Trouble in the Forest

California's Redwood Timber Wars

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have storage capacities that play important roles—namely, they accumulate traces of public discourse in archives that are necessary to sustain collective identifications and projects over time.

In concrete terms, consider that a forest and factory can bring workers together, and a town can bring its people together, but only mass media can bring the wide-flung regional timber folk together, spread out as they are across cultural spaces of forest, family, factory, and town. But local publics like this reach further still, upward and outward in scale, to identify local practice with national cultures and ultimately global political and scientific communities, larger collectives whose universalizing concepts of self-identification and inclusion—for example, citizenship and globalization as capitalist world system—are now used with facility in the collective self-identifications of timber workers, Maxxam managers, and forest defenders alike. People now cast themselves in global terms. They project themselves imaginatively into identification with global public cultures, contributing physical and psychical labor to ever greater unities by directing their attentions into world historical events and projects.

In this way psychoanalytic social theory allows us to speak of collective political subjects, for instance, the hegemonic cultural order of capitalism and oppositional social movements like the forest defense, without falsely isolating individuals into discrete categories—that is, without hypostatizing publics into groups of discrete actors that mobilize their bodies in unitary directions. This logic of collective identification helps us better understand a number of complex situations encountered by ethnographic field-workers, for example, a timber worker who consented to work on antiunion shop floors while criticizing the corporation, sympathizing with forest defenders, and attending environmentalist rallies. Is he a forest defender or a logger? His identity, not unitary, flows in both directions and presumably in others. Likewise, a forest defender who supports timber workers could organize against Maxxam while defending the traditional, pre–Maxxam Pacific Lumber's reputation as a good environmental steward. The timber war field of cultural politics is precisely this struggle for power over flows of attention and psychical investment in the sociomental environment.

The concrete expression of this struggle, through the long detour of political processes that ultimately control elections and policy decisions, including the forest practice rules governing redwood production, appears in the channeling of the flows of values that human labor, attending to nature, blasts out of nature into the commodity circuits of capitalism. Capital accumulations appear as compromise formations in the material pattern of values projected by opposing identificatory public and counterpublic forces.

It follows that the timber wars must be viewed as a symbolic politics of subject formation, embedded not just in the social relations of capital to labor but in those of the democratic republican—that is, the liberal—constellation of institutions that define everyday life, especially media. They are a redwood politics of libidinal-economic production. Just as Michel Foucault described the human sciences as power-knowledge complexes—discourses that produce and further subjectify the bodies they represent, technologies through which the European Enlightenment remade the masses that remade the world—so too do new social movements of labor and environmental defense create new public cultures with newfangled powers that reconfigure social actors and redirect their (psychical) labor (energies) into new collective place-making projects that carve out alternative places in alternative futures.

The Deep Culture Drive of Perpetual Conflict

At the energizing core of this constellation of liberal institutions—this colonizing culture of rights—lies the concept of individual property right. The framers of the U.S. Constitution, the pioneer lumbermen of Humboldt, the big redwood timber barons of the twentieth century, the lumber and sawmill union folk, and the CEO of Maxxam all agreed on one basic point: This is America, they repeated, the singular nation of liberty and equality, of which the distinguishing character is a specific program for the collective defense of individual rights, with property, free speech, press, assembly, and religion the most popularly understood. But among these rights, property has historically exercised extraordinary power. According to the prevailing faction of the nation's founders—the Federalists—the Constitution was conceived and written to represent and thus constitute the citizen as a free person, owner of his own body, mind, labor, and products, thereby forging him into a concrete Lockean bulwark against intruding power, governmental or otherwise. It was a necessary mechanism, they argued, for a newly conceived democratic polity in which a propertyless but newly enfranchised majority faction would certainly threaten minority rights sooner or later.
In the words of the historian George Mace, "the major innovation of the American Founding Fathers was the conversion of economic social conflict from confrontation based on the amount of property to confrontation based on the kind of property." This understanding of changing class relations can be traced in the words of Publius (Alexander Hamilton, writing in the Federalist Papers), who explained that by combining the democratic institution of direct election with the republican institution of representation, and repeating this structure at the state and federal levels while checking and balancing the powers, "the federal Constitution forms a happy combination." By ensuring the rights of property and setting a course for expansion of the nation's geographic sphere, it guarantees the public good somewhat paradoxically by guaranteeing a proliferation of opposing private property interests anchored in places distant in space and time.

What the authors of the Federalist Papers, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison—and the white owning class they represented—dreaded most was concentrated, unaccountable political power and its possible embodiment in a tyrannical majority. Two methods of preventing majority faction presented themselves: destroy the liberty that allows destructive differences to emerge, or produce "the same opinions, the same passions, the same interests" in everyone (10.4). The first cure would be "worse than the disease," while the second is impractical and unwise because "the reason of man is fallible and he is at liberty to exercise it, [so] different opinions will be formed," with the result being continuous instability and violence (10.6). This is because "as long as the connection subsists between his reason and his self-love, his opinions and his passions will have a reciprocal influence on each other; and the former will be objects to which the latter will attach themselves" (10.6). Citizens, in other words, are driven both by reason and by their passions. Reason will consistently fail if the passions are not contained. This familiar refrain of Enlightenment philosophy is directly embodied in the sacred institution of individual property and must be interpreted as the founders' most concrete solution to majority faction and limited government. Pure democracy could foster tyranny of the masses—a united, impassioned majority—unless, that is, the countervailing institution of a civil right to property is made equally as sacred as the political right of franchise. In property lay the life or death tendency of the national body politic.

One consequence of this program is clear: it helped carve out for the nation a colonial future of perpetual property conflict driven by reciprocally constitutive institutions of free speech, press, and assembly in each new place over which the colonizing culture extended its sphere—systems that establish a modern public sphere and constitute a social space of media technology for the formation of collective will and public power. Such was the ambivalent nation of public rights and individual liberties imagined and construed in the founding discourse.

From these remarks, we can draw several conclusions. There was a riotous, libidinal, and embodied subject conceptualized in the framers' performative and people-making constitutional utterances. We must therefore see the framers not merely as politicians but as philosophical psychologists as well—their Enlightenment views represented the essential nature of the human being as passionate and driven by impulses beyond its own control. People are ambivalent creatures whose drives, if not contained, overpower their reason. Their energies must be bound in productive institutions. The ambivalent, vindictive, rapacious, conceited, envious, fearful, loving, and ultimately irrational subject must therefore be subjected to rationalization by the rule of law. Only the law can make this creature into a citizen—a rational modern. And the law of property was central to the plan, as was the panoply of civil rights, including free speech, press, pulpit, and assembly, through which the institution of property is continuously made into a public affair. Property is, in fact, a state institution that hails all people into citizenship with spectacular public representations of their national character.

The Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the Constitution, the Federalist Papers, and innumerable lesser documents, including a litany of Supreme Court decisions, invoke a disciplinary, psychological discourse that channels its classifications and concepts of essential human nature into the great project of constituting the nation. In so doing, they did more than just recognize a passionate, interested, and conflicted subject desirous of property and fascinated by the law; they called it into being. Revolutionary U.S. nationalism must therefore be viewed as an economic psychology with a normalizing force that energized the colonizing culture, facilitating its privatization of the New World. It established constitutionalism as a deep cultural drive, among whose most profound effects are a
constant proliferation of rights-based forms of property and of free-speech public spheres, which together ensure the ongoing production of our modern archive culture and the filling of it with evidence of rights discourse.

The political architects of American modernity understood that it is not possible to extract the psychical character of human organisms from their economic, political, and spiritual livelihoods. To produce and maintain a successful nation, a political constitution must extend its government to the realm of subjectivity, where the liberty of economic, political, religious, and sexual energies inextricably merges in the psychosocial performance of citizenship.

It will help to recall that property is not the thing suggested by common sense and much property discourse but rather a social relationship defined by a bundle of enforceable rights that govern the relations between individuals with regard to things. Property rights are made by communities of struggle and institutionalized in laws that establish such relations, relations that are ultimately backed by force of some kind, for example, the state’s monopoly on legitimate violence. They are philosophical concepts being put—and again, eventually forced—into action. The right of individual property, for example, puts the philosophical idea of communally defined and publicly limited personal freedom into action.

But over time a problem emerges. The juridical institution of property rights begins to demonstrate its advantage over the coarticulated and reciprocally constitutive political and civil rights of universal franchise, free speech, press, religion, and assembly: being anything legitimately appropriated from nature through labor, property accumulates materially as power over labor under conditions of relatively open competition and freedom of contract. Accumulating power over labor then subverts its own conditions when, deployed in emerging markets, it perverts the operation of rational discourse in the public sphere. The philosophy of freedom, institutionalized as property, provides for, and even invites aspirations to, domination in the public sphere. The basic rights package turns out to be a program for perpetual conflict in the public sphere over property (rights).

But there is something more primary still in the representation carried by these institutions, something now built into this program for social conflict: a deep cultural context of modern European philosophy—the sciences of man!—a new certainty in the knowledge of the human being’s intimate connection to nature, its vulnerabil-

ity to nature, and its rootedness in nature. Knowledge of man as nature suggests that man must be dominated like nature—that it can and must be improved just as surely as wild external nature must be. Modern democratic polity makes these improvements a mandatory state project—through them Enlightenment philosophy addresses and forms a new national public of continuous improvement. When the framers wrote this perspective into the textual engines of national self-identification, it was part of a rational plan to defend against and to improve that alien, wild, natural force—the passionate, erotic, unruly, angry, envious, and greedy nature of actually living people—the unreasoning body. Thus did modern American democracy begin on the psychical defensive. The labor of government was rationally divided against itself, separated into tripartite powers, and set up to be continuously revolutionized with updated technology for the exercise of free speech, press, and assembly. These were conditions for republican democracy that alone made possible the aggregation of popular attentions and sentiments that gave substance to the philosophical concept of a general will embodied in a secular state, a state that was legitimately sovereign for just that reason—a state that had the right to rule because it was the rule not just of right reason but of collective, public reason.

Critical theory and history of American modernity—and by extension its subsidiary conflicts like the redwood timber wars—should begin here, in the juridical culture system that combines the legal authority of property rights with the other core symbols of the revolution (namely, the other civil and political rights) to form an institutional engine that proliferates public struggles and expands geographically as it constitutes the affective performance of American nationalism. The end result is a colonizing knowledge system, among whose chief institutional achievements must be included the collective force of its patriotic worker-citizens’ deep and pleasurable feeling of consent to be governed by a perpetual conflict of interests.

The Public-Sphere Spectacle of Rights

We should not be surprised to find that this conflict pervades the permanent record of media spectacle in Humboldt, for reasons intrinsic to the concept of the public sphere. Jürgen Habermas has shown how the natural rights constructed by modern constitutions in effect called the public sphere into its modern configuration, guaranteeing its
role as the technology of public address through which nations would call themselves to order. With the rights of free speech, press, assembly, and association, he wrote, “the functions of the public sphere were clearly spelled out in law.” These constitutional choices also inaugurated “the [juridical] protection of the intimate sphere (with the freedom of the person and, especially, of religious worship),” in what amounted to an “early expression of the protection of the private sphere in general that became necessary for the reproduction of capitalism in the phase of liberalized markets.” Nicholas Garnham lauds this Habermasian model for its “focus upon the indissoluble link between the institutions and practices of mass public communication and the institutions and practices of mass democratic politics,” for its “focus on the necessary material resource base for any public sphere,” and for its “escape from the simple dichotomy of free market versus state control.” My point here is that the so-called free market is a political construction deeply imbued by the state constitution with imbricated rights of free speech, press, and assembly.

On the nation’s frontier, where the story of the colonization of Humboldt begins, newspapers were a singular transmission line for the cultural discourse of the nation. They dominated the public sphere with a spectacle of words from the distant capital and eastern population centers, a vital technology connecting Humboldt’s local conversation to the continuous address that was forming the nation. They made possible a relatively informed, nominally free, and increasingly heterogeneous discourse in which something called informed public opinion might ostensibly form, something from which an idea of consensus could be derived through electoral process, something like a collective will.

Of course there was much more to the public sphere. There were bars, conversations on the docks and in the streets, citizens groups, voluntary associations, and even Humboldt’s genocidal volunteer Indian-hunting militias—these were all places where the conversations took place that boiled down opinion. They were sites for exchange between citizens. But the function of the newspaper system stands out among these collectivizing channels. It projected the culture of rights and perpetual conflict into the redwoods. And while this public-sphere rhetoric claimed universality and spoke as if it had no body at all, it was, as Michael Warner succinctly puts it, “structured from the outset by a logic of abstraction that provides a privilege for unmarked identities: the male, the white, the middle class, the normal.”

This was precisely the character of newspaper address that spoke to Humboldt through the region’s first local paper, the *Humboldt Times*. From its first issue in 1854, through the period of Indian trouble in which the indigenous lands were enclosed and otherwise appropriated, the *Times* was there, holding up a mirror of universal republican virtue in the bay redwood region and facilitating the instantiation of national culture.

In this way, newspaper culture initiated a media archive on which so much of Humboldt’s future historical consciousness would ultimately come to rely. The *Times* recorded the colonial discourse of redwood settlement, preserving its rhetoric of perpetual conflict and providing future historians with classifications and discourses through which the people invading the redwoods tended to see the world and remake it. In the stories of Indian trouble, labor trouble, and trouble in the forest I tell in later chapters, the papers are a primary source, as they have been for all previous historians of the region. The dominant conflicts that rocked the region in the decades leading up to the timber wars largely work on the present through this archive’s towering presence in historical consciousness. The state’s self-investment in the people and markets that constituted the nation as a public performance of affective character must largely be measured in terms of this collectivizing technology. Media made national self-consciousness possible, and so interpretation of Humboldt’s contemporary historical consciousness, and by extension the redwood timber wars, must begin in the voice of its public-sphere archive.

We need to treat the colonizing discourse of rights-driven markets, publics, and politics as an apparatus of power and ask how its continuous display in regional papers help set the cultural conditions of timber war. We can start by considering how the *Times* represented Anglos as citizen-subjects of what Étienne Balibar called “the nation form,” by which he meant a matrix of institutions that collectively shapes modern subjectivity in the image of national ideology. Modern nation-states produce national identity with a cultural and psychological depth that Balibar calls “fictive ethnicity,” which essentially means a feeling of “community instituted by the nation-state.” Nationality is a structure of feeling or community embodied and lived as identity produced under social conditions of state signification. It is formed within a field of power governed by state-sanctioned institutions of modern everyday life. It is crucial to note that the term *fictive* does not signify something unreal, untrue, or non-existent but rather points to
the presence of a social imaginary, in the constitutive sense that cultural theory gives this term, as I will explain in the following section. For Balibar, “Every social community reproduced by the functioning of institutions is imaginary, that is to say, it is based on the projection of individual existence into the web of collective narrative, on the recognition of a common name and on traditions lived as the trace of an immemorial past, even when they have been fabricated and inculturated in the recent past. But this comes down to accepting that, under certain conditions, only imaginary communities are real.” That would be the very conclusion reached in Cornelius Castoriadis’s *The Imaginary Institution of Society* and Benedict Anderson’s celebrated *Imagined Communities.*

Balibar sees the institutions of family and compulsory education as the principal engines of fictive ethnicity in twenty-first-century Western nations, whereas in the nineteenth century and before, the family-church institutional dyad had done most of this work. Universal schooling under the national compulsion of enlightened social engineering produces collective linguistic identity and community that, according to Balibar, in each case “produces the feeling [in the present] that it has always existed...it assimilates anyone, but holds no one...it affects all individuals in their innermost being (in the way in which they constitute themselves as subjects), but its historical particularity is bound only to interchangeable institutions.” Yet “the contemporary importance of schooling and the family unit does not derive solely from the functional place they take in the reproduction of labour power,” he says, “but from the fact that they subordinate that reproduction to the constitution of a fictive ethnicity—that is, to the articulation of a linguistic community and a community of race implicit in [that nations’] population policies.”

Race is essential to such language communities because they can always add strength and stability to their social project of maintaining order by positing a biologically material anchor for national identity. The geographic frontiers of a people are not in themselves necessarily enough to bind the structure of feeling for the nation across time and space. It “therefore needs an extra degree (un supplément) of particularity, or principle of closure, of exclusion...that of being part of a common race.” Consequently family, school, church, gender, language, and race are held to combine in the fictive ethnicity of the modern nation form. And this amalgamation is precisely what we hear in the archive of media spectacle and newspaper culture stretching back through the history of conflicts that map out the story of capital in Humboldt—a mélange of variously practical, cultural, narrative, and discursive supplements that, taken together, fairly describe an American national form of fictive ethnicity as it was differentially achieved in the redwood bay region under local conditions of Indian trouble, industrial forestry, and deforestation.

But the foregoing argument compels me to stress again the operation of mass media in the complicated engine of modern cultural colonization, for it was there that the specter of constitutional law was continuously displayed, addressing the people together, one and all, *e pluribus unum*, with an ideal image of republican virtue, calling all peoples (white and male, largely) into collective being by gathering their attentions in a public structure of feeling, situating them within a broadcast image that identified them with each other in and through that great symbolic structure—the national form of fictive ethnicity. The continuous spectacle of democratic public-sphere nationalism made locally informed participatory citizenship possible, calling to people with symbols of liberty and equality that channeled the force and fuel of their bodily labor and psychical attentions through juridical institutions that expanded the national colonial project.

Finally, the case of Humboldt teaches us to add one last cultural institution to our conceptualization of the national form of fictive identity that colonized the redwoods. In the modern American social imaginary, the concept of property forms another supplement, another extra degree of particularity or principle of closure and exclusion through which American identity knows itself and performs. The constitutional people-making machine and the media spectacle that helped establish its public and universal norms have never strayed far from this principal symbol of American virtue.

Benedict Anderson has shown how print capitalism in general and newspaper culture in particular helped make collective feelings of modern nationalism possible by establishing the experience of horizontal simultaneity—that new form of modern time consciousness in which a Humboldt pioneer, for example, who would never know and never meet more than a tiny fragment of his or her countrymen, could nevertheless develop “a complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity.” Here again is that media link that channeled the nation and its culture of rights into redwood ecology and Wiyot territory, setting in motion the long march of capital though Indian war and labor trouble that created the conditions for
timber war in the late twentieth century. It helped make this place modern by way of instating what the political philosopher Charles Taylor, among other culturally inclined theorists, would call a modern social imaginary.

The Redwood Imaginary

Cultural sociologists debate how best to interpret the meanings of social life and explain their institutionalization and reproduction, especially as they contribute to economic, gender, racial, and other pejorative forms of inequality.54 In this sense, questions of social justice are always at the center of cultural sociology. In this book I use the culturalist concept of a social imaginary—shared symbols, values, laws, and meanings performed and embodied in the institutional repertoires of a group—to theorize the local formation of a redwood imaginary, which I define as a unique, place-based manifestation of the modern social imaginary. I strive to show how it came to embody and shape local expressions of power, domination, and resistance in redwood social history and thus how it ultimately set the conditions for timber war.

We should pause for a moment and consider the analytic content and usefulness of this term—social imaginary—for bringing cultural and environmental theory together in a new analytic tool for studying conflicts like the timber wars. With Taylor we can start by defining a society's or group's social imaginary as the shared knowledges, competencies, and values embodied in the various patterns of its actors—their institutions; a social imaginary, he writes, is a “common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.”55 But common understanding comes from common practice, and this circular formula constitutes the peculiar strength of the social imaginary as an analytic category: it is dialectical critical theory, a way of defining and analyzing collective cultural phenomena as complex and always emergent processes in which energetic subjects answer, carry out, and ultimately embody and reproduce the cultural structures within which they emerged and which invited them to participate in collective action and gave them so much opportunity to do so in the first place. Institutions within a social imaginary are its culture patterns—its practical, tacit knowledges performed as meaningful, signifying actions. The effects of a social imaginary on the world register in the labor these institutions direct.

A social imaginary therefore consists of instituted ways of acting in the same way that a language consists of instituted ways of speaking and that collective belief systems, like religions, consist of instituted ways of seeing the world. Because they are symbolic systems, people use them for signification—and because signification is material, they transform the world.

For Taylor, rational capitalism, the public sphere, democracy, and rights discourse are vital institutions of modern social imaginaries.56 They are what is modern in modern social imaginaries, and they show how social imaginaries are in fact moral orders, in which differing ideas and values enacted in the relatively autonomous but reciprocally constitutive spheres of everyday economic, social, and political life establish a shared way of life. They are, in brief, what we mean by modern culture.

The compound term social imaginary is more insightful and analytically productive than the simple term culture precisely because it identifies, separates, and then dialectically binds the subjective and objective elements that common usage of the term culture too often leaves oblique. The social is nothing if not objective and collective, so the term social imaginary must be read as objective and collective imaginary. But the term imaginary refers to the imagination—which is nothing if not the subject's active representation and meaning-making activity; so now it reads objective collective representational action. One final ingredient is necessary: in the structuralist and semiotic movements indebted to the linguistics of Ferdinand Saussure, first among others, the objective collective social world is nothing if not a symbolic order; it is a meaning-making system comparable to a language system, an enabling and constraining system that individual and collective subjects put to use. Hence the term should be read objective-collective-symbolic order of and for active representation. There seems to be only one way to interpret this complex idea: the concept of a social imaginary defines the social as a usable system of ideal elements already up and running in institutional structures that individuals encounter as an objective moral order. Thus a social imaginary is a system of meaningful, value-laden institutions into which people are thrown and which they tend to embody and naturalize for use in making, performing, and expressing their own symbolic meanings, values, and practical lives.

Whereas Émile Durkheim called this performative order the world of collective representations and compelled us to treat them as social