American Cultural Sociology
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J. C. Alexander: »On the Social Construction of Moral Universals«

The main question which J. Alexander rises is »how can an audience to be traumatized by an experience that they themselves do not directly share?«. He examines the social process and the change of structure of dramatizing and thus the narration of the events which where later called 'Holocaust' from the very beginning when the American public first was informed about the cruel events to the present days.

The most important building blocks of his argument are the *coding* of the events, the *weighting* of the codes and the different types of *narrations* which engage different perspectives and social responsibilities.

coding At first the mass murders of Jews in Germany where reported (and thus coded) just as atrocities connected to war. After the full extend of the events became clear, they had to be coded as 'evil'.

wheighting After coding them as 'evil' the question of 'how evil?' had to answered. Only through wheighting of the events and pushing them into the sacred:profane matrix it was possible to code the horrible events as the ultimate, absolute evil, the sacred-evil in the tragedy narrative.

progressive narrative The narration of the events proceeded from the *progressive narrative*, which basically functioned as 'whe have to fight this absolute evil; we have to make process even after such horrible events for the future of the free world' to the *tragedy narrative.* »Nazism was coded, weightened and narrated in apocalyptic [...] terms as 'the dominant evil of our time'« The evil of this time was Nazism, not the massive killing of Jews. The mass murders where framed into the progressive struggle against, or, the liberation from the nazis. To be functional, this narrative had to bring distance between the mass murders and the democratic audience, prohibit identification with the victims. But nevertheless Anti-anti-Semitism was raised as kind of purification of the US in terms of 'Jews are the enemies of our enemies' and thereby converted the longstanding Anti-Semitism of the public sphere of America. A further step where the Nurnberg Trials which introduced the 'crimes against humanities' into the social representation of the events. Post-war redemption depended on the progressive nature of beeing victorious and the Nurnberg

Trials which both set an end of Nazism and thus the (now) free world could begin with the construction of a new, better, more humane world.

tragedy narrative The progressive narrative shifted to the tragedy mode with the personalization/identification with the victims and thus a new weightening of the events as sacred-evil which became generalized and reified as 'weltgeschichte'. The term 'Holocaust' became the »dominant representation for the trauma, it implied the sacral mystery, the 'awe-fullnes,' of the transcendental tradition« as a symbol for the evil that could not be named. In progressive mode the mass murder could be seen as the beginning (a 'birth trauma') for the new to be constructed world, where in tragedy mode the same events where seen as the end, the end of humanity, the end of 'our preconceptions that we are human' - the 'death trauma'. The killings became not an event, they became an archetype (of 'barbarism lodged within the essential nature of modernity itself'). We had to go through some kind of 'catharsis' not only to prevent the further possibilities of such events, but to the moral remaking of the modern world.

(sorry but it was a pain in the ass to read and excerpt!)