SCIENTOLOGY "ETHICS": DEVIANCE, IDENTITY AND SOCIAL CONTROL IN A CULT-LIKE SOCIAL WORLD

Roger Straus

Alfred University

Qualitative research at the macrosocial level can be facilitated by examining the more fully articulated social worlds existing within advanced societies. Based on the author's field research, Scientology's structure, culture, and comparability to American capitalist society are discussed and "Ethics," its institution of social control, is shown to involve a paradigm in which conduct flows from social identity and deviance is defined in terms of a progression of stages of identity loss through reference group confusion. A hypothetical case shows how each stage is treated through specific intervention formula designed to reverse the process. "Ethics" is shown to closely parallel symbolic interactionist theories of deviance. Its differences from symbolic interactionism are ascribed to the inherent contradiction between the individualistic and system-centered orientations permeating American capitalist society.

If we can get beyond our personal reactions to unconventional groups like Scientology, we can begin to use them as resources for the qualitative study of social institutions. Scientology's no-holds-barred pragmatism and lack of institutionalized cultural or political constraints upon organizational practice have, for example, permitted a 30-year-long, open experiment in social control. "Ethics," as Scientology labels its social control system, represents the outcome of this attempt to create a workable alternative to how society at large defines and manages deviance. As we shall see, "Ethics" exaggerates (and brings into clearer focus) certain features of American capitalist society while incorporating a model of deviance and conformity closely resembling symbolic interactionist theory.

To discover regularities in social life, qualitative researchers have long depended on information that can best be generated through appropriate case comparisons (e.g., Thomas and Thomas, 1938). One of the barriers to macrosociology of the interactionist kind has been finding something with which to compare advanced Western societies— yet we are already tapping a resource that can be used toward this end, those relatively autonomous social worlds existing as enclaves within our general society.[1] While usually dismissed as "cults," certain of these worlds (e.g., Scientology) are in fact organized much like miniature societies, lacking only such features as territorial jurisdiction and economic autonomy. One strategy for doing qualitative analysis at the "macro" level, then, would be to piggyback onto substantive studies at which we are already adept.

Thus, when we probe beneath its surface differences, we find that the Scientology world in fact not only shares but glorifies the essential value, motives, and rationality of American capitalist society. As we will see, Scientology epitomizes the historical trend toward rationalization of social control noted by Spitzer (1979). Its "Ethics" system proves to be of especial interest for the reason that Scientology institutionalizes a contextualist model (Straus, 1981) linking deviance, identity and reference group.[2]

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This type of social world, however, presents a host of methodological problems, such as the difficulty of obtaining good information. Not only do "cults" tend to maintain relatively impermeable boundaries between themselves and the outside world (Simmons, 1964; Balch, 1979), but they are often organized so that participants only perceive the actual pattern of the whole as they advance through the status hierarchies of their world. An "insider's perspective" is, therefore, necessary for practical understanding of a world like Scientology. Our usual methods of participant observation, interviewing members or exmembers, analyzing public documents, and so forth, cannot in and of themselves provide that overarching perspective.

My own solution to this problem is largely accidental: between 1968 and 1970, prior to my training as a sociologist, I had obtained "insider familiarity" as a Scientologist. That experience was subsequently documented in the form of field notes worked up in 1972 for an undergraduate course in qualitative analysis. This material along with documentary evidence then in hand has been supplemented on an ongoing basis by (a) intensive interviews with others who have had contact with Scientology or were presently Scientologists, and (b) analysis of the group's copious internal literature and promotional mailings. I have found it necessary to rely almost entirely on my own files and sources over the years because—with the major exception of Wallis (1977)—the literature on Scientology is primarily concerned with debunking rather than understanding it (e.g., Malko, 1970; Bainbridge and Stark, 1980).

THE SCIENTOLOGY CULTURE

Scientology originated in the early 1950s as an outgrowth of American si-fi writer, L. Ron Hubbard's Dianetics movement. Under his canny leadership it spread throughout the English-speaking world, the rest of Europe (particularly Scandinavia) and, most recently, into Mexico and Latin America (Anonymous, 1984). Although membership

figures are not obtainable, this world seems to involve (as a conservative estimate) hundreds of thousands of participants across the globe, rivaling the scale of many national societies.

Scientologists consider themselves different from "the raw public" as a result of the counseling-like process known as "auditing" through which (holds the group's culture) accumulated confusions, traumas, and limitations are progressively cleared away. Thus, like other "identity transformation organizations," Scientology maintains its integrity through a process of encapsulation (Greil and Rudy, 1984). Its worldview, however, is couched in a technological framework bearing virtually no resemblance to the schemata of conventionally occultist groups or self-consciously religious cults. There is no institution of faith, no concept of supernatural revelation, no formal separation of sacred from profane, no call to believe anything. The entire approach is pragmatic; truth is what works, period (Hubbard, 1970a).

Where Mead (1934) places the *I*, Hubbard puts the *thetan*, the self conceived as a living viewpoint capable of "postulating" and perceiving its postulates. Going beyond ethnomethodology to idealism, Scientology holds that "*Considerations take rank over the mechanics of space, energy and time* . . . These mechanics are the products of agreed-upon considerations which life mutually holds" (Hubbard, 1968:36, emphasis in original). The goal of auditing is "to bring an individual into such thorough communication with the physical universe that he can regain the power and the ability of his own postulates" (Hubbard, 1968:37). After a series of auditing levels designed to eliminate personal aberrations and produce the "State of Clear," the Scientologist begins the as-yet open-ended "Operating Thetan Course," the ultimate promise of which is to restore total power over matter, energy, space, time, life, form, and thought (Hubbard, 1954, 1968).

While this might seem rather far out, primary stress is placed on auditing's practical value, how it can help you maximize survival and prosperity in everyday life. Thus, despite the unfamiliar quality of Hubbard's cosmology and its Faustian promises, there is no conflict with capitalist values. To the contrary, Scientology culture seeks to maximize those values.

For example, in further contrast to conventional religiosity, Scientology shares the American emphasis on individualism; one of its basic premises is that "you are entirely responsible for the condition you are in." The philosophy defines *thetans* to be discrete individuals, auditing stresses individuation and differentiation (Hubbard, 1954). Toughness and effectiveness are championed as primary virtues — along with group loyalty, as it is also a premise in Scientology that maximizing one's own survival is fused with the survival of one's group and of all beings everywhere.

From the first days of Dianetics (Hubbard, 1950), survival has remained the bottom line in practice, organization, and philosophy. While the rationale of institutionalized Scientology is to deliver auditing services, this is seen as inseparable from the larger cause of "Clearing the planet" before we destroy ourselves through nuclear or ecological catastrophe.

SCIENTOLOGY ORGANIZATION

"My purpose is to bring a barbarism out of the mud it thinks conceived it and to form, here on Earth, a civilization based on human understanding, not violence" (Hubbard,

1970a:7). At least nominally toward these ends, Hubbard has institutionalized a complex system of formal organizations officially termed *churches* but known to Scientologists as *orgs* (for "organizations"). There are presently some 110 "local orgs" across the world providing the bulk of services to Scientologists. Beneath these are hundreds of privately owned missions providing introductory services and, above them, several different hierarchies of administrative and special-purpose organizations (Church of Scientology, International, 1984). It will become evident that the establishment of this organizational system has critical implications for the Scientology culture.

The central activity of Scientology is auditing; to move "up the Bridge to Total Freedom" one must "go on lines," take services from an "org." While only a minority of Scientologists join organizational staff, most will take auditor training to further their own progress and to help serve the cause (at every level, these two motives are identified as a single package). "Donations" for auditing and training, which can run into tens of thousands of dollars over a Scientologist's career, are the primary source of income for the Scientology network.

Again, rather than rejecting the capitalist system, Scientology institutionalizes an unabashed market economy. In fact, Hubbard (1970b) consistently champions laissez-faire capitalism and decries socialist alternatives. Yet, there is nothing within Scientology resembling the owner/worker division of labor; with only minor exceptions, the means of production are collectively owned by the Church and surpluses are either invested in the system or distributed among its staff.

Thus, the organization and its corporate interests become, as any sociologist would predict, as much ends as means for the Scientology world. Further paralleling the institutional order of developed societies, in contradiction to the usual characterization of an other-worldly cult dependent on the charismatic authority of its leader, Hubbard has strategically used that authority to establish Scientology upon the legal–rational basis of an almost ideal–typical bureaucracy. This social world is run along formal lines defined by "Policy"—the stream of bulletins and material written or authorized by Hubbard, periodically compiled into thick volumes and treated for all intents and purposes as law.

Policy specifies every aspect of organizational life, technology, and role expectation for Scientologists. Except in misconstruing this point, Wallis (1977) has provided an exemplary description of Scientology's organizational framework, which, while periodically changing in detail, has retained the same basic structure since the late 1960s.[3]

INTERNALIZED SOCIAL STRUCTURE

One key to the survival of a social world is its ability to behave like a social system in Parsons's (1951) sense of the term. Directly in line with Spitzer's (1979) analysis of trends in capitalist society, the Scientology world relies on internalized social control as the key to systems maintenance. That is, Hubbard ascribes to the notion that prevention is the best medicine; therefore, policy and procedure alike emphasize the socialization of Scientologists into enacting "correct" identities.

The implicit theory here is much like that of Park and Burgess (quoted in Wirth, 1931) who argued that an individual only becomes a person upon acquiring status in a group, and that the person's very self-conception is based upon that status. For Thomas and

other early clinical sociologists, however, the values of the mainstream American society, their social world of reference, took on a normative character (Wirth, 1931), even though the theory itself is relativistic. Similarly, while Hubbard holds that one's only real identity and value is one's status within the group, this relativistic proposition is reduced to a normative precription by the framing assumption that Scientology is the only legitimate reference group. This is not a hidden agenda, as in most Western societies; rather, the Scientologist quickly learns that he/she is expected to enact the principle that "you *are* your role."

From the first encounters with Scientology and Scientologists there is a push to get the newcomer to explore basic Scientology concepts as tools for enhanced living, with the expectation that he/she will discover their practical value and consequently adopt the premise that "Scientology works." Once the novice begins to perceive effects from Scientology technology, it is only natural to define further involvement with the group as in one's own best interest. At the same time, it's philosophical frame gains immediate plausibility — including the definition that Scientology is the only group able to "save the planet." There is no requirement that Scientologists "believe" this or anything else. Awareness is epiphenomenal to action in Scientology; the transactions of auditing and associated training are simultaneously the primary means of socialization to the cultural realities of Scientology.

The key to understanding the attraction of this world is its adeptness in creating a sense of change as evidence that Scientology works, that the technology is doing something for the person. Scientology life is carefully managed by the group in a strategic reversal of those principles whole societies employ to minimize the sense of identity change (Strauss, 1959). By keeping its people "moving up the Bridge" through ever more positively valued statuses, by providing language and symbols encoding its cultural realities, and by structuring services to actually produce that sense of change, Scientology keeps them happy — and keeps them operating within its grounds of meaning.[4]

THE "ETHICS" INSTITUTION

The actual institution of social control in Scientology is known as "Ethics": "All that Ethics is for—the totality of the reason for its existence and operation—is simply that additional tool necessary to make it possible to apply the technology of Scientology" (Hubbard, 1970b:7). While this statement can be read in terms of either individual or organizational discourses, the major concern of "Ethics" is to keep Scientology working as a social world. Adapted as it is to this world's bureaucratic framework, the practice theory (Scott, 1969) of its "Ethics" institution represents a shift from the reality-constructionism of Scientology philosophy to a businesslike, functionalist rationality:

> The whole decay of Western government is explained in the seemingly obvious law:
> WHEN YOU REWARD DOWN STATISTICS AND PENALIZE UP STA-
> TISTICS YOU GET DOWN STATISTICS.
> If you reward non-production you get non-production.
> When you penalize production you get non-production . . .
> In the conduct of Scientology in all matters of rewards and penalties we pay sharp
> heed to the basic laws as above and use this policy:

> We reward production and up statistics and penalize non-production and down statistics. Always.
>
> And we do it *all* by statistics—not rumor or personality or who knows who. And we make sure everyone has a statistic of some sort. We promote by statistic only. We penalize by statistics only. (Hubbard, 1970b:57–58)

Local responsibility for "Ethics" is assigned to the "Ethics Officer" (E/O) located within the Department of Inspections and Reports in the standardized 21-department organization chart used by all Scientology units. Two suprasystems—the Guardian's Office and the Sea Org—have additional centralized responsibility for overseeing "Ethics" in the larger Scientology world and dealing with external threats to the system. While production statistics—such as "auditing hours well done" for a staff auditor—are monitored by the Ethics Officer and form the basis upon which bonuses, other rewards and penalties are administered within the organization itself, the term *statistics* is more generally used in a symbolic sense to refer to a person's level of effectiveness and productivity or as a qualitative measure of the effects he/she causes.

To maximize these values and correct any deviation from group norms, Scientology employs the social invention of "conditions formulae." Hubbard identifies ten "conditions" as possible operating states in which any individual or system may be found. For each condition he defines a "formula" providing a step-by-step method for satisfying the functional necessities for advancement to the next higher state. The conditions formulae are held to be isomorphic for individuals, groups, and systems of every kind.[5]

When first entering any status, for example, one is in a "Condition of Non-existence." The formula for Non-existence requires establishing oneself in the new role by finding a communications line, making oneself known to those with whom one will be dealing, finding out what is needed or wanted, doing producing or presenting just that (Hubbard, 1970b). By conscientiously going through the Non-existence formula, the Scientologist enters into a defined role within the ongoing interactional network and begins to act in line with the socially constructed realities of the group. He/she becomes a person, an individual with social status (Wirth, 1931).

Above, Non-existence, five progressively "higher" conditions—Danger, Emergency, Normal Operation, Affluence, and Power—represent states of performance in any role or situation. Upon successful completion of each subsequent formula, as evidenced by productivity or goal attainment, one begins to work on the next formula. On the other hand, if one falters or runs into problems, the situation is corrected by working on a lower formula. While an important aspect of Scientology life, these formulae are only peripheral to the problem of deviance.

SCIENTOLOGY JUSTICE

"Ethics" also serves as Scientology's equivalent of the criminal justice system. Here we see bureaucratic rationality extended to a degree only rivaled in American society by champions of behavior therapy (Portes, 1971). This unswerving rationalization of justice can be seen in the recent description of a new, five-week long "thoroughly comprehensive and practical training course that produces a fully trained Ethics Officer who is 100% standard in his application of Ethics and justice" (Church of Scientology, International, 1984:39).

"Ethics" actions (the term is used to refer to deviance handling) are rarely opened on the basis of official production statistics alone. Rather, crime control begins with an extension of that monitoring function. A file is kept on active Scientologists, into which go any reports or other evidence concerning "out Ethics" behavior. If a major offense is reported or if that file gets fat, unless the subject's statistics, condition or status are exemplary, the file is opened and a formal investigation begun. All Scientologists, staff members in particular, are expected to report norm violations on the part of other Scientologists; identified "non-reports" will go into their own files and may be used as evidence of their own "out Ethics."

Along with procedures for investigation, adjudication, and subsequent handling of deviance, the Scientology Ethics Code (Hubbard, 1970b) lists some 168 errors, misdemeanors, crimes, and high crimes. Some acts are specifically defined as criminal, such as the "high crime" of "testifying as a hostile witness against Scientology in public" (Hubbard, 1970b:49). Others, such as using illicit drugs, have come to be so defined although not specifically listed in the codes. In general, any violation of Policy, hence any deviation from bureaucratically defined roles, can be grounds for "Ethics" actions. Underlying this entire system is a fundamental identification of criminal deviance as anything, however seemingly trivial, which threatens the consensus upon which this world is built.

The relativistic, interactionist-like strand within Scientology once again becomes evident in a second set of conditions formulae used primarily in the correction of deviance. These are based on Hubbard's theory that conduct flows from one's social identity within a reference group. Much as Strauss (1959) has suggested, the progressively "lower" conditions of Liability, Doubt, Enemy, and Treason, identify becoming deviant with a process of loosening or abandoning allegiances to one group while drifting into the networks and perspectives of another.

Scientology "Ethics" defines stages of dis-identification and identification, providing specific formula for the rational management of each. While the Scientology culture portrays leaving or harming Scientology as contrasurvival and, hence, insane, these formulae are themselves relativistic and value-free in the sense that they are designed to be isomorphic for any change of reference group and for use in either halting a slide into deviance and rehabilitating the group member of enabling the individual to become a functioning member of another group.

"ETHICS" IN OPERATION

We will now look at how this criminal justice system operates in practice through consideration of a hypothetical case. The Ethics Office of The Church of Scientology of Gotham receives the following report:

> This afternoon, while I was sitting with a friend at Moe's Coffee Shop, I overheard Peter Simon (who works in Central Files) talking with some people in the next booth. I don't know them, or if they are Scientologists. Anyhow, he was saying that when he was on the maintenance crew at Flag Land Base [in Clearwater, Florida] he used to know this girl who worked on a college newspaper and, to get into her pants, he made up stories about how everyone down there was into group sex and that this was one of the secret processes on the O.T. course. He said that she actually reported this is an article she wrote! They all cracked up and left the restaurant.
>
> Bill Williams, Staff Auditor

Telling lies about confidential materials to a reporter constitutes a "high crime," specified in the "Ethics" Codes as "public dissemination of false or forbidden or danger- ous data" (Hubbard, 1970b:52). While lesser violations are dealt with by the E/O, high crimes are handled by convening a Committee of Evidence, which is rather like a court martial but without lawyers or formal procedural norms.

After investigation to ensure that this was not a false report (itself an "Ethics" offense), the E/O would write up a proposed Ethics Order listing charges and convening a "Comm Ev" to investigate and adjudicate this case. Charges would include all wrong- doings relevant to the above report as well as any errors, petty malfeasance, or other "out Ethics" behavior contained in Simon's file. Once the proposed order is okayed by the E/O's superiors, it would be printed up on goldenrod stock and distributed for posting in all other Scientology units. When the Comm Ev is convened, Williams and any other witnesses would be called. Every Scientologist who wishes to do so may also present evidence for or against Simon. The Committee itself would be composed of some five Scientologists in good standing, typically high ranking staff members from Gotham Org. After establishing that the reported offenses did, in fact, occur, the Comm Ev would decide which counts Simon is guilty of and what the appropriate penalties would be. In this case, since Simon's actions have publicly discredited Scientology, it is probable that he would be assigned the Condition of Treason. Like others who have gotten this far into Scientology, Simon can be expected to decide that it is worth his while to "suffer up through the conditions" and restore himself to good standing as a Scientologist.

His only alternative is to walk out on everything he has come to define as valuable. Simon would be barred from "the only road to total freedom" forever (literally). His income would be lost, he would forfeit his investment of time and money in auditing and training, he would lose face among those for whom he has established himself as a Scientologist, he would have to define away the benefits he has identified from Scientol- ogy technology, change the very terms in which he has become accustomed to think, and cease to identify with his status in terms of auditing, training, and organizational posi- tion. Most bitterly of all, in Scientology he is *somebody*, whereas to the outside world he is just another ex-cult member (see Stark and Bainbridge, 1980). Thus, we can expect to see Simon act to salvage his vested interests as suggested by Becker's (1960) model of the commitment process.

TACTICS OF RESOCIALIZATION

At this point, Peter Simon would be escorted out of the Org. No Scientologist would be permitted to communicate with him in any way (since Scientologists comprise the vast majority of his friends and acquaintances, this form of shunning has great impact). He is now officially stigmatized, his identity publicly spoiled. He has, in effect, been branded a criminal. The Ethics formulae, however, provide an alternative to the secon- dary deviance process associated with this situation in the American criminal justice system (Lemert, 1951).

The Treason formula, "Find out that you really are," represents the bottom line of Scientology crime control.[6] Hubbard's rationale is almost identical to Shibutani's (1955) thesis that when one changes one's reference group one's "ordered view of the world— what is taken for granted" changes in line with the new group's interactional consensus.

Thus, the Treason formula assumes that, to be capable of behavior threatening the group to which one claims allegiance, the person is acting out of another cultural reality and has lost sight of the original reference group's basic grounds of meaning and value.

Peter Simon now enters into virtual seclusion. His task is to meditate on the Treason formula until he can embrace the Scientology culture as his own perspective and perceive his true nature as a thetan. At this point, as part of his rehabilitation, he must make a self-conscious decision to believe and, by so doing, to reestablish Scientology as his only reference group.

He might then write a letter to the E/O saying that he is ready to come in and apply for upgrading. The E/O might telephone to arrange an appointment, at which time Simon would be ushered into the Ethics Office without permitting him to interact with other Scientologists at the org. He would be interrogated to ascertain whether he believes what he is saying and is truly penitent. Great significance is placed on presentation of self; the subject's demeanor, appearance, speech, and conduct will all be scrutinized for "good indicators." If the E/O has the slightest doubt, Simon will be escorted back out of the org to have another go at it. If he convinces the E/O that he has "worked out of Treason" Simon is "upgraded" to the Condition of Enemy and ushered out of the org to work on that formula under the same conditions as before.

To complete the Enemy formula, Simon has to "find out who you really are" (Hubbard, 1970b). A typical working out of the Enemy formula might be "I now realize that I am simply another thetan seeking to go free with Scientology." The words alone are not enough: the E/O will demand that Simon's conduct show he has reinternalized the group as his generalized other. The strategy here is to halt the downward spiral of deviance at the point where one acts like an enemy of the group because one identifies oneself as something other than what one really is—before falling out of the consensus within which those words have intersubjective meaning.

Once again, Simon will be brought into the org to meet with the E/O. Once again, the official checks for "good indicators" such as looking and acting glowingly sincere, both happy and grateful about completing the Enemy formula. Thus, a series of implicit tests are built into the resocialization structure: to "pass," the subject must give off an impression of positively embracing whatever role and identity the group imputes to him, no matter how degraded. Again we see that, in Scientology, conduct is held to reflect the perspective constructed by the individual, who is therefore held accountable not only for conduct but for identity as well—about as extreme a rationalization of social control as is conceivable.

If the E/O is, in fact, convinced that Simon has satisfactorily reestablished his identity, an order would be issued upgrading his status to the Condition of Doubt. Peter must now formally decide as to which group his allegiance is due. He would, of course, only choose a group other than Scientology if he has not "successfully" completed the previous formulae. The Doubt formula, however, is not only a step toward reestablishing oneself in a specific group but also resolves a stage of identity loss characterized by confusion as to one's reference group which, if not caught and corrected at this point, would lead to a downward spiral into acting like an enemy of the group. Theoretically, this condition depicts the crisis point at which differential association processes (Sutherland and Cressey, 1970) leave the person poised between two sets of meanings. In contradiction to sociological conventions, Scientology defines this not as a matter of "drift" but of personal choice to pursue one line of action as opposed to another.

The Doubt formula prescribes a method for making a decision as to one's reference group. After evaluating the statistics of the groups one is in doubt about, one decides which group to join, makes a public statement of joining or rejoining that group, and then acts to demonstrate the sincerity of one's decision—in effect, goes through the process of conversion (Greil and Rudy, 1983). In "working out of Doubt" the Scientologist would traditionally do a straight 48 hours of menial work in the org as a symbol of commitment to the group while wearing a chain around one arm to signify his status. In addition to the combination of empiricist rationality and sociological perspective, we now see the utilization of degradation rituals (Garfinkle, 1955), public confession, and other rites of passage to translate changes of status and identity into intersubjective reality.

Scientology's deft integration of these elements is even clearer when, assuming Simon has completed those steps to the satisfaction of the E/O, he is upgraded to the Condition of Liability. Here the formula goes:

1. Decide who are friends.
2. Deliver an effective blow to the enemies of the group one has been pretending to be part of despite personal danger.
3. Make up the damage one has done by personal contribution far beyond the ordinary demands of a group member.
4. Apply for re-entry to the group by asking the permission of each member of it to rejoin and rejoining only by majority permission, and, if refused, repeating (2) and (3) until one is allowed to be a group member again. (Hubbard, 1970b:34)

Simon would write out his decision that Scientologists are his friends and that the young woman in Florida is not. He might give the E/O the names of his friends from the coffee shop and do whatever he could to get that reporter in trouble with her school or the authorities. Peter would then work another 24 hours straight in the org while wearing a dirty gray rag around his arm symbolizing his contaminated identity. Finally, he writes out, step by step, what he has done to complete the formula and, upon the approval of the E/O, humbly goes to each person in the org asking them to please sign his petition for re-entry to the group. Most will do so without comment, some will refuse to sign, yet others will go out of their way to humiliate him in whatever way they can, rubbing Simon's nose in his one-down status. He must maintain his "good indicators" and not abreact whatever they say or do.

In this formula, the implicit theory comes close to Lofland and Lofland's (1969) model of deviance and identity, even suggesting that the first step toward deviant identity is friendship with bearers of an incompatible culture and way of life. As a corrective, the formula seeks to abort such affective ties before they lead to differential association and establishment of a new reference group.

On another level, as a ritual, Liability serves a a launching platform for the individual's rebirth as a *person*. That is, completing the formula serves as a rite of self-reconstitution (Sarbin and Adler, 1970) involving symbolic death in one's total abnegation of face and then a resurrection, as the individual both formally and symbolically, privately and publicly reenters the solidarity of group members. This also reinforces the sense of belonging to a valuable group on the part of others involved in the ritual. From this public rehabilitation of self, the subject goes on to complete the Non-existence formula

which, as we have seen, establishes the individual within a specific status as a group member in good standing.

DISCUSSION

There are remarkable similarities between Scientology "Ethics" and interactionist theory. In both cases, conduct is held to flow from the definition of the situation, and the definition of the situation is held to be primarily a function of interaction with a reference group. Both Scientology and symbolic interactionism reject purely psychological behaviorism, stressing meaning as a critical factor. Scientology, however, institutionalizes individualism to an enormously greater degree than the other two approaches. It adopts the idealist premise that the individual's subjective definitions are primary realities, while the psychological and sociological views hold that the individual entity is more or less illusory. The "Ethics" system nevertheless converges with the interactionist models in that one is held to only become a person in the sociological sense of the term when self is identified as an individual with status within a specific group.

These abstract principles are modified in practice by their embeddedness within an organizational context. The situation is very similar to that of American capitalism generally, in that while a central value is placed upon the individual and the central explanatory discourse is premised upon individualism, these are bounded and implicitly defined by a functionalist, system-centered rationality. So long as individuals behave within the boundaries of free choice deemed acceptable by the organized social system, the society appears open and consensual. When they violate these boundaries, however, those identifying with the system asserts its "right" to ensure functional integrity through social control mechanisms.

The definitions of the situation embedded within the structured interpersonal system, in other words, tend to not only have greater practical force than conflicting individual definitions, but are treated as boundary conditions for individual choice. Both in socialization and the operation of social control, norms deemed functional by the system are at once made credible and elevated into moral imperatives by drawing upon claims of ontological fact or religious truth. Once a systems-level of interaction has been organized, in other words, its survival becomes an end in and of itself for those who identify their interests with that of the system.

Scientology follows this pattern, so that its abstract resemblances to interactionism are bound up with a normative rationality based upon the structure and function of the organized world. "Ethics" as a social control system is explicitly designed to structure conduct through identity management. As we have seen, it identifies stages of identity loss and establishes a social technology for resolving each level of crisis. A particularly interesting feature of "Ethics" is the provision of means by which individuals can rehabilitate their status within the group and avoid self-fulfilling prophecies associated with deviant labeling.

At the same time, Scientology employs (and injects into its "Ethics" system) a degree of bureaucratic rationalization most sociologists would reject as repressive or totalitarian. Despite Scientology's intensive socialization efforts and the existence of "Ethics" as a social control technology, some individuals who seek to remain within the system nevertheless engage in deviant conduct; cliques and informal systems still arise despite

the best efforts of the group. Even the highest ranking Scientologists, for better or worse, do not behave like the brainwashed robots of popular imagination. For example, the author in 1968, witnessed high-ranking Scientologists, at the time Hubbard's protégés, strategizing to steal classified technology and offer it for personal profit.

It is not, in any case, the purpose of this article to evaluate or value judge Scientology's "Ethics" system but, rather, to describe it; to show that it represents a working example of a social control system forged within the same cultural, situational, and historical context as those institutionalized by Western societies; and to point out that it displays surprising consonances with interactionist theories about deviance and social control. Perhaps the most cogent differences between Scientology and interactionist thinking stem from the fact that "Ethics" cannot be separated from its institutional context, so that its abstract similarities are subordinated to the normative concerns of a functioning social control system. Whatever its flaws and whatever our opinions, it has proved adequate to the practical task of keeping Scientology viable.

Grounded in the American capitalist society, Scientology goes about social control in a rational, systematic manner commensurate with sociocultural realities of twentieth-century life. By doing so in a "no holds barred" manner, it offends the sensibilities of many observers, while (or perhaps by) making explicit value contradictions inherent in the American culture, such as that between "free choice" and conformity to group norms. Operating on a scale and in a manner reasonably close to that implied by the term *society*, the social world of Scientology remains compact and integrated enough to permit more sweeping generalizations about its functioning than would be possible in the relatively chaotic case of a "real" society. This social world not only constitutes a fascinating case study of an institution embodying close analogs to interactionist principles, but provides a valuable resource for comparative macrosociology.

POSTSCRIPT: REFLECTIONS (1985)

I should now like to shift level of discourse and reflect upon the 15-year-long process culminating in the foregoing analysis of Scientology's social control system. As I have indicated, my "insider's perspective" was arrived at through having been involved in the group prior to my training as a sociologist. That simple fact leads to a host of complications.

For one thing, during the period of immersion in the field, there was no systematic data gathering or theoretical sampling. Rather, my wife and I stumbled into this world in Spring of 1968, decided "if you're going to do it, you might as well do it right," got ourselves onto L. Ron Hubbard's "Sea Org" flagship, subsequently became high-level staff auditors in Los Angeles until, in 1970, we broke with the organization in an escalating series of conflicts over local policy and working conditions. Our initial reaction was to blame it on the bureaucracy and the individuals with whom we had come into conflict. Then, as we drifted out of Scientology networks, we found ourselves increasingly hostile toward Scientology generally. (This seems to be a common pattern for disaffection with high-commitment groups.)

As we drifted back, more or less, to our former perspectives, I returned to college and completed my undergraduate degree. This was the first time I had been exposed to the sociological tradition. For a course on qualitative methods, it seemed appropriate to

work up my experience in the form of detailed field notes. Attempting grounded theory, I hypothesized a basic social process of "luciferization" reflecting my negative evaluation of the moral implications of a system in which the goal was "total power" for self (reducing others to mere use objects). The data was there, but so was the hostility!

Nevertheless, this constituted a breakthrough, enabling me to begin treating my experience as a resource. As a graduate student under John Lofland's tutelage, I initiated a systematic research program into identity transformation organizations and processes, while continuing to gather material on Scientology. I found that my experiential base afforded me a degree of *Verstehen* and an overarching perspective not otherwise attainable.

I can see no ethical objection to "mining" one's experience for ethnographic material as I have done, or obtaining information from the widest variety of sources including both apostates and insiders. Nevertheless, It is my strong suspicion that it would be far easier (and more rewarding financially) to write an anti-cult "exposé" than go through the sometimes painful effort and self-discipline of working up nonjudgmental analysis of the sort this article seeks to represent. It is not that I committed to a "value free" sociology, but that noninjury to subjects seems no less valid a concern here than in clinical practice. Certainly, if one can demonstrate overriding, factual cause to attack a group, then such an act can be defensible, as in the case of Richard Ofshe's work on Synanon. In the same way, to ignore clear violations of central values (as in a value-free report on the social dynamics of Nazi concentration camps) would be morally indefensible.

Consider, however, publication of discrediting information about Scientology. Granted, this would very likely trigger a lawsuit brought by the Guardian's Office of the Church of Scientology. It was to avoid such an eventuality, for example, that Wallis (1977) included a response by the group in his monograph. But what, in any case, would be the value of such an act? To make a moral point? To gain publicity? To ventilate one's hurt or disagreement or distaste? To harm the group? Anyone who has intimate knowledge of any organization or social setting would probably have at least some information of this sort, so what's the big deal?

Thus, unless I were to be convinced that Scientology is demonstrably evil or harmful or an underhanded scam, my opinions about it should be separated from scientific discourse. I am not so convinced. Certainly there have been individual Scientologists who have exploited their position for undue personal gain or gratification, but that is in itself an "Ethics" offense. Nobody is forced to join or remain in Scientology; despite its formal and informal social control systems, a majority of members seem to eventually become "inactive" or otherwise drift away from the group. Being "in" Scientology is not all that dramatic a situation, anyhow. Most Scientologists simply take occasional auditing or training courses and use Scientology methods and concepts in their lives and work. In high-pressure situations, such as I encountered in the Sea Org, people often do stupid, irrational, or even unconscionable things—but that is certainly not limited to Scientology.

My impression is that Scientology "insiders" are generally convinced that the system is valid and that their interests lie with the group. Rumors of violent attacks upon apostates seem no more than that; in fact, confidential materials I have seen indicate that there was at least one time when Hubbard got wind of such an attempt on the part of subordinates

and, to their dismay, ordered them to abort their plans immediately. It is not that this group believes in "turning the other cheek"; it is, rather, Policy to do dirt to those that do you dirt and to safeguard Scientology at all costs.

In 1968, I had the opportunity to interact with L. Ron Hubbard on several occasions and to observe him covertly when he was alone "backstage." I have no cause to hypothesize that he had any ulterior motive but to further his "baby," Scientology. His major luxuries at the time seemed to be full-dress dinners with his staff officers and having his personal steward serve him an iced glass of Tab on a silver platter. Unlike the leaders of some other groups, he has not been observed to exploit the group for personal gain or gratification; rather, I observed him working away at his paperwork at all hours of the night and day.

Once the emotional reaction cleared away, I found that I could see some positive things about Scientology. In any case, there is a great deal of practical wisdom in its strategies and tactics. One does not have to accept the explanatory scheme or underlying cosmology to appreciate something that works. Not that everything is peachy-keen-and-rosy in the Scientology world, or that they are a nice bunch of people just waiting to serve you milk and cookies while you bask in the warmth of their company. No way! The operative terms here are "toughness," "effectiveness," "getting the job done." There are no compunctions about hard-sell, no embarrassment about instrumental values or bureaucratic rationality.

I had problems with these aspects of Scientology from the beginning; in the end, they drove me out. Looking back, I suspect that my commitment to humanist values is a direct outgrowth of my experiences with the alternative offered by this system. I did not personally like its style. But, as William S. Burroughs (1964) puts it, "Who am I to be critical?"

In conclusion, I have no cause to adopt anything but a "live and let live" approach toward this group. I have friends who remain Scientologists and more friends who are ex-Scientologists. My opinions about the group, its style, policies or behavior are merely opinions. I learned a great deal from my experiences within the group (although not necessarily what it was intended for me to learn ...). It has been extremely difficult for me to work through my reactions to the negative aspects of my experience and eventual separation from the group but, at the same time, this has forced me to think through my commitment to humanism, to adopt a nonjudgmental perspective, and to clarify my personal convictions regarding self, reality and interpersonal relationships. Thus, while I could choose to regret the time I put into that segment of my youth, it seems more appropriate to make it serve as a resource and to get on with the show.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

NOTES

1. Expanding Lofland's (1976) definition, I define the social world as a constellation of roles, groups, institutions, social networks (and sometimes communities) forming a discrete and collec-

tively defined whole. While some—such as Lofland's "business world" and "sports world"—are largely undifferentiated from general social life, others—such as "cults" like Scientology and the Unification Church—exist as strongly bounded enclaves in tension with their host society. This latter situation can result in a social world with a well-articulated culture and a set of institutions of scale and complexity resembling a society-in-miniature. Still more to the point, a thriving social world of this type has found ways to deal with the same basic conditions as the host society with which it coexists in time and space.

2.   Which, it should be noted, have generally originated as critiques of the theories, institutions and practices of the mainstream society.

3.   Details of Scientology's earlier organizational history are given in the generally hostile report by Foster (1971).

4.   However, no such "full O.T.s" have yet been produced. While potentially a problem threatening to create cognitive dissonance and hence disaffection, this is not the central problem Bainbridge and Stark (1980) made it out to be. Rather, the focus is, as discussed, on producing or defining changes in the direction of this ultimate goal.

5.   This discussion is based on the system as it was institutionalized through at least 1970 (Hubbard, 1970b). Furthermore, certain subtleties and complications of the "Ethics" system have been omitted to avoid needlessly confusing the issues discussed in this article.

6.   Since 1970 there have been several modifications of the "Ethics" system including identification of a Condition below Treason. Labelled "Confusion," it defines a state in which the person has not only lost the sense of cultural identity but has become confused as to any basis for rational action. Its formula, my informants report, is "Find out," to define something as a working truth or "stable datum" by which one can begin to evaluate what is and is not so as a basis for making a rational choice about anything.

REFERENCES

Anonymous
   1984   The Auditor, the Monthly Scientology Journal, Worldwide Issue 191 (no pagination).
Bainbridge, W.S. and R. Stark
   1980   "Scientology: to be perfectly clear." Sociological Analysis 41:128–136.
Balch, R.W.
   1979   "Two models of conversion and commitment to a UFO cult." Paper presented at the
           annual meetings of the Pacific Sociological Association, Anaheim, Calif.
Becker, H.S.
   1960   "Notes on the concept of commitment." American Journal of Sociology 66:32–40.
Burrough, W.S.
   1964   Nova Express. New York: Grove.
Church of Scientology, International
   1984   The Guidebook to Clear & OT: The complete catalog of Dianetics & Scientology
           Training, Spiritual Counseling & Books. Tampa, Fla.: Church of Scientology,
           International.
Foster, Sir John
   1971   Enquiry Into the Practice and Effects of Scientology. London: HMSO.
Garfinkle, H.
   1956   "Conditions of successful degradation ceremonies." American Journal of Sociology
           64:420–424.
Greil, A.L. and D.R. Rudy
   1983   "Conversion to the world view of Alcoholics Anonymous: a refinement of conversion
           theory." Qualitative Sociology 6:5–28.

    1984   "Social cocoons: encapsulation and identity transformation organizations." Sociologi-
            cal Inquiry 54:260–278.
Hubbard, L. Ron
    1950   Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health. Los Angeles: Bridge Publications.
    1954   The Creation of Human Ability. Los Angeles: A.S.H.O.
    1968   The Phoenix Lectures. Los Angeles: Publications Organization Worldwise.
    1970a   Scientology 0-8: The Book of Basics. Los Angeles: Publications Organization
            Worldwide.
    1970b   Introduction to Scientology "Ethics." Los Angeles: Publications Organization
            Worldwide.
Lemert, E.
    1951   Social Pathology. New York: McGraw-Hill.
Lofland, J.
    1976   Doing Social Life. New York: Wiley Interscience.
Lofland, J., and L. Lofland
    1969   Deviance and Identity. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
Malko, G.
    1970   Scientology: The Now Religion. New York: Delta.
Mead, G.H.
    1934   Mind, Self and Society. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Parsons, T.
    1951   The Social System. New York: Free Press.
Portes, A.
    1971   "On the emergence of behavior therapy in modern society." Journal of Consulting and
            Clinical Psychology, 36:303–313.
Sarbin, T.R., and N. Adler
    1970   "Self-reconstitution processes: a preliminary report." Psychoanalytic Review 57:
            609–616.
Scott, R.A.
    1969   The Making of Blind Men: A Study of Adult Socialization. New York: Russell Sage.
Shibutani, T.
    1955   "Reference groups as perspectives." American Sociological Review 60:562–569.
Simmons, J.L.
    1964   "On maintaining deviant belief systems." Social problems 11:250–256.
Spitzer, S.
    1979   "The rationalization of crime control in capitalist society." Contemporary Crises
            3:187–206.
Stark, R., and W.S. Bainbridge
    1980   "Networks of faith: interpersonal bonds and recruitment to cults and sects." American
            Journal of Sociology 85:1376–1395.
Straus, R.A.
    1981   "The theoretical frame of symbolic interactionism: a contextualist social science."
            Symbolic Interaction 4:261–272.
Strauss, A.
    1959   Mirrors and Masks: The Search for Identity. San Francisco: Sociology Press.
Sutherland, E.H., and D.R. Cressey
    1970   Criminology. 8th ed. Philadelphia: Lippincott.
Thomas, W.I., and D.S. Thomas
    1938   The Child in America: Behavior Problems and Programs. Boston: Scribners.
Wallis, R.
    1977   The Road to Total Freedom: A Sociological Analysis of Scientology. New York:
            Columbia University Press.
Wirth, L.
    1931   "Clinical sociology." American Journal of Sociology 37:49–66.