CHAPTER 23

EVENTS AS TEMPLATES OF POSSIBILITY: AN ANALYTIC TYPOLOGY OF POLITICAL FACTS[1]

MABEL BEREZIN

Events, Walls, and Metaphors

On June 12, 1987, Ronald Reagan stood at the Brandenberg Gate and famously told Mikhail Gorbachev: "Tear down this wall." Reagan was referring to a metaphorical wall, the Iron Curtain, as well as the material wall that divided East and West Berlin. Indeed, two years after Reagan's famous speech, ordinary citizens tore down the Berlin Wall brick by brick and revealed a divide riddled with ideological fissures. Reagan's admirers often cite his speech and give him credit for the fall of the wall. A material piece of the wall exists about 20 feet from Reagan's grave at his presidential library in Simi Valley, California. Most specialists on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe would agree that Ronald Reagan and his administration's foreign policy were not determining factors in its fall. Yet, Reagan's speech at the Brandenberg Gate was politically important even if it was not causal with respect to the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc.

Reagan's speech was an *event*—a *caesura* in the flow of public time—a moment with, to borrow from Aristotle's conception of plot, a beginning, middle, and end that produced an enduring and multivalent metaphor of political transformation.[2] The multiple narratives of Reagan's speech intertwined with the collective memory

of it represent the intersection of *events* and political meaning. The speech and its afterlife underscore how difficult it is to extract explanations of political consequences from public political spectacle. This chapter confronts this challenge head-on. It takes politics as its object and asks what cultural analysis can bring to bear on the study of politics.

In a series of review articles (Berezin 1994a; 1997a) written when the linking of politics and culture was novel among political sociologists, I identified nodal works and mapped the contours and possible trajectory of the field. Politics and culture are no longer a novel coupling. Wide-ranging empirical studies populate the field. My own work on Fascist Italy (Berezin 1997b) and European populism (Berezin 2009) serves as one example. It represents the tip of a huge iceberg that includes work on family capitalism (Adams 2005), nationalism (Brubaker 1992; Kumar 2003; Calhoun 1994; Wagner-Pacifici 2005), colonialism (Steinmetz 2007), religion (Gorski 2003; Zubrzycki 2006; Lichterman 2005), social movements (McAdam and Sewell 2001; Tarrow 2008), memory and identity (Glaeser 2000; Olick 2005; Spillman 1997), as well as ethnographic accounts of American politics (Perrin 2006; Lichterman 1996; Eliasoph 1998). Yet, even the important and influential collection of Adams, Clemens, and Orloff (2005) contains no essay written explicitly on the intersection of the political and the cultural.[3]

Beginning where my earlier iterations left off, this chapter engages recent methodological moves in historical and institutional analysis.[4] It extends the concept of events to bring cultural analysis to bear on political explanation and privileges "thick description" (Geertz 1973) and narrative as methodological tools. Borrowing from sociologist Emile Durkheim ([1895]1964), this article argues that events constitute "social facts"—phenomena with sufficient identity and coherence that the social collectivity recognizes them as discrete and important. Events incorporate space and temporality, culture and history, agents and structure. Recognition or collective perception is integral to the constitution of a "social fact" and by extension the identification of a significant political event.

In order to locate social practices in a broader sphere of collective meanings and to approximate scientific rigor, social scientists have invoked "toolkits" (Swidler 1986), influenced by various iterations of French sociology, "boundaries" (Lamont and Molnar 2002), structure (Sewell 1992), and "frames" (Benford and Snow 2000). For the most part, these analytic approaches are metaphors that attempt to concretize social processes that analysts either explicitly or implicitly ascribe to culture.

In *Keywords*, British cultural critic Raymond Williams (1976) interrogated the social history of concepts.[5] He notes that culture in its original form was an agricultural term that described an action. It was a verb, not a noun. Culture, as Williams points out, became a noun, that is, the medium in which things grow, as well as a verb in the nineteenth century. Williams' insights are worth revisiting as they underscore the dynamic as well as the sustaining or nurturing dimensions of culture. It is the tension between change and sustenance (positively referred to as modernity and tradition; negatively as progress versus reaction) that lies at the

Events and the Counterfactual Turn

Cultural sociology and the field of historical institutionalism and political analysis have grown in tandem over the last fifteen years. There is no necessary overlap between cultural sociology and historical institutionalism, yet there is intellectual kinship between them. A subset of interdisciplinary scholars who are interested in culture, politics, and history provide the family ties.[6]

Historical institutionalism embraces the counterfactual as it carries the aura of hard science. Path dependence is the core concept of political institutionalism. Identifying the paths that polities took in the development of core institutions permits analysts to speculate about the paths not taken and to address the role of causality in the development of institutions. The union of path analysis and counterfactual thinking in a historical sense permits the development of hypotheses subject to empirical testing. It also unites temporality and choice. Not all historical institutionalists are rational choice theorists. Yet, the emphasis on the timing of events and the choices made or not made are attractive to choice analytic theorists. Path dependence is at the core of the concept of analytic narrative developed by economic historians (Bates, et al. 1998).[7]

Cultural sociology and the historical study of political institutions often share terminology—although terms tend to have vastly different meanings depending on which subfield is invoking them. Narratives are a core component of counterfactual historical institutional analysis because it relies heavily on being able to tell alternative stories so as to eliminate them in a propositional and hypothesis-testing manner. Narratives are also a core of cultural analysis (for a classic account, see Polletta 2006). In contrast to the counterfactual use of narrative that aims at explanation, the cultural narrative aims at interpretation. The former is hypothesis-confirming or -disconfirming; the latter is hypothesis-generating—left for others to prove or disprove.[8] Narratives are also descriptions, and description lurks in the interstices of even the most resolutely scientific analyses. Description is fundamental to human experience. Cross-culturally, the first questions that a child asks are, "What is it?" "What does it look like?" As Susanne Langer (1957) elegantly argues in *Philosophy in a New Key*, denotation comes before connotation. What it *is* precedes what it *means*.

Institutionalists often view history as enacting a causal process and events are seen as crucial conjunctures on a causal trajectory. Path dependence is the term that encapsulates the intersection of events and trajectory (Mahoney 2000; Pierson 2004). Borrowed from economic theory and economic history, path dependence assumes that at crucial moments collective decisions or events push collective actors down particular routes of "paths." Once a path is taken, it precludes others; makes course corrections difficult, if not impossible; and sets the course of future choices. Thus, the path taken, the choices made, are of critical importance for historical outcomes. The path and the choice are, in effect, causal with regard to the next set of choices.

Path analysis is attractive to some historical institutionalists because it has the aura of causality attached to it. Path analysis is amenable to counterfactual analysis

because it permits formulations such as these: If this choice had been made or not made, what might the outcome have been? Path dependence does a good enough job of explaining why something does not happen and why some actions are blocked. It does a considerably less effective job of explaining the *meaning of what actually happens*. Capoccia and Kelemen (2007) point to the limits of "critical junctures" and argue that an analytic emphasis on critical choices actually blocks the ability to identify significant events that may not be immediately causal. In addition, path dependence is subject to the criticism of first, being overly deterministic and second, being difficult to operationalize. Rigorous causal reasoning demands a focus on extremely discrete events if one is to be able to specify all the steps in a path with confidence.[9]

Within the field of political science, a strict version of path analysis has had its critics and important modifications (Mahoney and Thelen 2010). Yet, historical and political sociologists who share a concern with culture and history have recognized central insights of path analysis and institutionalism and built on them in important ways. Historical sociologists have focused on events to counter some of the more problematic claims of path analysis. Historical sociologists (Sewell 2005; Abbott 2001) have recently argued that events as units of analysis may yield robust forms of political cultural explanation. For example, Sewell's (1996b) thick description of the storming of the Bastille as a unitary event permits him to develop a nuanced account of a larger phenomenon, the French Revolution, than traditional analyses that limit themselves to causes and consequences.

Sewell (1996a, 1996b) has become the leading exponent of a sociological theory of *events*.[10] He (1996a) argues that classic path analysis is not capable of dealing with change because it assumes that "causal structures are uniform through time" (p. 263). Sewell posits an "eventful temporality" that recognizes that the "radical contingency" of some events allows for social change and transformation. Sewell's (1996b, p. 844) refinement of his argument defines a historical event as "(1) a ramified sequence of occurrences that (2) is recognized as notable by contemporaries, and that (3) results in a durable transformation of structures." The event that Sewell discusses is the storming of the Bastille in Paris in 1789—an event that historians agree was pivotal to the series of events that constituted the French Revolution. Sewell's theory of *events* has several characteristics. Events are the subject of narrative and are recognized as significant when they occur. Events reveal "heightened emotion" and collective creativity, take ritual form, and—most importantly—generate more events.

Sewell's elegant elaboration of events is subject to critique on multiple levels. He is, for one thing, interested in events that change the course of history. But arguably, there are many events that occur and recur in political life that are not as iconic as the storming of the Bastille, however constituted, and that still have importance within a nationally constituted political space. Patterson (2007) has critiqued precisely this part of Sewell's argument as well as its neglect of causality. Steinmetz (2008) has challenged Sewell's insistence on recognition. Whether or not the course of history is altered in the short or the long run, Sewell elaborates salient features of

events (particularly his emphasis on collective recognition, emotion, and narrative) that transpose well to political cultural analysis.

Sewell enriches the concept of event as a unit of analysis, and extends the field of historical sociology beyond institutions and path dependence. Sewell does not offer a fully integrated model of politics and culture, yet his engagement with these issues advances our thinking because it suggests a way to move forward. First, his critique of path dependence underscores its principle *lacuna* and its principle strength. Counterfactual analysis cannot incorporate all possible paths. Yet, it does take issues of temporality and sequencing seriously. Sewell's (1996b) story of the Bastille depends heavily on sequencing, but he also uses "thick description" to embed his analysis in its cultural particularity. His richly contextualized narrative underscores the importance of collective perception, performance, and emotion.

Sewell leaves us with two questions from which to begin a more codified approach to the intersection of the political and the cultural. First, how do we identify what matters? Or to put it another way, what constitutes political importance? Do we know that in July 1789 the group that stormed the Bastille, or French citizens in general, understood the importance of the event when it occurred? Second, Sewell (1996b) astutely notes that "events generate more events" (pp. 871–874). How do we categorize and order events so that they have explanatory as well as interpretive power. The next section of this chapter takes up the issue of importance; the following two sections turn to the issue of categorization and explanation.

What Matters? Events and Implicit Cultural Knowledge

In the realm of politics, what matters is crucial for analysis. Why does meaning suffuse some events more than others? How do we distinguish an event, a moment with political and cultural significance, from an occurrence—a normal blip in the flow of time?[11] Implicit cultural knowledge assigns importance to some events and not others. Political scientists and sociologists by training and disposition give short shrift to implicit meaning. In contrast to their colleagues in the "hard" social sciences, anthropologists have developed a sophisticated theoretical apparatus around the concept of collective understanding and shared cultural knowledge that is useful for political analysis.

In his essay on "thick description," anthropologist Clifford Geertz's (1973, pp. 6–7) elucidation of the difference between a "twitch" and a "wink" permits us to segue into this question. A twitch and a wink are basically the same neurological phenomena. The eyelid shutters and flashes open and shut almost involuntarily. The description of the physical phenomenon, the denotation, is the same whether one is twitching or winking—but the connotation, the meaning, is vastly different. In Western cultures, the twitch is usually a sign of nervousness or neurological

disease—a body part out of control. A wink is also a playful or flirtatious gesture. There are some circumstances in which a wink would be vastly inappropriate. For example, professors who wish to avoid sexual harassment charges should not wink at students given the structures of authority at the university. A brain surgeon twitching away as he operated would not generate confidence. What is critical as Geertz argues is to know the context, and if you know the context, you share the meaning. In other words, a winking professor might really be a twitching professor—an extremely nervous or shy person before a lecture hall filled with undergraduates.

But what if you do not share the meaning? How might one excavate the meaning and particularly in ways that are relevant for the study of politics? Collectivity is the core of politics; culture is the invisible brick wall that encloses collectivity. The task of any cultural analysis is to understand the collective perceptions that bind a community and to aggregate upward to the macro-level constructs such as the polity. Since Freud's ([1905] 1999) classic essay on wit and the unconscious, social analysts of various stripes have recognized that jokes are instructive when attempting to theorize the relation between macro-level structures and micro-level perceptions.

Anthropologist Mary Douglas (1975) argues that "a joke cannot be perceived unless it corresponds to the form of the social experience: but I [*MD*] would go a step further and even suggest that the experience of a joke form in the social structure calls imperatively for the joke form to express it" (pp. 153–54). Douglas continues: "Jokes being themselves a play upon forms can well serve to express something about social forms.... [The] joke connects and disorganizes. It attacks sense and hierarchy" (p. 156). Macro-level structures that we experience as part of daily life such as political institutions are analogous to "social forms." In order to "get" the meaning of a joke, Douglas argues that the individual or the group has to understand its subversive elements. They must belong to a community of shared culture where meaning is implicit and thus unspoken—until challenged in the form of a joke.

Events re-calibrated as "social facts" serve as conduits to implicit political and cultural meaning. We may think of political events, such as Reagan at the Brandenberg Gate, much in the same way that Emile Durkheim ([1894]1964) described "social facts," that is as "ways of acting, thinking, and feeling that present the noteworthy property of existing outside the individual consciousness" (p. 2). Social facts are "every way of acting, fixed or not, capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint; or again, every way of acting which is general throughout a given society, while at the same time existing in its own right independent of its individual manifestations" (p. 13).

Social facts include collective phenomena—the law, the economy, the unemployment rate—as well as the individual and collective perception of them. Thus, Durkheim argues that a "social fact" is a structural and a psychological fact that goes beyond structure. He labels this combination of material and mental phenomena as "social currents" and describes them as

> the great movements of enthusiasm, indignation, and pity in a crowd [that] do not originate in any one of the particular individual consciousnesses. They come to each one of us from without and can carry us away in spite of ourselves.

> Of course, it may happen that, in abandoning myself to them unreservedly, I do not feel the pressure they exert upon me. But it is revealed as soon as I try to resist them. Let an individual attempt to oppose one of these collective manifestations, and the emotions that he denies will turn against him. (pp. 4–5)

It is a short analytic leap from a *social* to a *political fact*. Within the realm of cultural analysis, political facts, rather than politics or the polity per se, are social facts that combine emotional valence, collective perception, institutional arrangements—and implicit cultural knowledge. We must now turn our attention to how collectivities experience events as political facts and how events can be ordered and codified in ways that are culturally sensitive and analytically rigorous.

Events as Templates of Possibility: Experiencing *Political Facts*

Building on the insights of institutional scholarship and Durkheimian sociology, we can argue that *events* are *templates of possibility that collectivities experience as political facts*. In contrast to historical institutionalism, we argue that events are important for *what* they force us to imagine—and these imaginings may generate hope as well as fear, comfort as well as threat—rather than *how* they determine choice. *Events* are sociologically and politically important because they permit us to see relations and interconnections that speak to broader macro- and micro-level social processes. *Events* speak to collective resonance, present possibilities, and offer visions of possible paths—even if those paths are *not* pursued. *Events* make manifest what *might* happen, rather than predict what *will* happen. Public political events, such as Reagan's speech at the Brandenberg Gate, engage the collective imagination and have the capacity to alter public perceptions that *may* in the future alter political actions. Because they make manifest the possible, they have the power to engage collective emotions from fear to collective euphoria and the range of emotions that lie in between these polarities.

Experience is central to how collectivities understand the meaning of events—large and small. *Experience* implies a thick conception of temporality that can be marshaled to theorize the collective significance of political events. *Experience* works well as an analytic category because it interrogates the past and imagines the future. It is emotional and cognitive; conservative and transformative. *Experience, individual and collective*, is a temporal and spatial phenomenon that consciously or unconsciously draws on the past to assess the future.[12] *Experience* creates a tension between imagined possibilities and perceptions of constraint. Without experience, individual or collective, there would be no social or political facts because as individuals or a society, we would not have the grounds of collective recognition. *Experience*, individual and collective, does not simply float unanchored in social and political space.

As Parsons ([1942] 1954, p. 147)) observed in his discussion of propaganda, institutions anchor experience since they define expectations. Thus, institutions are, in the argument of this essay, a necessary but not sufficient dimension of political cultural analysis.

Smail (2008) in a recent exegesis on "neurohistory" argues that the past, the collective past, is hard-wired in the brain. This suggests that experience, the social manifestation of this biological phenomenon, is both determinant and conservative. Smail's argument has a lineage. For example, William James ([1879] 1956) in his essay "The Sentiment of Rationality" defines this phenomenon as the "comfort of the familiar." The "familiar" would only be "comforting" if assessments of the past were always positive. Here, Koselleck's (2004) distinction between "experience and expectation" proves useful. In a conservative environment, the gap between experience and expectation, past and future, is narrow. Modernity expands this gap and introduces complexity in the form of collective judgment and imagination.

Events take on their collective meaning and significance in the *moment*—the brief temporal space between judgment and imagination, the cognitive and the creative. *Moments* bear a kinship relation to experience but they are analytically and ontologically opposite. *Moments* are events that generate experiences. *Moments* represent an intense present-ness. They are sensate rather than cognate phenomena. Braudel ([1969] 1980) underscores this point when he observes: "Take the word *event*: for myself [*FB*] I would limit it, and imprison it within the short time span: an event is explosive, a "*nouvelle sonnante*" ("a matter of moment") as they said in the sixteenth century" (p. 27). *Moments* are often invoked but rarely theorized. Where moments are discussed, they are conceptualized as "critical junctures" or "turning points." But, not all turning points are tipping points.

Moments are more often moments of recognition—subtle changes in collective perceptions. The overlooked paradox is that often subtle course corrections precede turning points and most turning points are locations of recognition and not changes in direction. Actions, changes in direction, come later and they can be negative or positive. The Prince's lament in Giuseppe di Lampedusa's *The Leopard*, "For things to remain the same, everything must change," is an affirmation that course corrections are required to avoid social cataclysms, but the words also betray a recognition that a turning point in collective perception has already occurred. In his address to the 2008 Democratic National Convention, former President Bill Clinton argued that a reason to vote for Barack Obama was that Obama was "on the right side of history." What Clinton meant was that Obama was in the moment—and the moment was a complete break with the collective perception of what an American president was. But, those perceptions did not change overnight. Those perceptions were the result of fifty years of collective national experience in which the meaning of difference changed. We have only to recall that in 1960, Americans perceived John F. Kennedy as "different" because he was Roman Catholic.

Experience lies in those moments when biography and history intersect. Past and present, experience and moments are embedded within events and imbue them with their aura of futurity and possibility. Obama did not have to win the 2008

American presidential election. The moment was propitious. His campaign and election were imaginable and they became an event. Reagan did not tear down the Berlin Wall, but his speech clearly tapped into the moment of popular imaginings and discontent that later became a political reality. *Events* are *templates of possibility*, but their analytic power and political salience are not simply ad hoc. In the last section of this chapter, we turn to how we can focus on events in a systematic way so as to form the basis of a cogent political analysis that incorporates culture.

From Meanings to Explanations: An Analytic Typology of Events as *Political Facts*

This essay is a pragmatic as well as theoretical discussion. Events worthy of study force changes in collective perception. They fracture or affirm community. For example, it would be difficult to argue that the event of 9/11 did not alter the collective perception of security in the United States. Since 9/11, the trope of safety has been a large part of American political campaigns.

As argued earlier, not all turning points are tipping points. It is rare that a single event has the impact of a 9/11. So which events matter and how do they advance a rigorous cultural understanding of the political? Comparison is crucial to the claim of cultural and political significance. Spatial or temporal variation provides the comparative dimension that supports analytic leverage. For analytic purposes, we can organize events as *contiguous*, *sequential*, and *spectacular*. Depending on context, events may have properties of all three categories—the *contiguous*, the *sequential*, and the *spectacular*.

Contiguous events refer to one event or class of events that has similar or different meanings, depending on the physical space in which the event occurs. Space might be as restricted as a neighborhood or as expansive as a nation-state or geographical region. Spatial context is a demarcator of cultural specificity. What is salient for political cultural analysis is how an event is collectively processed or perceived in a different milieu and the effects of that process on political action or nonaction. Difference depending on spatial location becomes a key to political analysis. For example, Ronald Reagan's trip to Berlin in 1987 was viewed with cynicism in the United States where some factions saw him as encouraging a militaristic stance toward the Soviet bloc, whereas in Berlin, his words were words of hope and possibility.

Clifford Geertz' slim book *Islam Observed* (1968) represents an early iteration of the focus on *contiguous events*. Morocco and Indonesia are Muslim countries, but the practice of Islam in each country is remarkably different. Laitin's (1986) study of the Yoruba in Nigeria reverses Geertz' strategy. He examines the political and

cultural factors that enable part of Nigeria to be Christian and the other part to be Muslim.

The strategy of *contiguous events*, even if not labeled as such, has been a mainstay of much comparative cultural political analysis since the early 1990s. While not strictly political sociology, Lamont's (2000a, 2000b) studies of the comparative perception of social boundaries as well as her concept of "repertoires of evaluation" (Lamont and Thevenot 2000) are seminal exemplars of this method.

Within the more restricted area of political sociology, the category of event has been somewhat elastic in practice. In his study of nationalism, Brubaker (1996) argues that nationhood should be studied as a "contingent event." This is an articulation of a methodological orientation that he deploys implicitly in an earlier work (Brubaker 1992) on citizenship law and nationhood in France and Germany. Brubaker (1992) asked why, when confronted with the same increase in immigrant populations, France and Germany chose completely different methods of incorporation. He argues that France and Germany developed different "political idioms" about membership in the nation based on longstanding practices grounded in geopolitical necessities. Once embedded in the collective consciousness, the "political idiom," in my terminology, became a *political fact*, durable and resistant to revision—an "invisible brick wall" of meaning around who could and could not be a citizen. Brubaker's book is now seventeen years old. Yet, in the ensuing years, French and German citizenship laws have only changed marginally.

Somers (1993) studies the development of citizenship law in eighteenth-century England using the method of contiguous events. Challenging the classic writings of T. H. Marshall, Somers argues that citizenship is an "instituted process" rather than a status bestowed upon individuals. She then proceeds to demonstrate how within England, a single nation-state, region and geography determined political development. By contrasting the cultural practices of "arable" and "pastoral" regions, Somers was able to show how political and economic organization contributed to different versions of citizenship and democracy. Elites governed the "arable" lands. These lands were poor learning grounds for democracy. In contrast, small landowners and farmers cooperated among themselves in the "pastoral" lands, creating cultures of solidarity. Democracy flourished in the pastoral lands and a "local public sphere and political culture of rights" (Somers 1993, p. 593) developed.

The analysis of *contiguous events* has grown increasingly sophisticated. Somers and Block (2005) deploy it creatively in their analysis of market fundamentalism and social welfare regimes. They take two unrelated events—welfare reform in England in 1834 and welfare reform in the United States in 1996—and find ideological parallels across time and space. Spillman (1997) has analyzed bicentennial commemorations in the United States and Australia as adjudicators of national identity. Steinmetz's (2007) study of German colonial practices reveals different strategies on different continents. He points to a concept of colonialisms rather than colonialism even within a single national state. Smith (2005) takes on the phenomenon of war and examines its "cultural logic" in three diverse iterations in different time periods—in Iraq, the Gulf, and Suez.

My own research on political violence employs a variation of *contiguous events* to analyze the policy consequences of different moral evaluations of terrorist activity. My empirical focus is the 1985 hijacking of the *Achille Lauro*. I examine the different collective perceptions of the event in the three countries that were involved in adjudicating the hijacking—the United States, Italy, and Egypt. The *Achille Lauro* was an Italian cruise ship that was hijacked in international waters by a splinter group from the Palestinian Liberation Organization. The Italians and the Egyptians successfully negotiated the release of the ship. When the hijacking was over, it was determined that an American passenger, an elderly man in a wheelchair, had been shot and thrown overboard. From that moment, the hijacking became an international event with vastly different meanings for those involved. The Italians saw it as a problem of Middle Eastern politics and they congratulated themselves at first with keeping peace in the Mediterranean; the Americans viewed it as a direct attack on an American citizen and the United States.

President Ronald Reagan ordered the interception of an Egyptian civilian passenger plane that was carrying the hijackers back to Italy in order to stand trial. Italy saw the attack on the Egyptian airliner as an insult and a violation of international law. The Americans viewed it as a triumph in the cause of justice. In the end, the legal interpretation held. But for Americans, the event hinged on the fact that terrorism was perceived as a moral issue, a crime against persons and under the jurisdiction of criminal law. The United States was particularly unhappy that the hijackers would be brought to trial in Italy—a country without the death penalty. In contast, the Italians (and virtually everyone else) viewed it as a political event that demanded adherence to the rule of extant international law. The event pointed to a moral evaluation of terrorism that has had political consequences as the United States has had to deal with the broader issues of international terrorism that 9/11 generated.

Sequential events focus on analogous events that move forward in time and in aggregate build new experiences. Whereas spatial context was constitutive of *contiguous event* analysis, temporal context or history is constitutive of *sequential event* analysis. *Sequential events* are future-oriented and lead to the imaginings of new possibilities. The contours of those imaginings and possibilities provide the basis of political analysis. The analysis of sequential events is aligned with, but not the same as, traditional path analysis. Turning points figure in the sequence, but they are viewed as contingent and their consequences less deterministic. *Sequential* analysis of events differs from path dependence or "analytic narratives" in two important respects. First, *sequential events* emphasize the *flow qua flow* of analogous events rather than the linkage of events in a monocausal chain. Second, analogues are sequential events because they occur within a similar spatial context but with a variable time frame. For this reason, periodization is an important dimension of *sequential event* analysis. *Sequential events* highlight the fissures in the cultural wall and foreground where the possibilities of political and cultural change might lie.

My analysis of "illiberal politics" (Berezin 2009) in contemporary Europe relies on the *sequential* analysis of events. The analytic core of the book is the French

National Front. The theoretical analysis focuses on the durability of national identities and practices, and the vulnerabilities of various national states to right-wing politics. The broader theoretical point that incorporated a political and cultural analysis sets the work apart from more standard approaches to the European right that limit themselves to electoral analysis. I examine the French National Front's political trajectory in the years between 1997 and 2002. This is a relatively compressed time period. For this period, I identify a series of key events: the 1997 Strasbourg Party convention; the 1998 success in the regional elections and the rupture of the National Front as a political party; and the 1999 "failure" in the European parliamentary elections. The culmination of the National Front's story was the first round of the 2002 presidential election when Jean Marie Le Pen, the party leader, netted second place.

The events in the National Front's story were "political facts." French citizens recognized them as important and for the most part they generated national anxiety and fear. But, they were not the only "political facts" in France, or in Europe during this period. I mapped the salient events within the National Front's trajectory against a series of events in French civil society, the French state and European politics more broadly. I was able to identify three narratives that moved in parallel sequences. The story of Europe, or more appropriately the European Union, was a story of geographical expansion and political integration. The central point of this story was the 2004 draft constitution. The European story had an effect on every nation-state on the continent—albeit in different ways. As Europe was expanding, Europeanization was becoming associated with globalization and market fundamentalism across the continent. In 1998, social movements within French civil society that had mobilized against Le Pen turned their attention to issues of globalization. ATTAC, the anti-globalization group, that has since become transnational was founded in France in 1998. The French state was espousing multiculturalism and Europe during this period, while at the same time reasserting French national identity.

In 1998, France won the World Cup and the French political establishment hailed the victory as a triumph of multiculturalism and toleration in France. Its star players were second-generation Algerians. At the same time, the French state was restricting immigration and refusing to ratify the European Union's "Regional Language" initiative. The culmination of the reassertion of nation-ness came with two events in 2005. The first was the French state's decision to uphold the law affirming *laicite* by banning the wearing of religious symbols in public places. In practice, this meant that young Muslim women could not wear headscarves to school. The second event was the French rejection of the European constitution after a popular referendum in May 2005. It was not only French citizens that rejected Europe. French political parties of diverse ideological persuasions, from the National Front to some segments of the Socialist Party, were vehemently opposed to the draft constitution.

By pursuing a sequence of analogous events in different spheres from the National Front to civil society, to the state to the European Union, and by looking at

the points in which events intersected, a new story of illiberal politics both in France and in Europe emerges. First, if we restrict the analysis to the National Front, we see that from 1997 on, the National Front shifted its public discourse from immigrants and immigration to Europe and globalization. If we look across spheres at the same point, we find that the language of national identity and anti-globalization was gaining momentum among members of the French political class as well as in civil society. The exogenous force that was threatening France at the moment was not immigration but Europeanization, and it was a force that not only applied to France. Most analysts viewed 1999 as the end of the National Front and Le Pen. Le Pen's second place in the first round of the 2002 presidential election proved them wrong. I argue that 1999 was the end of the beginning for Le Pen—not the beginning of the end. The end did come—but it came much later—in 2007 with the election of Nicholas Sarkozy. In 2007, the National Front and Le Pen's fortunes suffered a reversal for the first time in ten years. Sarkozy shrewdly detached Le Pen's message from the messenger. Sarkozy used those portions of Le Pen's messages that suited his strategy of strong nation-ness and an ambivalent commitment to Europeanization and globalization.

A *sequential* analysis of analogous events allowed me to locate a turning point in 1999—where few would have located it—but it was a turning point that applied not only to the National Front. French civil society and the French state were having second thoughts about Europe. The sequential analysis enabled me to make a broader theoretical point about the relation between "illiberalism" and Europeanization. This is a story that extends beyond France and beyond Europe. My analysis speaks to a core relation between security and democratic sentiment in a world beset by crises from the political to the financial that feels increasingly insecure to many people.

Sequential analysis may also focus on a single event that changes its meaning over an extended period of time. Alexander's (2003) study of how the Nazi genocide of the Jews became the Holocaust provides an illustration. He demonstrates how a variety of political and cultural actors came to identify the mass murders in German concentration camps as a Holocaust. This identification did not happen overnight. Political facts in the international and national public sphere defined periods in postwar history, during which time the collective conception of genocide evolved. The events that occurred in Nazi Germany have come to denote one among many events that the term Holocaust demarcates. Alexander's careful historical analysis demonstrates that today the term "Holocaust" stands as a "bridging metaphor" that connotes moral failure and evil in a variety of global contexts and describes a variety of events.

Spectacular events are the last category of events to consider. They are public performances of various types (Alexander 2004; Berezin 1994b). *Spectacular events* are central to anthropological, and some historical, accounts of politics. Geertz' (1980) "theater state" is a classic example. *Spectacular events* are the class of events to which cultural sociologists often refer when they speak of culture and politics. *Spectacular events* are visible and require an audience. In contrast to *contiguous*

events that draw on *past* experience and *sequential* events that deal with *developing* experiences, *spectacular* events aim to *create* experiences that can be reabsorbed into collective experience. Spectacular events exist in an *eternal present* and give narrative form to political facts.

Social analysts often take *spectacular events* at face value. Elsewhere (Berezin 1997b), I have argued that *representations of power do not equal realities of power. Spectacular events* are dense cultural forms that derive their political significance in relation to other events. Spectacle is a form of public sociability. German social theorist Georg Simmel ([1910] 1971) argues that sociability is based on an implicit knowledge of rules of behavior that inhabitants of particular cultural and social contexts share. Simmel juxtaposes sociability, or form, against values, or content. He argues: "Where a connection, begun on the sociable level... finally comes to center about personal values, it loses the essential quality of sociability and becomes an association determined by a content—not unlike a business or religious relation, for which contact, exchange, and speech are but instruments for ulterior ends, while for sociability they are the whole meaning and content of the social processes" (p. 131). Sociability is an end in itself—it is "*the play-form of association* [emphasis in original]" (p. 130). Moving from Simmel's insights on social forms to political spectacle is a short step. Political spectacle is the "*play-form*" of politics. Spectacle as a political form articulates what is legitimate and what is not. Spectacle as the "play-form" of politics uses theatricality to communicate the boundaries of political legitimacy. *Spectacle events* aim to engage the political public—but we cannot assume that they do. They may create a "community of feeling" (Berezin 1997b) or they may fall on deaf collective ears.

Spectacular events are either *ritualistic* or *mediated.* Ritual events repeat. National commemorations and celebrations focus on a single event of national history, such as endings or beginnings of wars, constitutions, or prominent leaders. National holidays as a strategy of commemoration always raise a question as to what extent they tap into the memory they wish to commemorate. Citizens may also view them as simply a day off from work.[13] In recent years, memory studies have developed as a specialized subfield within cultural and historical sociology (see, e.g., Olick and Robbins 1998). Before modern technology, ritual events occurred in real time. Medieval lords, kings, and political leaders up to the advent of film were restricted to the live political ceremony. Modern politicians still use live events but technology has greatly expanded their repertoire of possibilities. Modern mass media permit the theatricalization of events that might otherwise be left to restricted and local commemoration. The annual ceremonies at the site of the World Trade Center in New York permit grieving relatives to air their private sorrows on national television, but also keep the events and the dangers of terrorism ever-present in the American collective psyche.

Spectacular events may be spontaneous and then captured by national media and aired over and over. The World Trade Center Towers have fallen thousands of times. Less dramatic examples include: the crowds that lined the streets when Diana Princess of Wales died; the masses of people that regularly showed up during the

2008 presidential campaign when Barack Obama spoke; the riots in Iran after the June 2009 presidential election.

The moment of silence observed around the 2006 bombing of a London subway train provides an illustration of how the media may facilitate creating an event that makes a political statement. On July 7, 2006, a cell group of Middle Eastern terrorists set off a bomb in a London subway station during rush hour. Many persons were killed. The British government declared that a ritual moment of silence in solidarity with the victims be observed on July 14, 2006—a week after the event. While the public ritual occurred in London, with both the queen and the prime minster participating, the event became a European event denouncing terrorist activity.

Ever since Europe began expanding as an integrated union in the early 1990s, collective solidarity has been at issue. Despite a common monetary system, flag, and various ad hoc holidays, national identities have been as resilient as ever. The London bombing that occurred just a few months after the terrorist bombing of a Madrid commuter train presented European bureaucrats with an opportunity to promote a collective European identity. A European moment of silence in solidarity with the victims was declared to occur at the same time as the commemoration in London. Television programming and public radio were halted in all European Union countries at the moment in which the bomb hit. The only programming available was coverage of the queen and Tony Blair in England. After the moment of silence ended, normal broadcasting resumed, but not before a national political figure made a comment on the presence of terrorism in Europe and the need to stand together in its wake. Thus, a terrorist event was turned into a media event that was used not only to underscore the importance of fighting terrorism, but also to underscore the necessity of a collective European solidarity. Timing is crucial here. The summer of 2006 was one year after French and Dutch citizens had rejected in national referenda a European constitution. Europe as a solidarity project was frayed in the summer of 2006, and the terrorist attacks and their commemoration in European media became an event in the *sequence* of events surrounding Europeanization.

Spectacular events rarely stand alone. They provide an important adjunct to *contiguous* and *sequential* events and often serve as component parts of *contiguous* or *sequential* events. In *Making the Fascist Self* (Berezin 1997b), I analyzed *spectacular* events in both a *contiguous* and *sequential* manner to make broader points about political development in Fascist Italy and fascism as a political ideology more generally. In one set of chapters, I analyzed the annual commemoration of the March on Rome—the "founding" event of Italian Fascism. The ceremonies that I describe took place in the capital. In another chapter, I analyzed (thanks to a Fascist Party calendar) all Fascist spectacle events that occurred in Verona—a small city far away from the center—over a twenty-year period. The calendar permitted me to compare in contiguous fashion Fascist celebration in the center and periphery. Histories that describe Fascist ritual without taking this comparative approach often tell a story of Fascist ideology being transmitted through these public events. But my comparative eventful analysis yielded a far more nuanced account. The Fascist

ideological project was a struggle from the beginning. The years of standing together in the piazza in the end were a training ground for the civil war that ensued in Italy between 1943 and 1945. It also provided ritual form for the execution of Mussolini, whose body was hung by its heels in a central piazza in Milan where the citizenry gathered to defile it.

As if: The Meaning of what Actually Happens

Events focus our analytic attention. Events as objects of study offer methodological as well as theoretical advantages. Events as theorized in the preceding sections allow for historical and cultural analysis of the political. A cultural analysis of politics shifts the unit of analysis from political actors, whether voters or party operatives, to events that marked salient moments in collective national perceptions. Events are embedded in social and political relations. Events incorporate structure and culture, institutions and actors. Events permit us to hear the voices of multiple subjects at the same time.[14]

Past experience defines the meaning of *contiguous events.* Past perceptions and practices affect present interpretations and shape the repertoire of imaginings of collective social actors. Analyzing *contiguous* events in different spatial milieus underscores the durability of culture—the brick wall—and particularity of different cultures. The emphasis on past experience points in the direction of conservative rather than transformative political behavior. *Sequential events* interrogate the past and imagine the future. They are building events. Restricted to one spatial milieu, *sequential events* reveal the fissures in the brick wall of cultural—the points for repair and renewal—the malleability of culture. In the political sphere, they point us in the direction of transformation—they do not guarantee the nature of that transformation. Learning may take a reactionary as well as revolutionary form. Spectacular events derive their analytic power from their capacity to be inserted among analogous *contiguous* or *sequential events.*

Events as political facts lend analytic rigor to the cultural analysis of politics. The methods proposed in this chapter depart from both institutional and cultural analysis in important ways. In contrast to institutional analysis, events are not simply links in a causal chain. Events are templates of possibility only for agents. Political analysts must treat events *as if* they were fixed—with the full understanding that different agents might assign different possibilities to them. [15] Mikhail Gorbachev did not tear down the Berlin Wall because Ronald Reagan asked him to do so. In fact, neither Gorbachev, nor Reagan tore down the Berlin Wall—although they both may have felt as though they did. The citizens of East Berlin tore down the material wall that divided the city.

Many events led to the collapse of Communism in 1989. The wall was fissured long before it fell. But without the fixity of the "fall of the wall in 1989," it would be analytically difficult to locate the events that led to the collapse of Communism in a series of events. It would be difficult to talk about the different propensities for democracy and authoritarianism in the post-socialist East. It would be difficult to analyze authoritarian regimes in other parts of the globe. Without cultural analysis, we underestimate the importance of emotion and meaning, the invisible brick walls that surround politics. But without acting as if events are fixed and real, that events actually happen, our political analyses are attenuated; our critical capacities are impoverished; and a wall of incomprehension remains.

NOTES

1. I drafted the first version of this chapter when I was a Fernand Braudel Senior Fellow in the Department of Social and Political Sciences at the European University Institute in Fiesole, Italy. I thank Peter Mair, the chair, as well as the staff and faculty of the department, for their generosity and collegiality. I am appreciative of Phil Smith for his critique of the first version of this chapter. Jared Peifer and Laura Ford helped with manuscript preparation and provided important substantive comments. Chris Cameron designed the table. I presented an earlier version of my arguments at the Cornell-Giessen Workshop: Transnational Approaches to the Study of Culture (April 3, 2009). I thank Leslie Adelson of the Department of German Studies for asking me to participate. My paper benefited from the questions and insights of the workshop participants.

2. As a concept, *event* engages the current concern with narrative theory in comparative historical sociology (Sewell 1996a, 1996b; Somers 1994, 1995; Büthe 2002). Polletta (2006) and Tilly (2002), from divergent perspectives, have analyzed how narratives or "stories" influence politics. As an analytic category, the "event" captured the imagination of literary theorists (Deleuze 1969) and historians, "l'histoire événementielle" (Braudel [1969] 1980, p. 27), before attaining its current salience in political science and sociology.

3. The intersection of political and cultural analysis has a luminous, if problematic, history in social science. Modernization studies defined political culture in the 1950s and 1960s. Almond and Verba's ([1963] 1989) study of "civic culture" and Banfield's (1958) account of a southern Italian village are classic examples. These studies measured the diffusion of Western values as an index of democratic dispositions. They seem quaint in the face of the massive political upheavals and cultural complexity of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Yet, Almond and Verba as well as Banfield have contemporary counterparts as the essays in Harrison and Huntington's (2000) anthology, *Culture Matters*, illustrate. Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* (1996) locates culture in civilizations that are based on shared religions. Though politically conservative, these studies have value in that they point in the direction of a thick conception of culture that owes more to anthropology than to political science. Political anthropology focuses on shared practices and social actions as revelatory of meaning spheres, ranging from the political to the economic. See Paley (2002) for a review of this literature as well as Ortner (2006).

4. See essays in Adams, Clemens, and Orloff (2005) and Steinmetz (2005) for discussions of theory and method in comparative historical sociology.

Table 23.1 Typology of Political Facts

			Spectacular	
	Contiguous	*Sequential*	*Ritual*	*Media*
Event	Single	Multiple	Multiple	Single
Spatial Dimension	Multiple	Single	Single	Multiple
Temporal Dimension	Single	Multiple	Multiple	Multiple
Experience	Past	Future	Present	Present
	Tradition	Building	Creating	Creating
Political Potential	Conservative	Transformative	Conservative or Transformative	

5. See Somers (1995) for a discussion of a "historical sociology of concept formation."

6. The number of important review essays in both fields coupled with the interdisciplinarity of their citations support this assertion (see, e.g., Immergut 1998; Hall and Taylor 1996; Thelen 1999; Clemens 2007; Lamont 2000; and Alexander 2003, pp. 3–26).

7. For a critique, see Adams (1999, pp. 98–122) and Somers (1998).

8. Although by no means a cultural analyst, political scientist Arend Lijphart (1971) outlines how case studies may serve as valid analytic tools.

9. The comparison of Griffin (1993) versus Mahoney (2003) illustrates this dilemma.

10. Sewell, who acknowledges a debt to Marshall Sahlins (1991), reformulated these theories in *Logics of History* (2005).

11. Mast (2006) draws a distinction between event and occurrence.

12. Historians (e.g., Scott 1996; LaCapra 2004, ch. 1; Jay 2005) that privilege experience as an analytic category tend to focus on individual subjects. Their approach is inductive and is in contrast to the deductive and collective conceptualization of experience that this chapter proposes. See Throop (2003) for a critique from the perspective of anthropology.

13. See Schwartz (2008) for a study of the American holiday Presidents' Day.

14. SeeTable 23.1.

15. For a different approach to this point, see Wagner-Pacifici (2010).

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