phase in the war on terrorism" and "*strengthening* the home front" (emphasis added). The FBI publishing a list of wanted terrorists' names and pictures became "unveil[ing] a new line of attack" in the War on Terrorism.[7] The grand narrative of the War on Terrorism, then, became supported and "evidenced" by coded things—by fitted images (see Table 14.1).

ESTABLISHING THE CASE FOR THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

Once actual military action against the Taliban began, the word "war" was no longer merely an abstract, metaphorical expression. President Bush translated a war against terrorism from an abstract concept into the reality of war against a specific government as its target.

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[7] Details are available in a separate analysis. Gordon C. Chang and Hugh B. Mehan, "Discourse in a Religious Mode: The Bush Administration's Discourse in the War on Terrorism and Its Challenges," *Pragmatics* 16, no.1 (March 2006), 1–23.

Table 14.1 The War on Terrorism script and its fitting images

	War on Terrorism script	Exemplary images
Act (*what was done*)	Freedom and civilization are attacked; Americans quickly fight back	Those giving blood to fellow citizens vs. those who committed the attacks
Scene (*when and where it was done*)	Battlefield	World Trade Center, battle between good and evil, Americans vs. terrorists
Agents (*who did it*)	Freedom-loving people as protagonists; terrorists and their supporters as antagonists	Helpers at the World Trade Center; ordinary Americans, including children; international community; U.S. soldiers vs. Al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden
Agency (*how it was done*)	Fighting	Protagonists donate, help, volunteer, defend; antagonists harm, hurt, plot, terrorize
Purpose (*why it was done*)	Innate, essential difference between the two kinds of people	Antagonists hate freedom: freedom of America, of women, of human rights

Equivalence Through Common Group Membership

Bush's rationale was to enforce a doctrine that he had promulgated following 9/11: the U.S. administration would not only hold the terrorists who committed the attacks accountable, but also anyone who aided them. This doctrine in his exact words, as given on two occasions, was:

> We will make no distinction between **the terrorists** who committed these acts and those who harbor them.[8]
>
> We will not only deal with **those who dare attack America**, we will deal with those who harbor them and feed them and house them.[9]

These two statements established this conceptual *equivalence*: the 9/11 attackers and their purported harboring entities. Physically speaking, the immediate 9/11 attackers were already dead. But there might be

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[8] George W. Bush, "Address to the Nation on the Terrorist Attacks," Oval Office, The White House, *Weekly Compilations of Presidential Documents* 37, no. 37 (September 11, 2001): 1301–1302.

[9] George W. Bush, "Remarks in a Meeting with the National Security Team and an Exchange with Reporters at Camp David, Maryland," *Weekly Compilations of Presidential Documents* 37, no. 38 (September 15, 2001), 1319–1321.

additional planners, trainers, and other parties involved in causing the 9/11 attacks who had not yet been prosecuted. These supporting and "harboring" entities thus exhibited a *functional* equivalence to the 9/11 attackers—their actions had the same causal effect. Their resemblance was also enabled by the intermediary, elastic idea of "terrorism." On numerous occasions, all these people were classified as one group, assigned with one identity: terrorists. Hence, in terms of *essential qualities*, these entities were possessing the same kind of characteristics.

After defining the aforementioned doctrine, without yet naming any specific entity, on September 17, Bush identified Osama bin Laden and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan as the next concrete target.

> All I can tell you is that Osama bin Laden is a **prime suspect**, and the people who house him, encourage him, provide food, comfort or money are on notice. Last Tuesday—last week, I spoke clearly about our nation's policy. And that is, we're going to find those who—**those evildoers, those barbaric people who attacked our country and we're going to hold them accountable, and we're going to hold the people who house them accountable;** the people who think they can provide them **safe havens** will be held accountable; the people who feed them will be held accountable. And **the Taliban** must take my statement seriously.[10]

At the initial stage, the U.S. government did not, and probably could not, *substantiate* the involvement of Al-Qaeda (Osama bin Laden's terrorist group), instead relying on unverified intelligence information to assert that Al-Qaeda was the group that perpetrated the attacks. The "prime suspect" was thus the code applied to bin Laden. Deductively, "providing safe havens" [to the "prime suspect"] would be the action. With only minimal information being mentioned to the public, these conceptual linkages could nonetheless be established. The evidential threshold, in other words, was set to very low by the way the claim was constructed. If there was only the slightest bit of information that the Taliban "feed," "house," "comfort," or "encourage" bin Laden and his group, then such information would be enough to prove the conceptual linkages. This

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[10] George W. Bush, "Remarks to Employees at the Pentagon and an Exchange with Reporters in Arlington, Virginia," *Weekly Compilations of Presidential Documents* 37, no. 38 (September 17, 2001), 1324–1327.

equivalence is succinctly captured in a later speech when Bush stated: "By aiding and abetting murder, the Taliban regime is committing murder."[11]

Streamlining the Mode of Reasoning

Indeed, Bush had consistently shifted the debate from a legal or rational mode of discourse—which required a kind of strong evidentiary basis built on correlative empirical events and multiple sources of material evidence— to a (civil) religious mode of discourse that favored a strong ideational match between information and idealized conceptions and images. The "links" between the Taliban and the terrorists or terrorism could be established in the latter manner but not in the former. Consider the following interaction between Bush and a reporter on September 19, 2001; the reporter asked Bush to respond to the countries that expressed uncertainty about waging war on terrorism and cited China's statement that "any strike must be preceded by irrefutable evidence."

REPORTER: Can I follow on one point? Do you to your mind
                  have **irrefutable evidence** that links al Qaeda,
                  and specifically Osama bin Laden to these attacks?
PRESIDENT BUSH: When we take action, we will take action because
                  we believe—because **we know we'll be on [in]
                  the right**. And I want to remind people that
                  there have been terrorist activities on America **in
                  the past, as well**. And there has been—indict-
                  ments have been handed down.[12]

Escaping the request for a legal-rational codification of the situation, which called for detailed empirical evidence (connecting Al-Qaeda and bin Laden to 9/11), Bush asserted "knowing one is on [in] the right" as sufficient justification for undertaking a military action. The codification process in idea-making was to be ideationally driven. Per this route, Bush proposed this intuitively justifiable idea: that the entity "on the right" (a coded thing)

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[11] George W. Bush, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the United States Response to the Terrorist Attacks of September 11," House Camber, U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C., *Weekly Compilations of Presidential Documents* 37, no. 38 (September 20, 2001), 1347–51.

[12] George W. Bush, "Remarks Prior to Discussions with President Megawati Sukarnoputri of Indonesia and an Exchange with Reporters," The Oval Office, The White House, *Weekly Compilations of Presidential Documents* 37, no. 38 (September 19, 2001), 1337–40.

to act against "terrorists" (another coded thing). In finding information to support the notion, Bush elicited Al-Qaeda's and bin Laden's involvement in terrorist attacks *from the past* to substantiate the act, scene, agents, agency, and purpose. Any materials from historical memories, media reports, vivid images, or recollected incidents could thus be used.

The Design of Political Demands

The president's address to the Joint Session of Congress on September 20, 2001, was the first time that the Bush administration openly condemned the Taliban government of Afghanistan, made official demands on the Taliban regime, and warned that if the Taliban did not "hand over the terrorists" then it would "share in their fate." This list of political demands could be taken literally, simply indicating one government's requests of another government's actions. But we are interested in demonstrating how political demands could be used by idea systems' users as devices to generate future information for use against an enemy. Bush stated:

> And tonight, the United States of America makes the following demands on the Taliban: **Deliver to United States authorities all the leaders of al Qaeda who hide in your land.** (Applause.) **Release all foreign nationals**, including American citizens, you have unjustly imprisoned. **Protect foreign journalists, diplomats and aid workers** in your country. **Close immediately and permanently every terrorist training camp in Afghanistan**, and **hand over every terrorist, and every person in their support structure**, to appropriate authorities. (Applause.) **Give the United States full access to terrorist training camps**, so we can make sure they are no longer operating. These demands are not open to negotiation or discussion. (Applause.) The Taliban must act, and act immediately. They will hand over the terrorists, or they will **share in their fate**.[13]

Besides predicating on the incorrigible assumption of the War on Terrorism script, these demands collectively exhibit several epistemic characteristics pertinent to codification. Some of these demands were vague; others were built on potential "facts" that might be erroneous, and therefore undoable; some called for actions that would be hard to verify even if executed; others suggested actions that were morally simplistic, and therefore problematic; and overall, they embedded demands that undermined the sovereign identity of the other governmental party. "Release all foreign

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[13] George W. Bush, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the United States Response to the Terrorist Attacks of September 11," 1347–51.

nationals…unjustly imprisoned" assumed unjust imprisonment, and the determining party was essentially the United States. "Foreign journalists, diplomats and aid workers" were construed as monolithic entities with an all-innocent identity, no matter what they had done. "Giving the United States full access to terrorist training camps" could lead to open access permitting the U.S. to access, station, search, and collect information on anyone, anywhere in the country (as we will see more clearly in the case of Iraq). There were many reasons for refusal, and here lies a key epistemic implication: any sign of "refusal"—even acts that could merely be construed as a refusal—could be used for further ideational codification to fulfill the idea of the enemy's villainy, *by the very design of the list of demands.*

The Design of "Draining the Swamp" Policy Metaphor

Aside from Bush himself, the members of his administration also demonstrated significant competence in the established mode of idea-making. Bush had previously declared a new policy doctrine to treat the supporting entities of the 9/11 attackers as equivalent to the attackers themselves. The doctrine was justified as a moral stance (regarding moral equivalence), rather than policy efficacy. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, a prominent figure among neoconservatives (and later nominated as President of the World Bank by Bush in 2005), explained both the moral justification and the prospective efficacy associated with this policy, using the vivid metaphor "draining the swamp":

DEPUTY SECRETARY WOLFOWITZ: [**Al Qaeda** are] involved in the [USS] Cole, they're involved in the Philippine hijacking plot, they're involved in the previous World Trade Center bombing. And then what I suppose is the main thing we know post-September 11, which is that **some number of the people** in those planes have been pretty clearly identified as members of **al Qaeda**. The other thing, which I tried to emphasize, is that while **there's a lot we**

know, there's also a lot that we don't know. **We don't know how they were able to organize an operation as sophisticated as that. We don't know everyone involved. We don't know all the networks that may have supported them.** And while we expect to learn more as this campaign proceeds, we also have to recognize that—I think the metaphor of **draining the swamp** applies—you can work as hard as you can to **find as many snakes** as possible, but if you can **dry up the place where they live**, that's even more effective than trying to do both.

REPORTER: When you mentioned, when you first started talking to us, you said Al Qaeda and possibly, I think, other organizations or other networks—have you identified or do you have information that there was cooperation between al Qaeda and any other groups in the attack on New York and Washington?

DEPUTY SECRETARY WOLFOWITZ: The important point is—and again, this is something I stressed to them, we know these groups **cooperate with one another extensively**, and we **can't wait until we prove** that one particular group was involved in a particular opera-

tion before we consider them dangerous.…**we're not going to wait until they're proven**—in our view they've **already been proven dangerous and deadly** and we're going to take them out wherever we can find them.[14]

Wolfowitz here also reinforced the mode of idea-making, as expressed by Bush, that de-emphasized the need for direct, evidentiary proof pertaining to 9/11. It shifted the conditions of proof toward things that were (allegedly) already proven in two ways. First, 9/11 was to be conceived as merely being emblematic of broader class of negative acts—such as suicide bombing (USS Cole), hijacking, and bombing, basically acts that could be classified as terrorism. Therefore, as long as sufficient proof can be made about an entity having the tendency to forward acts of terrorism, then specific proof of connection to 9/11 was not needed. In fact, specific proof about *any* terrorist incident—let alone specific details regarding that entity's involvement—would not be needed, as it would be too late to do so. Aggregate assessments regarding the enemy's actions were deemed to be adequate—sufficient in justifying the U.S. administration's actions to minimize the existential threat emanating from the enemy.

Wolfowitz's discourse was not merely a justification for the attack against Al-Qaeda and Afghanistan; it was also an incredibly efficient effort to legitimate an open plan for future invasion and intervention—on every country that was to be associated with the label. For example, by sheer implication, Cuba, Iraq, Syria, Iran, North Korea, and Libya were suddenly elevated to potential targets because each was already officially listed as a "state sponsor of terrorism" in the U.S. government documents. Other countries that had ties with them now belonged to that expanded category—in varying degrees, they have "the likeness of" a threat. The snake-swamp metaphor characterized the symbolic, conceptual relationships between these groups and countries, even if the exact collaborative relationships between them and various governments may have been nonexistent.

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[14] U.S. Department of Defense, "Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz En Route from Brussels," http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=1941 (accessed May 28, 2008).

Maneuvering over Contesting Epistemic Conventions

The development of the War on Terrorism script was met with some critical responses. Many community groups and individuals—particularly those established in progressive, grassroots politics or long-standing involvement with pacificist, religious, and human rights issues—generated their own scripts and ways of representing the events. Some—like the renowned critics Howard Zinn and Noam Chomsky—sought to re-situate 9/11 in the scene of U.S. historical interventions worldwide; some sought to stress the need to use non-military means to deal with "terrorism" problems; yet others emphasized the need to act in accordance with international law.[15] The Bush administration counteracted them using similar approaches that all relied on the War on Terrorism script.

The following interaction between a reporter, Muslim leaders, and President Bush in the White House on September 26, 2001, exemplifies this containment strategy:

REPORTER: Granted the extremism, do you—and I'd like to ask the Imam the same question—**do you consider bin Laden a religious leader or a political leader?**

PRESIDENT BUSH: I consider bin Laden **an evil man**. And I don't think there's any religious justification for what he has in mind. Islam is a religion of love, not hate. **This is a man who hates.** This is a man who's declared war on innocent people. This is a man who doesn't mind destroying women and children. This is a man who **hates freedom**. **This is an evil man**.

REPORTER: **But does he have political goals?**

PRESIDENT BUSH: **He has got evil goals.** And **it's hard to think in conventional terms** about a man so **dominated by evil** that he's willing to do what he thinks he's going to get away with. But he's not going to get away with it.[16]

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[15] Chang and Mehan, "Discourse in a Religious Mode," 1–23.

[16] George W. Bush, "Remarks Prior to Discussions with Muslim Community Leaders and an Exchange with Reporters," The Roosevelt Room, The White House, *Weekly Compilations of Presidential Documents* 37, no. 39 (September 26, 2001), 1380–82.

In this interaction with the reporter, Bush quickly veered away from a path of sociopolitical thinking and discussions that would lead to detailed, evidentiary codifications. By insisting on the codes of "evil man" and "evil goals," Bush removed the discussions from the contextual realm of politics and pushed it into the contextual realm of the constructed ideational situation. In a similar manner, in response to a reporter mentioning the staggering 90% of Japanese (based on a public opinion poll) worrying over possible terrorist retaliation, Bush asserted that "100 percent of the Japanese people ought to" support Japan's involvement in the campaign against the Taliban regime. In the encoded idealized context, practical worries emanating from ordinary political conventions (political legitimacy and individual safety) were less important.[17] Cumulatively, Bush and his administrative staff skillfully designed and navigated a cognitive device, a device that enabled them to employ ideationally driven codifications to build their case against identified targets.

[17] George W. Bush, "Remarks Following Discussions with Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan and an Exchange with Reporters," The Colonnade, The White House, *Weekly Compilations of Presidential Documents* 37, no. 39 (September 25, 2001), 1372–75.

Extending the Idea System to the War on Iraq

The U.S. invaded Afghanistan in early October 2001 and removed the Taliban regime from power in early November 2001. A new government in Afghanistan headed by Hamid Karzai was temporarily installed in December 2001. Shortly thereafter, the Bush administration shifted their attention to Iraq.

The case against Iraq was predicated on a policy doctrine known as a "preemptive" or "preventive" doctrine by critics.[1] The central idea is that a preventive or preemptive military action would be justified when enemy regimes posed a grave threat to the national security of the United States.[2] After this new doctrine (idea) had been created, a whole chain of implications were deductively formed. *Because* there had already been a short list of officially declared state sponsors of terrorism (Cuba, Iraq,

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[1] Noam Chomsky, *Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky*, eds. Peter R. Mitchell and John Schoeffel (New York: The New Press, 2002).

[2] The introduction of the 2002 *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* articulated the basic doctrine: "Our enemies have openly declared that they are seeking **weapons of mass destruction**, and evidence indicates that they are doing so with determination… And, **as a matter of common sense and self-defense, America will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed… History will judge harshly those who saw this coming danger but failed to act.** In the new world we have entered, the only path to peace and security is the path of action." The White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, September 2002).

Syria, Iran, North Korea, and Libya) in government reports, [3] any country or entities that expressed support toward them could, theoretically, be encoded as their collaborators—or more mildly, as obstructors of the War on Terrorism. Bush specified the targets by using the new phrase (code) "Axis of Evil" to connect the regimes of Iraqi, North Korea, and Iran in the important 2002 State of Union Address, with Iraq receiving the longest description.

To connect to the conclusion that a military invasion was required, a further idea was proposed: *Iraq posed an eminent and imminent international threat, particularly and specifically to the United States, which could not be deterred by other means except through military ones.*

The Bush administration had sought to provide evidence (*compact symbolic structures*) for the Iraq threat in a number of ways, but in 2002–2003, the political discourse centered on two empirical arguments: (1) Iraq was likely to be in possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), and (2) it was likely to have active collaborative relationships with terrorist groups like al-Qaeda. Although cloaked in the form of empirical arguments—the administration acting as if it was conducting an exclusively empirical assessment—an ideational mode of codification was intermixed at critical junctures in such arguments. Such skillful, repeated intermixing was critical to constructing Iraq's threat. This chapter sketches out this "hybrid" codification method.

The Threat of Iraq: Codification in the Face of Empirical Ambiguity

First and foremost, the idea of an international or foreign threat requires both empirically and ideationally coded constructs. Physical capability alone does not define an international threat. The level of an international threat depends on the *ideational* caricature of a national leadership at least as much as the empirical profile of physical capability.

One of the many ways in which the Bush administration employed empirical-ideational hybrids to produce a chain of reasoning is this: a *good* nation (like the U.S.) can possess WMDs without introducing danger (or

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[3] For example, see U.S. Department of State, "Patterns of Global Terrorism 2001," accessed June 16, 2008, https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2001//index.htm; The White House, The National Security Strategy of the United States of America (Washington, D.C.: The White House, September 2002).

can even reduce it); an *evil-and-rational* nation (like the U.S.S.R.) possessing WMDs would introduce a higher but deterrable danger; yet an *evil-and-insane* nation (like Iraq) equipped with WMDs could introduce a grave, non-deterrable danger. [4] By implication then, (a) the U.S. can and should possess WMDs; (b) the U.S.S.R. should not possess WMDs but it does not pose an imminent threat so long as deterrence is in place; (c) Iraq must not be allowed to possess WMDs, and its ownership required immediate actions.

But, did Iraq really possess WMDs?

There was a well-known situation of unresolved empirical ambiguity recognized by many experts involved in the international weapons inspection regimes. It was not clear in 2003 whether Saddam Hussein had WMDs from the end of the Gulf War in 1991 to that time. The discrepancy lay between the number of WMDs found by U.N. inspectors in Iraq and the number that the international community estimated that Iraq possessed. It also concerned whether Iraq had resumed WMDs-related programs after the U.N. inspectors were forced to leave Iraq, due to contentious reasons.[5]

WMDs encompasses three main types: (1) nuclear weapons; (2) chemical weapons (CWs), and (3) biological weapons (BWs). Although all lethal, the only *existentially* threatening form of WMDs to the United States as a nation would be nuclear weapons.

One position is that Iraq did not pose an imminent threat—or at least not one that could not be deterred. Former U.N. Chief Inspector Scott Ritter, as well as U.N. chief inspector in 2003, Hans Blix, had acknowledged that, while it was possible that a large number of WMDs remained hidden in Iraq, it was also possible that some WMDs had been destroyed by Iraq's government without documentation.[6] Chemical weapons (CWs)

[4] This point is explicitly covered in Gordon C. Chang and Hugh B. Mehan, "Why We Must Attack Iraq: Bush's Reasoning Practices and Argumentation System," *Discourse and Society* 19, no. 4 (July 2008) 459–463.

[5] See Glen Rangwala, Nathaniel Hurd, and Alistair Millar. "A Case for Concern, Not a Case for War," in *The Iraq War Reader: History, Documents, Opinions*, eds. Micah L. Sirfy and Christopher Cerf (New York: Simon and Schuster), 2003, 457–63; Chang and Mehan, "Why We Must Attack Iraq," 453–82.

[6] Hans Blix, "Briefing the Security Council, January 9, 2003: Inspections in Iraq and a Further Assessment of Iraq's Weapons Declarations," United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission, accessed March 11, 2020, https://www.un.org/Depts/unmovic/bx9jan.htm; Scott Ritter, *Frontier Justice: Weapons of Mass Destruction and the Bushwhacking of America* (New York: Context Books, 2003).

and biological weapons (BWs) have a certain shelf life, after which their lethality would be drastically reduced. Any further production efforts could have been prevented by reinstituting regular inspections by the U.N. Concerning nuclear weapons specifically, a report released by the CIA in 2002 stated, "Saddam probably does not yet have nuclear weapons or sufficient material to make any," indicating, at the very least, that the U.S. government acknowledged Iraq's possession of nuclear weapons was extremely ambiguous rather than clear.[7]

The following sections will show the opposite case build by the administration.

SECRETARY POWELL'S U.N. PRESENTATION

Secretary of State Colin Powell's presentation on February 5, 2003, to the U.N. Security Council was a culminating event for justifying the War on Iraq. Secretary Powell represented the Bush administration in order to present its evidence in the most detailed, coherent, and systematic manner.[8] His main propositions could be captured in the following quote:

> The **gravity of this moment** is matched by **the gravity of the threat** that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction pose to the world. Let me now turn to those deadly weapons programs and describe why they are **real and present dangers** to the region and to the world. [9]

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[7] Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, October 2002). The full sentence in the document is: "Although Saddam probably does not yet have nuclear weapons or sufficient material to make any, he remains intent on acquiring them."

[8] In later years, Colin Powell described that much of the internal intelligence information was drawn from the *National Intelligence Estimate* (NIE) produced by the intelligence community. And his intention was "go out to the CIA and draw the best items out of that NIE and make the speech out of that. That's what we did." Jason M. Breslow, "Colin Powell: U.N. Speech 'Was a Great Intelligence Failure'," PBS, last modified May 17, 2016, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/colin-powell-u-n-speech-was-a-great-intelligence-failure/ (accessed May 30, 2022).

[9] Colin Powell, "Remarks to the United Nations Security Council," U.S. Department of State, released on February 5, 2003, https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2003/17300.htm (accessed May 30, 2022).

Intelligence Sources as a Superior Kind of Information

Before proceeding further, Powell first asserted that the information the administration possessed was not of an ordinary kind. It was backed up by "solid sources"—mainly "solid intelligence." Some information was vouched to internal, intelligence experts, as were the "facts and conclusions":

> My colleagues, every statement I make today is **backed up** by sources, **solid sources.** These are **not assertions**. What we're giving you are **facts and conclusions based on solid intelligence**. I will cite some examples, and these are from **human sources**.

In this quote, Powell elevated the status of the sources he used over others. If his information was backed up by sources, particularly "solid" sources, then it was not of the same empirical status as "assertions." A judgment of "solid" was rendered here. Who is to judge how "solid" the sources are as well as the validity, accuracy, relevance, and appropriate representation? In this case, it would be either Powell himself or undisclosed individuals who worked in intelligence agencies, or perhaps both together. The exact identity of the entity rendering the judgment is unclear.

Intelligence sources, however, were not available for open examination. A general audience was only able to see the filtered information; the members of the U.S. Congress and U.N. agencies were shared with more, but even they did not have complete access. It was therefore difficult to observe how intelligence information was filtered, and then made into "facts" and "conclusions." An implicit trust toward Powell's and the intelligence agencies' integrity is assumed (as established in prior ideational codification). To increase such trust, Powell emphasized the diversity and integrity of his sources:

> The material I will present to you comes from a **variety of sources**. Some are **U.S. sources**. And some are those of **other countries**. Some of the sources are **technical**, such as intercepted telephone conversations and photos taken by satellites. Other sources are **people who have risked their lives** to let the world know what Saddam Hussein is really up to.

In this one sentence, Powell sought to present a case with as many credible and authoritative figures as he could: people who have risked their lives, who gather and process "technical" information, and the governmental

units of multiple countries. "People who have risked their lives" conveyed moral authority; those who have technical skills conveyed technical authority. The original database of information was assumed to be trustworthy because of these diverse authorities.

Detailed Congruity and Account Convergence from a Polyphony of Authorities

Powell's borrowing of other countries' intelligence services was similar to the building of an impression of *detailed congruity* and *account convergence*.[10] Borrowing a variety of voices helped to create a polyphonic impression among various epistemic experts. Such a polyphony in turn helped to bolster the definitiveness of signs. Even if such signs are not linked with asserted facts with high certainty, having enough of them would still help to accumulate *uncertain signs* that come from expert sources.

Two such sources were Mohamed El-Baradei, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and Hans Blix, head of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) and former IAEA director general:

> I asked for this session today for two purposes: First, to support the core assessments made by Dr Blix and Dr El-Baradei. As Dr Blix reported to this council on January 27: "**Iraq appears not to have come to a genuine acceptance, not even today, of the disarmament which was demanded of it.**" And as Dr El-Baradei reported, Iraq's declaration of December 7: "**Did not provide any new information relevant to certain questions that have been outstanding since 1998**."

This adoption of a plurality of voices was highly selective. Blix, for example, in the same January 27 report to the U.N., stated, "we have to date found no evidence that Iraq has revived its nuclear weapons program since

[10] "Ladies and gentlemen, these are not assertions. These are facts, corroborated by many sources, some of them **sources of the intelligence services of other countries**. For example, in mid-December weapons experts at one facility were replaced by Iraqi intelligence agents who were to deceive inspectors about the work that was being done there." "Powell's Remarks to U.N.," *The New York Times,* last modified February 5, 2003, https://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/05/international/powells-remarks-to-un.html (accessed May 30, 2022).

its elimination of the program in 1990s. However, our work is steadily still in midstream, progressing and should be allowed to run its natural course."[11] El-Baradei made an almost identical statement:

> To conclude: we have to date found no evidence that Iraq has revived its nuclear weapons programme since the elimination of the programme in the 1990s. However, **our work is steadily progressing and should be allowed to run its natural course**.[12]

Both Blix and El-Baradei reiterated these positions more strongly later on. But their statements and credibility were used selectively by Powell for his own codification purposes. Powell sought to draw *parallels* between the inspectors' words and his own judgment—the few people who were among the most authoritative and capable of examining empirical forms of evidence.

Accounting and Displaying Patterns in Ambiguous Empirical Materials

None of the information Powell presented was strong direct evidence—the kind akin to an exact video recording of a murder scene. Rather, Powell presented a collection of information that displayed extraordinary objects and patterns, which could not be explained by mere chance. To use a term we have previously adopted, these patterns were built by a collection of *uncertain signs*, which served as *circumstantial evidence* for Powell's arguments.

As a next step to build his case, Powell then offered an account that coherently explained the extraordinary objects and correlative patterns. Unsurprisingly, the account was primarily derived from the War on Terrorism script. Table 15.1 maps out the general manners in which the information was used to substantiate uncertain signs (which acted as

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[11] "No 'Genuine Acceptance' Of Disarmament, Blix Says," *Washington Post*, last modified January 1, 2003, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2003/01/28/no-genuine-acceptance-of-disarmament-blix-says/9129fdcd-f54f-4a4d-8274-364ea2aabf61/?utm_term=.9c9578f00b86 (accessed May 30, 2022).

[12] Mohamed El-Baradei, "The Status of Nuclear Inspections in Iraq: Statement to the United Nations Security Council," United Nations, last modified November 26, 2019, https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/statements/status-nuclear-inspections-iraq (accessed May 30, 2022).

Table 15.1 Arrangements of uncertain signs—and circumstantial evidence—in Secretary Powell's 2003 U.N. presentation

Uncertain relations		Signs for sub-relations
A—B	A—B	Terrorist X crossed the border of Iraq
(e.g., Iraq-WMD relations;	A′—B′	Terrorist XX stayed in Iraq's hospital
Iraq-terrorist relations)	A″—B″	"Iraqis" had visited Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan
	A‴—B‴	"Iraq has hosted conferences attended by
	…	Palestine Islamic Jihad"
Uncertain facts		**Signs for sub-facts**
D	D′	"Forbidden ammo" in audiotape
(e.g., WMD capacities; stockpile	D″	Plan to develop mobile facilities
of WMDs)	D‴	Usual aluminum tubes
	D⁗	"Nerve gas" in audiotape

— = relations (e.g., correlations)

′ = variant or derivative

circumstantial evidence). I have broken down uncertain signs into two kinds: *uncertain relations* and *uncertain facts*. Uncertain relations refer to the relations between Iraq, WMD, and terrorist groups—which were asserted and suspected by the Bush administration but never fully proven. Equally, uncertain signs refer to the objects and facts that were asserted and suspected but the evidence for which was indefinite and indirect. Because the nature of such relations and the facts remained unknown and somewhat mysterious, each piece of concrete information only pointed to an incomplete, partial number of them. In other words, each piece of information might point to a "sub-relation" and a "sub-fact." Only by holistically viewing or aggregating them together could one—from the general coherent patterns shown—gain a fuller understanding of such uncertain relations and facts.

Relations between two things may be asserted in their *sequential or repeated co-presence*—for example, an event-type called "A" is followed by an event-type called "B" (e.g., an argument with a witch is frequently followed by unusual misfortunes). Facts may be presented in the form of *resemblance*—for example, an animal that looks like a cat may indeed be a cat, even if all cats look a bit different. Through two different ways, the items in the right column served as "evidence" for the concepts in the left column.

These evidential relations were implicitly and smoothly conveyed by Powell. His presentation chained the empirical information together in an intricate arrangement, intermittently bringing in ideas derived from the War

on Terrorism script to enhance coherence. Powell strategically organized empirical materials to lay out a clearly defined pathway, so that a willing audience—based on patterns they recognized—could walk the individual steps of deduction and idea generation, reaching conclusions on their own.

For example, Powell played two clips to the audience, which showed intercepted conversations. Neither of which were directly about WMDs; one concerned a "modified truck," and the other "forbidden ammos." Powell essentially provided intercepted conversations of what *resembled* hidden special trucks, which purportedly occurred *right before* the arrival of inspectors. Then he suggested these special trucks were a type of WMD production facility. This idea was tied to intelligence sources—to how "defectors" had described such trucks.

Powell presented satellite images of several alleged productive facilities. However, captured from afar, such images would have no discernable difference to regular facilities. The connections were made much clearer by Powell's verbal elaboration, in part aided by callout boxes and captioning on the visual slide, which highlighted a *coincidence* of locations that have had historical associations with WMDs, as well as current associations as suggested by experts. Any missing item that was not reported was quickly made to *look like* it was caused by a variant of lying and deliberate concealment, and any item which has been proven to be "concealed" in such a manner was not always differentiated in terms of its physical power or threat, hence old hard drive data could receive the label of "prohibited items" undifferentiated from the category of significantly more dangerous items.[13]

Consider how Powell provided a way to "make sense" of the ambiguities in the "raw data" (pre-coded information) he presented about the modified trucks. The verbatim narration of the intercepted conversation, which was also shown in PowerPoint slides, is presented in bold below; Powell's elaborative commentaries are in italics:

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[13] In the presentation, Powell stated: "Our sources tell us that in some cases the **hard drives** of computers at Iraqi weapons facilities were replaced. Who took the hard drives? Where did they go? What is being hidden? Why? *There is only one answer to the why: to deceive, to hide, to keep from the inspectors.* **Numerous human sources** tell us that the Iraqis are moving not just **documents** and **hard drives**, but **weapons of mass destruction**, to keep them from being found by inspectors. While we were here in this Council chamber debating Resolution 1441 last fall, **we know**, we know from sources that a missile brigade outside Baghdad was dispersing **rocket launchers and warheads containing biological warfare agent** to various locations, distributing them to various locations in western Iraq." The underlined sentence represents a clear example of ideational encoding being applied in the empirical assessment.

SECRETARY POWELL: *Let me pause and review some of the key elements of this conversation that you just heard between these two officers.*

First, they acknowledge that our colleague, Mohammed ElBaradei, is coming, and they know what he's coming for and they know he's coming the next day. He's coming to look for things that are prohibited. He is expecting these gentlemen to cooperate with him and not hide things.

But they're worried. **"We have this modified vehicle. What do we say if one of them sees it?"** *What is their concern?* *Their concern is that it's something they should not have, something that should not be seen.*

The general is incredulous: **"You didn't get a modified. You don't have one of those, do you?" "I have one." "Which, from where?" "From the workshop, from the al-Kindi company?" "What?" "From al-Kindi." "I'll come to see you in the morning. I'm worried. You all have something left." "We evacuated everything. We don't have anything left."** *Note what he says: "We evacuated everything." We didn't destroy it. We didn't line it up for inspection. We didn't turn it into the inspectors. We evacuated it to make sure it was not around when the inspectors showed up.*

"I will come to you tomorrow." *The al-Kindi company: This is a company that is well known to have been involved in prohibited weapons systems activity.*

The background information concerning the presented videotapes could be questioned: how these audiotapes were gathered, who the speakers and information gatherers were, what information was left out, and so on. Audiotaped exchanges could also be "staged" and manipulated with modern technology. The contextual information could be wrong or misleading, in which case most people were not in a position to judge. Translation could be an issue, since most of the audience did not speak Arabic. The words "we evacuated everything" referenced earlier might be retranslated as "we do not have anything."[14] However, such issues pertaining to the

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[14] See John Hartung, "Who Deceived Colin Powell?" *Foreign Policy Journal*, last modified August 6, 2015, https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2015/08/06/who-deceived-colin-powell/ (accessed May 30, 2022). The original audio file may be downloaded at https://americanrhetoric.com/speeches/wariniraq/colinpowellunsecuritycouncil.htm (accessed May 30, 2022). Translation issues have been identified by critics regarding another intercepted conversations on "forbidden ammo." According to a report about that conversations, Powell said that one soldier stated: "And we sent you a message yesterday to clean out all of the areas, the scrap areas, the abandoned areas. Make sure there is nothing there." But a critic stated that the words may simply be translated as: "And we sent you a message to inspect the scrap areas and the abandoned areas." Jonathan Schwarz, "Lie After Lie After Lie: What Colin Powell Knew Ten Years Ago Today and What He Said," *HuffPost*, last modified December 06, 2017, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/colin-powell-wmd-iraq-war_b_2624620?guccounter=1 (accessed May 30, 2022).

backstage processing never came to surface; they were "taken-as-shared" to be legitimate, presumably because of the authority and integrity that Powell had asserted earlier.

Viewed independently, without Powell's verbal and textual commentaries, what the exchange indicated was not unambiguous. Powell's elaborative comments gave each of these uncertain signs an immediate, clear meaning; each piece of information (a "sub-fact") was a small answer to the broader, unanswered idea of Iraq's WMD possession or capability (an "uncertain fact"). In addition to selecting information, skillful informational placement was important. Placing these pieces of information side by side, many suspicious signs are organized together—and some of them are co-present in a condensed timeframe and setting. In this brief exchange, we can already see "Modified vehicle" appearing *alongside* "the Al-Kindi company" and the phrases "We evacuated everything." "I'm worried" and "I will come to you tomorrow" do not explain what the officer was worried about or what was being planned for the next day. None robust on its own, these uncertain signs (sub-facts) constitute much more robust evidence when viewed together, in a gestalt context. Too many suspicious signs being co-present together—too much circumstantial evidence supporting a hypothetical idea—would seem too extraordinary to be coincidental; in this context, a hypothetical idea that brings forth a cohesive pattern would have better explanatory merits.

Besides informational content and placement, Powell's effective wordsmithing was catalytic in creating fitting ideas to the ambiguous information. Consider the contextualizing commentary offered by Powell: "This is a company [the al-Kindi company] that is *well known* to *have been involved in prohibited weapons systems activity.*"

None of the informational elements in this summative statement is technically false. This seemingly ordinary telling of a summative "fact," however, is full of empirical vagueness and caveats.

"Prohibited" is a vague identifier with many potential qualifying references. The asserted prohibitions imposed on Iraq had been numerous, and many were of trivial implications. As long as the specifics of what activities or things were kept very vague, the phrase of someone conducting or hiding "prohibited" things—in an aggregate sense—could be conceived to be applicable to the information.

The phrase "involved in" was another vague, broad, aggregate identifier. How was the al-Kindi company involved—research, intelligence, diplomacy, buying, engineering, repair, disposal, quality control?

Regardless of the extent and capacity of "involvement," the identifier could be applied to the company, and thus a linkage can be established between the company and Iraq's WMDs.

The phrase "having been" is another identifier. It is a time code that could be applied to a very distant past or a very recent one. Yet, using this broad code could suggest a potential for continuing and current connection, even if the actual information may point to an extremely distant past.

"Well known" is aggregate identifier for which information could serve as evidence. After all, the phrase never specifies anything about well known by whom and in which circle, by whose perspective, and how "well" is well.

This sentence is thus devoid of empirical clarity as *five* referentially vague identifiers are used to construct an idea. Yet, this very sentence creates a clear, coherent, gestalt impression of the al-Kindi company's *ideational* identity, and this ideational construct in turn helps to make sense of the ostensibly raw information the interlocutors in the video were trying to "make sure it [the objects related to al-Kindi] was not around when the inspectors showed up." In this manner, the broader assertion of Iraq possessing weapons of mass destruction thus gained a slice of empirical evidence.

Defectors' Accounts: Detailed Congruities

Beyond the aforementioned information, Powell presented materials that created an impression of factual *convergence*. More information was offered about this modified truck and its potential implications. Powell cited two "eyewitness accounts." The first defector, identified as an "Iraqi chemical engineer who supervised these facilities," had "biological weapons factories on wheels and on rails." While physical facilities could be inspected by the U.N., mobile facilities could conceivably escape a sudden inspection—an idea more fitting than asserting that Iraq's facilities were all physical, as noted the details in this account:

> Although Iraq's mobile production program began in the mid-1990s, U.N. inspectors at the time only had vague hints of such programs. Confirmation came later, in the year 2000. The source was an eyewitness, an Iraqi chemical engineer who supervised one of these facilities. **He actually was present during biological agent production runs. He was also at the site when an accident occurred in 1998**. Twelve technicians died from

exposure to biological agents. He reported that when UNSCOM was in country and inspecting, the biological weapons agent production always began on Thursdays at midnight because Iraq thought UNSCOM would not inspect on the Muslim Holy Day, **Thursday night through Friday**. He added that this was important because **the units could not be broken down in the middle of a production run, which had to be completed by Friday evening before the inspectors might arrive again**.

This account provided some vivid details of empirical events—such as the extraordinary timing of the window between "Thursday night through Friday." After Powell prefaced that this account had come from a defector, or multiple defectors if the account was to be made more credible (due to extraordinary account convergence and an appearance of rigor), he could simply reiterate the many details that this defector said, regardless of this person's credibility or identity, or the influence of incentives to the defector. Implicit in using his account is that the "intelligence community," as a group of experts, deemed this account to be sufficiently trustworthy for Powell to use, or that Powell used his own expertise to select this source to present to the public. In short, backstage manipulation was taken-as-shared to be nonexistent, and background factors of those defectors were judged to be irrelevant to the discussion. Powell further added: "His eyewitness account of these mobile production facilities has been corroborated by other sources." Three such sources were briefly identified with vague descriptors: one was "an Iraqi civil engineer in a position to know the details of the program"; one was simply a person "also in a position to know"; the last one was "an Iraqi major, who defected." When all these sources corroborated a cohesive account of such mobile research and production facilities, an impression of *detailed congruities* was constructed.

Furthermore, defectors' accounts—while rich in visualizing effects—are as hard to disprove as hard as they are to confirm. They are constituted by personal experiences. For an objective event like an earthquake, it can "probably" be disproven by other witnesses being in the same place. But if the subject pertains to a person's behavior—say, whether Person X has been abusive—having ten more people attesting to the positive character of Person X cannot technically "disprove" the horror story told by one eye witness, because the other ten people are not "there." And if the eye witness's account can be embellished by several other fabricated ones—perhaps by incentives and disincentives—the required effort to disprove the claims is even harder. In the case of Iraq, no matter how many

Fig. 15.1 Image display of an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) spraying simulated anthrax

interviewees might give disaffirming information, they could not directly entirely disprove the words of the few "defectors."

Adding to visualization, Powell also presented several "diagrammed" graphics[15]—essentially cartoon sketches based on defectors' accounts (not close-up photographs based on real objects). The pictures, with the heading "Mobile Production Facilities for Biological Agents," had called out boxes pointing to different parts of the alleged facilities, labeling those parts as a storage tank, mixing tank, active material tanks, water tank, filling machine, spray dryers, fermentation, and control panel.

Powell then went into length to augment the idea of Iraq's development of anthrax. Materials accompanying his statement included a black-and-white photo of a small plane (drone) flying in the air, assigned with the heading "Iraqi Test Flight Spraying Simulated Anthrax" (see Fig. 15.1):

[15] U. S. Department of State, "Biological Weapons," last modified February 5, 2003, https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/photos/2003/17314.htm (accessed May 30, 2022).

The Iraqi regime **has also developed ways** to [disperse] lethal biological agents, widely and discriminately into the water supply, into the air. For example, Iraq **had** a **program** to modify aerial fuel tanks for Mirage jets. This video of an Iraqi test flight obtained by UNSCOM **some years ago** shows an Iraqi F-1 Mirage jet aircraft. Note the spray coming from beneath the Mirage; **that is 2,000 liters of simulated anthrax that a jet is spraying**. In 1995, an Iraqi military officer, Mujahid Sali Abdul Latif (ph), **told** inspectors that Iraq intended the spray tanks to be mounted onto a MiG-21 that had been **converted into an unmanned aerial vehicle**, or a UAV. UAVs outfitted with spray tanks **constitute an ideal method** for launching a terrorist attack using biological weapons.

Grammatical manipulation was used to amass historical events and "facts"—which were empirically validated—to create congruity. One function of grammatical tenses is to specify time, but purposeful manipulation could also be used to hide and obscure a reader's sense of timing.[16] Technically, none of the information Powell stated was incorrect. "Has also developed" could indicate anything from the distant past to an unspecified recent or even the present timeframe. The evidence repeatedly provided about this one piece: "some years ago" was never specified; it could reasonably be interpreted as 5 to 25 years. Then, a defector's statement was provided in 1995. Powell could have said that the video was taken before 1991. And the defector might be referencing that Iraq had the intention to modify before the 1991 Gulf War, not an ongoing intention. But by *not* specifying time frames, it made the empirical statement "has also developed" supportable. Information dating back from decades ago could appear to be congruent with current "facts."[17]

Aside from a few people who knew the detailed contexts and history, such a congruence would look impressively extraordinary. Empirically, Iraq had developed liquid anthrax before the 1991 Gulf War, which had minimal application if it was sprayed, as anthrax was primarily effective through inhalation into the lungs. There was no evidence that Iraq had successfully developed a dried (powdered) form of anthrax, either before 1991 or after. The "simulated anthrax" indicated in the photo was merely

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[16] For details about grammatical manipulation shared by the Bush administration, see Gordon C. Chang and Hugh B. Mehan, "Why We Must Attack Iraq: Bush's Reasoning Practices and Argumentation System," *Discourse and Society* 19, no. 4 (July 2008), 468–72.

[17] Empirically, Iraq had developed liquid anthrax before the 1991 Gulf War, which had minimal application if it was sprayed, as anthrax was primarily effective through inhalation into the lungs. There was no evidence that Iraq had successfully developed a dried (powdered) form of anthrax, either before 1991 or after.

an image of *resemblance*, a means to imagine an idealized scenario. Furthermore, if there was never dried anthrax to begin with, the presence of UAVs barely had any significance. Any ambiguous signs of small drones (UAVs) would have been dismissed in terms of their threat. But given the ambiguous signs Powell created for CWs and BWs, partly using grammatical techniques, then presenting visualizable data of, and forging a connection between, ambiguous UAVs and CWs and BWs became significant.

Using Ambiguous Signs in Stepwise Inferencing

There was an art to leaving ambiguous signs as they were, without declaring a definitive meaning, but to still use them systematically in inferencing. Powell modeled a way in which such actions could be carried out. Continuing on the discussion of the subject of drones, Powell stated that intelligence agencies detected that "one of Iraq's newest UAVs in a test flight that went 500 kilometers nonstop on autopilot in the racetrack pattern depicted here." Meanwhile, Iraq declared that it only had a UAV with a range of only 80 km—above the 150 km range that the United Nations permitted. Powell embellished:

> The UAV was flown around and around and around in this circle and so that its 80-kilometer limit really was 500 kilometers, unrefueled and on autopilot.

The discrepancy between intelligence and Iraq's declaration constituted an ambiguous sign. Building on this ambiguous sign, *tentatively supposing* that had this capability, then Powell created a next-step possibility:

> Iraq **could** use these small UAVs which have a wingspan of only a few meters to **deliver biological agents to** its neighbors or, **if transported**, to other countries, including **the United States**.

Other ambiguous signs pertaining to BWs could hardly be connected to an attack on the U.S. soil. The cognitive distance is too high for a reader to bridge. Powell introduced several intermediary, bridging ideas, supplementing each of them with ambiguous information. Thus, the ambiguous sign of one small drone that could remain in the air for 500 km, and which does not need to be mass manufactured, could be of use. However, the distance between Baghdad and Washington, D.C. is a sizeable 9900 km. Therefore, Powell added the idea of the drone being "transported"—intended to be anywhere within 500 km
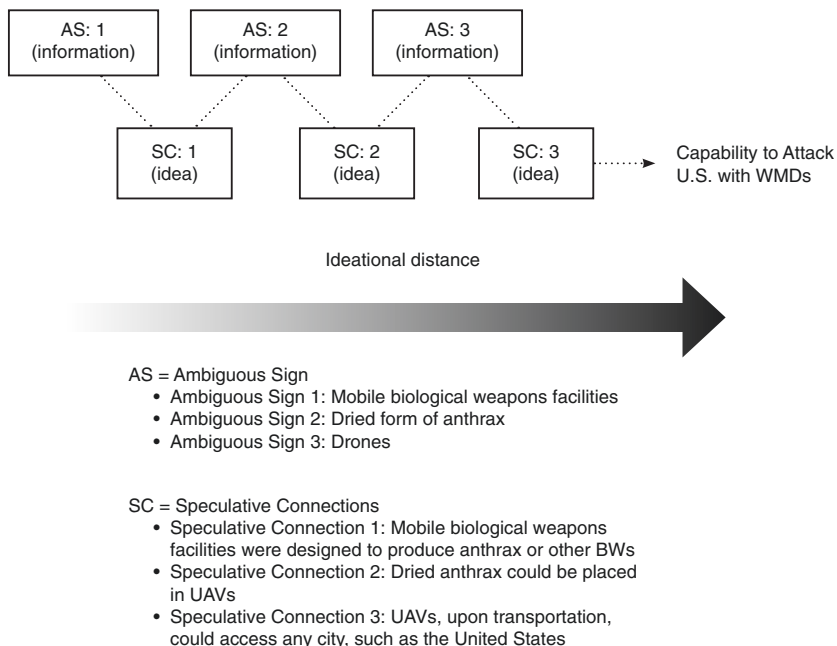
Fig. 15.2 Incremental idea extension through multiple ambiguous signs

radius of the U.S.[18] Here, Powell emphasized the small size ("have a wingspan of only a few meters") presumably because it is much more easily transported than a regular aircraft, and a small number of BWs could cause significant havoc.[19] A pathway of thought, with multiple bridging points as premises, could thus be constructed to cross a long distance. A threat that previously seemed to be located far away became an idea much closer to reality.

This pathway of thought cultivated by Powell had a basic format, as mapped out in Fig. 15.2. Multiple steps of interweaving ambiguous

[18] For reference purposes, the distance between Cuba and the United States exceeds 2400 km.

[19] Powell, holding up a small vial filled with whitish powder, described the significance of a small amount of anthrax: "Less than a teaspoon of dry anthrax, a little bit—about this amount. This is just about the amount of a teaspoon. Less than a teaspoonful of dry anthrax in an envelope shut down the United States Senate in the fall of 2001. This forced several hundred people to undergo emergency medical treatment and killed two postal workers just from an amount, just about this quantity that was inside of an envelope."

empirical signs and speculative connections (informed by ideational premises) could be built on each item. A conversation about an "evacuated truck" [AS1] could be connected to BWs through a defector's account of mobile BW production facility [AS2] by speculative connection by Powell (e.g., "What is their concern? Their concern is that it's something they should not have…"), and the specific mentioning of Al-Kindi was further speculatively connected to prohibited BWs (e.g., "The Al-Kindi company… is well known to have been involved in prohibited weapons systems activity"). For the production of BWs, Powell claimed, in one sentence, "Iraq's procurement efforts include: equipment that can filter and separate microorganisms and toxins involved in biological weapons [AS1]; equipment that can be used to concentrate the agent; growth media that can be used to continue producing anthrax and botulinum toxin [AS2]; sterilization equipment for laboratories [AS4]; glass-lined reactors and specialty pumps that can handle corrosive chemical weapons agents and precursors [AS5]; large amounts of thionyl chloride, a precursor for nerve and blister agents [AS6]; and other chemicals such as sodium sulfide, an important mustard agent precursor [AS7]." All of these items could well be multipurpose equipment, as Powell acknowledged; for example, a "specialty pump" made to handle corrosive chemicals could also be used to handle "corrosive chemical weapons agents." But it rested on Powell to make speculative connections that otherwise could not be made.

At the macro scale, there was more information on suspicious items connected to WMDs. The whole presentation covered more than just this chain and consists of modified trucks, BWs, and UAVs—but also conversations about "forbidden ammo" and "nerve gas," aluminum tubes of an extraordinary nature. The suspected aluminum tubes, for example, were "manufactured to a tolerance that far exceeds U.S. requirements for comparable rockets" and "an anodized coating on extremely smooth inner and outer surfaces." And then there were attempts to link Iraq with actual terrorist groups.

Hybrid Codification Processes: Imbricating Ideational Codification into Empirical Codification

The vast chain-complexes of ideas simultaneously operated on both empirical and ideational codifications. A "fact" derived from empirical data—estimated empirical possibility, a description of an unusual phenomenon—which could then be linked to one or two ideational mechanisms,
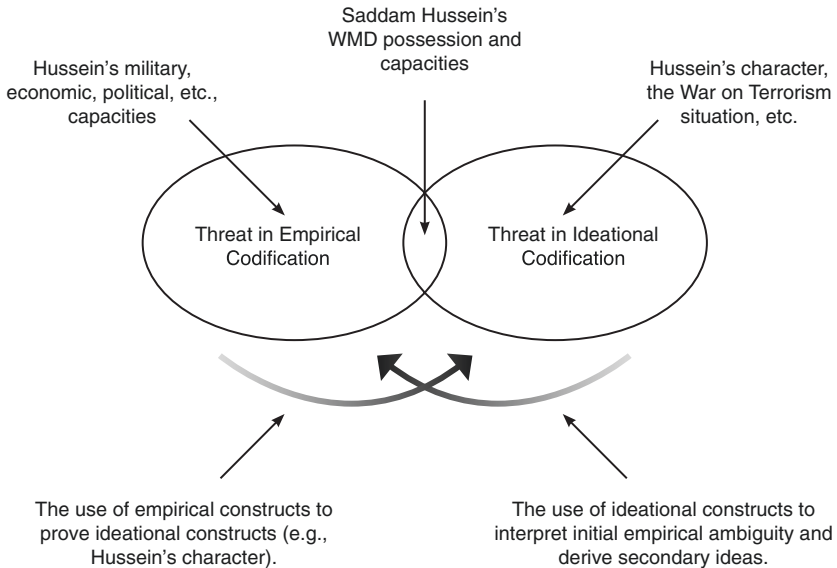
Fig. 15.3   Hybrid codification of Iraq's threat

which are then linked to two or other empirical "facts." The hybrid codification enabled a much further distance to be bridged.

The alternation between these two codifications could be seen in the last figure (Fig. 15.3), as "speculative connections" were often made with assumptions and ideas that are accepted to be valid, or at least intelligible. Not all speculative connections were ideational, but some of them—such as those involving intent and probability—subtly enabled speculative connections to be made. The primary resource enabling an ideational mode of codification was the War on Terrorism script.

Even from the previous example, we can see that, when looking at the ambiguous data, Powell uses what he saw from the intercepted conversation to support an ideational construct—for example, Iraq was hiding things. He also used ideational constructs to speculate on possibilities: that an attack on the U.S. was possible. But to increase the likelihood of such a scenario, Powell also presented a chained connection between Iraq and terrorist networks.

Displaying Nation-Terrorist Connections

The codification techniques to demonstrate an Iraq-WMDs relation are also used to demonstrate an Iraq-Terrorist connection. I have discussed Powell's general techniques extensively elsewhere. Generally, many extraordinary coincidental patterns and uncertain signs that were unlikely to occur naturally were presented. The information encompassed suspected terrorists meeting Hussein's officials, being harbored in Baghdad, or receiving medical treatment. A collaborative relationship between Iraq and Al-Qaeda thus stood as an extraordinarily fitting external cause. One example clearly illustrates how ideational codifications are imbricated into empirical sense-making.

> Some believe, **some claim these contacts do not amount to much**. They say Saddam Hussein's secular tyranny and Al Qaida's religious tyranny do not mix. I am not comforted by this thought. **Ambition and hatred are enough to bring Iraq and Al Qaida together**, enough so Al Qaida could learn how to build more sophisticated bombs and learn how to forge documents, and enough so that Al Qaida **could turn to Iraq for help** in acquiring expertise on weapons of mass destruction.[20]

Power conflicts and value differences between Al-Qaeda and Hussein were ignored by Powell; instead, the shared character of the enemy—that is, "ambition and hatred"—was said to be enough of a motivation to transcend their differences and to unite in common endeavors to build bombs, forge documents, and acquire WMDs. A case for Iraq's grave threat was produced—by Powell's skillful, integrative, and synergistic uses of both evidentiary and ideational modes of codification to construct ideas.

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[20] "U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell Addresses the U.N. Security Council," transcript, The White House, accessed March 15, 2020, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives. gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030205-1.html.

INTEGRATIVE ARGUMENTS DELIVERED
TO THE AMERICAN PUBLIC

It is worth noting that Powell's presentation to the U.N. Security Council—while somewhat incoherent—was significantly more systematic and detailed than Bush's presentation during his speeches to the American people from September 2003 to March 2004. The following quote succinctly represents how Bush would normally make his case to the American public:

> One of the greatest dangers we face is that weapons of mass destruction might be passed to terrorists, who would not hesitate to use those weapons. **Saddam Hussein has longstanding, direct and continuing ties to terrorist networks.** Senior members of Iraqi intelligence and al Qaeda **have met at least eight times** since the early 1990s. Iraq **has sent** bomb-making and document forgery experts to work with al Qaeda. Iraq **has also** provided al Qaeda with chemical and biological weapons training. **We also know** that Iraq **is harboring** a terrorist network, headed by a senior al Qaeda terrorist planner. The network runs a poison and explosive training center in northeast Iraq, and **many of its leaders are known to be in Baghdad.** The head of this network **traveled to Baghdad for medical treatment** and **stayed for months**. Nearly two dozen associates joined him there and have been **operating in Baghdad** for more than eight months.[21]

The aforementioned statements weaved many allegations together. In contrast to Powell's U.N. presentation, Bush did not usually publicly divulge the sources of his allegations; he merely mentioned them one after another as if they were a list of known facts. Powell at least specified, occasionally, select details of intelligence sources. However, the idea-making techniques were very similar to Powell's; the information provided was in reality based on questionable intelligence information, and many events (e.g., terrorists staying in Baghdad) were treated as solid evidence of Iraq-terrorist ties. The codification activities were very similar.

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[21] George W. Bush, "Remarks on the Iraqi Regime's Noncompliance with United Nations Resolutions 164–165," Roosevelt Room, The White House, *Weekly Compilations of Presidential Documents* 39, no. 6 (February 6, 2003), 164–65.

Encoding the Prisoner's Abuse Scandal

This chapter showcases how U.S. political figures encoded a scandalous situation to the American public. In April 2004, graphic images which included specific details of ritualized prisoner abuse committed by U.S. soldiers in Iraq were suddenly exposed in the mass media. The information contradicted the previously cohering imageries formed by the War on Terrorism script and threatened some of the script's core assumptions about U.S. righteousness. Republican and Democratic party politicians, who routinely vie with each other, formed different interpretations of the events. They carried out their contestations on public media by generating ideas that accomplished two objectives at the same time: (1) to reinforce and bolster the War on Terrorism script (partly by using old and new information to create affirmative streamlined patterns, and partly by speculations), and (2) to critique actors in the other party. These elaborative activities thus tempered the potential damage brought forth by the initially contradictory information. How these actors behaved tells us how competent they are at operating a mixture of both ideational and empirical codification.

Outbreak of the Abu Ghraib Scandal on CBS *60 Minutes II*

On April 28, 2004, CBS *60 Minutes II* hosted by Dan Rather aired an interview with Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt and other military officials. The program showed photos of Iraqi prisoners in various bizarre and

degrading conditions. The first photo was of a hooded figure standing on top of a rectangular object and wearing a black robe; his hands, which seemed to be attached with wires, were spread out in a position that resembled a scarecrow or a crucifixion. Thirteen more photos were shown. A few of them depicted nude Iraqi prisoners placed in a variety of positions, such as piled up on top of each other or standing by the wall, and with two U.S. soldiers—one male and one female—smiling and posing for these photos. Between comments made by Brigadier General Kimmitt and telephone conversations with military officials and reservists, Rather mentioned accounts of Abu Ghraib detainees being intimidated with dogs, badly beaten, instructed to strike each other, and even raped by a prison member of staff (a staff translator).[1] U.S. soldiers were reportedly observing and taking photographs of some of these activities.

According to Army Reserve Staff Sergeant Chip Frederick, who was being court-martialed, officials from military intelligence and the CIA, FBI, and other government agencies regularly visited the Abu Ghraib prison where he had been assisting the interrogators. Rather quoted from Frederick's letters and email messages at home, which stated:

> Military Intelligence has encouraged and told us 'Great job.' They usually don't allow others to watch them interrogate, but since they like the way I run the prison, they've made an exception. We help getting them to talk with the way we handle them. We've had **a very high rate with our style getting them to break.** They usually end up breaking within hours.

[1] Details of these allegations, as well as some not mentioned by Rather, are contained in an investigative report conducted by Major General Antonio Taguba and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) report. The Taguba report, dated April 1, 2004, was made publicly available in early May 2004. The ICRC, dated February 2004, was allegedly leaked to the *Wall Street Journal* on May 7, 2004. For a concise review, see Philip Zimbardo, "Abu Ghraib's Abuses and Tortures: Understanding and Personalizing Its Horrors," in *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (New York: Random House, 2007), 324–79. For original documents, see *Report of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on the Treatment by the Coalition Forces of Prisoners of War and Other Protected Persons by the Geneva Conventions in Iraq During Arrest, Internment and Interrogation* (Geneva, Switzerland: International Committee of the Red Cross, February 2004), *The Guardian*, accessed October 23, 2004, http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/ Guardian/documents/2004/05/11/ICRCreport.pdf; and *Article 15-6 Investigation of the 800*th *Military Police Brigade*, an internal army report conducted by Major General Antonio M. Taguba and submitted on February 26, 2004, CBS, accessed September 21, 2004, http://www.cbs.news.com/htdocs/pdf/tagubareport.pdf.

The information indicated that higher-ranking military officials intentionally supported and encouraged the abuse as a means of gathering intelligence. It seemed to squarely contradict the image of U.S. military as "liberators" of Iraq in the War on Terrorism. Dan Rather, as well as other journalists, explicitly addressed such a tension.

Early Codification by the Bush Administration

The Bush administration's account differed from those of politicians from both the Republican and Democratic parties. But all their accounts had one thing in common: upon codification, the War on Terrorism script was not contradicted by the Abu Ghraib scandal. The U.S. Army was depicted as the initiator of condemnation and as the leading prosecutor of unjust events; U.S. responses served as "evidence" that only reinforced premises in the War on Terrorism script.

This response by President Bush to a reporter indicates the general characterization of the initially ambiguous situation:

> First, people in Iraq must understand that I view **those practices as abhorrent**. They must also understand that what **took place in that prison does not represent America** that I know. The America I know is a **compassionate country** that believes in freedom. The America I know cares about every individual. The America I know has sent troops into Iraq to promote freedom—**good, honorable citizens** that are helping the Iraqis every day. It's also important for the people of Iraq to know that in a democracy, everything is not perfect, that **mistakes are made. But in a democracy, as well, those mistakes will be investigated and people will be brought to justice. We're an open society. We're a society that is willing to investigate, fully investigate in this case, what took place in that prison. That stands in stark contrast to life under Saddam Hussein. His trained torturers were never brought to justice under his regime. There were no investigations about mistreatment of people. There will be investigations. People will be brought to justice.**[2]

Applying Kenneth Burke's dramatistic pentad again, Bush generally characterized the abusive *acts* in the photos as "abhorrent," disgusting, and

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[2] George W. Bush, "Interview with Alhurra Television," interview taped at the Map Room, the White House for later broadcast, *Weekly Compilations of Presidential Documents* 40, no. 19 (May 5, 2004): 786–89.

unrepresentative of America; the *scene* where the acts occurred was restricted to the site of the Abu Ghraib prison; the *agents* were a "few people" who do not "reflect the nature of the American people"; the *agency* was "mistakes" and imperfections within democracy; the *purpose* of those acts was not explained and it was a topic needing to be investigated.

Bush himself not only put forth a depiction of U.S. response, but personally modeled and represented it, as America's spokesperson. The *acts* enacted by individual Americans were a sensation of "deep disgust"—an automated, bodily reaction preceding reflective thought; at the collective level, the United States responded by pursuing immediate full investigations into these events. These activities took place in the *scene* of American democratic society, which implies a larger setting of the War on Terrorism given the contrast Bush made with Saddam Hussein's regime. The *agents* of these activities were Americans as individuals and as members of a nation. The *agency* was legal and investigative, and the prosecution mechanisms were designed to find truth and justice. The *purpose* to conduct extensive investigations was simply the compassionate American desire to serve justice and democracy.[3]

An even more masterful repairer of the War on Terrorism idea system was Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. The following was his opening statement at a congressional hearing on May 7, 2004. It was a widely reported hearing, which addressed the prisoner abuse scandal.

> However terrible the setback, this is also an occasion to **demonstrate to the world the difference between those who believe in democracy and in human rights, and those who believe in rule by terrorist code**. We value human life. **We believe in individual freedom and in the rule of law. For those beliefs, we send men and women of the armed forces abroad to protect that right for our own people and to give others who aren't Americans the hope of a future of freedom.** Part of that mission, part of what we believe in, is making sure that when wrongdoings or scandal do occur, that they're **not covered up**, but they're **exposed**, they're **investigated**, and the guilty are **brought to justice.** Mr. Chairman, I know you join me today in saying to the world, judge us by our actions, **watch how Americans, watch how a democracy deals with the wrongdoing and with scandal and the pain of acknowledging and correcting our own**

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[3] For more details, see Gordon C. Chang, "The Politics of Representation and the Social Order: In the War on Terror," (PhD diss., University of California San Diego, 2008), 139–157, available for download at eScholarship: https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4xt6g5v1.

mistakes and our own weaknesses. And then, after they have seen America in action, then ask **those who teach resentment and hatred** of America if our behavior doesn't give a lie to the falsehood and the slander they speak about our people and about our way of life. Ask them if the resolve of Americans in crisis and difficulty, and, **yes, in the heartbreak of acknowledging the evil in our midst**, doesn't have meaning far beyond their hatred. Above all, ask them if the **willingness of Americans** to **acknowledge their own failures before humanity** doesn't **light the world** as surely as the **great ideas and beliefs that made this nation a beacon of hope and liberty for all who strive to be free**…We say to the world, we will **strive to do our best, as imperfect as it may be.**[4]

In this statement, American investigation was evidence to prove its moral superiority over the evil terrorists "to the world." The investigations proved that "those who believe in democracy and in human rights" (*agents*) uncover, expose, investigate, and bring the "evil in our midst" to justice (*acts*) in the *scene* of the War on Terrorism. It also proved that Americans had a functioning legal system (*agency*), a character to "strive to do our best" amidst imperfections and the "willingness of Americans to acknowledge their own failures before humanity" (*purpose*). In summary, Rumsfeld encoded the prisoner abuse events in light of the image of U.S. responses; the scandal was used to affirm, if not to prove, the moral superiority of individual Americans and exceptionalism of the nation.

At this stage, detailed empirical codification was not being conducted, as further investigations were pending. But the very act of investigation itself was a form of information used to support ideational propositions pertaining to "good" actors in the War on Terrorism script. When questioned by Congresswoman Ellen Tauscher (Democrat-California) in the May 7 hearing on whether early internal reports about prisoner abuses were taken seriously, Rumsfeld responded:

Of course they're [the reports were] taken seriously. They're taken seriously. **There are 18,000 criminal investigations opened a year in the Department of Defense. You would not open them if you did not take them seriously.** They are the responsibility of the commands.[5]

[4] "Rumsfeld Testifies Before Armed Services Committee," *The Washington Post*, accessed November 28, 2004, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A8575-2004 May7.html.

[5] "Rumsfeld Testifies Before Armed Services Committee," *The Washington Post*.

The secretary's deductive reasoning goes: if the U.S. military (or the Bush administration) indeed do not reflect a democracy- or justice-loving country, then they could not be so interested in conducting so many investigations toward the goal of prosecution. The very ways U.S. responded to the events therefore proved the democratic, compassionate, and just *agency* that America possesses *all along*. The *act* of correcting mistakes evidenced that the U.S. was indeed helping to spread freedom, justice, and democracy in Iraq.

The use of the aggregated number as evidencing data is worthy of note. The fact that there were 18,000 criminal investigations open every year could also indicate an alarming degree of moral corruption in the U.S. military, bringing into question the good and exceptional nature of U.S. soldiers and military officials. But in this particular instance when favorable information was scarce, this information was used to construct a fitting image of the U.S. military. The same "fact" (information) thus affirmed one pattern rather than another.

In sum, Rumsfeld exercised certain methods. First, to minimize attention to and elicitation of current information, thus rendering the epistemic situation maximally ambiguous (e.g., the role of "investigations" to ascertain the empirical status of U.S. conduct, as represented by its military institution). Second, to introduce many forms of *other* information (e.g., positive examples of U.S. conduct) in order to create "streamlined" patterns in accord with the War on Terrorism script.

With contradictions minimized by the methods exemplified by Bush and Rumsfeld, U.S. congressional politicians created differing speculative explanations of the events. These speculations fell within a parameter, forming an *orbit of potential explanations*. Even though they did not resolve the questions at hand, they all served some protective functions to the War on Terrorism script by creating plausible, competitive theories.

VARIED CODIFICATION BY REPUBLICANS

Every Republican representative showing up on TV programs reinforced Bush and Rumsfeld's depictions surrounding the Abu Ghraib events, while adding elaborate articulations and vivid descriptions on their own. Four central points were being reinforced:

(1) Most U.S. military soldiers sent to Iraq were fine and honorable individuals and were not associated with the *act en masse*;

(2) The *purpose* and motivation behind the *acts*—while remaining ambiguous—were unacceptable and were against American cultural upbringing;

(3) The *agency* or instruments that gave rise to the acts were ambiguous and were to be rigorously investigated;

(4) Investigation and legal procedures were mechanisms that symbolize democracy, justice, and freedom; they were mechanisms to deal with lasting ambiguities.

In one of the TV interview opportunities,[6] the Chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee John Warner (Republican-Virginia) reiterated that the *agency* and *purpose* behind the perpetrators of the *acts* in Abu Ghraib prison were ambiguous—saying that there were "no solid facts." Then, he resorted to evoking certain known knowledge—known information, or known premises to make sense of the scandal. First, the detainees were "held for reasons" related to opposing those forces who "bring freedom in Iraq." Second, obtaining information by "means of cruelty" was "not a part of [U.S.] military history." Third, the U.S. military was governed by discipline and professionalism, hence the revelation prompted "apology" and "total condemnation." Fourth, the U.S. soldiers wanted to propel "the cause of freedom," joining the military to fight the enemy for that motivation. Fifth, U.S. soldiers, representative of all children raised in the American nation, were all taught not to conduct such behaviors "at home" and in "schools." Elsewhere in his interview, Warner described that "99.9 percent" of the soldiers were courageous and good. [7] By deduction, the president should be commended for being "the first to step in and apologize."

From Warner's aggregate figure of "99.9 percent," one could deduce the "fact" the abusive behavior only constituted 0.1 percent (100 minus 99.9 percent) of all soldiers. Another Republican colleague reinforced his idea by citing two other aggregate numbers.

REPRESENTATIVE DUNCAN HUNTER (Republican-California): And I have seen that same Army lady now over and over and over again in those pictures. And the **American people need to remember just two numbers**,

[6] "Rumsfeld Called to Account," *Online NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, PBS, accessed September 21, 2004, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/military/jan-june04/hearing_5-7.html.

[7] SENATOR WARNER: "I'm talking about **99.9 percent** of the men and women of the armed forces who are valiantly and courageously carrying out their missions throughout the world and here at home." "Rumsfeld Called to Account," *Online NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*.

Joe. **One is 135,000,** because that's **the number of soldiers** who are in that theater **doing a great job**. And **the other is six,** because it's precisely six so far **who have been charged under Article 32 of the UCMJ for criminal activity.**[8]

Like Warner, Hunter evoked this highly certain piece of information that indicated a pattern—against the relatively uncertain, purportedly insufficient empirical information about the scandalous situation.

Tentative Idea One: Technical, Systemic Failure to Blame

Among Republicans, two tentative explanations were offered to explain the incident. The first group acknowledged that there was broad-scale "system failure" and problems. Senator Lindsey Graham (Republican-South Carolina) belonged to the latter type, acknowledging that there were failures in the "system." Here are two of his quotes:

(1) I think that probably the core issue here is we just don't want a bunch of privates and sergeants to be the **scapegoats** here. And I don't want any political person to be the **scapegoat**. I think we are dealing with **system failures**. When you say this is a few bad apples, in terms of the values that we represent, these are a few bad apples. In terms of the million—thousands of people serving in Iraq, these are a few bad apples. But I think it's clear to me that we had **system failure**.…[9]

(2) One thing I found from these photos, Bob, this is not hazing, these are felony-type offenses. The abuse is real, it's serious, and the idea that a few rogue MPs directed all this, I think, is gonna be **disproved by the photographs**. 'Cause when you look at these photographs, you see **military intelligence analysts**, maybe interrogators, present at the abuse situations, and it's—present during the abuse sessions. So I've never believed this was just a few rogue MPs, **but I'm not willing to indict everybody in the system until I have more evidence.**[10]

[8] *Scarborough Country*, MSNBC, accessed December 3, 2004, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4961237.

[9] *Meet the Press*, NBC, accessed September 21, 2004, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4938258/.

[10] *Face the Nation*, CBS News, accessed September 21, 2004, http://www.cbsnews.com/htdocs/pdf/face_051604.pdf.

Graham read into the clues of the photographs, seeing the presence of military intelligence personnel. From this information, he suggested a tentative, fitting idea—the presence of "system failure" in the U.S. military. This idea tacitly noted that the U.S. military system might serve as an *agency* for the Abu Ghraib events, a point of potential tension with the War on Terrorism script. However, he also subtly deflected such a tension. The deployment of the "system failure" metaphor was consistent with the meanings suggested that Abu Ghraib events probably took place because an otherwise good system failed; *if the system had not failed, then Abu Ghraib events would not have happened*. He further speculated the reason:

> SENATOR GRAHAM: And what will we learn from this prison abuse scandal? Number one, we **didn't have enough people in place**, they were **poorly trained** and it just failed. **That prison failed**. We need to get to the bottom of it to make sure we don't let a military unit ever get out of that cont—ou—so out of control again, and we show the world that we're different, that we lead by example, that we walk the walk, **we're the good guys**.[11]

In this quote, Graham specified some of the system failures as being a result of staff shortages ("didn't have enough people in place") and lack of training (people were "poorly trained"). The statement implied technical failure and not other types of problems (e.g., moral behavior of the leadership). And by modeling an interest to correct the system, he created a piece of information that fitted the idea that "we [Americans] are the good guys."

Tentative Idea Two: A Few Bad Soldiers to Blame

The second group of Republican politicians, seeing the same photos, insisted that only a few individuals committed the acts, as a result of their own character flaws. They strongly rejected the characterization that the U.S. military system might be an *agency* contributing to the abusive acts in Abu Ghraib. Consider the following two exchanges:

HOST: But you're a military man. Do you believe that national reservists would go to Baghdad with hoods or dog leashes and actually undertake that kind of activity without it being devised by someone higher up?

[11] *Face the Nation*, CBS News, accessed September 21, 2004.

SECRETARY POWELL: **I wouldn't have believed that any American soldiers would have done any such thing**, either on their own volition or **even if someone higher up had told them**. **I'm not aware of anybody higher up telling them.** But that's why **Secretary Rumsfeld has commissioned all of these inquiries to get to the bottom of it.** What these **individuals** did was wrong, was **against rules and regulations.** It was against anything they should have learned in their **home,** in their **community**, in their **upbringing**.[12]

Secretary Powell denied the theory that there were instructions from higher up which contributed to the events. Powell—being a retired four-star general and a current Secretary of State—lent his epistemic authority as an insider to vet for this idea: "I'm not aware of anybody higher up telling them." Powell also added a set of information that comes from his ostensibly personal knowledge, testifying what he knew of the general characters of the American soldiers—they should have been, and usually were, strong enough and good enough to resist commands from higher up. He used the information that "Rumsfeld has commissioned … inquiries" to evidence the integrity of the system and of higher-up officials. In the context of these coded "facts," a normal pattern was established, and the few "individuals" are seen as exceptional to the normal patterns of the American institution.

Similar efforts to defend the system—the U.S. military system and military policy in particular—were represented in public statements by Senator John Cornyn (Republican-Texas), who characterized the violators lacking in discipline and training that were mysteriously missing: "This was a **handful** of American troops **run amok** and **not acting pursuant to any policy** that we heard about." [13] Cornyn did acknowledge some technical deficiencies in the military system as possible *agency*—but those

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[12] *Meet the Press*, NBC, accessed November 28, 2004, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4992558.

[13] *Hardball with Chris Matthews,* NBC, accessed December 4, 2004, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4945190/.

deficiencies were strictly technical, and not intentional. Cornyn's theory emphasized the perpetrators' own decisions and misbehavior ("acting on their own" and "run amok") as the primary agency for the Abu Ghraib events. The military system and military policy as a whole were an *agency* to prevent the abusive acts in Abu Ghraib; the Abu Ghraib events occurred because individual soldiers broke with established policy.

Varied Codification by Democrats

The Democrats, like their Republican counterparts, also represented the Abu Ghraib events and the U.S. response within the War on Terrorism script parameters. Based on the information available, Senator John Edwards (Democrat-North Carolina), who ran for presidential primary earlier in the year of 2004, characterized U.S. troops as consisting of "**thousands and thousands of men and women who put their lives on the line in Iraq and who are good, able, brave people**," and that the incident "is also damaging to them." As far as critiques go, he said: "It's disturbing that **our senior military leadership**…is **not stronger and more on top of this** than at least it appears right now they are."[14]

In many respects, Edwards' codification was almost identical to many of the Republicans.' The main discernable difference was Edwards' explicit emphasis on the "senior military leadership" as a probable mechanism contributing to the abusive acts. However, these leaders were not intentional *agents* performing the acts. By technical neglect—by senior military leaders "not stronger and more on top of this"—the *agency* that allowed the Abu Ghraib events to occur was created. Edwards thus indirectly agreed with the assumption that a stronger and more proactive leadership would have prevented the acts. He faulted the senior military leadership for not implementing the War on Terrorism project more properly and effectively than it could.

Edwards also evoked a snippet of information—the "thousands and thousands" of highly honorable military members in Iraq, which was an aggregate depiction common to an ideational mode of codification. Along the same lines, several renowned Democratic Party members also affirmed this information, depicting the U.S. soldiers as unambiguously good and

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[14] "Interview with Dan Senor; Interview with Seymour Hersh," *CNN Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer,* CNN, accessed December 3, 2004, http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSC RIPTS/0405/02/le.00.html.

honorable. Once this fact was established, they went one step further, depicting such soldiers as the *victims* of the scandal:

> (1) SENATOR CARL LEVIN (Democrat-Michigan): I agree, by the way, with everybody that **99.9 percent of our troops are doing the right thing**. What these actions have done, this **leadership failure** has done, is **to stain the honor and the reputation of honorable men and women in the military** and that's one of the real tragedies, it seems to me....[15]
>
> (2) SENATOR DIANE FEINSTEIN (Democrat -California): Well, my reaction was disgust. There's no other way to put it. I think the actions by these people, military people, really disadvantaged **all the valiant military we have all over the world who are doing fine jobs.**[16]
>
> (3) SENATOR JOSEPHE LIEBERMAN (Democrat -Connecticut): It's hard to tell. This is a very serious allegation that Sy Hersh is making. It must, like everything else about the prison abuse scandal, be **investigated**, and the **search of truth** should take us wherever it leads. That's the only way we're going to **restore the honor of the United States and the honor of the 99.9 percent of American military who live by the law**.[17]

The aggregate number "99.9 percent" was repeatedly stated, as well as the descriptive words associated with "honor." The U.S. soldiers were described as "doing the right thing" and "doing fine jobs." They were portrayed as victims in the Abu Ghraib scandal (and/or by the military leadership failure)—not perpetrators. The perpetrators might be, per Lieberman's suggestion, the people who dishonored the soldiers given the information available thus far; Lieberman's critique of Seymour Hersh indirectly conveyed what he saw as the appropriate parameter for the discourse.

Seymour Hersh, a renowned journalist who wrote a public commentary critical of the higher-up officials,[18] argued that evidence provided by a preliminary, internal document known as *The Taguba Report*:[19]

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[15] *Meet the Press*, NBC, accessed September 21, 2004, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4938258/.

[16] *Hardball with Chris Matthews,* NBC, accessed December 3, 2004, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4969709/.

[17] "Interview with Seymour Hersh," *CNN Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer*, CNN, accessed December 3, 2004, http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0405/16/le.00.html.

[18] Seymour M. Hersh, "Torture at Abu Ghraib: American soldiers brutalized Iraqis. How Far Up Does the Responsibility Go?," *The New Yorker,* last modified April 30, 2004, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/05/10/torture-at-abu-ghraib.

[19] *Article 15-6 Investigation of the 800*th *Military Police Brigade*, an internal army report conducted by Major General Antonio M. Taguba and submitted on February 26, 2004, FAS, https://fas.org/irp/agency/dod/taguba.pdf (accessed May 30, 2022).

amounts to an unsparing study of collective wrongdoing and the failure of Army leadership at **the highest levels**. The picture he [Major General Antonio Taguba] drew of Abu Ghraib was one in which **Army regulations** and the **Geneva Conventions** were **routinely violated**, and in which much of the day-to-day management of the prisoners was delegated to Army military-intelligence units and civilian contract employees. Interrogating prisoners and getting intelligence, including by **intimidation** and **torture**, was **the priority**.

Based on the information provided in the document, Hersh made a reasonable, justifiable interpretation, without significant leaps and added speculation. Lieberman's critique of him was the interpretive choice Hersh made—in that particular moment, given the available information, he *chose* to make a "serious allegation" dishonoring the U.S. and its military (and in the process *chose* not to encode the information at hand in the context of the positive "information" associated with the American nation). Highlighting empirical ambiguity (that "the search of truth" is pending) underscores the subjectivity in one's sense-making. Making this interpretive choice—one that linked the acts to the strategic intention by military and intelligence personnel—and articulating it publicly was beyond the parameter of acceptance as deemed by Lieberman. And it was beyond the parameter of acceptance because it violated the core premises of the War on Terrorism script too heavily.

To the extent that Democrats were willing to critique something, it would be from angles that did not challenge the "goodness" (as in character goodness) of the American institution, including the military or intelligence institutions. The Democrats instead sought to imply that the Republican Party was ineffective in delivering such goodness.

Tentative Idea One: Critiquing Anonymous Authorities and Administrative Incompetence

Democrats were generally more explicit in recognizing that the *acts* of prisoner abuse probably went beyond the *scene* of Abu Ghraib, that these disgusting behaviors were part of a systemic effort to obtain intelligence (*purpose*), and that *some* officers in military leadership positions probably gave the order to conduct such *acts*—or at least they were professionally responsible for the administrative climate in which the Abu Ghraib events occur.

Consider the following quotes:

(1) SENATOR LEVIN: According to the testimony in the **Taguba report**, and even the photographs that reinforce that to indicate some really **strong evidence** that this was an **organized effort to extract information** from the people who were being detained, to get information from them by using MPs to mistreat them in the way that they were mistreated, to **soften them up**. In the words of one of the MPs in the **Taguba** report, this is **more than MPs misbehaving** and conducting themselves in the despicable ways that they conducted themselves. This is, it seems to me, quite clear part of a **pattern, an effort, to obtain and extract** information for the **intelligence folks**. And **they're the ones**, if in fact this is true, that have got to **be held accountable**.[20]

(2) SENATOR FEINSTEIN: Well, I think this: This apparently, this degrading terrible humiliating treatment **went on in more than one place**. And I think that what's clear to me is that there was **not a strong chain of command**. And the **Geneva Convention was winked at**. And that **somebody gave the order** that prisoners had to be softened up and **someone came [up] this idea** of doing it this way. **Now, who that was, I have no way of knowing.** But, you know, we have some problems in other places, as well. The important thing, and I think something we should know, we were just able to obtain the ICRC, the **International Red Cross report**, which I believe was finished in February and sent in to the military. And it would seem to me that **very strong action should have been taken at that time based on that report.** And that's something that **we have to look into**, because the report documents some of the behavior. I spent the afternoon reading General **Taguba's full report**, plus what are called the annexes of that report. And I think **he's really to be commended.** He did **a tremendous job of investigation. So all the dots are there. He connected them**. And I think the next thing is for the powers that be, in the military, in the CIA, to take a good look at this and take the necessary action, **clean it up**, prevent it from ever happening again, **provide the supervision, the command structure,** that's necessary to do that.…[21]

Carl Levin explicitly identified "intelligence folks" as part of the *agents*; the *purpose* of the acts was to "soften prisoners" and to extract information. In other words, Levin explicitly identified a select group of people higher up in the chain of command as possible *agents* behind the *acts* of

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[20] "Rumsfeld Called to Account," *Online NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*.

[21] *Hardball with Chris Matthews,* NBC, accessed December 3, 2004, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4969709/.

abuse. Even though he saw "strong evidence" that supported his theory, he did not hold that the evidence was strong enough for a definite conclusion. Levin merely stated that "if in fact this is true" (i.e., if the intelligence agencies made an organized effort to abuse prisoners in order to obtain information), then they should be held accountable.[22]

Similarly, Diane Feinstein interpreted from the information that some unknown, superior military authority "came up with the idea" and "gave the order" to soften up the prisoners in such a terrible manner. She further depicted that the policy environment—in which "there was not a strong chain of command" and "the Geneva Convention was winked at"—gave rise to the Abu Ghraib events. Moreover, she also cited the International Red Cross report as an informational source, which reported problems associated with the military administration and possibly with individual military administrators—affirming the idea of official negligence. However, Feinstein also indicated that she did not know the specifics regarding these problematic issues. According to her theory, the key to preventing future occurrence was through effective investigations, a proper "command structure," and appropriate supervision. By stating that these actions should be put in place by "the powers that be" in the military and the CIA, Feinstein's explanation assumed the fundamental problems to be fixed did not correspond to the characters of CIA and military leaders; the problems lay in their administrative competence—that they did not take "very strong action" upon receiving the International Red Cross report. She erected General Taguba as a model agent, since he conducted thorough investigations and connected the dots.

Tentative Idea Two: The Fault of Secretary Rumsfeld

Several prominent Democrats explicitly called for Secretary Rumsfeld's removal, linking him to the cause of Abu Ghraib events. These figures include 2004 Presidential Candidate John Kerry, 2004 Vice-Presidential Candidate John Edwards, Senator Joseph Biden (D-Delaware), 2004 Presidential Primary Candidate and Retired General Wesley Clark, and Minority House Leader Nancy Pelosi. Two lines of argument were

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[22] However, we should keep in mind that Levin placed at least an equal, if not heavier, emphasis on agency rather than on agents. While the *agents* were anonymous, Levin presented the *agency* problems related to "a lack of accountability up the chain." *Face the Nation,* CBS News, accessed September 21, 2004.

repeatedly raised. One line critiqued Rumsfeld's leadership and bureau-cratic incompetence—such as the dismissal of the Geneva Convention and the dismissal of investigative reports issued by IRCR and other entities—which led to the unnecessary loss of lives and honor of good American soldiers. Senator Tom Harkin (Democrat-Iowa) used the information of Rumsfeld having "pooh-poohed the Geneva Convention" as a cause of the event. [23] Representative Charles Rangel (Democrat-New York) used the information that Rumsfeld "didn't tell" the Congress and the presi-dent of the ICRC's report as an evidential indicator of a deliberate "cover-up."[24]

Based on such information, Minority House Leader Nancy Pelosi actu-ally called for the resignation of Donald Rumsfeld *and* the replacement of the president. In her opinion, both Bush and Rumsfeld should be removed because their faulty leadership had created "the lack of preparation, the lack of equipment, the lack of intelligence, the lack of knowledge" among U.S. armed forces, a condition which harmed the American soldiers who were risking their lives in Iraq. [25] She stated in a TV interview that she made the resignation calls in order to protect the U.S. troops, whose lives were endangered and whose honorable reputation were "tainted" by the leadership of the Bush administration.

Senator Harkin also iterated the need to send a correct signal. He stated that Rumsfeld should resign "for the **morale of our troops**. I think if all we're going to do is go after a few of the lower ranking people that were there, and not go after the ones up the chain of command, I think it's going to **send the wrong signal** to our troops out there that the higher up you go, the easier it is to get off." [26] A voluntary resignation by Rumsfeld would help to maintain the "morale of the troops" as well as maintaining the "moral high ground" of America.[27] General Wesley Clark, another presidential candidate in the Democratic primary, stated Rumsfeld should resign because the action would remedy the U.S. image in the

[23] "Analysis of Donald Rumsfeld's Congressional Testimony," *Larry King Live*, CNN, accessed December 3, 2004, http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0405/07/lkl.00.html.

[24] "Analysis of Donald Rumsfeld's Congressional Testimony," *Larry King Live*.

[25] *Meet the Press*, NBC, accessed December 6, 2004, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5086094/.

[26] "Analysis of Donald Rumsfeld's Congressional Testimony," *Larry King Live*.

[27] "Analysis of Donald Rumsfeld's Congressional Testimony," *Larry King Live*.

Arab world as well as promoting democracy in Iraq and promoting U.S. views "of the right way to govern around the world."

When asked for why he would support Rumsfeld's removal, Senator Joseph Biden (Democrat-Delaware) dramatically stated:

> Look, Bob, this is a sad moment. I mean, you know, this is—I—**I don't care about Rumsfeld and Myers.** This administration seems to have lost the **clarity**, its voice. I mean, what we need is the kind of **moral clarity** that occurred when the president stood on top of that rubble with the bullhorn and communicated to the American people he understood their feelings, he knew what they were about and he was determined to change it. Look, what—thi—this has **jeopardized our troops.** It's **jeopardized our mission.** The rationale for us going in now has been we're going to restore civil rights and human rights to the people who are in Iraq. What does this say about—what does this **communicate to those millions of people in the Arab world and in Iraq who are looking for us to provide the moral clarity** for their ascension into some kind of democratic position? I mean, it—it—I—this is **so much bigger than Rumsfeld and Myers**.[28]

This quote shows Biden's rationale: Rumsfeld should be removed because it was the way to maintain the moral clarity that Bush had established in the rubble of New York City after 9/11. The call for removal is not due to personal failure but rather institutional morale, image, and effectiveness. The resignation from a senior official would produce positive evidence about U.S. democratic character for the public in Iraq and the Arab world.

Policing the War on Terrorism Script Parameters

Figure 16.1 maps out the four tentative theories, which constitute a space of speculations that fall within a parameter of acceptable contradictions.

They were similar enough not to contradict the War on Terrorism script, yet different enough to suggest different solutions—with partisan, political implications. The first two theories proffered by Republicans did not implicate higher-up military officials and the high-ranking administrative officials, unlike the latter two theories proffered by the Democrats. Democrats, even when they suggested official resignations as solutions, tried to make their case aligned with the War on Terrorism script.

[28] *Face the Nation*, CBS News, accessed December 6, 2004, http://www.cbsnews.com/htdocs/pdf/face_050904.pdf.
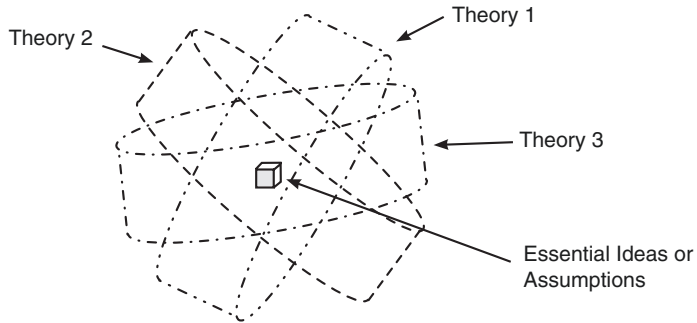
Core Propositions:
- American institutions are fundamentally good.
- Personal characters of the Bush Administration are fundamentally good.

Theory 1: Systematic failure and the stressful situation were to blame.
Theory 2: A few bad apples in the military were to blame.
Theory 3: Administrative competence and select authorities were to blame.
Theory 4: Rumsfeld was specifically the one to blame.

Fig. 16.1 An orbit with four potential explanations operating within parameters of acceptable contradictions (regarding the Abu Ghraib incident)

Republicans—with the participation of some Democrats—occasionally tried to suggest that certain voices might be exceeding the appropriate parameters. The critique of journalist Seymour Hersh by Democratic Senator Joseph Lieberman was one example. There are two other examples of political statements that illustrated the contour of acceptable and unacceptable ideas. One example surrounds the speech-acts of Senator Edward Kennedy (Democrat-Massachusetts).

HOST: Duncan, let me begin with you. Of course, you know Ted Kennedy [Edward Moore "Ted" Kennedy] came out yesterday and he compared the American troops that were operating this prison to those that ran Saddam Hussein's torture chambers.[29] Do you believe

[29] According to one news report's description: "Speaking in the Senate on May 10, Kennedy had this to say about the Abu Ghraib prison scandal: "On March 19, 2004, President Bush asked, 'Who would prefer that Saddam's torture chambers still be open?' Shamefully, we now learn that Saddam's torture chambers reopened under new management—US management." Jeff Jacoby, "Ted Kennedy's Anti-American Slander," *The Boston Globe*, accessed September 4, 2008, http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2004/05/25/ted_kennedys_anti_american_slander/.

REPRESENTATIVE
HUNTER
(Republican-California):

today's pictures, today's events coming out of Iraq actually undercut his theory a great deal? I think the American people are really upset about this **bashing of America and America's military** which has taken place. And I think Teddy Kennedy has been right in the center of that… **And those 135,000 people** [i.e., U.S. troops in Iraq] **who are doing such a great job need to have some focus on them.** And so I say to my senator friends, **let's get off this thing**. We have compartmentalized it. You have got **six Army investigations** on it. Those people are going to be **the most questioned, most interrogated people in history and most prosecuted**. **Let's go to the 135,000 who are in combat right now and help them.**[30]

Hunter was actively policing the War on Terrorism script parameters. The anchor paraphrased a Democrat's comment that seemed to juxtapose the U.S. and Iraqi torture chambers—thus raising questions regarding the U.S. righteousness in the War on Iraq. That paraphrased statement itself suggested the idea based on ideational codification. In return, Hunter depicted the comment as "bashing of America and America's military." He further urged that senators should stop public critiques of the Bush administration officials on the issue of Abu Ghraib and start to help the "135,000 who are in combat right now."

Aggregate depictions of information were used to build visualized images (coded things). For example, "those 135,000…in combat" were, without any other information, all doing a great job. And the mechanism of six investigations, without knowing how they are conducted, will be—without any empirical nuances whatsoever—"the most questioned, most interrogated people in history and most prosecuted." So too was the depiction that the problem had already been "compartmentalized," and senators should instead focus on the incident to begin to "go to the 135,000 who are in combat right now and help them," implying such an act had not been done. None of these statements required exceptional empirical investigations, but they formed a coherent set of vivid ideas.

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[30] *Scarborough Country,* MSNBC, accessed December 3, 2004, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4961237.

Another instance pertains to the Congresswoman and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (Democrat-California). Pelosi, who called for the removal of Rumsfeld as well as President Bush for their leadership failure, faced strong criticisms from Congressman and House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (Republican-Texas).

HOST:	Your counterpart in the House on the Republican side, **Tom DeLay, said this: "Nancy Pelosi should apologize for her irresponsible, dangerous rhetoric.** She apparently is so **caught up in partisan hatred** for President Bush that her words are **putting American lives at risk**."
REPRESENTATIVE PELOSI:	Well, I totally disagree. I made the statement that I did, and I think with **great courage**, if I might say about myself **because I am worried about the troops on the ground in Iraq** and wherever our troops serve. I…
HOST:	Do you think that President Bush does anything well?
REPRESENTATIVE PELOSI:	Of course I do.
HOST: What?	
REPRESENTATIVE PELOSI:	And this is not about a partisan—this **isn't about politics**. It's **not even about personalities**. It's **about policy**. **It's a situation where the clear and present danger facing our country is terrorism,** and we're in this abyss in…
HOST:	But where does he show judgment, experience and knowledge?
REPRESENTATIVE PELOSI:	**I think he's a nice person. I think he's true to his religious convictions. It's not about personality. I think we have to get away from that. Just because we think someone is a good**

person doesn't mean that they are capable. And I have no dislike for President Bush.[31]

A parameter could be sensed in this exchange of words. Pelosi's statement was characterized as being motivated by "partisan hatred" and, more damningly, "putting American lives at risk." Empirically, it is hard to prove whether criticizing the Bush administration's leadership and effectiveness would increase or reduce the risk to "American lives." Ideationally, the idea could conceivably be valid, if indeed Pelosi's motivation was one of "partisan hatred," as DeLay tried to encode Pelosi's intention. Pelosi defended herself within the parameter by also applying the War on Terrorism script; she immediately related her criticisms to her concern "about the troops on the ground in Iraq" and to the scene of U.S. conflict with terrorism. She elaborated her critique by recognizing President Bush as a "good" and "nice person" with "religious convictions," just that she believed Bush was incapable—that is to say, incapable of serving U.S. troops well and incapable of winning the War on Terror. Like Bush, Pelosi encoded a set of information about Bush to illustrate that her ideas were also built upon the codes, assumptions, and propositions of the War on Terrorism script.

Overall, Democrats were distinguished by their unhesitating rejection of the "few bad apples" theory and in their acknowledgment of large-scale systemic failure and the probable involvement of some leaders in the top sector of the chain of command. Their arguments stretched the War on Terrorism parameters further than the Republicans—but without violating them. In the two rare instances when the border was breached, an interaction of policing and self-policing occurred. Ultimately, the U.S. politicians skillfully employed both ideational and empirical codification to repair the War on Terrorism script. Even as they attacked each other and called for each other's removal from office, they did so by reinforcing the core assumptions about the U.S. political institution and creating various elaborative explanations that helped to reduce the contradictions brought forth by the scandal.

[31] *Meet the Press*, NBC, accessed December 6, 2004, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5086094/.

CHAPTER 17

Encoding the Absence of Weapons of Mass Destruction

After military operations in Iraq had ended, the Bush administration handled a multi-month scandal when the U.S.-commissioned weapons search team did not locate physical stockpiles of WMDs in Iraq. Some previous guesses about WMD production facilities seemed to be egregiously off the mark. It was scandalous, for example, when the design drawings of suspected mobile biological weapons laboratories—presented by Secretary Powell to the U.N.—were likely to have been trucks that produced weather balloons.[1] The Bush administration commenced an elaborate effort of codification to deal with the information newly surfacing from the weapons search team. Although evidentiary codifications were ostensibly the focus, ideational codifications were intermittently integrated and interwoven.

Timeline of the Iraq Weapons Search Scandal

The Iraq Survey Group (ISG) based in the United States was in charge of the ground-search activities in Iraq. The group was mandated to hunt extensively for WMDs as well as documents pertaining to Iraq's weapon development activities, issues which were repeatedly mentioned as sources of concern before the invasion. The investigation team, first headed by

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[1] Solomon Hughes, "Blow to Blair over 'Mobile Labs'" *The Guardian*, accessed March 27, 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jun/08/iraq.foreignpolicy.

David Kay, began its ground-search efforts in May 2003 and delivered its first report in October 2003. On January 23, 2004, David Kay offered his high-profile resignation from his post for undisclosed reasons. In mass media interviews as well as his testimony to Congress on January 28, 2004, he claimed that he did not believe stockpiles of WMDs would ever be found.[2] Aside from concrete evidence about a long-range missile program—which consisted of conventional weapons and not WMDs—as well as some "small activities" related to WMD development, there was "no scientist, no documentation nor physical evidence of the production plants" of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons.[3]

Kay's admittedly inconclusive report did not entirely shut the door to a potentially ground-breaking discovery. Some officials (e.g., Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld) insisted that WMD stockpiles might still be found. However, several months later, the investigation effort largely came to a close when the ISG exhausted all searchable sites and investigative leads. Charles Duelfer, who headed the ISG after Kay's resignation, delivered a *Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI* [Director of Central Intelligence] *on Iraq's WMD* (hereafter referred to as *The Duelfer Report*)[4] on September 30, 2004, which was considered to be a conclusive document pertaining to the weapons search. Released only around a month before the November 2004 presidential election, the report did not add significant evidence to Kay's report with regard to WMD stockpiles or programs, and it dismissed some of its previous suspicions. The report stimulated a wave of criticism against the Bush administration about its prewar assertions. To counteract critics, President Bush, Secretary Powell, and Charles Duelfer insisted that the ISG report *affirmed* that Iraq presented a strong threat to the United States warranting Iraq's forced disarmament.

[2] "Weapons Search," a transcript of Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, *PBS Online NewsHour*, accessed November 13, 2011, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle_east/jan-june04/kay_1-28.html.

[3] Tom Brokaw, interview with David Kay, "David Kay: Exclusive Interview," *Nightly News with Brian Williams*, NBC, accessed July 11, 2008, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4066462/.

[4] Central Intelligence Agency, Special Advisor to the Director of Central Intelligence, *Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq's WMD*, by Charles Duelfer, (Washington, D.C., 2004), accessed March 14, 2020, https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq_wmd_2004/.

Tabulating Threat from Summative Capability

The main approach of the Bush administration was to empirically encode various material findings (information) into a calculation of *summative capability*.

Bush often only used "capabilities" as a generic phrase (code), claiming that Iraq was found to have a high, threatening capability pertaining to WMDs. But the phrase "capability" had at least two different meanings. While having *immediate* capabilities to deploy WMDs meant that a functional stockpile had already been manufactured, having *summative* capabilities meant an estimated state of readiness to develop WMDs that can be deployed later.

These two notions imply dramatically different thresholds of proof. An infinitely more expansive classes of information could be encoded as "capabilities" if the notion refers to *summative* capabilities. And to further lower the required threshold, the Bush administration claimed that the ISG search had documented *incomplete* summative capabilities and was *increasing* or *developing* its summative capabilities. Such coding methods create a situation wherein the Bush administration was technically and literally correct by their accounting and reporting, and yet pragmatically fallacious and inaccurate (consider the distortion models that we have examined in Chap. 5).[5]

"Retained scientists/expertise," for example, often referred to scientists who had participated in Iraq's WMD or nuclear programs before the 1991 Gulf War; they might indeed be directed to participate in WMD programs if sanctions were to be lifted, or they might be directed to perform other tasks. The word "retained" conveyed an action; but in reality, unless those scientists were deported from Iraq and banished from reentry, their mere presence could plausibly fit the code of "retained scientists/expertise."

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[5] This relates to Walton's discussion of the subtle fallacies of "equivocation and amphiboly." Douglas N. Walton, *Informal Logic: A Handbook for Critical Argumentation. Second Edition* (New York: Cambridge University Press [1989]2008), 300–308, 321–325. Walton writes: "The fact that words can shift in meaning as the context of argument changes, means that in longer arguments the process of shifting can be more gradual. Changing standards of comparison can be less easily detected where several steps are involved." Walton, *Informal Logic*, 302. More in line with ethnomethodology and pragmatism traditions, I relate informal logical fallacies to their *practical* value—acknowledging them as artful endeavors by cultural members to accomplish practical purposes.

Dual-use items were another class of objects being extensively accounted. A knife has dual-use potential—for murder or peeling an apple. A battery can be used in an ambulance or a military vehicle.[6] In a glossary, the ISG report explicitly defined "dual use" as:

> **Technology**, **materials**, **equipment**, or **knowledge** capable of use for both legitimate and proscribed purposes. The object per se is not one or the other—it is dependent on **intentions**.[7]

There was considerable flexibility by which the ISG could apply the code "dual use" to objects. Moreover, once the code is applied, an intermediary meaning (idea) associated with the object is established, and then the object could, as a next step, be counted as a part of summative capability—or Iraq's WMD capability at large. Simply by accounting dual-use items extensively it could have a visually stimulating effect—especially if some Iraq agents were found not to have accounted for them in their report in the way ISG accounted for them—or simply "hiding" such items.

A passage under a section labeled as "BW Agent Simulants" shows how things fitting the notion of "dual use" was treated in the report:

> *BW Agent Simulants.* The UN deemed Iraq's accounting of its production and use of BW agent simulants—specifically *Bacillus subtilis*, *Bacillus lichenformis*, *Bacillus megaterium* and *Bacillus thuringiensis* to be inadequate. ISG remains interested in simulant work because these items may be used not only to **simulate the dispersion of BW agents, develop production techniques, and optimize storage conditions**, but also the **equipment** used for their manufacture can also be **quickly converted to make BW agents**. It permits maintenance of techniques and provides continuing familiarity with the process to **preserve skill levels**. Iraq continued its work on *Bacillus thuringiensis* as a **bio-pesticide** carried on **bentonite**, at Tuwaitha after the destruction of Al Hakam. As a result of interviews with the former staff of Al Hakam and principal researchers at IAEC, ISG has discovered that this research also included investigations of **bentonite** not only as a carrier but also as means of enabling the speedy production of slurry from the stored dried biopesticide.

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[6] *Duelfer Report*, Volume 1, "Regime Finance and Procurement," p. 134.
[7] *Duelfer Report*, Volume 3, "Glossary," p. 4.

Fig. 17.1 Presentation of dual-use equipment in *The Duelfer Report* (Volume 3, "Biological Warfare," p. 31)

What the ISG actually found, materially, was that Iraq was using *Bacillus thuringiensis* as a biopesticide. But the project "preserve[d] skill levels" and equipment that could be used for BW production, storage, and dispersion. Bentonite, a clay that has many uses including cosmetic masks and as a digestive aid, was a potential carrier of BW.

Figure 17.1 presents an item of dual-use equipment, which includes textual descriptions. [8]

While the steel vessel and egg incubator could—and had been—used to produce virus vaccine, the descriptive texts raised the point that this device *could prospectively* also *be* used to produce smallpox and miscellaneous "pathogenic viruses." For their legitimate uses, two qualifiers were used to elicit doubt—that the devices "appeared" to be for the "expressed" purpose of producing virus vaccine. For possible alternative uses, the

[8] Central Intelligence Agency, special advisor to the director of Central Intelligence, *Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq's WMD*, by Charles Duelfer, (Washington, D.C., 2004), Volume 3, "Biological Warfare," p. 31. https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq_wmd_2004/ (accessed March 14, 2020).

connection was direct. The device was crisply labeled as "*this* dual-use equipment." The distance of cognitive linkages between this object and many negative consequences was compressed. Contextual information overwhelmed the idea formation process.

To summarize, after extensive accounting, the ISG report stated that Iraq *could have* restarted some elementary form of functioning BW program within several weeks and a more elaborate one in a few months. Regarding CW, *The Duelfer Report* stated that "Iraq at OIF [Operation Iraqi Freedom] probably had **a capability to produce large quantities of sulfur mustard within three to six months.**" Duelfer also stated in a congressional testimony that "[b]y 2003, Iraq would have been able to **produce mustard agent in a period of months and nerve agent in less than a year or two**."[9] Iraq seemed to have very limited potential to acquire or develop nuclear weapons.

These alarming estimations of BW and CW production capabilities, however, have much to do with the apparent *ease* of producing biological and chemical weapons (which is not the case for nuclear weapons). If materials were made available for biological weapons, only a "couple of dozen" experts and facilities were needed that "can be readily assembled from quite simple domestic civilian plants." A CW program requires more experts and more elaborate infrastructure, but Iraq already had a usable chemical production structure due to its indigenous chemical industry. It was for these reasons that it would only take a few months to two years for them to produce biological and chemical weapons; the conclusion was not based on finding surprising materials during the ground search.[10]

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[9] Duelfer has also made a similar statement in a congressional testimony (p. 6) on Iraq's CW production capability: "Over time, and with the infusion of funding and resources following acceptance of the Oil for Food program, Iraq effectively shortened the time that would be required to reestablish CW production capacity. Some of this was a natural collateral benefit of developing an indigenous chemical production infrastructure. By 2003, Iraq would have been able to produce mustard agent in a period of months and nerve agent in less than a year or two. We have not come across explicit guidance from Saddam on this point, yet it was an inherent consequence of his decision to develop a domestic chemical production capacity." "Testimony of Charles Duelfer Special Advisor to the DCI for Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction," prepared statement, U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, accessed July 21, 2008, http://armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2004/October/Duelfer%2010-06-04.pdf.

[10] See "Testimony of Charles Duelfer," 1–8.

Tabulating Threat from Uncertain Signs

Besides itemizing objects that could fit the notion of summative capability, the ISG also catalogued certain objects that were *not found* as a set of problematically mysterious issues and objects. The absence of objects lingered on as *uncertain signs* supporting the notions of hidden threat.

Contextual and linguistic elaborations are the key. A lost "frog" we see on the street can look much more mysterious if we describe it using the words "something that looks like a frog." Or we can further a sense of problematic quality[11] by manipulating the time, space, and other contextual cues (i.e., pre-coded or coded information) with which the object appears—such as saying that "it appeared where there has never previously been a frog and there is no suitable habitat in sight." In reporting its findings, the ISG often inserted Saddam Hussein's nefarious history, past acts of violation, and similar contextual cues when it interpreted empirical information. In these given contexts, the absence of findings acquires the aura of *uncertain signs*. Although uncertain signs are a weak form of data in themselves, they can serve as a basis for circumstantial evidence if they fit stable patterns when viewed in combination with other information. It is often enough to sway public perceptions.

In substance, *uncertain signs* on BWs have very little difference to *nonfindings*. Consider the items anthrax and botulinum toxin mentioned in Powell's U.N. presentation. The ISG reported them as follows:

> *Anthrax.* The UN **could not confirm, and in fact its evidence contradicted**, the quantities of anthrax declared by Iraq as having been produced, used for trials, filled into weapons, and destroyed. The UN assessed that Iraq probably had greater stocks of the agent on hand in 1991 than it declared, probably for use in the Mirage F1 drop-tanks, and questioned Iraq's account of destruction of the agent. ISG has interviewed most of the key Iraqis who admitted working with the agent, and has obtained contradictory explanations of the events. The details are in Annex A.

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[11] A problematic experience is key in motivating attention and action. Alfred Schutz, *Reflections on the Problem of Relevance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970).

> *Botulinum Toxin*. Iraq's declaration of the amount of botulinum toxin it produced, used in experiments and trials, filled in weapons, wasted during handling, and unilaterally destroyed is derived from calculations, or contrived from the numbers of weapons stated to have been filled—**none of these figures is verifiable**. ISG teams have interviewed principal engineers and scientists involved with botulinum toxin; there has been **no new information**.[12]

Little new information had been found on either item *after an extensive search*. What was added, however, was an aura of mystery because so little information could be found after such a search. Their secretive, ambiguous status continued to persist, and the "facts" continued to be linked (as data) to the notion the potential empirical threat posed by Iraq.

Many other mysteries were interpreted toward potential summative capabilities in a similar manner. Each presentation may be coupled with a "next-step" speculation of how they could be related to a scenario of WMD production. For example, after discovering a suspicious laboratory that had been cleaned ("sanitized"), hard drives that were removed or non-functional ("destroyed"), vehicles or engines that were labeled as civic but could have "military" applications, a minor speculative idea could be offered to fit the description to an image of a tangible threat.

Stepwise Division in Constructing Threat

Just as we have discussed in Chap. 4, a chain-complex of ideas is constructed by different agents, often with sharing a part in a "division of labor." Stepwise errors could accumulate in this way.

In the context of interpreting the ISG findings, there are several key divisions in codification, conducted by different sets of agents, that can be mapped into a chained relationship (see Fig. 17.2).

From the left side to the right in the flowchart, each step of codification included fewer and fewer details, progressively divorced from raw conditions and diverted toward summaries. At the same time that each step of "summary" filters out details (information) by the agent, each step may have included "next-step" speculation which would fall within an

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[12] Central Intelligence Agency, *Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq's WMD*, by Charles Duelfer, (Washington, D.C., 2004), Volume 3, "Biological Warfare," p. 57. https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq_wmd_2004/ (accessed March 14, 2020).
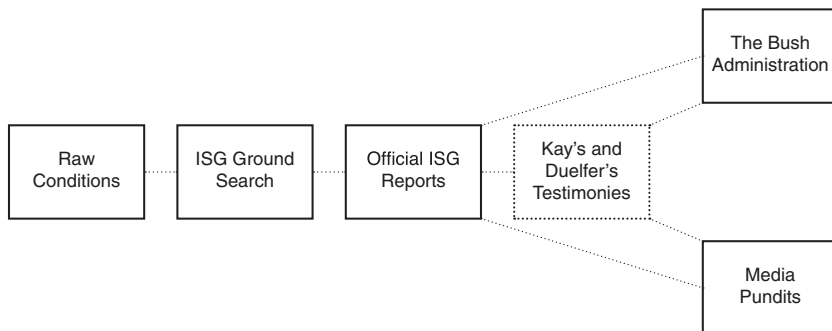
Fig. 17.2 Divided, stepwise construction of Iraq's threat after ISG codification

acceptable, reasonable range of error. Corresponding to the identities of these agents, each of these agents is subjected to a different "convention" of errors that they could commit. The president, for example, cannot possibly know every detail, but would be expected to cite the words of the ISG heads accurately. Media pundits (experts) may be subjected to basic standards of rational reasoning, but they are not expected to have access to raw or backstage information. Furthermore, each of these agents is imbued with a certain liberty in interpretation; it is acceptable for most of these agents to speculate within reason, bringing in selected contextual cues while filtering out non-fitting information, codes, objects, and ideas. Small errors and speculations may then interact with one another in a stepwise manner, ultimately asserting a compounding effect on the total degree of resulting erroneousness.

An Alternative Theory of Threat: Iraq's Chaotic Environment

Alongside the theory of Iraq's threat mentioned earlier, a second one was proffered. The ISG findings were used to build the (intermediary) idea that Iraq had a chaotic environment, so that clandestine activities might actually be taking place without Saddam Hussein's knowledge and outside of his grasp. This new, intermediary idea helps to link an absence of evidence to the idea of threat. And if the chaotic environment can be linked to Saddam Hussein, even ambiguously, then a cohesive chain of causation could thus be suggested, as follows:

(A) Saddam Hussein → (B) Chaotic Environment → (C) Unknown Dangerous or Terrorist Activities → (D) Iraq's Threat

The Duelfer Report, as a text of empirical codification, largely performed the works of selective and extensive empirical documentation, a refined textual and linguistic presentation, interspersed with minor next-step speculations. The next-step speculations—usually aligned with the position of the Bush administration—are formed by linkages in many snippets of contextual information with existing ones, so that ambiguous information could be assessed to have the possibility of fitting a certain speculated pattern. For example:

> (1) *Al-Nida State Company*. This facility…had general-purpose machine shops utilizing CNC lathes, CNC milling centers, hydraulic presses, welding equipment, coordinate measuring machines, quality-control laboratories, nondestructive testing equipment, and CAD/CAM computers prior to the recent war. Such facilities **would be necessary for a reconstituted centrifuge program**. An ISG team visited the Al-Nida site in late August 2003 and found that the entire plant **had been systematically looted** of all equipment, computers, and documents.[13]
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> (2) Site visits to several M16 labs, safe houses, and disposal sites have turned up no evidence of CW-related production or development, however, many of these sites were either **sanitized by the regime or looted**, limiting the obtainable information from site exploitations.[14]

Concerning the first passage, the "general-purpose machine shops" housed fragmented groups of objects which were potentially useful—but hardly sufficient—for a nuclear weapons centrifuge program. Such objects were not actually discovered. Rather than saying that nothing was found, the absence of equipment, computers, and documents was first invoked, and the possibility of "systematic looting" was listed. When discussing the M16 labs and other sites potentially linked to "CW-related" activities, the

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[13] Central Intelligence Agency, *Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq's WMD*, by Charles Duelfer, (Washington, D.C., 2004), Volume 2, "Nuclear," p. 40. https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq_wmd_2004/   (accessed March 14, 2020).

[14] Central Intelligence Agency, *Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq's WMD*, by Charles Duelfer, (Washington, D.C., 2004), Volume 3, "Iraq's Chemical Warfare Program," Annex A, p. 43. https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq_wmd_2004/ (accessed March 14, 2020).

absence of evidence of any object was also not highlighted; instead, the possibility that they were "either sanitized by the regime or looted" became an accounted fact.

Concerning the second passage, allegedly "destroyed" or "sanitized" materials and infrastructures could have been for confidential purposes unrelated to military uses, could have been related to WMD production activities in the distant past, could have been destroyed by coalition or insurgents' bombings, could have been to the result of the overcompensating efforts of independent government officials to impress the U.N. inspectors or the regime, or could have been looted by mobs or miscellaneous agents for monetary or political gains.

With the mention of the word systematic, and the mention of the possibility of looting, a new type of risk—a new pathway toward an idea of Iraq's threat—was identified. If the sites were sanitized, then the regime had the power and coordination to skillfully hide its activities from international inspectors; if they were "looted," then Iraq would fit the image of a chaotic environment (see Fig. 17.3).

These two possibilities could explain opposing, and potentially contradictory, interpretations of the same data. An empty laboratory, for example, could signify either interpretation, but not both at the same time. If
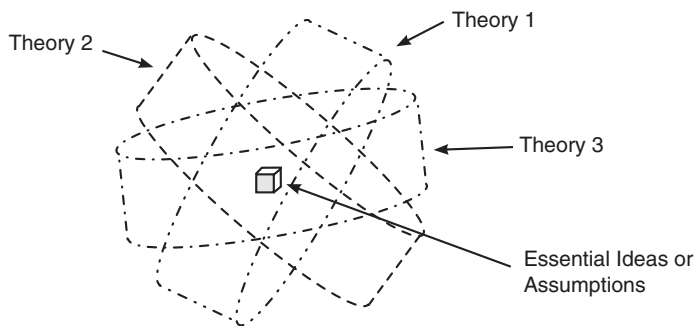
Core Propositions:
- Iraq poses a significant threat.

Theory 1: Iraq already possesses intention and capability, with terrorist connections.
Theory 2: Iraq has isolated materials and a chaotic environment, with presence of terrorist and unknown groups.

Fig. 17.3 Orbit of potential explanations consisting Iraq's threat

the lab is empty primarily because it has been systematically looted by mysterious actors (such as terrorists), then it could not be empty primarily because it was systematically ordered to be destroyed by Hussein.

The Duelfer Report merely provided the initial materials in the chain of idea-building. The connections with previously hypothesized or new speculative ideas were articulated more explicitly by a different set of social actors who ostensibly mediated between the world of experts and the world of politics: the spokespersons of ISG. The following exchange between Kay and an MSNBC's news correspondent also shows the role of Kay:

KAY: Tom, an imminent threat is a political judgment. It's not a technical judgment. I think **Baghdad was actually becoming more dangerous in the last two years than even we realized**. **Saddam was not controlling the society any longer**. In the **marketplace** of terrorism and of WMD, **Iraq** well **could have been** that supplier if the war had not intervened.

HOST: But as you know, the administration and its supporters, not just suggest, but insist that there was a real connection between Saddam Hussein and terrorist organizations that would be a threat to the United States.

KAY: Look, **I found no real connection between WMD and terrorists.** What we did find, and as others are investigating it, **we found a lot of terrorist groups and individuals that passed through Iraq.**

Kay offered the central message that the Iraqi government posed a significant threat to the world before the invasion. This claim, however, was not built on solid empirical evidence, since the ISG did not actually find any WMDs in Iraq, any actual instances of WMD trading occurrences, any documented plans of trading, or any nongovernmental WMD development programs of any significant government capabilities. The ISG did "document" a state of chaos and disorder within the Iraqi government before the war—with Iraqi scientists lying to Saddam Hussein, government officials lying to each other, and, lastly, as we have discussed, *systematic looting*. Along with finding of terrorists "passing through" Iraq (for unidentified reasons), Kay formulated a next-step idea: this environment would eventually amount to terrorists attaining WMDs, was a new

speculation that served to re-justify the U.S. war on Iraq after the old justification started to fall apart.

The overall structure could be seen in the following terms. Whenever Kay exhausted his ability to extrapolate based on empirical information, an ideational construct that involved additional information—such as a reiteration or speculation on Hussein's character—served to solidify an idea (an *intermediary* idea) that could function as a bridge to other ideas. At a later time, simply citing Kay's, or Duelfer's, judgments—based on their epistemic authorities, grounded in their near-exclusive access to raw data—would be the same as incorporating their well-structured, hybrid codification.

Charles Duelfer briefly mentioned in his October 2004 senate hearing that:

> I am **convinced we successfully contained a problem before it matured into a major threat** [of Iraqi CW experts collaborating with anti-coalition forces]. Nevertheless, it points to the problem that the **dangerous expertise** developed by the previous regime could be **transferred to** other hands. Certainly, there are **anti-coalition and terrorist elements** seeking such capabilities.[15]

Further Extrapolations: Judgments Encoded in "the Language of Washington"

Further down the chain, it was the Bush administration communicating both theories to the public as informed by the ISG ground search. President Bush made the following statement on October 1st, immediately after the ISG released its final report and a month before the November 2004 election.

> We **didn't find the stockpiles** we thought would be there. We didn't find the stockpiles everybody thought would be there. But I want you to remember, Saddam still had the capability of making weapons of mass destruction. He **could have passed** that **capability** onto an enemy, and that is a **risk** we

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[15] "Testimony of Charles Duelfer."

could not have afforded to have taken after September the 11ᵗʰ. Knowing what I know today, **I would have made the same decision.** (Applause)[16]

In his response, Bush was not obliged to cover all contravening information from the report; for example, the qualification that it would take several months and very coordinated mobilization in order to produce even a limited amount of a specific type of BW that many other nations could produce. Narrowing the scope down to not finding any stockpiles was a sufficient act.

As for the use of codes, the president, as the nation's leader, unlike being a technical expert, was regularly permitted to use codes and coded things at a rather abstract level—using a set of "buzzwords" that a critic has deemed to be characteristic of the "language of Washington."[17] Not only do details vanish in summative assessment in such abstract words, the language also made it easy for the empirical meanings to be conflated or intermixed with the ideational ones. In the aforementioned quote, these words were "Saddam," "capability," "enemy," "risk," "weapons of mass destruction," and "September 11ᵗʰ." To say that "**Saddam** could have passed that **capability** [of making **weapons of mass destruction**] onto an **enemy**" and "that is a **risk** we could not have afforded to have taken after **September the 11ᵗʰ**" is emblematic of a sentence composed of abstract key words that make a perceivable idea, using references that are tied partly to an underdefined set of empirical references[18] and partly to socially significant symbols predicated on preconceptions drawn from preexisting knowledge.

Secretary Powell, in an interview several days later, stated a similar line of interpretation, pointing to selected "aggregated facts" (a filtered set of information) affirmed by the Duelfer report:

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[16] George W. Bush, "Remarks by the President at Victory 2004 Rally," Mcintyre Ski Area, Manchester, New Hampshire, *Weekly Compilations of Presidential Documents* 40, no. 41 (October 1, 2004), 2209–16.

[17] Journalist and writer Christopher Hitchens has called some of the constructs I have observed as "the language of Washington": "On ordinary days the trivial and empty language of Washington isn't especially awful. The drizzle of repetitive key words—'perception', 'agenda', 'address', 'concern', 'process', 'bipartisan'—does its job of masking and dulling reality." Christopher Hitchens, "Realpolitik In The Gulf: A Game Gone Tilt," *Harper's Magazine,* January 1991 issue, accessed February 19, 2021, https://harpers.org/archive/1991/01/why-we-are-stuck-in-the-sand/

[18] For example, although "capability" in the quote is empirical, so many people could summarize this capability from the Duelfer report differently.

The only thing that I think we got wrong, really, was that he did not have stockpiles…But **I still have no doubt** in my mind about the **intention** that he had and the **capability** that he retained. And as you saw from the Duelfer report, he was doing everything he could to **get out from under the sanctions**. He was **cheating on the sanctions**. He was **deceiving the world**, sometimes in ways that are **incomprehensible** as to why he was trying to deceive the world in that way…. And the **intention** and the **capability** were there, the history was there of what this guy has done in the past, and there was no reason to believe, at least in my judgment and in the judgment of the President and the other coalition leaders, that if left to his own devices and allowed to be free of the sanctions regime, you could put a bet down: Was he going to go back to weapons of mass destruction or not? **And I don't think it was reasonable to think he would not**. **And certainly Duelfer, when you read the report, it pointed in that direction.**[19]

As per Powell's analysis, it is within the bounds of reason for him to express a preferred judgment purely on the basis of what was provided from *The Duelfer Report*. Powell directed the audience to focus on the structural connections between several parts, and such connections and parts corresponded to the same ones that he had evoked before the war—those that indicated Saddam Hussein's unchangeable character, with motivation so irrational or mysterious that made him "incomprehensible." And not only was he deceptive toward particular agents, but he was "deceiving the world"—yet another abstract action composed of "buzzwords" (and another instance that fits the aforementioned "language of Washington"). That *The Duelfer Report* has provided more documentation of Hussein's character has only reinforced the overall, abstract case in favor of invasion. And such an expression makes sense impressionistically because of the accumulation of idea-building works that had already taken place.

In this realm of abstract conceptions, in which all things empirical are often transfused with those of the ideational, many judgments can be afforded to be composed using hybrid codification, reducing the traces of cognitive manipulation or breaching in reason.

[19] "Interview by Warren Strobel of Knight-Ridder: Secretary Colin L. Powell [on October 7, 2004]," U.S. Department of State, accessed July 15, 2019, https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/36930.htm.

The Hybrid Codification of Costs and Benefits

Consider the calculation—or weighing—of costs and benefits.

First, there is a question of worthy economic costs. Lobbying for a military budget increase in 2002, Bush repeatedly used the expression "the price of freedom," stating that "while the price of freedom is high, it is never too high."[20] Although such expressions had a rationalist cloak—ostensibly about weighing relevant information involved in an empirical situation—the actual object being weighed was infused with an ideational mode of codification.

Couched in fundamental American values, freedom is a sacred symbol of the civil religion that has been transmitted for many generations. By implication, in this context then, freedom cannot be measured in economic terms; it is a cause that numerous Americans have died and sacrificed their lives for. It is customary for members of the American nation to say that human freedom is "priceless"—in a rapid manner akin to steps of connections formed through a "cognitive portal." It was certainly reasonable for Bush, as a spokesman for the American nation, to evoke this portal-like connection. Linking to the military budget sought by Bush, the price of freedom, then, could indeed be said to be "never too high."

The similar juxtaposition of human and economic costs with immeasurable moral benefit is also evident in post-invasion rhetoric. Bush repeatedly made reference to "mass graves" and the fall of Saddam's statue when he sought to argue on his reelection campaign trail about the worthiness of the U.S. invasion of Iraq; he seemed to personally believe in the idea when he met Iraqis who expressed their thanks, allegedly breaking down into tears when learning that an Iraqi woman addressed him as "Liberator" ("Muharrir" in Arabic) upon entering the White House's Oval Office in November 2003.[21] Responding to the release of a widely publicized book, *The Three Trillion Dollar War*, coauthored by Nobel Laureate in Economics Joseph Stiglitz and Harvard professor Linda Bilmes,[22] which estimated the

[20] George W. Bush, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," House Chamber, The U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C., *Weekly Compilations of Presidential Documents* 38, no. 5 (January 29, 2002), 133–39; George W. Bush, "Remarks at a Republican Luncheon in Greenwich, Connecticut," *Weekly Compilations of Presidential Documents* 38, no. 15 (April 9, 2002), 571–618.

[21] Bob Woodward, *State of Denial: Bush at War, Part III* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 270.

[22] Joseph E Stiglitz and Linda J. Bilmes, *The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict.* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008).

true cost of the U.S. War on Iraq to be at least three trillion (that is to say, $3 million millions) if it is to end swiftly, White House spokesperson Tony Fratto reportedly stated:

> People like Joe Stiglitz lack the courage to consider **the cost of doing nothing** and **the cost of failure.** One can't even begin to put a price tag on **the cost to this nation of the attacks of 9–11**…. It is also an investment in the **future safety and security** of Americans and our vital national interests. **$3 trillion? What price does Joe Stiglitz put on attacks on the homeland that have already been prevented**? Or doesn't his slide rule work that way?[23]

Here, a seemingly astronomical financial figure seemed to weigh against "the cost of doing nothing" against terrorism and "the cost of failure" in the face of terrorism, and it is weighed with the benefit of "future safety and security" and the attacks against America that have already been prevented. The costs and benefits were ostensibly empirical constructs—at least in the context discussed by Stigliz and Bilmes—but they were devoid of an empirical character in the usage by Fratto. Fratto's costs and benefits were not precise measurements, but were based on hypothetical scenarios that terrorists were so evil that they would attack the United States, that the Iraq war has already prevented (not provoked) attacks on the homeland, as well as the presumption that that the enemies could not be deterred by non-military means. Based on Fratto's calculation scheme, "one can't even begin to put a price tag" on the 9/11 events on the United States, which follows the benefit already purchased via the Iraq war. Therefore, the worthiness of spending $3 trillion is justified as a matter of course.

In the hybridized mode of codification, Bush did not merely articulate the material benefits that satisfy the nation's self-interest. At a deeper level, Bush also made a symbolic calculation arguing for the *moral benefit* of the war in light of *human costs*. In an exchange with media host Tim Russert following the David Kay scandal in NBC's program *Meet the Press*, [24] Russert invited Bush to reflect on whether it was "worth the loss of 530 American lives and 3,000 injuries and woundings simply to remove

[23] Dan Froomkin, "Bush vs. Obama," *The Washington Post*, accessed September 27, 2008, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/blog/2008/02/28/BL2008022802152_pf.html.

[24] "Interview with President George W. Bush," *Meet the Press*, NBC, accessed October 1, 2004, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4179618.

Saddam Hussein, even though there were no weapons of mass destruction." Near the end of the interview, Bush weighed between the precious but finite human costs to what he referred to as fulfilling "history's call to America":

> And, Tim, as you can tell, I've got a foreign policy that is one that believes America has a **responsibility** in this world to lead, a **responsibility** to lead in the war against terror, a responsibility to speak clearly about the **threats** that we all face, a **responsibility** to promote freedom, to **free people from the clutches of barbaric people** such as Saddam Hussein who tortured, mutilated—**there were mass graves that we have found**—a responsibility to **fight AIDS**, the pandemic of AIDS, and to **feed the hungry**. We have a **responsibility**. To me that is **history's call to America**. I accept the call and will continue to lead in that direction.

The possibilities "to free people from the clutches of barbaric people" were the codes applied to characterize U.S. motivation. The elicited mental objects (coded things) were the tortures, mutilations, and "mass graves" caused by Saddam Hussein on Iraq's side, and the grandeur, historical, moral "responsibility" that of the U.S. nation on the other—represented by the aggregated facts of U.S. past efforts to "fight AIDS" and "feed the hungry". By implication, forgoing the "responsibility" would entail an increase in mass graves, mutilation, and torture as well as AIDS victims and starving people. Casting the cost of measurable casualties against these aggregated facts, the moral benefits could "reasonably" be extrapolated as being worthy of the human cost paid by the U.S. soldiers.

Demarcating the Causes and Nature of National Errors

Under the pressure of the pending Presidential Election in November 2004, President Bush used several codification strategies to contain the potential impact of the negative proof of WMDs on his reelection efforts—as well as to continually legitimize the Iraq invasion.

Unlike the topic of Iraq's threat, in which a massive amount of information had to be handled using an evidentiary mode of codification, this topic on the *causes* and *nature* of errors in the administration's previous empirical estimation had very little information. Therefore, Bush had considerable liberty to proffer explanations, primarily by activating an

ideational mode of codification in the manner that we have seen in other instances.

Within that room for freedom, Bush's chief strategy was to compartmentalize the causes and nature of the national errors into the domain of technicality and not morality, in the circumscribed *scenes* of intelligence agency rather than in the broader institutions of the U.S. government, political parties, or the American nation.

In response to David Kay's announcements and resignation in January 2004, Bush issued an executive order to form a commission to look into potential problems within the U.S. intelligence agencies. Bush first affirmed the identities of the *agents* who might have caused the errors, using amiable word choices, as "men and women of our intelligence community and intelligence officers who work for our friends and allies around the world are dedicated professionals engaged in difficult and complex work." And these agents were up against "America's enemies" who were "secretive," "ruthless," and "resourceful." The phrase "difficult and complex work" implies that the *act* that led to error was committed not with deliberate intention, and the motivational cause (*agency*) was probably explainable by the challenging nature of the work. Parallel to our previous discussions, these are characterizations coded through an ideational mode.

The ISG's *sincerity* in seeking the truth—and not merely scavenging useful information to build a case for war—was an idea that needed to be defended, as it could have great relevance to the core proposition about the character of the American nation, represented by the U.S. government. Opponents of Bush could seek to zero in on a narrow set of responsible agents within the government, such as Bush himself, in order to stay within the appropriate discourse parameter. But doing so would require strong, clear empirical evidence rather than merely guesswork; and when comparing to the Abu Ghraib scandal, where there were graphic photos and an internal investigative report, much less information was available regarding this matter characterized as "intelligence failure."

Making an assertion that questioned the moral integrity of the president without strong evidence would be a rather risky interpretive *choice*. One reason is that Bush attributed to the ISG experts a role of moral integrity. Another is that Bush had lumped together the people who were deceived by inaccurate intelligence and their motivations. This included all

the intelligence agencies in the U.S. and their collaborators "around the world," the highest-level staff of his own administration, and the entirety of the U.S. Congress, whose members presumably had access to more intelligence information than the American public. In the previously cited interview with Russert, Bush said, "We didn't find the stockpiles *we thought* would be there. We didn't find the stockpiles *everybody thought* would be there."[25] A rather large stock of credible epistemic authorities was thus evoked. A critic would thus risk symbolically countering the combinative integrity, credentials, and knowledge of many people—including many who have exclusive access to information.

The appointment of a new fact-finding commission (led by former Democratic Senator Charles Robb and federal appellate court Judge Laurence Silberman) was a corrective act that served symbolic and evidentiary purpose. In so doing, Bush positioned himself as if he was a disinterested leader seeking to rectify the technical problem. Stating the importance of intelligence in executing the War on Terror effectively, Bush proclaimed: "We are determined to figure out why. We're also determined to make sure that American intelligence is as accurate as possible for every challenge in the future."[26] These words implicitly proffered the idea that his administration did not know in advance of the original causes of the intelligence-related errors, and that the issue was one of technical accuracy rather than of political manipulation enacted by his administration. But at a collective level, this action at least symbolized the nation's commitment to the truth. And the more extensive such investigative efforts were—in which case a team of nine appointees was to direct the interviewing of several hundred people and review thousands upon thousands of pages of documents—the more the symbolic message was conveyed.

In sum, by knowing how to activate the idea system effectively at the codification level—to navigate and intermix both the empirical and ideational modes of codification—Bush elegantly defended his interest in the scene of contemporary politics. While relegating the causes of national

[25] George W. Bush, "Remarks by the President at Victory 2004 Rally," Mcintyre Ski Area, Manchester, New Hampshire, *Weekly Compilations of Presidential Documents* 40, no. 41 (October 1, 2004), 2209–16.

[26] George W. Bush, "Remarks Announcing the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction," The James S. Brady Briefing Room, The White House, *Weekly Compilations of Presidential Documents* 40, no. 6 (February 6, 2004), 202–3.

errors to "intelligence failure," the roots of which existed in a state of *empirical uncertainty* yet to be investigated, he simultaneously used various means to clarify the various *ideational certainties*. That the technical cause of the grave misestimation still needed to be discovered, the solution would certainly come from the integrity of his administration, the U.S. government, and the American nation as a whole.

A Five-Tier Reflection

The War on Terrorism idea system consists of a hybrid of empirical and ideational codifications. It efficaciously draws on the strengths from both. For example, the massive mobilization of empirical information helped to create extraordinary correlative patterns and vivid illustrations, whereas an ideational mode of codification—which operates on a much more relaxed empirical requirement—was often activated to form constructs or forge linkages whenever empirical codification reached a point of exhaustion.

Such a hybrid structure allowed the Bush administration to establish ideas with a great degree of flexibility. Its codification approaches even withstood the supposed scrutiny within the "modern" informational and media environment. In fact, the administration even incorporated numerous informational, expert, and media apparatuses for their purposes.

Let us now reflect on the key features of the construct and uses of the War on Terrorism idea system, along the five-tier criteria.

BELIEVABILITY

Two phases of the War on Terrorism—the first month after the 9/11 events and the first month after the outbreak of the Abu Ghraib scandal—were primarily based on ideational codification. These two phases had one thing in common: the general information available was scarce. An ideational mode of codification showed its utility by helping to organize disparate information, at great speed, into coherent explanations.

In these ideational codification phases, an internally cohesive set of codes was designed to define the general *act*, *scene*, *agent*, *agency*, and the *purpose* in the unfolding, the so-called War on Terrorism. The broad descriptive codes include terrorists, good Americans, democratic values, and freedom haters. These codes had a typical set of general meanings as well as images with which they were associated. Matching—per the principle of *resemblance*—particular concrete situations, characters, and activities (information) to this scheme of codes yielded various "fitted images." These "fitted images" (coded information) in turn allowed idea-makers to generate cognitive events such as "winning the War on Terror" and "providing a safe haven to terrorists." Once such fitted images were developed into structurally organized formats substantiated with a high degree of informational density (in other words, into *compact symbolic structures*), they enabled many other secondary cognitive processes, including step-by-step logical deduction and the creation of new ideas.

An evidentiary mode of codification was mobilized to extend the War on Terrorism to Iraq. The available empirical information was, however, fractured and ambiguous rather than coherent or definitive. Gaps and imperfections were noticeable. In such situations, the administration strategically used ideational codifications to its advantage. Often, intermittent insertion of fitted images and minor steps of extrapolative guesses (i.e., speculations) bridged otherwise disconnected parts, ultimately affording the creation of coherent accounts, as well represented in Colin Powell's U.N. presentation in February 2003. Factually true information—such as Iraq having made WMD-production plans before 1991—was brought back to contextualize current sets of *uncertain signs*, creating discernable cohesive "patterns," into which currently gathered information fitted.

This case study shows how empirical information and rigorous procedures could serve as *bad idea safeguards*. These safeguards *simulated* empirical rigor, actually making the manipulative idea system appear to be much more objective than it would otherwise look without the embellishing information. The backstage apparatus that gathered, filtered, and encoded the empirical information was tightly controlled. Ordinary audiences had no means of examining the rawest possible form of data; instead, they could "openly" access what was ostensibly a close version of them, such as investigative reports, even some that had been "leaked."

These materials allowed limited critiques, such as the possibility to identify some internal or external contradictions. At the same time, they also enabled the manipulators of an idea system to generate believable

speculations that could not otherwise be formed, especially because the manipulators could command a group of organized, institutional experts. These conditions amounted to increased opportunities to create packaged summaries, viewpoints, and biased filtered information that seemed legitimate and believable.

Resilience

Part of the resilience of the War on Terrorism script was owing to its *preemptive designs.*

In the face of stubborn patterns of uncertain signs, many ideas of threats were not *designed* to be easily disproven, because of the classic difficulty of "proving a negative." Conducting the patterns of uncertain signs as a pretext is a key process of empirical codification, if the threat conception is to be kept unchallenged by counterevidence. For a normal person, it can be harder to generate a pattern of uncertain signs. However, for a resourceful nation, given the pretext of discrepancy in documentation, it was relatively easy to create patterns of uncertain signs by the use of the broad category of WMDs. The code "WMDs" does not technically have to specifically refer to nuclear weapons, so stockpiles of chemicals and bacteria commonly possessed by nations for regular needs can easily be made into such suspicious signs. Compared to physically existing objects, it would be infinitely easier to create patterned, uncertain signs if the categories of mental objects were broadened—from actual WMDs to "WMD-related *capabilities*" or "*intentions* to develop WMDs." If a suspected person seeking to disprove an accusation by "proving a negative" is hard enough, a nation seeking to clear itself from suspicion of all of these concrete and abstract objects associated with vague conceptual objects is bound to find it infinitely harder. Even efforts that were monumental cannot—in an absolute sense—disprove the proposition generated from all kinds of suspicious, uncertain signs. The ISG investigation and the U.N. inspection headed by Blix were cases in point.[1]

The ease of creating patterns of suspicious, uncertain signs has been extensively   discussed,   but   a   fundamental   issue   affecting   the

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[1] Hence, even though the U.N. inspection headed by Blix was gradually able to search Iraq extensively enough to "build the trust" about the lack of imminent threat associated with Iraq's weapons programs, the Bush administration could easily claim that the negative outcome showed that the U.N. inspection itself was not trustworthy.

epistemological condition is that many empirical codification processes were often confidential to begin with. This is different from an open, low-threshold research environment wherein multiple researchers could independently perform their own investigations and generate their own data analysis (ideally without being affected by power). Therefore, even when certain publicized portions of the Bush administration's account were questioned, some undisclosed procedures and materials could be referenced in their defense. Such backstage confidentiality, alongside the intricate design of accusations, was a major factor for the idea system's resilience.

Many claims that seemed to be empirical had been fused with ideational codifications; for example, a matter of trust is not really just an empirical matter, and neither is a matter of threat. An entrusted nation could have all the WMDs in the world and not be threatening, while for an untrustworthy nation, even the prospect of being able to develop or own any can be constructed as a matter of grave threat.

Ideationally, many general ideas of the War on Terrorism script were resilient because they were culturally and intuitively valid. Culturally, they were ideational constructs that were *already* established in the American culture and constantly revalidated in American schools and civil discourse. Intuitively, the ideational propositions—like the mission to battle the forces of "terror"—are also intuitively sensible almost by definition: who would not be against "terror"?

The faults in empirical details, even when revealed, hardly threatened the core proposition of the idea systems. They were rather unimportant partly because of the hybrid structure of constructions. Just as Satan's power was depicted by de Lancre as *consistently inconsistent*, terrorists' and enemies' methods were always secretive in their multifarious active formations. Because the mysteriousness was given by the object in question, and that the *threat* could be *prospective* rather than currently existing, making errors in technical assessment or speculation would not necessarily affect the overall idea system, as long as those errors are compartmentalized as being technical in nature, for which improvement could be sought in future actions. And if the aggregate outcome is assessed to be generally positive in an aggregate sense, the erroneous means would largely be irrelevant—and the strategic errors could be partly attributed to the enemy itself. The successful ridding of an evil, even when motivated by initial misinformation, would not undermine the integrity of the idea system in

a fundamental way. Only demonstrated patterns of *intentional, immoral motives* would do so.

Ensuring that the War on Terrorism script remains intact partly depends on the voices available in the discourse environment. What disaffirming information and ideas are being brought forth and how they are articulated in those voices are important determinants. As our analysis shows, the core propositions were protected in "debates" that took place in national forums, and even in international ones. Fundamental challenges to the moral integrity of the American nation or the motivation of the Bush administration were largely kept out of view in domestic media, and even in the scene of the United Nations. Critical voices were articulated as suggestions of alternative considerations or limited to the specific, technical dimensions of the War on Terrorism project.

This condition of discursive closure made all the most developed, potential alternative explanations fall within a restricted, well-controlled parameter. The Bush administration and the agencies it oversaw created their own potential alternative explanations to address empirical ambiguities. Those that sought to significantly depart from the Bush administration's explanations often repeated the core propositions when they voiced their alternative interpretations—as evidenced in the busy international discourses voiced at the dawn of the Iraq invasion. It was even more evident in the response toward the Abu Ghraib scandal by a network of elected as well as bureaucratic government officials, crossing the lines of political parties, which was filled with regurgitations of the honorable identity of the U.S. military as well as that of the idea of the War on Terrorism. These discourses repaired any damage to the core propositions by suggesting ways of improving efficacious execution of the project, demonstrating their commitment in the process. Otherwise negative information, whether pertaining to human abuse, informational misjudgment, or financial costs, was actually used to reinforce the strength of the idea system (by the means of what has been called *oracular reasoning*[2]).

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[2] Hugh Mehan, "Oracular Reasoning in a Psychiatric Exam: The Resolution of Conflict in Language," ed. Allen D. Grimshaw, *Conflict Talk: Sociolinguistic Investigations of Arguments in Conversations* (New York and Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 160–177.

Adaptability

The War on Terrorism script was adapted and readapted by the Bush administration a number of times—from its initial focus on the 9/11 attackers to bin Laden and al-Qaeda, and then to the Taliban and Iraq. Each major shift to a new major enemy or policy objective took some reconstruction work, entailing a new wave of empirical, ideational, and hybrid codifications. But given the enormous informational and expert apparatuses, as well as the flexibility of the script, the process of building connections to new agendas was not too difficult. The unique form of hybrid codification—consisting of flexible switching between evidentiary and ideational modes as well as their creative intermixing—made adaption-related tasks easier.

Empirically speaking, the enormous empirical apparatus run by the U.S. government made the gathering of fitting empirical materials relatively easy. Partly due to the timing, the case of the Afghan war did not even necessitate the use of much empirical work. Referencing historical facts and undisclosed information was largely sufficient. The Bush administration also self-generated a piece of evidence in the discursive interchange; it had requested that Mullah Mohammed Omar's government in Afghanistan extradite bin Laden, a request that Omar refused, citing fairness, bureaucratic, and religious reasons.[3] In this way, a key piece of information—an act of protecting "terrorists"—was elicited, aiding in the adaptation of the war target to Afghanistan.

The apparatus was put into work in the case of Iraq. The apparatus needed to generate enough patterned, uncertain signs at the empirical level that could warrant suspicion. Where gaps and deficits occurred, they could be bridged or filled by speculative connections and interpretations afforded by previously validated ideational constructs. When new ideas or agendas emerged, a hybridized version of empirical codification could "catch up" with such changing situations, generating new sets of information, objects, and ideas that looked real, vivid, or legitimate.

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[3] "Taliban Leader: Prepare for Holy War," CNN, accessed July 19, 2003, http://www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/central/09/14/afghan.denial. For more details, see Gordon Chang, "The Politics of Representation and the Social Order: In the War on Terror," (PhD diss., University of California San Diego, 2008), 78–82, available for download at eScholarship: https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4xt6g5v1.

Developmental Potential

Developmental potential is equivalent to the ability to "scale-up." The War on Terrorism idea system was designed to be flexibly expandable.

The initial decision not to treat the 9/11 attacks as a legal case handled by law enforcement and court officials, but instead, promising a "global war on terror" campaign, had moved the efforts into unspecified boundaries. The War on Terrorism was said to have multiple "fronts" (much like how the Chinese Communist Revolution had their multiple fronts and battles).

In the War on Terror, when the "front" moved to domestic policies, budget priorities were altered and new security policies were made. In foreign policy, the U.S. government gained new power in labeling states and groups as terrorists or sponsors of terrorists, *pre-legitimizing* drastic adjustments in sanctions, immigration, arms sales, aside from physical and verbal coercion. And although the actual act of invasion stopped at the 2003 Iraq war, the idea system pre-legitimizes actions later on.[4]

The opening of new phases of development required agents to assemble a basis of new information, a slightly new set of codes, and from them create new mental objects, make creative and new linkages between them, thus forging stepwise idea creation, equivalences, and an elaborative set of potential explanations' core propositions. In the vast potentiality of hybrid codification, knowing when to draw from which elements to bridge a gap, as well as knowing what to create in order to service a precise objective, is an art. Those who could tackle the most challenging tasks could be considered agents who had forged *catalytic* changes to the idea system so that it could be developed into a new phase.

The most prominent *catalytic* agents, first and foremost, were the back-stage players who authored the initial War on Terrorism idea as well as the so-called Bush doctrine that drew equivalence between terrorists and their supporters. These cognitive mechanisms allowed speedy linkages to be drawn between one proposal and the next. And creative metaphors, such

[4] Although the theme of terrorism was not a predominant form of public legitimation for the intensified sanctions against Iran and military actions against Libya during the first Obama administration (2008–2012), the institutional documents produced by the administration and in Congress repeatedly referenced Libya's and Iran's encouragement of terrorism. For one representative example, see Kenneth Katzman, last modified July 12, 2019, *Iran Sanctions.* Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, Report No. RS20871, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS20871.pdf (accessed May 30, 2022).

as that of "draining the swamp," serviced as additional catalytic ideas that, in one stroke, added intuitive legitimacy for the United States to dramatically transform multiple countries in order to solve the problem of terrorism. And when a narrow scope was needed, the idea of "Axis of Evil" came into view from Bush's discourse, and further sub-doctrines (or sub-ideas) pertaining to the methods of weapons inspection and norms of internationalism (including the departure from the U.N. framework) were also devised.

The hybrid format of codification allowed the idea system to have both solid and fluid materials for idea development. An ideational mode of codification could be relied on exclusively if conditions for robust material proof were not available. And when the empirical route of codification was blocked at a particularly critical juncture, infusing ideational codification could serve as an imperfect but nonetheless functioning remedy. Such a fluid, hybrid structure of codification allowed more combinative and synthetic possibilities to be generated.

EASE OF USE

The War on Terrorism idea system is bifurcated when it comes to its ease of use.

The ideational mode of codification is easier to master and apply by the public than the empirical mode; it is an "easy-to-use" version of the idea system. The American civil religion was already heavily ingrained in the American vocabulary and culture. The propositions derived from it would have a guaranteed degree of intuitive support as well as familiarity. This quality is a precondition that allowed for *speedy* extrapolations, parallel structuring, deductions, and conclusions by users of the idea system, which make it very important in the context of casual conversations.

The Bush administration officials often—in the "language of Washington"—*modeled* an easily digestible and repeatable line of thought and reasoning initially, filled with abstract codes that nevertheless encompassed complex matters and made intuitive sense. Such lines organized a set of "simple and clear" ideas, which were then repeatable by others (officials, experts, journalists, etc.) in public settings.

Through these exercises, the administration institutionalized certain *cognitive portals* in the polity enabling actors to quickly make their steps

from premises to meanings, as if by a "leap." For example, the concept that all "terrorists" share similar qualities, and that Iraq's capability was conceptually linked to 9/11 attacks, became quite "natural" due to repetitive rehearsals.

Even if the portal-like linkages were not completely established in the public mind (that is to say, those in the public who are not die-hard believers), they were shared among internal officers in charge of authoring official documents and reports. This pattern could be seen in the reports and documents issued by multiple departmental units—from immigration, visa extension, homeland security, extradition, foreign aid, government research grants, government contracts, congressional research reports, and so forth. Established templates were often developed from year to year without significant changes in their formats except for the need for updates. The categories and styles of depiction—the codification—were built into these internal reports with remarkable continuity.[5]

But empirical conversations have also become a substantial part of public discourse—both in the discussions among pundits invited to TV shows and among fierce online commentators. The detailed empirical codification works were much harder to replicate, or even to reiterate and comprehend, due to their technical nature and sheer volume. Even the most interested, motivated members of the public would find the process of sorting through the details and jargons overwhelming, as well as the task of firmly ascertaining the relations between suspicious evidential signs. It would be much easier for those segments of the public to simply follow the guide of certain epistemic authorities, such as a Powell or a Duelfer. Although the task of debating these empirical matters would still be overwhelming in the space of public discourse, those audiences would receive an elevated advantage in such situations, with officials and experts demonstrating particular lines of codification that they could model and cite.

[5] See Kenneth Katzman, *Iran Sanctions.*

Conclusion

This book has journeyed into intense episodes of manipulation and mayhem connected to idea systems. All along we have borne in mind two questions. *Why do people end up doing what they do? Why do things happen in society the way they do?*

A summary of the answer is this: many human events are not *planned* or *intended* by any particular actor. Outcomes in social dynamics *unfold* over the course of idea systems' activation. After they emerge, they could often no longer be tempered because of the efficacy, and sometimes because of the general state of malfunction pertaining to idea systems.

Here, *idea systems* must not simply be equated with *ideas,* and the focus must not exclusively rest on *contents.* Contents themselves, even if flawed, are often mistakenly identified or presumed as the primary motivators of social actions. However, such contents are hardly sufficient in driving the manifold unfolding entropy. For example, seemingly extreme beliefs about magic, the Devil, or liberation plans may indeed be responsible for social turbulence, but they also exist in numerous other more tranquil social settings.

Idea System as a Matrix

Our cases have presented a driving cause that seemed to be *combinative* and *synergistic*, always involving a structurally driven social and cognitive dynamic. In the scenes of social disasters which we have visited, the key

instigators seemed to be those who were exceptionally capable of utilizing programmatic modes of codification to influence the unfolding of social events. The strength of the idea systems (or idea programs) conditioned, though not absolutely determined, these instigators' powers. The *more* promising and sound an idea system is (the *more* informational merit it possesses), the *more* it has been refined, polished, and tested by intelligent minds, and the more extreme are the results it can produce.

Aided by such idea systems, these actors interweaved a discourse in the form of a cognitive and informational matrix.[1] Such matrices were capable of creating semiotic transformations comparable to those in Greek mythologies: time, space, and events could be extravagantly manipulated; beings could be readily transformed into wolves or pigs, flowers or stone, or even a river or an echo. Unlike these mythologies, the means and methods we encounter in this book are human ones, and the events of semiotic transformation unfold in slow successive motion, often "rationally." This book has unpacked the basis of these transformations by examining the detailed codification processes involved.

Some transformations were predictable; they were enacted in a manner according to the build and design of an idea system. In such an arrangement, the human agency of thinking and social subjects is suppressed; most subjects are limited to particular corners and activities in the matrix. As they themselves are steered away from possible exits, their discourses reinforce a structure that entraps others in the matrix's algorithms. Such occurrences are exemplified by our case subjects, who could manufacture identifications of witches, counterrevolutionaries, and terror associates— as well as facts, arguments, narratives, and extrapolative ideas—efficiently, as supported by the facilitative mechanics built within an idea program.

Idea systems have also engendered behaviors and social outcomes— including transformations—that were utterly unpredictable. Unregulated or ill-regulated human minds are dangerous. For all the ills that it can bring, a refined idea system regulates people. Conversely, a defective idea system can act like a defective software program suffering from frequent glitches or crashes. The more destructive potentials of the idea system can be unleashed as a consequence. After all, those who regulate the matrix

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[1] I am using the word matrix here to simply mean a surrounding structure or model, but the usage is conceptually inspired by the well-known science fiction film. See *The Matrix*, directed by Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski (Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1999).

also work within the matrix; when the dysfunctional matrix is open for multiple social actors to recondition the code, even skilled system programmers could lose control of the processes. Under such conditions, two child-witnesses who knew how to embellish an event with fitting details about witches could transform the lives of everyone in their community, in ways not even initially comprehended by the children—and ultimately resulting in their death. Comparatively, revolutionary youths could be made to condone actions far exceeding the initial vision of the Revolution in China; Mao himself was entrapped by the matrix and had to repeatedly terminate the process by force. Less is yet known about the aftermath of the U.S. War on Terror. However, the unfolding of unpredictable events over the past two decades has continuously begged these questions: *Can this "war" be decisively "won" or "ended"? Has it created more or fewer terrorists? Is the destruction caused in Afghanistan and Iraq justified by the liberties gained by the people in those locations? Given the economic costs and soldiers' casualties for the United States, is the "price of freedom" ever too high?* Coherent answers seem missing, with the architect of the War on Terrorism script having faded from the political front stage. The matrix seems to be hibernating, except in sporadic moments when new global terrorists appear in its wake.

This book has offered a framework and set of vocabularies to study idea systems, closely analyzing complex cognition and language use. In this conclusion, I will first conduct an academic recapitulation by stating a few unfinished, synthetic, essential observations from the past chapters about the nature of idea systems. I will then conduct a humanistic recapitulation in light of the complex situation we face in the contemporary world. The latter part ends with a discussion of "fair-mindedness"—my choice of principle to mitigate against the monstrous human conditions identified in this book.

Academic Recapitulations

Following each of the case studies, we have assessed the respective idea system using a five-tier model. Several points warrant additional discussions: (1) the cyclical dynamics that seems to be engrained in idea systems, (2) the basic, functional mechanisms common to all idea systems, and (3) the logic and limitations of our typologies.

A Three-Stage "Life Cycle" of Idea Systems

A generalized pattern that can be observed from our cases is a cyclical dynamic manifested by idea systems. Without indulging in the abstraction of dialectical theories, the biological analogy of a "life cycle" is heuristic in describing the unfolding trajectory of idea systems. I separate the life cycle into an initial Settling Phase, an intermediate Unsettling Phase, and a third Resettling Phase.

In the Settling Phase (Stage 1), an idea system is largely in a state of controlled manipulation. Those who control the system have disproportionate knowledge and expertise over other actors in society pertaining to the idea system. They take an active part in making an idea system believable, resilient, and adaptable, subjecting it to controlled development and ensuring that it is easy enough to use. The activation is guided and directed by relatively few actors. The first ten years of the Mao era, where the Party devised innovative campaigns to transform China's societal institutions, represents this Settling Phase of the idea system.

In the Unsettling Phase (Stage 2), an idea system is noticeably less stable in quality. Its use and activation are no longer controlled by the initial developers' intention. The source of this change comes partly from the fact that many actors have become familiar with the codification techniques, so in some ways they are more empowered to become creative and inventive on their own, deviating from the initial models and guides. There are also those who mis-activated the idea system inadvertently, and their acts were not monitored or corrected. As more diverse models become available in society, social members are also more likely to take influence from novel models and techniques.

Perhaps even more importantly, the broader institutionalization over time yields many *small-time manipulators*. These skilled actors, with varying degrees of power, could make fundamental changes to the initial models. In this scenario, the idea system goes beyond a state of diffusion into one of *significant mutation*. They could make up new codes or introduce new information, even merging ideas together or putting in unusual idea-catalysts or de-catalysts. The idea system becomes truly unsettling when the act of manipulation is conducted by too many parties, creating climatic schisms and contradictions that clearly undo the belief in the idea system as one cohesive entity. The height of the Cultural Revolution's chaos, characterized by the moment of Mao's intervention at Tsinghua University, exemplifies the idea system undergoing an Unsettling Phase.

In the Resettling Phase (Stage 3), an idea system has concluded the unsettling dynamic and arrives at a new state that is more settled, albeit in a new form. Often, the potentials of the initial form of the idea system have reached a state of exhaustion, even after repeated adaptions. The system of ideas and the style of codification have been "tested" so that their limitations are commonly recognized. The events and mutations related to exhaustion thus become part of the "data" shared by many members of society. A sense of fatigue and disillusionment, or even illegitimacy, becomes a common response.

A state of rebalancing is also possible in this phase. Even if the idea system may not live on as before, it can be rebalanced so that only the problematic parts and processes are trimmed off, and the idea system can exist in a viable or even realistically functional form. Or, in the case of a decomposition, an idea system may become like a species of weed that seems to "die off" in the wintertime. The cohesive form is no longer present, but its vestiges may remain visible. Yet, an important point is that while the species has decomposed into the ground, this does not mean that the species has become extinct. People's knowledge and experience with a once-institutionalized idea system can be fused with a society's memory and cultural repertories—which one day could be reorganized and then reemerged into new forms and compositions.[2] The steady waning of the revolutionary aura during the last few years of Mao's life, transitioning into Deng Xiaoping's era of governance over China, signifies the Resettling Phase of the idea system.

Basic Mechanisms of Idea Systems

Idea systems could be drawn from or embedded in the worlds of art, sciences, politics, or religion. The logics that tie an idea system's components together can be as diverse as the ways that humans can think. Structurally speaking, the following set of mechanisms are fundamental for an idea system to operate.

The first is *coherence mechanism*s. These mechanisms work to maximally integrate differing ideas, voices, data, as well as information coded in different formats—irrespective of their abstractness or concreteness, their similarity or

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[2] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (The Project Gutenberg, [1852]2006), The Project Gutenberg eBook, February 18, 2006 (eBook #1346} https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1346/1346-h/1346-h.htm

diversity. This mechanism includes the effort to correlate multiple kinds of data, to fit data into specific kinds of codes, and to draw equivalences between concepts. A strongly coherent idea system avoids excessive diffusion and "diversity" that may lead to a convolution of meanings. For example, when the interrogators of witch-suspects attempted to create convergent accounts through manipulative questioning, the effort was to minimize the mismatch of information that could appear in the final confessions.

Defense mechanisms work to deflect and weaken the forces attacking it. Filtering out unwanted voices by institutional means is one technique. Sanctioning those acting outside of the parameter is another. Enlisting supportive epistemic authorities is yet another. One option actually works on the public's deep thinking: it is to put out defensive, alternative potential explanations that orbit around the core propositions. The threshold for creating these potential alternative explanations is rather low. Many of them could be rapidly created and circulated. Thus, the amount of work and resources to refute them would correspondingly increase. Generally speaking, a strong set of defense mechanisms could raise the *threshold* of conversations; as more authoritative experts take part in them, it becomes harder for a common person to question or challenge the idea system. In the case of witch hunts, we could see skeptics being entrapped in highly uneven epistemic battles, for, without information, expertise, or the support of social authorities, it was virtually impossible to penetrate the defenses erected by zealous witch prosecutors.

Adaptive and development mechanisms deal with changes, including modification, adaptation, extension, and development. From the point of view of a strategic manipulator, regulating the pace and the magnitude of these changes is very important, and changes in content are intricate activities. These activities encompass exact decisions to make stepwise inferencing, including measured, selective, and legitimate speculation. This also encompasses scrupulous revisions upon an old doctrine or metaphor, as well as introducing thoughtful intermediary ideas that bridge unconnected concepts during critical junctures. Ideally, these activities should all be well choreographed, but the processes of change are often nonlinear and turbulent, and sometimes spiral out of control, especially when there are diffused or conflicting forces shaping these adaptive and developmental changes. The Roman Catholic Church took actions to raise the difficulty of persecution and curb the overuse of torture; the purpose was to slow down and control the momentum of idea development. Mao, too, did the same when he criticized the vulgar behaviors of the Red Guards, and even the manipulative behaviors of his wife Jiang Qing.

Communicative-cognitive mechanisms involve linguistic and other cultural resources. At one level, these mechanisms make ideas easy to understand, create, use, and circulate. We have seen from the discourses in the book that the simple forms of codification could be used by illiterate people, and even by children, in an everyday context. On another level, a version of ideas also needs to be applied in sophisticated institutional contexts. Generally speaking, each institution—legal, scholarly, religious, or scientific—has a set of codification formats and requirements to which ideas need to conform. Communicative-cognitive mechanisms help to ensure that ideas can be smoothly processed in accordance with the linguistic-cognitive "registers" of these institutional spheres. Demonologists, many of whom were also judges and jurists, were the ones familiar with epistemic nuances and could recode information into formal, standardized language admissible for legal and bureaucratic purposes.

Typologies and Mixtures of Idea Systems

Using the classic social science method of "ideal type," this book has opted for cases showing the differences between idea systems that are driven by an evidentiary versus an ideational mode of codification, and then it has added a third case to show how actors could selectively integrate these two types of processes in a hybrid manner.

By no means does this book assert that the idea system that shaped each case's events was *exclusively* based on one mode without the influence of another. Instead, the typology is meant to highlight some *characteristic* differences, which then allows us to analyze their *characteristic* features. [3]

An idea system principally based on empirical, evidentiary codification, such as witchcraft, has certain distinct dynamics. The goals of the activators of the idea system trying to generate specific ideas were to demonstrate, with as much clarity as possible, clean, unambiguous empirical relationships. Many mechanisms—like physically fabricating witchcraft

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[3] The criterion Weber set up for ideal type still assumes a level of existing difference: "Its [an idea type's] relationship to the empirical data consists solely of the fact that where market-conditioned relationships of the type referred to by the abstract construct are discovered or suspected to exist in reality to some extent, we can make the *characteristic* features of this relationship pragmatically *clear* and *understandable* by reference to an *ideal-type*" (italics in original). Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, ed. and trans. Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch (New York: The Free Press, 1949), 90.

phenomena or verbally narrating a witchcraft incident—revolved around this dynamic.

In contrast, an idea system, primarily operated on ideational codification, places much more emphasis on the internal integrity of an ideal. Its heuristics focus on determining and debating whether or how particular objects, situations, and people "fit with" or "match" certain quintessential, idealized constructs. Intense debates were waged over whether people fitted the broad categories of left or right, as well as the various subcategories, in the Mao-era case study. The many—almost endless—uses of creative, highly visual idioms and "aggregated facts" (which serve visualization functions) were indications of the need to successfully stabilize a certain fit between raw reality and ideational constructs.

I describe their characteristic difference in this way. Obviously, the evidentiary mode of codification of witch hunts has abstract theological narratives. But no one could state that an incidence of witchcraft was an actual, empirical happening, or a particular person is really a witch, without reference to a corpus of purported evidence that can be traced to very specific empirical relations. Judges had routinely acquitted witch-suspects based on evidential weaknesses and inconsistencies. With the exception of the extreme cases of power abuse, if all the empirical relations in the evidential corpus were demonstrated to have resulted from *deliberate* fabrication, then an accused person would most likely be acquitted.

This process is characteristically different from an ideational mode of codification that starts with an integral set of ideals as if such ideals are already a valid truth (that is to say, a moral truth). The discourses about whether someone fits certain revolutionary categories and conceptions are a little like whether a child fits the conception of a "good kid" or a "bad kid." There are "facts" involved in the assessment, but, first of all, the validity of the ideals is independent of those facts. Regardless of whether a child has actually unjustifiably disrespected others, the idealistic distinctions between a good and bad kid are not altered. Second, the facts involved tend to be nonexclusive. Many other facts could be entered into a holistic assessment regarding whether the same child fits the ideal of good or bad. The kinds of "facts" used in the Revolution, such as a luxurious lifestyle or history of corruption, were similarly not of an exclusive nature. Other "facts"—including "aggregated facts"—could be entered or taken out of the process of holistic assessment. Third, much more subjectivity is presumed, and related to it a much higher degree of empirical ambiguity. Idealized constructs are not very concrete or unified in form.

Whether a particular fact *actually* fits or *should* fit an idealized construct—and the extent and manner in which such a fit is to be articulated in a certain situation—is generally understood to depend on the *subjective* decisions of a thinking agent. Many battles thus lie in interpretations and depictions. And it is precisely because a judgment is not just a matter of disembodied fact but also a matter of creative interpretation that it can make so many disagreements unresolvable.

These two modes of codification can be exercised in many cases of current social, religious, and political movements. The idea systems proffered by UFO groups, for example, noticeably rely more so on the testing of empirical propositions, than mainstream churches, which aim to classify and guide the world correctly according to an ideal.[4] In social movements, there are those who rely almost exclusively on science-based appeals to transform societies by exhaustive research, and there are those who seek to move societies in the broad direction of an idealized image—even if that image may be futuristic, unattainable imperfection, or grounded only in subjective appeals.

The different modes of codification may operate together to an extent, but they do contain different lines of operational logic, and the principles of one could contradict those of the other. Randomly mixing modes of codification could result in the weakening of an idea system.

Our third case that examines the legitimation of the War on Terrorism aims to show an instance of a masterly act of mixing such modes of codification. The designers of the idea system selectively, creatively hybridized the two kinds of codification processes, sometimes relying exclusively on one set, and sometimes judiciously intermixing the two modes. We see a hyper-propagation of idealized constructions as well as extensive mobilization of empirical-pattern building, depending on the moment. When the two modes were integrated, they were done so in a complementary manner. For instance, ideational constructs helped to "form" empirical facts on a more basic level—they determine what questions and problems to "look for" and what objects to "look at." The work of empirical pattern-building did not primarily revolve around the revelation of definitive facts; the main activity was the transformation of otherwise ambiguous information into organized, uncertain signs—and ideational elements were indispensable to this.

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[4] For a broad survey, see John R. Hall, *Apocalypse: From Antiquity to the Empire of Modernity* (Malden, UK: Polity Press, 2009), esp. 98–99, 151–152, 157.

Reading the many passages articulated by Bush administration officials has revealed just how *well-choreographed* their acts of intermixing codification were. Many intricate actions were literally done "between the lines"; other intricate actions were done between the documents, across a period of several years. When we move from a close-up view to take a broad, longitudinal view of the whole discourse, we can see the additional works that were executed to build connections between different pieces. Sometimes the works were divided between separate agents, where each of them played a specific role in the larger act of hybrid codification. Their separate actions, each manifesting a degree of epistemic discipline, were coordinated into a cohesive effort to build, activate, and sustain an idea system.

HUMANISTIC RECAPITULATIONS

The situation today emanates evermore dangers resulting from the abuse of ideas. Scientific and rationalist mentalities are often absorbed into the abusive apparatus. *Fair-mindedness*—a cognitive style, virtuous character, and form of competence—is an important barricade to the worst abuses.

Intensified Vestiges from Past to Present

"Revolution" and "witchcraft"—the two topics listed in the book title— seem to evoke impressions of the distant past. But their vestiges are ubiquitous in current public discourses over social and political issues. People today occasionally like to evoke the phrases "witch hunt" and—more so in Chinese-speaking locations—"Cultural Revolution" to vaguely reference certain recognizably dangerous cognitive dynamics, which we have established as resulting from codification styles. As our third case study illustrates, these codification styles have been activated by the Bush administration in ways that are *hybridized* and *intensified*—intensified due to the aid of technological, informational, and expert infrastructures controlled both by the government and by the mass media. In the early-modern era, verbal tricks combined with physical means of fabrication (sometimes physical coercion) were the basis for building evidence. With the capabilities developed now, powerful institutions can create a long list of correlating vivid, extraordinary events in today's world—often catalogued in organizational reports with an intimidating length.

Beyond elite and professional circles, many sensational, extraordinary events can now also be rendered by the masses. The populace can certainly

"rehash" what was systematically developed for them, adding a humorous or scornful remark of originality. But with communication-technological thresholds lowered, much smaller groups and agencies can learn to execute manipulation themselves—co-constructing mediatized spectacles in the era of "'massification' of the media/journalism"—"via thousands of camera-wielding participant/partisan journalists/protesters."[5]

The modern-day manifestation of older-day techniques is widely practiced in contemporary communication processes, by young people who have extensive experience manipulating them. Suppose there is televised footage of a basketball game. It is the prerogative for the do-it-yourself, self-styled sportscaster favoring the home team to:

- Report only the most vibrant moments of the home team;
- Use close-up angles on a player from the home team;
- Give a home player much richer, more amiable, detailed contextualization than an opposing player;
- Make a creative "story" by cropping and recombining videos;
- Magnify a possible violation of an opposing player, giving it ample speculations as to its motive and damage, while ignoring or reframing the many dishonest actions committed by the other team;
- Reverse the order of events slightly to make one player into a constant *initiator* of actions and the opposing player a *responder*;
- Make the actions of the home team coherent while making the other fragmented;
- Use memes, headlines, captions, subtitles, voiceover, soundtracks, and comments to simulate what actually occurred in the game;
- And so on.

Such capacities to creatively produce a "reality" based on another similarly produced "reality"—as Jean Baudrillard wrote in *Simulations and Simulacra*—have become everyday business. Youths and adults, and to an extent the rich and poor alike, generate and condition many "realities"

⁵ Daniel F. Vukovich, "A Sound and Fury Signifying Mediatisation," *Javnost—The Public*, 27, no. 2 (2020), 203–204. See also Samuel C. Woolley and Philip N. Howard, eds., *Computational Propaganda: Political Parties, Politicians, and Political Manipulation on Social Media* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). See also Christopher T. Conner and Nicholas MacMurray, "The Perfect Storm: A Subcultural Analysis of the QAnon Movement," *Critical Sociology* (November 2021), https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205211055863.

that seem to really exist on a daily basis.[6] For the most part, social actors could afford to concentrate on interacting with particular "realities" that they preferred and staying away from the ones they disapprove of. Speech and conduct are no longer regulated by a strong, unified set of norms or one shared sense of normalcy in society, aided by a unified set of social structures.[7] Afforded by the social structure and new technologies, diffused norms and senses of normalcy are produced by numerous networks of shifting social actors who produce, circulate, and validate premises, ideas, data, or even "facts" and "events" pertinent to various inhabited "realities."[8]

In summation, we see both the intensified form of idea abuse emanating from centralized sources and much more diffused networks—all interacting with and often colliding onto one another in today's public political discourse.

The Limitation of Scientific and Rationalist Mentalities

Intuitively, the inadequate reasoning ought to be guarded against by a more stringent rationalist mode of thought and scientific knowledge predicting on the tradition of logical-empiricism (or logico-positivism). But practical circumstances complicate this solution—and in some selected contexts the imperfect application of scientific and rationalist mentalities can worsen social outcomes. This section highlights several complicating factors, following which we will reflect on possible solutions.

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[6] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation,* trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, [1981]1994), 6–11. Per Baudrillard, a fundamental difference exists between a mere misrepresentation and simulation. A simulation is not "false"; like a human clone, the replica can have an existence that is real on its own. To use international politics as an example, the words that are used by international actors to define situations can end up making a situation real. The same can be said of stock market, "the economy," social movements, social media identity constructions, celebrity cultures, or university rankings. Gordon C. Chang and J.R. Osborn, "Spectacular Colleges and Spectacular Rankings: The U.S. News Rankings of American 'Best' Colleges," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 5, no. 3 (November 2005), 338–364; Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *Josephine Baker in Art and Life: The Icon and the Image* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Robert J. Shiller, *Narrative Economics: How Stories Go Viral and Drive Major Economic Events* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020).

[7] For an in-depth discussion, see Charles Thorpe, *Sociology in Post-Normal Times* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2022), 175–235.

[8] See Conner and MacMurray, "The Perfect Storm."

A. Bounded rationality and expertise. The first complication is that rationalist and scientific mentalities are constrained by people's abilities and by practical contexts. Even if people commit themselves to apply scientific and rationalist mentalities to the maximum extent, they are inevitably "bounded" by the biological limits of the mind, the availability of time and information, and various material and practical constraints. In a competitive university, some students struggle to pass a regular science or logic course, while others fail to pursue their preferred careers because of grade performance. The test errors made by these students are painstaking manifestations of people's limits.

"Thinking like a scientist" regarding sociopolitical affairs over a broad range of sociopolitical matters is a respectable attempt. But a member of the general populace is not an expert, an academic, or a scientist. Even those individuals who are tend to have a delimited circle of expertise. Thus, when the populace applies the rationalist or scientific style of codification on a diverse range of matters, it is inevitably in the form of a scientific or "satisficing" answer or simple rules of thumb. One exemplary form is applying a very general "scientific mode of thought," such as the emphasis on logic and argumentative coherence. Another way is to emulate one or two standards or procedures they know, such as the model of controlled experimentation. A third way is to trust and cite opinions by experts and epistemic authorities. Yet another is deferring ultimate judgments to the competitive processes in public discourse. These "fast and frugal heuristics"[9] (or "heuristic shortcuts") came to characterize the actual exercise of scientific and rationalist mentalities in public political discourse. They can still be constructive, but they are not at the same standard, or even the same nature, compared to the mentalities applied by actual scientists or logicians who work on well-defined problems within professional institutions and subcommunities.

Tragedies can happen precisely in this space where the amateur applications of scientific and rationalist mentalities depart from the idealized conventions and standards. This book has demonstrated that, alongside "ignorance," there was also a diverse mix of organized "knowledge" and

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[9] Herbert A. Simon, *Reason in Human Affairs* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1983); Peter M. Todd, "Fast and Frugal Heuristics for Environmentally Bounded Minds" in *Bounded Rationality: The Adaptive Toolbox*, eds Gerd Gigerenzer and Reinhard Selten. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 51–70.

"rationalities" that contributed to the worst social phenomena. Witch-beliefs were driven by scientific and rationalist mentalities, as was the Great Leap Forward campaign. Witch believers in Europe witnessed various "experiments" and "empirical" observations—like the search for the Devil's marks, and the Chinese masses and political leaders alike were exposed to numerous photos and reports to affirm theories that were "scientifically sound." Not knowing the "boundedness" in their own scientific and rationalist mentalities, social actors ended up making ideas with inappropriate confidence and acted zealously, beyond what their abilities and resources actually afforded. These actors only became aware of shortfalls of their epistemic processes after enough counter-information surfaced, and by that point it was too late.

B. Manipulative mimicking of scientific and rationalist discourse and procedures. Idea systems' designers and manipulators could deliberately structure "boundedness," setting up elaborate conditions that systematically misdirect people's exercises of scientific and rationalist mentalities. [10] Prevalent in our current society are packaged or semi-packaged bodies of information, facts, ideas, or even authorities that *mimic* the methodical discourses and practices associated with idealized notions of science and rationality. These works may be performed by professionals trained in public relations or various fields in social sciences and the humanities, reinforced by sophisticated think tanks, academic units, and government agencies. These forms of "mimicking" encompass professional vernaculars, reasonable attitudes, and meticulous documentation in evidence that may match or even exceed the same elements observed in "regular" scientific or rational conventions (which themselves are not free from impurities).

Take the War on Terrorism as a guide. Most Americans did not have the basic expertise in chemical and biological agents, nuclear science, missile delivery systems, historical relations between multiple religious and

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[10] The real world of science, of course, also departs from a naïve image. The institution is filled with power struggles, data concealment, selective reporting, and complex representational processes that are at times arbitrary. See *Science After the Practice Turn in the Philosophy, History, and Social Studies of Science*, eds. Léna Soler, Michael Lynch, Sjoerd Zwart, Vincent Israel-Jost (London & New York: Routledge, 2014); Claude Rosental, *Weaving Self-Evidence: A Sociology of Logic*, trans. Catherine Porter (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Michael Lynch, Simon A. Cole, Ruth McNally, and Kathleen Jordan), *Truth Machine: The Contentious History of DNA Fingerprinting* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

political factions within the Middle East, the basics of foreign relations, or the institution of American intelligence.[11] But government agencies could amass a well packaged, digestible set of ideas and information, releasing these materials incrementally in bits and pieces.

Far from hyperbolic, my study has engaged with several such documents that *resemble* an unadulterated informational source: the reports released, leaked, or authored by Colin Powell, Hans Blix, the 9/11 Commission, Antonio Taguba, the International Red Cross, and Charles Duelfer. These reports appear to cover an extensive amount of non-extraordinary (ordinary) facts, and are therefore referenced as if they are primary sources, which "peers" or "the public" could examine.

But, as illustrated in previous chapters, these seemingly "raw" sources are often already filtered and encoded, and their rawer forms are not subject to open examination. This characteristic is applicable to the myriad of publicly released reports authored by think tanks, NGOs, government agencies, special commissions, and so forth—involving numerous "experts" or credible people. Even if they may not always match the idealized standard of science, they have enough rigor and resemblance that discourse participants are often emboldened to use them to back up their interpretation of existing situations—even using them for so-called fact-checking.[12]

[11] According to a survey study, the American public are much more likely to know more about generic rather than specific facts. Even in the domain of generic facts, more than half of the American public in 2010 could not correctly identify whether Indian-Pakistan relations were friendly, the name of the British prime minister, or the party soon to be controlling the House. Tom Rosentiel, "Public Knows Basic Facts about Politics, Economics, But Struggles with Specifics," the website of the Pew Research Center, November 18, 2010, https://www.pewresearch.org/2010/11/18/public-knows-basic-facts-about-politics-economics-but-struggles-with-specifics/ (accessed May 28, 2021).

[12] A typical problem with fact-checking is that it can only go so far when the available information is limited to that which is already publicly available. For example, a fact-checker can document the actuality of whether an official, news reporter, or an expert has said certain things, and perhaps even some inconsistencies, but they cannot check the information against all the sources. Fact-checking institutions seem to at least uphold a *minimum* standard in idea-making. Yet, a fact-checker can also biasedly select certain facts to be checked, such as those most relevant to one side within a debate; in this sense, fact-checkers can be a force that induces bias (much like fact-finding commissions). Another problem is that many facts in public discourses are expressed as "aggregate facts"—serving visualization purposes—which cannot be easily "checked." "Aggregate facts" are not easily falsifiable, because they are partly interpretations.

For an ordinary member of the public enveloped in dozens of circular debates with the participation of a myriad of voices, or caught up in the busy mundanity of everyday life, the real is difficult to distinguish from the fake. Generally, though, a few quintessential differences may be discerned between the look-alike and actual enterprise of scientific, rationalist institutions that people expect (when they are free from being corrupted by power). For example, on the issue of finding repetitive, correlative patterns, the mode of idealized natural science would supposedly pay considerably more attention to *non-extraordinary* (ordinary) facts. In regard to resources, people, power, and publishing venues, some norms of fairness and openness would have to be respected, even if they cannot be perfectly enforced. The original informational database would ideally be presented to "peer" scholars so that some form of replication or alternative interpretation could be conducted, and the results published without problems.[13]

However, in situations where the fake is too real, or in situations where corruption (by money, politics, and miscellaneous social factors) affects the authorships of even the most respected scientific or academic institutions, adjudicating between the real and the fake might not be realistic for even the most disciplined rationalists.[14] And simple rules of thumb such as *acting based on the best of information* can be destructive and detrimental especially when the sources of idea pollution are widespread.

C. Zones of epistemic ambiguity (empirical and ideational uncertainties). The third factor limiting the power of scientific and rationalist mentalities is dangerous ideas that precisely crop up in certain interesting *zones of epistemic ambiguity*—not within the domain of solid certainty achievable by current means of science and rationality.

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[13] This is only an *idealized* conception of science applicable to some fields of inquiry. In practice, the original data sets may not be available for examination, both in the natural and social sciences.

[14] Real-world scientific and academic institutions are not free from corrupting influences. The founding of numerous privately funded institutes, endowed professorships, fellowships in universities, and even academic journals and award programs has greatly exacerbated this fact. These influences tend to especially populate areas of inquiries where there are financial or political stakes. Under this context, the distinction between the "original" and the mimickers can be extremely conflated, to the point where the mimicking agents could create independent realities with more presence and substance (e.g., in evidential facts, in prestige, in professional authority) than their counterparts, as Baudrillard theorized.

Some uncertainties are empirical in nature. In the Iraq case, the zone of ambiguity includes the discrepancy between the numbers of produced and allegedly destroyed weapons. In the case of witchcraft, the zone includes symptoms of illness, such as black urine or strange coincidences. It is within such zones that many interesting signs fall into patterns that proponents of a particular position use to support a single "best" explanation. While absolute certainty was unavailable, enough evidence warrants speculative ideas to develop, rather than relegating the explanation to random chance.

Ideationally, a vast zone of epistemic ambiguity exists in the matching of codes and information. The acts of speaking about worldly affairs using metaphors, dictums, image-codes, aggregate facts, and abstract categories are common *modus operandi* in public political discourse. Asserting that one is gaining or losing ground in the War on Terror—or in the Revolution—is an *interpretation* instead of a strictly empirical statement that can be straightforwardly verified or falsified. Neither are efforts to label things or the use of elastic categories—such as the forty-something elastic categories in Mao's time, or the various -isms and similar categories of our own time, across the political spectrum. Technically speaking, one event can be labeled within multiple, elastic categories, and many ideas are likely to be supported by aggregate facts or a rich array of information.[15] "Resolving" such ambiguity may entail making decisions in finding one valid, fitting category among many—not simply conducting an experiment or making a mathematical calculation.

The line that separates certainties and uncertainties is often mistaken and ambiguous. "Known uncertainties" and "unknown uncertainties" are not clearly demarcated. Sometimes experts and rationalists can have a

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[15] Beyond the issues of clear informational fabrication and filtering, more complex concerns are codification choices that do not clearly involve "right" and "wrong." Usually, a concrete fact can be falsified in an objectively recognizable manner—such as in the case of a town's population of 5000 being reported as 20,000. In contrast, falsifying an "aggregate fact" or "summarized fact" is not as straightforward. Misapplying concrete categories—such as when a person points to a cat but says that it is a dog—can be easy to pinpoint. But loosely using elastic codes—such as saying that a government policy is suppressing people's freedom, or whether a government leader has made a nation "great again"—involves much more subjectivity.

sense of *what they know they do not know* ("known uncertainties"), and therefore adjust their levels of confidence. But other times they can completely misjudge what they think they know. Many controversial political issues—such as the origin and medical course of viruses, the possibility of ballot manipulation, personal testimonies of egregious events, or the identification of precise sponsors behind uprisings and coups—involve many known uncertainties and unknown uncertainties. Many honest errors in judgment can thus be made in such an epistemic space.[16]

D. Outside of the strength of science or rationality. Lastly, while scientific and rationalist mentalities excel at handling certain epistemic needs, this is not necessarily the case for others. If we look into our own cases, we will discover many rich, substantive topics that ignite ideas beyond "cold" facts and reason. Visual imageries, fantastic stories, and powerful verbal expressions are not simply data but also carry certain moral, cultural, and aesthetic force in unique, situated contexts.[17] They may be "logical"—but such logic operates in tune with humans as *being*, and hence is governed by a form of "inner logic" embodied in actual *beings* in the world.[18] Today's media channels are similarly filled with the same elements, in the form of videos, memes, images, declarations, interpretations, and testimonies. We can attempt to use science to describe the nonrational factors to readers *after the fact*, mapping out their primary forms and effects. But scientific and rationalist mentalities—even if they have considerable influence—do not constitute the entirety of such rich formations, which seem to articulate and influence humans as being. When these semiotically constituted mentalities are not on the same plane, one cannot necessarily be used to understand the other, and attempting to use the logic of one to make sense of the logic of another can quickly hit a limit. Whatever solution that could counteract these formations would need to be more inclusive.

[16] Jennifer Mitzen and Randall L. Schweller, "Knowing the Unknown Unknowns: Misplaced Certainty and the Onset of War," *Security Studies*, 20, no. 1 (March 2011), 2–35.

[17] Gary Alan Fine and Bill Ellis, *The Global Grapevine: Why Rumors of Terrorism, Immigration, and Trade Matter* (New York and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[18] Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (New York: Prometheus Books), 129.

Fair-Mindedness as a Thought Ability, Attitude, and Principle

A cornerstone of the new convention we should emphasize, I suggest, is one of *fair-mindedness*. We cannot demand absolute certainty. We cannot ask persons and cultures to be "perfect." We cannot expect elite social actors not to take part in idea manipulation and make a difference in perceptions. But, if people exhibit fair-mindedness in concrete situational contexts, within the spaces of public political discourse and beyond, then we can realistically temper the worst effects of the idea-manipulations of our time.

The worst casualties in the battle of ideas, I contend, are not simply the consequences brought forth by flawed ideational contents. It was certainly awful that individuals were prosecuted as witches in early modern Europe. But another dimension of the events' tragedy—beyond the physical dimensions—peaked in moments when all efforts at fair-minded reasoning were eradicated from the social scene. Powerful ideas and modes of codification overtook the collective social dynamics and transformed the characters of idea-makers into certain *altered thinking, emotive beings.* A whole, dystopian *state of humanity* with a new *state of mind* seemed to be awakened, which then cracked and shattered healthy sociality and social relations.

Fair-mindedness is at once an *attitude* and an *ability*, exercised within a circumscribed context, and conveys a state of *developed humanity*. We can first conceive of it as a minimum ethic, manifested in mature social actors who have a consistent *attitude* to be open to different ideas and paradigms of thoughts, and information and voices of different sorts, before rendering a sincerely made judgment.

At a more advanced level, fair-mindedness is linked to an *ability* to think in accordance with the heuristic models embedded in different epistemological paradigms and the perspectives of various case subjects, especially the most deserving ones. This ability can be developed from an experience in operating thoughts according to multiple methods of codification and an objective understanding of the basic nature of the "politics of representation."[19]

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[19] The "politics of representation" program developed by Hugh Mehan is a good case in point, as well as this very book and various other works that explore discourses systematically while also doing so humanistically. A key to this method is that various interpretive activities would be examined in their merits or at least described in the works.

Last but not least, exercising fair-mindedness sometimes involves the practice of a high ethical standard, which involves a well-developed *character*. More important than knowledge and information, most pertinent here is the mentality that one will carry through different ambiguous or intense epistemic situations, a refusal to be lured by seemingly simple answers or models of action, even in the face of an overwhelming amount of evidence and social pressure. Fair-mindedness is different from relativism and inaction. In Confucian thought, there is the phrase *Chung Yung* (or Zhongyong) [中庸], commonly translated into the "middle, common" road or way (not to be confused with the Buddhist "middle path" or "middle way").[20] "Middle" more or less means non-biased and objective; "common" means the world, or what is in synchrony with *the operation of the common world*. The path of *Chung Yung*—which regulates speech and action—is actually very difficult to achieve, and for this reason it was believed, in the classical Chinese context, that only a rare few could attain *Chung Yung*, rather than a mass of society being able to do it. In this spirit of *Chung Yung*, fair-mindedness may process all kinds of voices from all kinds of paradigms. Even in the direst situations, one would need to be committed to choosing the most substantive voices to hear, harvesting and synthesizing the most cogent materials or perspectives that are in tune with both the objective truth and the common world.

Granted, not even the best minds can reach the right conclusion if only false information and biased messages are available. During these memorable historical moments, we have seen, however, judicious, fair-minded voices went a long way to mitigate the worst effects of dangerous idea systems. These minds are shining lights during the darkest and the most tumultuous of times. Their voices and modes of thinking—often going against the grain—have embodied hope in the most precarious of contexts. Even with their imperfections, they forwarded the pace of righting the wrongs, even in minor ways. They express among the highest form of ethics. They are the real protagonists of our study.

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[20] For an English translation of this text, see "中庸—Zhong Yong," trans. James Legge, Chinese Text Project, https://ctext.org/liji/zhong-yong (accessed May 28, 2022). See also James Legge, *The Chinese Classics, Vol. 1, Confucian Analects, the Great Learning, and the Doctrine of the Mean* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1893).

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