FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS IN
ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY:
An Interpretative Essay

S N Eisenstadt

Department of Sociology and the Truman Research Institute the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel

The Dominance of Functionalism in the 1940s and 1950s and
the Basic Assumptions of Functionalist Analysis

Functionalism, which dominated in central parts of anthropology and sociology from the late 1930s till about the mid-1960s, has since then been discredited and seemingly discarded. In anthropology, functionalism was associated with A R Radcliffe-Brown (64, 65), B Malinowski (53, 54), and some of their most prominent students—among others, R Firth (33, 34), M Fortes (34–36), H Kuper (46, 47), F Eggn (20, 21), and M Gluckman (although Gluckman was even then critical of some of functionalism’s basic tenets (39–41)). In sociology, functionalism, or rather structural-functionalism, was associated above all with Talcott Parsons (59, 62) and his students—e.g. K Davis (16), Wilbert Moore (57, 58), R Williams, Jr (80), and many others. Robert Merton (56), one of Parsons’s first and most prominent students (but not necessarily a disciple) examined critically the analytical methodological assumptions of the structural-functional approach and developed an independent ‘structural’ mode of sociological analysis (56).

The basic and simplest tenets of functionalism and structural-functionalism are two: one weak, one strong. The weak tenet, not unique to functionalism, is that there exists a close interrelation among the parts or aspects of all patterns of social interaction—above all, of groups and societies. The strong tenet of functionalism is that such interrelations must be understood in terms of the systemic nature of social interaction and organization. Social organizations, groups, and perhaps above all societies constitute systems.
possessing both boundaries of their own and boundary-maintaining mechanisms. Patterns of social behavior—roles, institutions, and the like—must be analyzed in terms of their contribution to the maintenance of the systemic boundaries of societies. Powerful illustrations of this approach in the anthropological literature of the 1940s and 1950s were the analyses of various ritual occasions (e.g., first fruit or harvest ceremonies) undertaken by, among others, M. Fortes (34, 35), Hilda Kuper (46) and W. Lloyd Warner (78, 79). Going back to Radcliffe-Brown (64, 65) and through him to Durkheim (19)—who often served as the totemic father of functionalism in anthropology—they showed how these festivals served, by representing or portraying the common symbols of the society, and by bringing different sectors of the society together in a festive and highly emotional ritual solidarity, as integrative mechanisms, alleviating the society's tensions. One of the most interesting developments of this kind of analysis can be found in Max Gluckman's "Rituals of Rebellion" (41, Ch. 3), where he showed how seemingly rebellious activities in such rituals serve to uphold the existing order.

Such analyses of ceremony also highlighted another central aspect of functional analysis—namely, the emphasis on common symbols (and to some extent values) as a major integrative mechanism of societies.

As Alvin Gouldner (43 185–86, 335–68, 402 ff) has shown, following an earlier indication by Merton (56, Ch. 1), some of the basic tenets of structural-functional analysis can be found in the work of Karl Marx. In his analyses of modes of production and class societies, Marx showed how many patterns of social behavior and organization, be they political parties and groups, legal arrangements, or structures of family, serve to maintain the existing social system of class domination and exploitation. Moreover, in his analyses of religions and ideologies as the "opium of the people." Marx shared another tenet with Durkheimian and Parsonsian analyses—namely, the crucial role of value consensus as a basic integrative mechanism of societies.

The central assumptions of structural-functional analysis were thus that societies were bounded systems with certain basic "societal prerequisites" in the absence of which they would disintegrate.

According to Parsons, societies functioned by

*adaptation*, or securing generalized resources for use in achieving the varied output goals of the system, *goal attainment*, or providing for the effective expenditure of resources in the pursuit of particular goals, *integration*, or providing for the coordination of the diverse elements and units within the system, and *latent pattern maintenance*, or maintaining the stability of the overall structural reference points and boundaries that define the system. These functions (which are often referred to by their abbreviations A, G, I, and L) can be ordered according to the hierarchy of control, with pattern maintenance the controlling function at the top and adaptation the ultimate conditional element at the bottom.
The four functions virtually follow from the very concept of a system. If a set of elements can be considered to form a system (rather than a merely arbitrary subset of the parts of some larger whole), then there must be a boundary that demarcates the elements within a system from elements not properly considered a part of the system. (55 23-25)

Parsons thought such functions were needed by, and could be identified in all societies and groups, in all patterns of social interaction (even in personality and in whole cultural systems). He held that the various patterns of social behavior and organization must be analyzed in terms of their contributions to the fulfillment of these needs. This mode of analysis was applied, in the late 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s, to many areas of sociological and anthropological research. Considered to have great promise, it left its imprint on subsequent research.

Rooted in the central problems of sociology, the structural-functional school's methodological sophistication (compared with that of the earlier, mostly anthropological functional school) was manifest in its analysis of how various patterns of behavior and interaction met the needs of societies or groups by maintaining their boundaries (1. 2).

Of central importance in this context was the analytical reformulation of such concepts as roles, norms, values, institutions, and processes of institutionalization. According to Parsons, Mayhew notes (55 12-13).

the structure of social systems consists in institutionalized normative culture

Any attempt to attribute ordering, regulatory power to norms must come to grips with the problem of how norms control conduct. The process by which this happens—the process by which norms come to be routinized, established, and so to speak, built into social organization—is what we call institutionalization. The highest levels are cultural, including the ultimate 'grounds of being,' or basic philosophical propositions, from which values are derived. Within the social system, there are four levels of values, norms, collective goals, and roles. Each level is said to control the level below it and to constitute conditions for the level above it. Social systems must respond to conditions, but the direction of response depends on what sorts of new institutionalized norms can gain legitimate acceptance within the framework of established value premises. Implicit in this scheme is the idea that higher levels change more slowly than lower levels, or, alternatively, that pressures for change and other disturbances are handled by adaptive changes at the lowest possible level in the hierarchy. Thus the hierarchy of control is for Parsons an explicitly cybernetic concept. At the top of a cybernetic hierarchy are informational elements which define and control lower-level elements of energy and matter.

In close connection with these analyses there occurred also an important shift between the functional and the structural-functional approaches in the conceptualization of culture and its place in the social systems.

Anthropological functional analysis implied a view of culture as either the "reflection" of social structure or as at most a basic but not necessarily
autonomous component thereof. Structural-functional analysis, on the other hand, defined culture—as well as personality and social system—not as entities in their own right but as analytical components constitutive of any pattern of social interaction (1, 2).

A central problem of functional analysis was, of course, the methodological one. How was one to prove that a certain pattern of behavior serves to maintain some system of which it is a part?

The methodological problem was first formulated by R. K. Merton (56), later by A. Stinchcombe (72) and J. Elster (31). Mary Douglas (18, 33) summarizes Elster’s analysis:

Elster has most helpfully spelled out the conditions that a correctly argued functional analysis must meet. Though they sound abstruse at first, they greatly clarify the issues. An institutional or behavioral pattern X is explained by its function Y for a group Z if and only if:

1. Y is an effect of X.
2. Y is beneficial for Z.
3. Y is unintended by actions producing X.
4. Y or the causal relation between X and Y is unrecognized by actors in Z, and
5. Y maintains X by a causal feedback loop passing through Z.

Major Criticisms of Functionalism and the Development of Alternative Approaches

By the late 1950s several major criticisms had been voiced against the structural-functional school (17, 25, 30). The general criticisms that developed in this period focused around several different, yet interconnected themes. First, it was claimed that this mode of analysis was unable—because it assumed a social consensus around central societal values and goals—that it emphasized boundary-maintaining mechanisms of social control, and it implicitly minimized power and coercion as means of social integration—to explain either social conflicts and processes of social change or the great historical range of institutional variability. This inability was often blamed on the very general way Parsons defined “functional prerequisites”—a generality that could not explain the variability in the structural characteristics of the institutions that presumably fulfilled the same needs in different societies. Concomitantly it was claimed that Parsons explained social change only in terms of very general master trends, such as those of social differentiation, and not in terms of specific social processes operating in concrete historical contexts.

A parallel general criticism of the structural-functional school was that it minimized the autonomy of individuals by presenting an oversocialized con-
ception of man (81), the structural-functional school was thought to subsume social and cultural subsystems under the systemic exigencies or needs of the primary social system.

Such criticisms were accompanied by the proposal of alternative theoretical approaches, new and old (1, 2, 17). Common to these was the rejection of needs and prerequisites as bases for the "natural" givenness of any institution or role. An institutional arrangement (be it the formal structure of a factory or a hospital, the division of labor in the family, the official definition of deviant behavior, or the place of a ritual in a given social setting) or role was no longer considered derivable from its function in the social system. Likewise various patterns of behavior that developed within such settings were no longer examined mainly in terms either of their contributions to the working of institutions or of their deviance from institutional norms. Instead, the very establishment of institutional arrangements and the very definition of roles required explanation.

The alternatives to structural-functionalism differed in how they proposed to explain the emergence and continuity of institutional settings. First, they differed on the nature of the processes through which institutional settings are set up and maintained. Here the conflict (13, 15), and exchange (3, 4, 45) approaches explained all institutional arrangements in terms of negotiated order, while the structuralist approach of Lévi-Strauss (48-52) and the Marxist approach (25, 42) sought such explanation in terms of hidden or deep structure. All such approaches emphasized power rather than symbolic elements as the major constituent of institutionalization.

Among those who analyzed institutions in terms of negotiated order, the conflict and exchange schools emphasized the elements of power and bargaining over resources in negotiations, the symbolic-interactionists emphasized the struggle to define social situations, while the ethno-methodologists stressed the basic codes of the language of social interaction.

A second, seemingly contradictory approach was to be found among the structuralists [following C. Lévi-Strauss (48, 50, 52)] and the Marxists. Here there developed a search for principles of "deep" or "hidden" structure akin to those which, according to linguists such as Chomsky, provide the deep structure of language. In attempting to identify such deep structure, the structuralists stressed the symbolic dimensions of human activity and certain rules inherent in the human mind. In contrast, the Marxists explained institutions and their dynamics through a combination of power with a symbolic dimension—e.g., the dialectic between forces and relations of production, alienation, class struggle, and class consciousness.

In summary, the alternative approaches emphasized several themes in their attempts to explain the crystallization of institutional roles (a) power relations, and the coalitions developed in the course of such relations, (b) coercive
and conflicting elements, (c) the manipulation of symbols, attachment to them, and their coalescence into patterns of interaction and institutional arrangements. (d) the possibility that participants in interactions may attach different meanings to situations, and that these definitions are related to perceptions based on role incumbency, and (e) the autonomy of subgroups, or subsystems, with goals differing from those of the broader organization or institutional setting.

**Major Shifts in the Modes of Social Science Analysis**

By the late 1960s these criticisms of structural-functionalism had become associated with more general theoretical and often ideological controversies. These were closely interwoven with the so-called crisis of the social sciences, which culminated in an attack upon the major premises of positivist science, of which the modes of functional analysis were seen as integral parts (25, 30).

The discussions and controversies of this period involved the major substantive problems of the social sciences (e.g., the nature of social order and of past and present societies), the perennial meta-problems of social sciences analysis (e.g., the vision of man and history, the various modes of analysis and explanation in the social sciences), the place of the social sciences in modern and post-modern intellectual tradition, and the boundaries of scholarly disciplines.

Far-reaching shifts in the definition of the major concepts of social science analysis, in the relations between the major explanatory models employed in the social sciences, and consequently also in the major directions of research all affected the fate of functional analysis (28, 30). Basic social science concepts such as culture, religion, knowledge, social structure, and social behavior were reconceptualization as distinct and “real” entities rather than analytical constructs—i.e., as constituting each other and “partners” in social interaction.

Concomitantly, theory has shifted away from the emphasis on collective symbols, values, and norms that had characterized the functional and structural-functional schools. As a result of this shift, the structuralists (à la Lévi-Strauss) and less explicitly the ethnomethodologists conceived of “culture” as the programmatic code behind human behavior, they espoused the view of man as (to use Geertz’s felicitous if ironical expression) a “cerebral savage” (37, Ch 13). From this perspective, culture is fully programmed according to clear principles embedded in the very structure of the human mind—principles that regulate human behavior through a series of codes. By contrast the symbolic anthropologists—e.g., Clifford Geertz (37, 38), Victor Turner (75–77), and David M. Schneider (68, 69)—and to some extent the symbolic interactionists in sociology began to conceive of culture as a social construction, a set of expressive symbols constructed through active human interaction (63). Finally, individualistic or “rational choice” modes of analysis
viewed culture as the result of the aggregation of individual choices, reflecting differences of power (44).

The "symbolic" anthropologists and those symbolic interactionists who analyzed social organization from the point of view of "rational choice" agreed that culture resulted from a process of negotiation. The nature of such negotiation, however, they conceived in radically different ways. The "rational choice" view resembled Marxist views emphasizing the manipulation of symbols for narrow class-ends and analyzing the production of symbols. The concept of culture espoused by symbolic anthropologists—above all Geertz (37, 38)—was summarized recently by J. Bruner (12 65–66).

It would not be an exaggeration to say that in the last decade there has been a revolution in the definition of human culture. It takes the form of a move away from the strict structuralism that held that culture was a set of interconnected rules from which people derive particular behaviors to fit particular situations, to the idea of culture as implicit and only semi-connected knowledge of the world from which through negotiation, people arrive at satisfactory ways of acting in given contexts.

In sociology a parallel shift took place in the conception of social structure. On the one hand, many researchers came to define social structure as a real entity composed of groups, their interests and conflicts. Meanwhile, at the other end of the spectrum of sociological analysis, social structure came to be viewed as networks or organizations arising from the aggregation of patterns of interaction, such structures had no autonomous characteristics. Excepting certain emergent qualities often described as primitive effects, much of this research ignored the tradition of structural analysis represented by the work of Simmel (70), Merton (56), Blau (4), and Boudon (7–9)—a tradition that stressed the formal characteristics and emergent properties of social structure.

These shifts in both the definition and the analytical status of culture and social structure were often accompanied by a preference for deterministic, reductionist, "realist," or "materialist" interpretations of social action and cultural creativity.

The same shifts changed social science research directions in this period (30). A dissociation occurred in all the social sciences between studies focused on symbols (their construction, patterns, and meaning)—on "culture"—and studies analyzing social structure, institutional or organizational formations, and patterns of social behavior.

A closely related trend was the marginalization of the major arenas of sociology of culture—the sociology of religion, knowledge, and the arts (27).

The Discarding of Functional Analysis

As functionalism was first criticized and then discarded as a legitimate mode of analysis, the major problems with which it had attempted to cope ceased to be addressed in large sectors of social science. The most important of these
were the emergent qualities of social structure, the possible systemic tendencies of patterns of social interaction, and the ways emergent qualities and systemic tendencies structure human interaction and behavior. The major concepts developed and employed in functional analysis (values, norms, rules, institutions, and processes of institutionalization) fell likewise into disuse. Whereas earlier critics of structural-functionalism had doubted that these concepts captured real phenomena, and disagreed that they could be understood in the same way by different interactants, in the later discussion such aspects of social interaction were barely touched upon. Thus on the whole (with the exception of some ethnomethodologists), approaches that stressed negotiation in the construction of social interaction neglected to inquire into the rules governing such negotiations or into the processes that establish such rules. Indeed, some scholars espousing these views—e.g. Bourdieu (10. 11)—claimed that they consciously neglected this problem in order to stress instead the various strategies of action employed by individuals in different situations.

Structuralists à la Lévi-Strauss, and to some extent Marxists (insofar as they addressed themselves to these problems), derived such rules (norms), along with the systemic tendencies of social formations, from the structure of the human mind (or of the "forces of production"). Beyond the general claim that these rules were promulgated by ruling groups, proponents of structuralism and Marxism did not explain the processes that translated structures into concrete patterns of social interaction or that gave rise to systemic dimensions of such interactions.

The Reemergence of Functional Premises and Orientations

Eventually, interest in functionalism, together with interest in the analysis of "whole" societies or social formations, began to reawaken, if only in subtle ways. Such a reemergence of functionalism can best be seen—perhaps paradoxically, but not surprisingly—within the Marxist or Marxian camps, above all among scholars concerned with problems of ideology, of domination and power, or of political economy.

Scholars who considered ideology to be not a mere system or congeries of symbols but rather something embedded in social life (see e.g. 5, 73) began to stress the interlock between ideology and power. They held that by becoming (to use the famous Gramscian expression) "hegemonic," ideology served to legitimate the existing patterns of power—the boundaries of the prevailing systems of power. A similar conclusion was reached in the various Marxist studies of political economy that have burgeoned in anthropology (66).

Despite many disavowals, these works and the proliferating comparative institutional and organizational studies in various social sciences indicated (if sometimes only implicitly) that various institutions and patterns of social interaction develop and maintain systemic boundaries, especially those con-
cerned with the maintenance of systems of power. Most of these works did not acknowledge that their analyses were based on functionalist premises. Their authors chose instead to distance themselves from what they saw as the "conservative" and "positivist" implications of the "old" functionalist analysis. But ironically these works conceive of the relationships among culture, ideology, and social structure in ways that resemble those of the earlier functional-anthropological works. In their analytical detail, many of these studies relating ideology and power [see e.g. Maurice Bloch's analyses of the Circumcision Ritual among the Merina of Madagascar (5, 6)] are more sophisticated than many earlier Marxist approaches. They attend more closely to ideologies as systems of symbols with some intrinsic characteristics, to the psychological processes through which symbols become accepted by large sectors of the population, and to how symbols and ideologies are interpreted in different ways by different sectors of society. In addition, they analyze the relations between historical conditions and the crystallization of systems of ideology or political economy. Yet because of their unwillingness to admit concern with some of the major problems of functional analysis, such problems were treated only implicitly in most of these works.

Thus, for instance, most of these works have not studied how such systems of political economy or power are constructed and changed, nor have they—M. Bloch partially excepted (5, 6)—analyzed in detail the social actors. Above all they have not analyzed—contrary, for instance, to Marx himself—how the interrelations between power and ideologies may both legitimize the existing system and generate processes of change. These works also paid little systematic attention to the role of religious sects and heterodoxies in social change. None of these researchers has confronted directly the basic methodological problems of functionalist analysis mentioned above.

Starting Points for the Reassessment of Functional Analysis

The works discussed here, along with numerous other comparative and historical studies, have much to suggest about the problems and possibilities of functional analysis. All attest to the inadequacy, in its general formulation, of the concept of system prerequisites (74). They indicate that the specification or construction of such needs that take place in most patterns of social interaction are not determined by the level of differentiation of social structure alone, or by the respective modes of production. Whatever systemic boundaries such patterns of interaction exhibit, they are neither simply given, nor are they constructed as "closed" systems that totally encompass the populations active within them. The central challenge to a reappraisal of functional analysis is thus the identification of (a) the social processes through which the concrete prerequisites and systemic boundaries of social interactions are constructed and effected, and (b) of how the cultural, ideological, and power components in such constructions are interwoven.
Historical Empires an Illustration of the Reassessment of Functional Analysis

In the following pages I illustrate functionalism reassessed by extending in a simplified way the analysis I presented almost a quarter century ago of the political system of bureaucratic empires (22) In that work I attempted to identify the common systemic characteristics of the historically centralized bureaucratic empires—that is, the Sassanid, Roman, Byzantine, and Chinese empires, the original Caliphates and the Ottoman empires, and the European states in the period of Absolutism That analysis was based on the explicit premise that such empires generated characteristic boundaries and "needs," as well as specific types of activities to assure their continuity

Among the characteristic features of these empires, I stressed the coexistence of traditional, undifferentiated political activities with more differentiated, specifically political goals, noting especially how the latter were limited by the former I argued that various organizations developed within these empires, mostly through the efforts of their rulers, to implement policies designed to maintain the specific external and internal boundaries of the system (i.e., its specific institutional contours and characteristics) The rulers were interested in freeing resources from commitments to traditional aristocratic groups and controlling these resources themselves For example, the rulers attempted to create and maintain against big landowners' encroachments an independent peasantry with small holdings By this means they sought both to assure the peasants' independence and to provide resources for themselves They also tried to establish colonies and settlements of peasant soldiers not controlled by the aristocracy to ensure sufficient military manpower for the state

In the work just described I began to explore problems that went beyond functional analysis—especially in asking how such a system is constructed and maintained First I stressed that the institutionalization of such systems was not assured by some overall trend to greater structural differentiation but was contingent upon several historical conditions Certain levels of differentiation in combination with the emergence of political entrepreneurs—rulers with the vision and ability to create new political entities Such combinations developed in some societies—those out of which the empires in question developed—and not in others In the Greek city-states, no group of leaders or entrepreneurs developed capable of forging a new type of polity In other cases—e.g., those of Charlemagne and Genghis Khan—such leaders did arise, but the necessary broader social conditions were lacking

Second, I stressed the prevalence within these empires of systemic contradictions The rulers, for example, attempted to limit the influence of the very aristocratic system of stratification and legitimation that made them rulers, meanwhile the lower strata of the population, to whom the rulers
attempted to appeal. began to "aristocratize" themselves. Such contradictions generated struggle, change, and the eventual demise of these systems.

Third, instead of taking the persistence of these empires for granted or attributing their demise to external factors or general historical trends, I attempted to analyze the specific conditions under which they broke down. For example, the rulers' tendency to maintain their control sharpened the conflicts between the traditional and the newer, more flexible and differentiated strata. The latter groups were often destroyed or became alienated from the rulers. The greater the intensity of such internal contradictions and the greater the pressure of external exigencies, the more quickly changes in such societies came about, and the greater the chances for their breakdown.

Fourth, I analyzed the specific mechanisms and policies that maintained these systems, the relations between different types of entrepreneurs, and especially the means used by bureaucracies to implement the policies of rulers. I described the possible breakdown of such mechanisms through their "aristocratization." 

In my initial work I did not fully explain how institutional entrepreneurs constructed such systems, nor did I detail how cultural forces, power dimensions, and material resources are interwoven in the processes of empire construction and demise. I did not, in other words, take into account some of the criticisms of the structural-functional approach noted above. Given the state of the art at the time. I was unable to face squarely the central problem of functional analysis—the processes through which the systemic boundaries and structural prerequisites of these empires were constructed and reconstructed. However, recent analysis of axial civilizations\(^1\) (27) has made it possible to treat these problems in a more systematic way. This research indicates that the empires were constructed by coalitions of political and cultural elites. Each elite promulgated its own emphasis on either the transcendent or the mundane world (see below). In close conjunction with these differing ontological conceptions there developed distinct political visions, and the combination of these visions with the processes of their institutionalization provides the clue to the crystallization and dynamics of these empires.

Thus differences in the specific institutional dynamics of these empires were greatly influenced by both the ontological and the political visions articulated by the various coalitions of elites and counterelites—and especially by the definitions of the major institutional arenas in the empires. The Chinese center, for example, was constituted by a coalition between the emperor and the literati, both of whom exhibited a strong this-worldly orienta-

\(^1\) These Great Civilizations—the Ancient Israelite, Christian, Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist—all shared some conception of a great chasm between the transcendent and mundane worlds.
Consequently there developed in China little symbolic differentiation among the various social and cultural arenas. The literati comprised both the cultural and political elites. Chinese economic groups, having no autonomy, did not differentiate.

In the Byzantine Empire, on the other hand, a strong tension existed between this- and other-worldly orientations. State and church, and civil and military aristocracy were sharply differentiated. and the arenas of social action were defined as distinct. This articulation, combined with the relative autonomy of agrarian and urban groups, created a dynamic entirely different from that in China. In the Ottoman Empire, the division between church and state was structured in yet another way (ideally it did not exist, but it was in fact very important)—a way related closely to the mode of institutionalization of the Islamic vision.

These same factors shaped the movements of protest that developed in these Empires. Multiple elites, above all multiple sects and heterodoxies (25, 26), developed in all these civilizations. Such groups promulgated different ontological visions and competed to institutionalize them. Each group sought hegemony in the production of symbols, and control of the media of communication. These elites, sects, and heterodoxies also constituted the most active elements in the movements of protest and the processes of change that developed in these societies. Between and among them structural and ideological linkages developed—above all among rebellions, central political struggle, and religious or intellectual heterodoxies—that were capable of impinging significantly on the center(s) of society.

Between Axial Age civilizations with this-worldly orientations there developed crucial differences in the structures of sects and heterodoxies (25). In the monotheistic and the Chinese civilizations where a strong this-worldly orientation prevailed, the various heterodoxies and movements of protest tended to combine efforts to redefine ontological reality with visions of a new social and political order. By contrast, in civilizations oriented toward the other-world (e.g., those based on Hinduism or Buddhism), where salvation was not sought in the political arena, sectarian activities developed either in the direction of renunciation or, as in the case of the Bhakti movements, toward the reconstruction of inner experience. Their impact was thus greatest on the redefinition of their own symbols and boundaries and not on the reconstruction of political centers (26).

The different views of reality institutionalized in the different Empires influenced greatly the extent of overlapping within them of political and civilizational frameworks. This overlap in turn greatly influenced the relative "survival" of such nonpolitical collectivities (e.g., the Greek Orthodox religious collectivity). The greater the degree of overlap (as in the strongly this-worldly Chinese Empire) the smaller the probability that nonpolitical collectivities would survive the downfall of the empire. In the monotheistic
and the other-worldly civilizations the continuous tension between this- and other-worldly orientations, promulgated by different coalitions of elites or subelites, made the civilizational and political imperial collectivities somewhat independent from each other. This gave them different rates of continuity, sometimes even enabling the survival of the former after the demise of the latter.

A Reassessment of the Problems of Functional Analysis—the Cultural Definition of Social Arenas

The preceding, necessarily simplified analysis of the processes of construction, continuity, and change in some of the centralized empires, together with a closer look at the numerous comparative, historical, and organizational studies available, illuminates somewhat the central problem of functional analysis referred to above. Construction of concrete systemic boundaries, “needs,” and prerequisites of patterns of social interaction is effected through the cultural definition both of political, economic, and religious activities and of various situations of interaction. Such definitions derive from symbolic or ideological evaluations, rooted in a society’s basic ontological concepts, of the unique elements of human experience. Culture mediates in the definition of sex, growth, and aging, of mental and physical capacities, of the importance of time. It mediates definitions of the major arenas of social activity as well, specifying the ground rules that regulate social interaction and the flow of resources. Such definitions and regulations construct the broad contours, boundaries, and meaning of the major institutional formations—one types of centers, basic contours of cities, patterns of authority, modes of social hierarchy, modes of economic production and polity, and the like.

As a comparison of the Chinese and Byzantine Empires indicates, cultures do not always define in the same way such structural elements as economics, politics, cultural creativity, roles, and situations of interaction. However, such definitions must always take into account the organizational and systemic needs of these arenas, which are influenced by the degree of structural differentiation arising from their prevalent division of labor. by their political-ecological situations, and by the basic prerequisites of different modes of production (67. Ch. 3). At the same time, it is these definitions that specify the needs of the various organizational settings, their relative autonomy, and their hierarchical arrangement. Thus, for instance, the construction and effective functioning of a modern industrial system require specific institutional arrangements—e.g., industrial labor must be available, the division of labor must be of the proper type, labor discipline within the enterprises must be adequate, capital must be available, and so on. Such prerequisites thus became even more specific in capitalist and socialist industrial systems (67: 182–266).
This does not mean that the common core of such "functional prerequisites" can be provided only by one suite of institutional arrangements. In different industrial—even in different capitalist—regimes several types of functionally equivalent institutional arrangements may develop—e.g., various kinds of industrial relations, capital markets, and the like. Such arrangements are influenced by the specific conceptions and definitions pertaining to the institutional arena in question—in this case, by the ultimate legitimation of economic activities, whether in terms of direct economic profit, industrial growth, or collective political or ideological goals.

The Construction of Systemic Tendencies, Boundaries, and Needs

Such specification of the alternative ways of arranging the functional prerequisites of seemingly similar systems defines the environments within which the organizational problems of such systems are set, the relations among different social systems and their respective environments, and the range of sensitivities and responses to such environments. It is wrong to assume that there exists a natural environment for any society. Rather, as our analysis of the Empires has shown, each society, each concrete pattern of social interaction, constructs its own environment. Such construction generates stress within the various organizations, groups, and "societies" and determines both the nature of the contradictions, conflicts, and crises that develop within them and the salience of these potential conflicts for the continuity of the system. Such constructions also influence the ways groups cope with their problems and crises, as well as the outcomes of such struggles—whether breakdown of regimes or revolutionary transformation.

The analysis of empires (and of many other social formations) has also shown that such systems never develop as entirely self-enclosed entities. The populations living within a society or a macro-societal order are usually organized not into a single system, but in different ways on several levels—e.g., into political systems, economic formations, different ascriptive collectivities, and civilizational frameworks. These different systems evince different patterns of organization, continuity, and change; these structures and patterns may change within the same society to different degrees and in different ways in various areas of social life.

The Process of Construction of Boundaries and Structural Prerequisites

The Interweaving of Culture, Power, and Material Resources

The definitions and specifications of the "needs" of different patterns of social interaction are not a natural emanation from cultural symbols or tropes. They are not determined by any rules of "deep structure," nor are they effected mainly by the utility considerations of individuals (as claimed by the ration-
al choice theorists). Rather, the construction of collectivities, social systems, and civilizational frameworks involves the delineation of their boundaries and the concrete specification of their needs involves processes of struggle in which symbolic, ideological, material, and power components are continuously interwoven. These processes are structured, articulated, and carried out by specific social actors and carriers—above all by elites, influentials (29), and coalitions interacting with each other and the broader social strata.

These components are not distinct, autonomous, ontological entities, but rather—as has indeed been emphasized by structural-functional analysis—analytical dimensions of any pattern of social interaction. They are interwoven at every level of social interaction and, contrary to the assumptions of structural-functional analysis, no single component has a natural predominant place in a cybernetic hierarchy. Rather, at different levels of social interaction, such components are interwoven in different modes.

**The Ubiquity of Conflict and Change.** Construction of such different definitions of the major arenas of social action, and concomitant specification of the “needs” or prerequisites of various groups, societies, and the like, not only assures the relative integration and continuity of different patterns of interaction, it also generates the potential for conflict and change within every group or society. Conflict is inherent in any setting of social interaction where various actors struggle to institutionalize their different cultural orientations and ontological visions. But although the potential for conflict and change are inherent in all human societies, the concrete processes and directions of change differ greatly between societies and civilizations according to the specific constellation within them of the elements analyzed above—e.g., ontological principles, the pattern and social division of labor, coalitions of elites, counterelites, and influentials, and political-ecological settings and processes.

Given this potential for conflict, mechanisms of control always develop. The more complex these are, the more sensitive they are to internal and external pressures, and the more vulnerable they are to greater internal contradictions (71). The great fragility of the imperial systems was due in part to the fact that the various complex mechanisms of control that developed in them were carried by distinctive elites who made “natural” targets for movements of protest. Such targets were not as easily visible in less complex societies, where mechanisms of control were embedded in broader ascriptive collectivities.

In any pattern of social interaction, the opposition between processes of control and processes of change results in continuous reconstruction of situations and arenas. Most such reconstruction and reinterpretation concerns routine social interchange, but some involves changing the basic premises and symbols of collective identity. Such attempts to reconstruct the rules of the
game may be dramatic, and they are relatively rare. When they occur, as for instance in the crystallization of the Axial Age civilizations (26) or in the Great Revolutions (23), their historical impact is enormous.

Summary: A Reappraisal of the Problems of Functional Analysis

Some of the basic tenets of functional analysis seem valid. Systemic tendencies exist that structure and bound patterns of social interaction, and such patterns exhibit various prerequisites. However, one must go beyond "classical" functional or structural-functional analysis by taking seriously both the major earlier criticisms and the major subsequent theoretical developments.

This discussion (see also 1, 2) goes beyond the assumptions of classical functional and structural-functional analysis by not assuming that the boundaries, "needs," or "prerequisites" of social systems are given—either by natural facts, by the respective levels of structural differentiation in a society, or by the basic characteristics of different modes of production. Rather, this discussion indicates that the crystallization of the systemic tendencies of patterns of social interaction is itself a social process. Such boundaries, needs, and prerequisites are themselves continuously constructed through specific social processes, activated by special social actors, in which power, symbolic orientations, and material resources are continuously interwoven in different modes. Definitions of the various major arenas of social interaction constitute the core of such construction. Such definitions are constructed in close relation to the broader ontological premises of the societies in which they develop. At the same time, they shape the ground rules that regulate the flow of resources in each arena.

Such systems, continuously constructed, are open and fragile. No human population is confined within any single system, humans occupy a multiplicity of only partly coalescing organizations, collectivities, and systems.

Of central importance in the construction and maintenance of system boundaries are different integrative mechanisms, which acquire an autonomy of their own. Assurance of their working is of crucial importance in the continuity of groups or societies.

Such integrative mechanisms and processes of control become more important and autonomous—and hence also more fragile—the more complex different social and political systems and civilizational frameworks become.

The construction of system boundaries generates, in all patterns of social interaction, in all groups or societies, continuous conflicts, processes of change, and movements of protest. The interactions among such processes and movements, on the one hand, and among various mechanisms of integration and process of control on the other, shape the degree of continuity, demise, and/or transformation of social groups and societies.

These considerations do not by themselves solve the methodological
problems of functional analysis raised by Merton, Stinchcombe, or Elster. They may, however, indicate the components of social action, as well as the types of processes that such analysis must take into account.

**Literature Cited**

13. Coleman, J. S. 1964 *Collective decisions* Social Sci 34:166–81
32. Firth, B. 1939 *Primitive Polynesian Economy* London: Routledge
33. Firth, B. 1971 *Elements of Social Organizations* London: Tavistock
34. Fortes, M. 1945 *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi* London: Oxford Univ Press
35. Fortes, M. 1949 *The Web of Kinship*
Among the Tallensi London Oxford Univ Press
36 Fortes, M 1970 Time and Social Structure and Other Essays London Humanities
37 Geertz, C 1973 The Interpretation of Culture New York Basic Books
38 Geertz, C 1983 Local Knowledge New York Basic Books
39 Gluckman, M 1958 Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand Manchester Manchester Univ Press
40 Gluckman, M 1949 An Analysis of the Sociological Theories of Brunslaw Malinowski The Rhodes-Levingston Inst
41 Gluckman, M 1963 Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa London Cohen & West
42 Godelier, M 1973 Horizons, Trajets Marxistes en Anthropologie Paris Maspero
43 Gouldner, A 1970 The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology New York Basic Books
44 Hirshfield, L., Scott, B and Yen Gou 1982 Theories of knowledge and culture Soc Sci Inf 21(1) 161-98
47 Kuper, H 1952 The Swazi London Int African Inst
49 Lévi-Strauss, C 1983 Structural Anthropology New York Basic Books
50 Lévi-Strauss, C 1966 The Savage Mind London Widenfeld & Nicholson
51 Lévi-Strauss, C 1967 Totemism Boston Beacon
52 Lévi-Strauss, C 1971 Mythologues Paris Plon
53 Malinowski, B 1927 Sex and Repression in Savage Society London Kegan Paul
54 Malinowski, B 1954 Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays New York Doubleday
55 Mayhew, L. 1982 Talcot Parsons on Institutions and Social Evolution Chicago Univ Chicago Press
56 Merton, R. K 1948 1963 Social Theory and Social Structure New York Free Press
57 Moore, W 1955 Economics and Society New York Doubleday
59 Parsons, T 1951 The Social System New York Free Press
60 Parsons, T 1956 Economy and Society London Routledge & Kegan Paul
63 Peterson, B 1979 Revitalizing the culture concept Annu Rev Sociol 5 132-66
64 Radcliffe-Brown, A. R 1948 The Andaman Islanders Glencoe, II. Free Press
65 Radcliffe-Brown, A. R 1957 A Natural Science of Society Glencoe, II. Free Press
67 Runes, W. 1989 A Treatise on Social Theory. Vol II. Substantive Social Theory Chapt 3 Cambridge Cambridge Univ Press
71 Simon, H 1977 Complexity Models of Discovery and Other Topics in the Methods of Science ed H Simon, Sect 4, pp 175-265 Boston Reidel
72 Stinchcombe, A 1968 Constructing Social Theories New York Harcourt Brace
73 Tausig, W 1980 The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in Latin America Chapel Hill North Carolina Univ Press
74 Turner, J. Maryansky, A 1988 Is neofunctionalism really functional? Sociol Theory 6(1) 110-21
75 Turner, V 1947 The Forest of Symbols Ithaca Cornell Univ Press
76 Turner, V 1968 The Drums of Affliction Oxford Clarendon
77 Turner, V 1974 Dramas, Fields and Metaphors Ithaca Cornell Univ Press
78 Warner, R. L 1941 The Social Life of a Modern Community New Haven Yale Univ Press
80 Williams, R. Jr 1970 American Society New York Knopf
81 Wrong, D 1961 The oversocialized conception of man in modern sociology Am Social Rev 26 183-93