RISK
AND
CULTURE

An Essay on the Selection
of Technical and Environmental Dangers

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and

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Introduction:

Can We Know The Risks We Face?

Can we know the risks we face, now or in the future? No, we cannot; but yes, we must act as if we do. Some dangers are unknown; others are known, but not by us because no one person can know everything. Most people cannot be aware of most dangers at most times. Hence, no one can calculate precisely the total risk to be faced. How, then, do people decide which risks to take and which to ignore? On what basis are certain dangers guarded against and others relegated to secondary status?

The current consideration of risk has three peculiarities. The first is that disagreement about the problem is deep and widespread in the Western world. The second is that different people worry about different risks—war, pollution, employment, inflation. The third is that knowledge and action are out of sync; whatever programs are enacted to reduce risks, they conspicuously fail to follow the principle of doing the most to prevent the worst damage. In sum, substantial disagreement remains over what is risky, how risky it is, and what to do about it.

Are dangers really increasing or are we more afraid? Undoubtedly people and the environment face risks from technology. The perils of nuclear wastes and carcinogenic chemicals
are not figments of the imagination. Undoubtedly, also, we benefit from technology. Life expectancy continues to increase; accident rates and infant mortality are way down. Are the dangers worth the advances? Do we make too much or too little of such risks and benefits? Different groups give exposure to toxic chemicals vastly different significance. Fear of risk, coupled with the confidence to face it, has something to do with knowledge and something to do with the kind of people we are.

At the level of public policy the main dangers can be grouped into four kinds:
1. foreign affairs: the risk of foreign attack or encroachment; war, loss of influence, prestige, and power;
2. crime: internal collapse; failure of law and order; violence versus white collar crime;
3. pollution: abuse of technology; fears for the environment; and
4. economic failure: loss of prosperity.

Do those people who worry about the future worry equally about all four kinds of risk? A Harris survey on attitudes about risk among the general public, corporate executives, and federal regulators—demonstrates the diversity of perspectives. The Harris findings show that twice as many people in the general public (as compared to executives) think that there is more risk in society today than 20 years ago. As for domestic political instability, 61 percent of both the public and executives feel there is more risk; but only 34 percent of the regulators agree with this. In regard to danger from the chemicals in use, however, almost 3 times as many executives (58 percent) as the general public and the regulators (15 percent each) think there is less risk today than 20 years before. Comparing regulators to executives, 41 percent of the latter felt the greatest risks facing the country (in March 1980) were the economy and energy; only 10 percent of federal regulators gave the same response.

At the elite level of public debate, the actors—political parties, interest groups, government officials—do not uniformly attach the same dangers to different objects. People who are most concerned about attack from abroad, for instance, tend to be less worried about pollution at home. Those who would take strong steps to counter violent crime in the streets are not as passionate about the effects of inequality of income. Why not? The two trends may well be connected. The mark of an intelligent man, it is said, is that the more he learns, the more he becomes aware of how much more there is to know. The advance of science increases human understanding of the natural world. By opening up new realms of knowledge, however, science simultaneously can increase the gap between what is known and what it is desirable to know.

What would be needed to make us able to understand the risks that face us?—Nothing short of total knowledge (a mad answer to an impossible question). The hundreds of thousands of chemicals about whose dangers so much is said are matched easily by the diversity of the causes of war or the affictions of poverty or the horrors of religious and racial strife. Just trying to think of what categories of objects a person might be concerned about is alarming. Indeed, it might be better for mental health to limit rather than expand sources of concern. Since no one can attend to everything, some sort of priority must be established among dangers; otherwise, merely counting risky objects would leave us defenseless.

Ranking dangers (which is what risk assessment requires) so as to know which ones to address and in what order, demands prior agreement on criteria. There is no mechanical way to produce a ranking. As Jerome R. Ravetz, a philosopher of science, puts it:

"The hope that one can produce a taxonomy, evaluation, and finally a technical fix to the problems of risks is in substance as ambitious as the program of putting all of human experience and value onto a scale of measurement for mathematical or political manipulation."  

Because no one knows it all, there can be no guarantee that the very dangers people seek to avoid are those that actually will harm them most. Moreover, successful surmounting of one
danger is not always a good omen. Success may lead people to relax their guard in overcoming adversity. Then, the next unexpected danger may do them in. As Ravetz reminds us,

risks are conceptually uncontrollable; one can never know whether one is doing enough to prevent a hazard from occurring. Even after a hazard has occurred, one is still left with the question of how much more action would have been necessary to have prevented it, and whether such action would have been within the bounds of "reasonable" behavior.

Even in the distant future, when the record of these times is more complete, historians undoubtedly will differ about whether our generation might have taken different, safer paths. Yet, we must, not knowing what will happen to us along the path we choose to take.

When one enlarges the question to ask about which kinds of risks are acceptable to what sorts of people—-the prime political question—the uncertainties surrounding current knowledge are multiplied. A comprehensive study of acceptable risk by Baruch Fischhoff, Sarah Lichtenstein, and Paul Slovic concludes that acceptability is always a political issue.

That choice depends upon the alternatives, values, and beliefs that are considered. As a result, there is no single all-purpose number that expresses "acceptable risk" for a society.

Values and uncertainties are an integral part of every acceptable-risk problem. As a result, there are no value-free processes for choosing between risky alternatives. The search for an "objective method" is doomed to failure and may blind the searchers to the value-laden assumptions they are making . . .

Not only does each approach fail to give a definitive answer, but it is predisposed to representing particular interests and recommending particular solutions. Hence, choice of a method is a political decision with a distinct message about who should rule and what should matter.

Since there is no single correct conception of risk, there is no way to get everyone else to accept "it."

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Introduction: Can We Know the Risks We Face?

No person can know more than a fraction of the dangers that abound. To believe otherwise is to believe that we know (or can know) everything. Yet even if we did, it would still be necessary for us to agree on a ranking of risks. In the absence of complete knowledge, and in the presence of disagreement between scientists and laymen alike, how can anyone choose to zero in on any particular set of dangers? How, faced with endless possibilities, can anyone calculate the probabilities of harm (the risks)?

Risk should be seen as a joint product of knowledge about the future and consent about the most desired prospects. This enables us to put the problems into perspective.

CHART A

FOUR PROBLEMS OF RISK

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When knowledge is certain and consent complete, when objectives are agreed and all alternatives (together with the probability of occurrence) are known, a program can be written to produce the best solution. The problem is technical and the
solution is one of calculation. In the next instance—knowledge certain, but consent contested—the problem is one of disagreement about how to value consequences; here the solution is either more coercion or more discussion. In the third case, complete consent hampered by uncertain knowledge leads to the problem of risk being defined as insufficient information; hence the solution is seen as research. Looking at the way governments handle controversies over risk in Europe and America, Nelkin and Pollak observe:

If lack of confidence is thought to be a problem arising from insufficient technical evidence, then the goal is to ascertain "scientific truth." This leads to a structure based on scientific advice to public representatives. If the controversy is defined in terms of alienation, a more participatory or consultative system is developed. And if the problem of public consensus is defined in terms of inadequate information, it is assumed that people oppose technologies because they are poorly informed. The task then becomes one of "education."

The last situation, in which knowledge is uncertain and consent is contested, is precisely how any informed person would characterize the contemporary dilemma of risk assessment.

What can reduce the need for new knowledge and at the same time focus attention on a few critical subjects? Only social consent keeps an issue out of contention. The perception of risk is a social process. All society depends on combinations of confidence and fear. Learning about fear ought to afford a backdoor route for understanding confidence. Some fears are physical, some are social. Perhaps physical fears would not threaten to overwhelm citizens who felt confident of justice and social support. Perhaps people are not so much afraid of dying as afraid of death without honor. In addressing questions of acceptable risk without considering their social aspects, we could be speaking to the wrong problems. The different social principles that guide behavior affect the judgment of what dangers should be most feared, what risks are worth taking, and who should be allowed to take them. In Zaire the Lele people suffered all the usual devastating tropical ills—fever, gastroenteritis, tuberculosis, leprosy, ulcers, barrenness, and pneumonia. In this world of disease, they focused mainly on being struck by lightning, the affliction of barrenness, and one disease, bronchiitis; they mainly attributed these troubles to specific types of immorality in which the victim would generally be seen as innocent and some powerful leader or village elder would be blamed. In other countries the prevailing culture promotes a different selection from a similar range of hazards. Sometimes, instead of placing the blame on the village elders, it rather enhances self-blame: in those cases a disaster is the victim’s own fault. Whether blaming the elders or blaming the victim, the type of society generates the type of accountability and focuses concern on particular dangers. Much as in biology, the cultural theory of risk perception which will be developed in these pages sees the social environment, the selection principles, and the perceiving subject as all one system. It does not ignore the reality of the dangers around. Plenty of real dangers are always present. No doubt the water in fourteenth century Europe was a persistent health hazard, but a cultural theory of perception would point out that it became a public preoccupation only when it seemed plausible to accuse Jews of poisoning the wells.

A cultural approach can make us see how commonly consensuses relate some natural dangers to moral defects. According to this argument, dangers are selected for public concern according to the strength and direction of social criticism. Death and disease statistics are mobilized for justifying the criticism. Why is asbestos poisoning seen to be more fearsome than fire? Asbestos was developed to save people from burning; asbestos poisoning is a form of industrial pollution whose toll of deaths by cancer justifies a particular anti-industrial criticism more strongly than does loss of life by fire. Similarly, there is no obvious way in which the incidence of skin cancer caused by leisure-time sunburn can be mobilized for criticism of industry, and so we hear less of it. We shall show that this connection between perceived risk and moral blame does not reduce the selection of dangers to political analysis. At the
same time politics must not be avoided. A cultural theory of risk perception would be trivial if it started considering the distribution of power in relation to the pattern of risks incurred by Americans. Our guiding assumptions are that any form of society produces its own selected view of the natural environment, a view which influences its choice of dangers worth attention. Attribution of responsibility for natural disasters is a normal strategy for protecting a particular set of values belonging to a particular way of life. Consequently, research into risk perception based on a cultural model would try to discover what different characteristics of social life elicit different responses to danger.

This book is about how particular kinds of danger come to be selected for attention. We could have chosen to discuss perception of the risks of poverty or of war, but it is not an encyclopedia. Our book is about why, at this time, pollution has been singled out for special concern. Our answer will be that the choice of risks to worry about depends on the social forms selected. The choice of risks and the choice of how to live are taken together. Each form of social life has its own typical risk portfolio. Common values lead to common fears (and, by implication, to a common agreement not to fear other things).

There is no gap between perception and reality and no correct description of the right behavior, at least not in advance. The real dangers are not known until afterward (there always being alternative hypotheses). In the meantime, acting in the present to ward off future dangers, each social arrangement elevates some risks to a high peak and depresses others below sight. This cultural bias is integral to social organization. Risk taking and risk aversion, shared confidence and shared fears, are part of the dialogue on how best to organize social relations. For to organize means to organize some things in and other things out. When we say, therefore, that a certain kind of society is biased toward stressing the risk of pollution, we are not saying that other kinds of social organization are objective and unbiased but rather that they are biased toward finding different kinds of dangers.

How do we choose which risks to face? We choose the risks in the same package as we choose our social institutions. Since an individual cannot look in all directions at once, social life demands organization of bias. People order their universe through social bias. By bringing these biases out into the open, we will understand better which policy differences can be reconciled and which cannot.

Each side in the current risk debate is thought by the other to be serving interests of preferred social institutions. Whether the reference is to the industrial establishment or the "danger establishment" that lobbies against it, each takes the arguments of the other to be self-serving and therefore false. Cultural bias is much more complicated. What to do about it depends, first and foremost, on learning to recognize it.

To ask which is the correct description of rational behavior (that is, to ask what the real risks are) leads to an answer which finds irrational bias and misperceptions of real interest in the viewpoint of anyone who disagrees. Instead, cultural analysis shows how a given cluster of values and beliefs makes sense out of the various positions people take and the practices they employ. To what beliefs and values would members of society most readily refer in order for that kind of society to have credible, coherent institutions?

Once the idea is accepted that people select their awareness of certain dangers to conform with a specific way of life, it follows that people who adhere to different forms of social organization are disposed to take (and avoid) different kinds of risk. To alter risk selection and risk perception, then, would depend on changing the social organization.

Questions about acceptable levels of risk can never be answered just by explaining how nature and technology interact. What needs to be explained is how people agree to ignore most of the potential dangers that surround them and interact so as to concentrate only on selected aspects.

Let us try it another way: the key terms in the debate over technology are risk and acceptability. In calculating the probability of danger from technology, one concentrates on the risk
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that is physically "out there," in man's intervention in the natural world. In determining what is acceptable, one concentrates on the uncertainty that is "in here," within a person's mind. Going from "out there" to "in here" requires a connection between the dangers of technology and people's perception of those risks. Neither the one approach (that the perils of technology are objectively self-evident) nor the other (that all perceptions are subjective) can connect the two. Only a cultural approach can integrate moral judgments about how to live with empirical judgments about what the world is like.

To develop the argument, we turn to a cultural change that has taken place in our own generation. We begin with a sense of wonder. Try to read a newspaper or news magazine, listen to radio, or watch television; on any day some alarm bells will be ringing. What are Americans afraid of? Nothing much, really, except the food they eat, the water they drink, the air they breathe, the land they live on, and the energy they use. In the amazingly short span of fifteen to twenty years, confidence about the physical world has turned into doubt. Once the source of safety, science and technology have become the source of risk. What could have happened in so short a time to bring forth so severe a reaction? How can we explain the sudden, widespread, across-the-board concern about environmental pollution and personal contamination that has arisen in the Western world in general and with particular force in the United States?

Our argument is that a complex historical pattern of social changes has led to values that we identify as sectarian being more widely espoused. The sectarian outlook has three positive commitments: to human goodness, to equality, to purity of heart and mind. The dangers to the sectarian ideal are worldliness and conspiracy. Put into secular terms, worldliness appears in big organization, big money, and market values—all deny equality and attack goodness and purity; conspiracy includes factions plotting secret attack, transporting evil into an essentially good world. Infiltration from the evil world appears as Satanism, witchcraft, or their modern equivalent—hidden technological contamination that invades the body of nature and of man. We shall argue that these ideals and these dangers respond to the problems of voluntary organization: they are the daily coinage of debate in groups that are trying to hold their members together without coercion or overt leadership. The remedies most easily proposed in such organizations are to refuse to compromise with evil and to root it out, accompanied by a tendency toward intolerance and drastic solutions. These organizations depending on the voluntary principle also tend to reject wealth. Nature in the wild, uncorrupted by social artifice, equivalent to a society without social distinction, is their preferred emblem of godliness and symbol of unworldliness. Before developing this cultural explanation of the current directions of risk aversion, we should consider some rival theories.

A favorite explanation for the intense new interest in risk is that the United States is richer and Americans can now afford to be more cautious. Lester Lave writes:

Although no evidence exists that Americans have become sated with the products of the U.S. industrial economy, it is natural that they should want a more pleasant environment, lower risks associated with their products and work places, and general health improvements to accompany their increases in real income. What appears to be a paradox ["that Americans are safer now than ever before, but at the same time they are more concerned about health and safety than ever before"] is resolved by recognizing the rapidly increasing desire for lower risk.

After all, this argument runs, the more people have, the more they can lose. Once people have satisfied their main material wants, from cars to television, they can concern themselves with safety. So far as it goes, this explanation is plausible. We do more for self-protection because we are able to do it. Safety is presented as another consumer good, part of general material advance. But is it true that richer people are more averse to risk? If that is so, why are they not risk averse to economic disaster, crime, and war? Why do they select technological
rather than other kinds of risks? Even more fundamentally, why should the success of a way of life generate self-doubt among its adherents? Success could more likely be expected to generate confidence in more of the same. The problem is not merely a rise in the value of safety. There is the proposition that affluence has bred distrust of the culture that created it. Where does this idea come from? The proliferation of research on risk has called forth various sociological theories about the sources of public concern. Divisions among the general public are scanned to see whether changes in income, education, or rural and urban dwelling patterns can account for changing public judgments. It is reported that public-interest groups tend to be run by individuals in the professional and managerial occupations with higher-than-average income and education. More to the point—this is true of leaders everywhere—their rank and file are more educated than is the general public. Such observations lead to a variant of this explanation: education itself has bred a social conscience. It is plausible that the most alert watchdogs on behalf of society should come from the most educated classes. But this in itself does not explain why the last twenty years should have seen the change and why concern should take this particular direction. For education to explain the new attitudes toward risk, one would need to indicate some threshold at which the educated elite tips over from unconcern to concern. This is provided by Maslow's theory of stages of wants. When struggling for bare survival, according to Maslow, the individual has a narrow perspective; his political demands are material, for food and shelter. With industrial wealth guaranteeing economic well-being, the individual looks around for forms of personal expression and personal freedom. At a more developed stage of the economy, the individual can afford the luxury of a social conscience; at this point altruistic concerns come to the surface. Hence the growth of public-interest lobbies, and so on. Still this does not explain the selection of risks. Why is social conscience concerned with environment and not with the education of the poor or relief of the indigent? Since they no longer need to worry about the safety or sustenance of their bodies, the educated public can presumably satisfy what Ronald Inglehart calls nonmaterial needs for group identification and for self-realization. Their aims are not for more income, but for a high quality of life, including democratization of work. At this stage what people most want is a sense of individual control over social forces. This want is so imperative that their demands tend to be "non-negotiable." Thus Inglehart uses Maslow's stages to explain a new era of public sensitivity to oppression and of concern for fellow men on an international scale of comparison. The idea is pleasing. It supposes that the social classes least motivated by concern for public welfare are only those less prosperous. All people would be speaking for the public interest if they were fortunate enough to have solved their material and money needs. One might naturally expect public-interest groups to concentrate on spreading prosperity. Psychology, however, seems to be against the theory; so does history. It is easy to think of extravagant civilizations where the elites were not at all public-spirited. Maslow's argument supposes that a mood of public altruism is generated by the sheer material successes of industrial development. The empirical difficulty is that altruism is not a post-industrial monopoly. Most nonindustrialized cultures have their equivalent of public-interest watchdogs, however low their level of poverty. It is hard to name a time in the last 100 years, moreover, when Western industrialized society was not rich enough to qualify for the last altruistic phase, whose predominance among us now needs to be explained. What is it about affluence now and security now that is different? According to our argument, advanced technology is not the explanation. There is no unequivocal body of evidence that life is (or is becoming) less safe; on the contrary, such tentative evidence as there is leads in the opposite direction—life is
growing longer not shorter; health is better not worse. We get more insight from asking why certain risks get selected from the range of dangers that always threaten. This question points to the growth of sectorisation as a more convincing answer.

The organization of this book reflects the kind of question we ask: What sort of people would use risks to nature to get other people to change their ways? If we asked, “What has modern technology done to nature to cause so much concern?” we would concentrate on evaluating the scientific evidence about environmental damage. Instead we begin by analyzing the arguments connecting technology to environmental decline—risks are hidden, involuntary, and irreversible—in order to show that the judgments are essentially social rather than scientific. One response to this thesis is that we modern people see things differently precisely because we share an empirical, evidential, scientific ethos. In order to show that risks are socially selected, in our second chapter we compare “advanced” views with those of “primitive” peoples. Readers are welcome to see if they can discern differences between “us” and “them” in the way that dangers are selected for public concern. Even if we were all scientists, the third chapter shows, we would be no nearer agreement because scientists themselves are as divided on risk as are the rest of us. Nor will the procedures of risk assessment help in this regard, the fourth chapter asserts, because all modes of assessment are biased by the social assumptions they make. Having done our best to dispose of the contention that selection of dangers could be determined by direct assessment of the physical evidence, we begin to develop the case for social selection of risk. Chapters five through seven argue that each culture, each set of shared values and supporting social institutions, is biased toward highlighting certain risks and downplaying others. Along the way, we mix examples of risk selection among people like ourselves and people such as the Amish and the Hutterites, contemporaries who have a strange appearance to the modern eye. One reason for doing this is that these peoples and their cultures have a pronounced identity, so they can be readily described. A more important
The Border Fears For Nature

The many groups that exist to mobilize public concern for the evils of our times are organized in various ways. We can demonstrate the social theory of risk perception by classifying them according to their principles of organization. We expect that those which show up as most hierarchical in their relation with each other and the outside world will also be making the more typically hierarchical selection of dangers. Those organized on voluntaristic, egalitarian principles will make the sectarian selection of risks and justify their view of danger with a recognizably sectarian worldview.

Little hierarchies speak and act like big hierarchies. Though they may be intended to protect nature from depredation, theirs is not a true border voice. The more that a public interest group is organized as a hierarchy, the more it believes there is time for reform. It seeks incremental changes and speaks frankly for its own perceived interests. The more like a hierarchy, the stronger its internal control and the less its fear of subversion. The more hierarchical the organization, the less it bears a message about catastrophe and the less it is cosmic in its potent.

A hierarchy can be maintained so long as there are enough selective incentives for individual members so that they have an interest in subscribing without being too concerned with relative status or with who is making the decisions, or how. Or it can be maintained so long as exit from the group is heavily penalized. As we have seen, without these supports it faces the problems of other voluntary groups. It will either suffer the exploitation of the few by the many, or it will have to lower the costs of organization to a point where the members’ individual contributions are really negligible and then it will face other problems. One of the ways of collecting more voluntary support for less cost of organization is by invoking danger. Either the backlash of God or the backlash of nature is an effective instrument for justifying membership. If none of these strategies is enough, the group as a last resort can organize itself upon the production of prestige for all members. In this latter case the strategies for survival in an exclusive group exert a powerful pressure towards godliness and utopian, millenarian values.

The sectarian cosmology expects life in the future to undergo a radical change for the worse. It is not confident that the disaster can be averted. There may be no time left. But it knows how the disaster has been caused: corrupt worldliness; that is, ambition for big organization has endangered mankind and new technology represents all that is most reprehensible—social distinctions, the division of labor, materialist values, unfeelingness for individual suffering. Its cosmology is characterized by dichotomized values: good and bad are severely contrasted, compromise is bad, purity is good. Paradoxically, given the alert detection of betrayers in their ranks, the sectarians supplement their mistrust in human organization with trust in the goodness of human individuals. The sect espouses the widest causes, all mankind rather than a section. They refer to God or nature as arbiters to justify their rightness, and every tragedy that can be attributed to worldliness as here defined is chalked up as one more divine or natural warning. We have seen how in a secular civilization nature plays the role of grand arbiter of human designs more plausibly than God. Consequently the environmental movement is the case
which should give the best illustration of our theme. Here we find that big differences of organization correspond to big differences in their stated expectations and values.

The conservation movement dates as far back as 1872 when Yellowstone became the first national park. The Sierra Club was founded some twenty years later. By 1900, when the Sierra Club led the fight to preserve the Hetch Hetchy Valley from being converted to a reservoir serving San Francisco, there were seven national conservation organizations in existence, and by the 1920s many new national parks had been established. The efforts of dedicated hunters and fishermen (including President Theodore Roosevelt) caused a series of important laws to be enacted to protect wildlife and create government agencies to manage natural resources. At that stage the conservation movement depended heavily on its big-interest members, and once they had procured enough conservation measures to suit their needs, it seemed to lose momentum. Some organizations were dissolved, while other remained stable with relatively small memberships. A resurgence of interest in conservationism began in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when existing conservationist organizations formed coalitions to fight well-publicized battles against developers over the proposed Echo Dam at Dinosaur National Monument in 1956 and to protect the California Redwoods, the Cascades in Washington, and the Grand Canyon.

The conservation groups then began to widen their interests to embrace air, sea, and river pollution. Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring, a book on the environmental damage of DDT published in 1962, strongly roused public interest in conservation. The first national celebration of Earth Day in 1970 mobilized many thousands of Americans who attended rallies and took part in numerous local environmental activities. Ecology having entered American consciousness, a number of new national and local organizations sprang up. Today there are some seventy-five national environmental groups and thousands more at state and local levels.

Environmental issues are ideal for a loose federation of small voluntary groups. They are sufficiently numerous, diverse, and complex to allow each group to specialize. For example, in 1977 the Sierra Club led the campaign on water pollution legislation, the Environmental Defense Fund campaigned to prevent the slaughtering of porpoises by tuna fishermen, while Environmental Action demanded legislation against no-deposit bottles. Each major national organization implicitly recognizes this informal division of labor by joining coalitions led by the principal campaigner on each issue. Such cooperation is helped by the fact that in recent years all of the national groups have built up large lobbying staffs in Washington whose members are personally acquainted with their counterparts in other groups.

One important difference between the modern environmental movement and its conservationist predecessor is the professional staff that now supplements the voluntary efforts of members. Before 1950, some, such as the National Audubon Society and the National Wildlife Federation, employed full-time, paid staff members. They were very few, principally involved in administration, and none were full-time lobbyists. In the past ten years the Sierra Club has moved further toward hierarchy by developing a national complement of eighty-five full-time staff members including support personnel. The growth in staff coincided with a dramatic increase in membership. The period of major growth occurred between 1965 and 1971, coincident with the upsurge in public environmental awareness. The rate has been considerably slower since 1972, with most of the national groups maintaining their membership at about the same level or continuing to grow at a more modest rate.

Direct-mail appeals are the primary means of recruitment used by the national groups. Although for many years it relied primarily on recruitment through its local chapter organization, the Sierra Club, for example, has taken to campaigning for its members in this way. The various national organizations send out annual appeals to people who are likely to be sympathetic to the cause. They are offered the chance to support the
different groups' lobbying, educational, and legal efforts. They may also enjoy some private benefits, which usually include a publication and sometimes the opportunity to purchase merchandise at a discount or to go to organized outings. According to Robert Mitchell's researches, only a small proportion of members takes advantage of these private benefits.

At the national level the members play a relatively passive role. Their numerous small contributions combine to represent a substantial part of the national organizations' financial support. Members form a constituency which the groups can claim to represent in their lobbying; and some of them can be mobilized periodically to write letters, send telegrams, or make phone calls to legislators in support of key bills.

The members themselves seem to be mainly white, middle-class, professional people. While there may be some variation in the dominant age group from one organization to another, the popular stereotype of the youthful environmentalist does not seem to be borne out by systematic research. The political party affiliation of environmentalists is distributed in much the same way as among the general population. Within this general framework there is significant diversity in the organizational styles. The older conservationist organizations, such as the Sierra Club and the National Audubon Society, tend toward hierarchy. On the other hand, as we shall show, the newer and more aggressive environmental groups are modeled more suitably for speaking for the border in a typically sectarian frame of ideas.

When David Brower became full-time director of the Sierra Club in 1952, it had about 7,000 members. By May 1969 the Club had grown to about 77,000. He had led several large-scale campaigns, including those to save the California Redwoods and to prevent two reservoirs from being built on the Colorado River near the Grand Canyon National Park. The public lobbying for the Grand Canyon campaign had led the Internal Revenue Service to withdraw from the Sierra Club its tax-exempt, charitable status. Resentment against Brower's militant style of leadership and against some of his accounting practices brought about a serious split in the leadership. The 1969 board election was a battle fought for two clearly defined slates: the Concerned Members for Conservation (CMC) and the Active Bold Constructive (ABC) slate. William Deval, who studied the dispute, stated: "The election was seen as a competition between factions of the elite in the club rather than a true grass-roots opposition to a long-established and monolithic incumbent administration." The CMC stood on the platform of strict financial control, a volunteer board as distinct from paid staff, and a gentlemanly approach to campaigning that included inviting the opposition to dinner. The ABC slate demanded the end of "the California elite's rule," the end of the hiking club image, and a move toward an aggressive concern with total environment and global conservation issues.

Though the old-time conservationists may understand that there is a crisis... they will want to be gentlemen while the world is dissolving. We know what doesn't work: the quiet, gentle approach... The world is going to tumble around its ears if the Sierra Club—or someone—doesn't do a job in the next five years. If the Sierra Club's main worry is the preservation of its own existence, there won't be any environment left for it to exist in.

The old liners are all right on most issues... but not those that come in conflict with their personal lives, their friends, the people they see at cocktail parties. They argue, "we must have pleasant and fruitful discussions with the people trying to wreck the landscape so they won't do it so bad." We should appeal not to the lobby but to the public at large—on TV, in the press. Gentle persuasion does not work. The utilities have to be controlled, not reasoned with.

Note that while the world is tumbling and dissolving, there is no time for gentleness or reasoning. Here we see how the form of the organization determines what is reckoned a disaster. The Sierra Club consistently expressed the typical concerns of hierarchy, according to which the worst eventuality is to change the structure of the society.

The election result favored the more conservative platform.
by a majority of two to one. One board member felt that uncontrolled growth would destroy the structure of the Sierra Club and that no benefits to the environment were worth that. “We believe what Brower is doing, whether it makes money or not, is heading the Club towards disaster. Brower’s ideas have no place for the amateur, and the Sierra Club is unique because it is an amateur, a volunteer organization.”

Although he remained as a member of the Club, Brower was forced to resign from the Board. At this point many doubted whether his charismatic style of leadership could continue without the Club name, power, and resources behind him. But the skeptics were proved wrong. Within sixty-nine days Friends of the Earth was founded with a fifteen-member board of directors and an executive committee of six board members authorized to establish policies. By creating a group around a self-perpetuating elite, Brower had avoided having his hands tied by the kind of bureaucracy which he believed held back the development of the Sierra Club. Devall described Brower’s organization principles as an explicit rejection of hierarchical principles.

Don’t be tied up with bureaucracy and what sociologists call “organizational maintenance,” because the organization becomes an end in itself. Brower liked to select good people and give them their freedom to do their job. The Sierra Club, on the other hand, in its structure and processes, has grown as complex, bureaucratic and heavy with job descriptions, committees, chains of command and administration as the government organizations and private corporations with which it battles.  

Friends of the Earth (FOE) has led major campaigns against nuclear power, pollution, exploitation of Alaska, and a host of other causes to protect the environment. From its inception, FOE emphasized its long-range concern by developing international affiliation. A primary disagreement between Brower and the Sierra Club had been over the international role Brower wanted the Club to adopt. While emphasizing the importance of its global cause, FOE leaders have also insisted that it remain decentralized. Its international organization remains a network of autonomous and varied sister groups sharing a common name and purpose.

The determination to remain decentralized has also affected the character of its local chapter organization. FOE rejects tax-deductible status and does not seek support from wealthy individuals or foundations. Its local branch organizations supply most of its funds. They are relatively autonomous and, conversely, they have very little control over the national organization. The FOE inner leadership maintains its position of power and a broad membership (over 24,000) partly by emphasis on the autonomy of local branches and partly through its procedures for elections. These are held at the annual general meeting, which all individual members are entitled to attend. Financial aid is not provided for those who have to travel great distances, nor are branches empowered to send representatives; but FOE makes extensive use of the proxy vote system by which individuals return a form to FOE headquarters empowering the leadership to act on their behalf. Within FOE there has been some disquiet about this procedure, but as yet the directors have not chosen to use the provision in the constitution to allow ballot by mail.

Although FOE is formally democratic, there seems to be little opportunity for members to participate actively in national decision making. At the local level it is loose and decentralized, but at the national level the leadership continues as a small, active elite. Rather than promoting the organizational growth and stability valued so highly by the Sierra Club, this leadership favors reliance on a dedicated and generous staff and on volunteers, which enables FOE to concentrate its financial resources on achieving particular goals.

Here we can note several sectarian tendencies: a favoring of equality against leadership, fear of infiltration, jealousy, and fear of ambition. Finally we recognize the old utopian hopes of peace through moral regeneration.

FOE local chapters maintain a high level of participatory democracy. The group rejects a traditional committee struc-
ture for its local organization. Rather than electing representative committees to carry organizational responsibilities, FOE local chapters prefer a division of labor based on a number of task forces, each specializing in a particular function such as fund raising or recruitment. Task forces are self-selecting, each chapter member being free to decide which sort of activity suits him best.

The hostility and bitterness which marked the split in the Sierra Club have rarely been displayed in its subsequent relations with FOE. Both have participated jointly in coalitions on major issues. Brower has continued his Club membership, and, for its part, the Club has valued Brower’s contribution to the environmental cause. They even presented him with the John Muir award in 1977.

Environmental groups generally agree that coalitions, both among themselves and with groups having diverse but not opposing views, are valuable and necessary to achieve their goals. Although it will ally with other conservation organizations for particular objectives, FOE will never merge or compromise its separate identity for the sake of a unified movement.

If we grant for the sake of argument that a unified movement would be ideal, is there any reason to suppose that conservationists could achieve this ideal? The peace movement is not unified, nor are the denominations that call themselves “Christian.” If unity could be achieved, it would rarely be temporary. A unified conservation movement would immediately begin fragmenting again, not only because of human cussedness, but also because of the perfectly sincere and plausible belief by separatists that the super-organization was handling one issue after another less effectively than would more sharply focused individual organizations. If plurality didn’t exist, we’d have to invent it.4

They believe that a multiplicity of organizations is more likely to ensure that important local issues receive their due attention, which they would never get from a national organization. Furthermore, the existence of specialized organizations

with expertise in particular issues is seen as strengthening the overall movement. Finally, environmental groups are afraid of infiltration and subversion by corporate interests.

Adversaries could concentrate all their fire on a single super-organization, and when they defeated it on an issue like the SST, for instance, they’d dispose of all conservationist opposition at a single stroke. A super-organization would also be vulnerable to subversion—and don’t for a moment think that well-heeled adversaries are too pure to bore from within! There is safety in numbers. A conservation movement consisting of many organizations is a much more difficult target to catch in a cross-fire, and because less can be gained by it, there is less temptation for opponents to bore from within. Subversion of an individual organization would leave today’s conservation movement substantially intact, whereas subversion of a super-organization would leave the movement in a shambles.6

FOE claims that government, industry, and the public at large must be made aware of the immediate and severe danger to the environment, or else the earth will not survive for anyone.

FOE is not an end in itself. It exists to reduce the impact of human activity on the environment and to ensure that we as a species adopt policies which permit life in its varied and beautiful forms to continue. But FOE cannot thrive in isolation any more than a single species can; we are, and need to be, part of a political ecology. We must thoroughly understand the basic limits of the political world in which we live. We must know our relationship to the other components of that system, benign and hostile, and we must learn to act appropriately to our surroundings. We cannot force the world to adopt our views, values and policies, but we can construct, together with other institutions, a web of political life that will have no place for exploitative values, destructive technologies, and dehumanized relationships.8

This definition of its aims leads Friends of the Earth to stress that allies should be sought outside of the field of conservation. Consumers, public-interest groups, labor unions, religious organizations, and minority associations are pursued with the
aim of obtaining support. It seems logical that the broader the scope of groups supporting a cause, the more seriously will established politicians have to consider it. Thus FOE has shown greater conscious interest in recruiting the support of blacks and labor than more established conservationists.

The first thing to do is to get the endorsements of national environmental, consumer, and public interest groups. Such endorsements will give you credibility. . . . Don't stop with environmental or consumer groups; labor unions, religious organizations, and fraternal organizations often can be persuaded to take stands on national issues. These groups sometimes have more impact than public interest groups. The broader the scope of groups supporting your cause, the more seriously the Congressman will consider it. When you have a broad coalition of support, it is difficult for him to say "those do-gooders are at it again."

Despite its elitist national structure and its largely pragmatic motive for enlisting support from groups outside the conservation movement, FOE maintains an almost utopian vision of the future society in which all forms of life will exist harmoniously without political, economic, and technological restraints. We hear the sectarian overtones of love, cosmic unity, and resistance to center machinations:

In each new country we would try to find people with the right bias toward the planet and the things that live on it, people who also had a gift of leadership to match their devotion, people who knew what would work in their respective countries. The principal coordination would be spiritual, with one goal—the preservation, restoration, and rational use of the earth. 19

We note the determination to remain small and decentralized. We note the sectarian tendency to concentrate all kinds of disparate issues into one inclusive doctrine.

If one has to boil it down to one issue, I guess that issue is Growth. Growth of population, of technology, of economy. of waste, of products, of per capita consumption, of power, of things generally.
ecology movement reproaches them for never producing any program for society, never identifying adversaries or moving to engage constructively with urgent problems. They make a stand against abuses and against particular projects, but on the positive side they do not go beyond abstractions, justice, freedom from repression, humanity— who would not support such a list? We have seen that when sects give their own organizational problems the highest priority, these attitudes are solutions. They must avoid a program; if they had one, they might be called upon to implement it. If they name their adversary, they might defeat him, in which case they would be faced with conflicting moral principles. If they were to engage with the central institutions of society, they would have to stop vilifying the social process as such. They would have to stop accusing their own members of treasonable conspiracy. Without their usual tactics for mutual control, their sectarian organization would be in jeopardy. They might even need someone to lead from the front, in which case they would have to break the habit of dragging down anyone who seems to be taking more of that scarce commodity, the prestige of the movement. Solutions to the problems of voluntary organization entrench them in the border and permit only negative effectiveness. Like watchdogs, they can stop people from doing some bad things. If they are wanted to do more, they would have to be organized differently.

The relation between social organization and values and beliefs can be demonstrated by an impressionistic exercise in grid/group analysis. This is a way of checking characteristics of social organization with features of the beliefs and values of the people who are keeping the form of organization alive. Group means all the other social distinctions and delegations of authority that they use to limit how people behave to one another. A society organized by hierarchy would have many group-encircling and group-identifying regulations plus many grid constraints on how to act. An individualist society would leave to individuals maximum freedom to negotiate with each other, so it would have no effective group boundaries and no isolating constraints on private dealings. A sectarian society would be recognizable by strong barriers identifying and separating the community from nonmembers, but it would be so egalitarian that it would have no leaders and no rules of precedence or protocol telling people how to behave. The distinctions are relative to some norm in some particular activity in some particular place and period. When this analysis is carefully applied, it shows up consistent patterns of shared values and beliefs, which are part of the everyday justifications sustaining each type of organization.

We can use this form of cultural analysis to compare some of the public-interest groups that mobilize concern for the environment and for the dangers of new technology. First we decide on indicators for group, then for grid; then we rank the organizations in question. We predict that a low score for grid and a high score for group will be more associated with sectarian cultural values. These are as follows. Objectives of the organization will be explicitly global in range, not local. They will explicitly include regulating moral behavior. They will include counteracting a global conspiracy of evil. Members will expect to achieve their ends by small-scale organization. Their values will be against big technology, big industry, as well as big organization. They will expect and be on guard against infiltration from without. They will invoke the parity of the movement as a prime value. They will be apt to make symbolic statements of their rejection of the larger society and especially its technology, as by a preference for hand-woven clothing, hand-thrown pottery, vegetable foods and dyes.

The comparison above of the Sierra Club with POE already demonstrates the relation between the hierarchy and the sect and their respective cultural values. To carry the exercise further we can recall the history of the antinuclear movement in the United States to indicate the grid/group differences between the local interventional groups and the direct-action groups. Until the late 1960s antinuclear activity was almost exclu-
sively concerned with campaigning against nuclear bombs. Protests against nuclear power were limited to a few, local, poorly organized efforts to stop particular projects. However, by the beginning of the 1970s there was a proliferation of local protest groups responding to the rapid expansion of the nuclear power program planned in response to the mounting costs of imported energy.

These organizations were initially formed by people who, living next to a proposed reactor site, were very concerned with the safety aspects of atomic power. They feared catastrophic accidents and also the effects of continued exposure to small doses of radiation. The organizers were mainly housewives, professionals, and retired people, often with a history of community involvement. Their activities primarily consisted of lobbying local and state politicians, intervening at hearings of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission or its predecessor, the Atomic Energy Commission, and initiating litigation to prevent such things as compulsory purchase of property and change of land use. Most of these local intervener groups had little formal structure and no requirements for membership.

But as local groups increased their efforts to intervene in reactor licensing and to influence politicians and educate their neighbors, coalitions of groups began to form on a regional level. Doctors and scientists who had studied the problems of nuclear power and radiation, and lawyers, lobbyists, and community activists with special expertise in antinuclear issues, worked with a much larger number of local groups and helped to coordinate their activities. One such state-wide coalition was the Environmental Coalition on Nuclear Power (ECNP) described by Judith Johnston.4 This coalition was brought together in 1970 for the purpose of providing a unified opposition at a hearing before the state legislature in Pennsylvania. In its ten years of existence, the organization has achieved several successes. Most notably, in 1975 the coalition managed to defeat the proposed development in Pennsylvania of several energy parks (concentrations of several power plants at one site) through a combination of legal and political activities.

The ECNP is one of the most active coalitions of local intervener groups. It illustrates the development of small, isolated intervener groups opposing a local power plant, into formal coalitions with common strategies opposing nuclear power in an entire region.

The local intervener groups have a very high concentration of middle-age and middle and upper class members. Their motives for joining tend to be concern about property value, noise pollution, general community impact, and reactor safety. Most members of local intervener groups live within a few miles of the plant they are fighting, and since most proposed reactors are sited in rural areas, most local interveners live in small towns. The relative absence of the working class and younger people from these groups may of course partially be explained by the fact that in order to participate in legal action, it is necessary to have both time and money. The proceedings are often demanding, lengthy, and specialized and are usually carried on during the day. Unlike the direct-action alliances, the localized concerns of most members of the intervener groups make it unlikely that the absence of working people would be a matter of great concern. Their limited aim is to prevent nuclear power plants from being built in their backyards. They do not intend to democratize society.

As regional coalitions gained strength, some of them attempted to forge national networks of antinuclear groups. In 1974 Ralph Nader called a citizens' conference that spawned a network of national watchdog groups called Critical Mass. Local and regional efforts, however, remain fairly isolated both from one another and from the professional organizations that concentrate on specific problems, such as nuclear waste disposal. They are organized with a few specialized staff members, active directors and, perhaps, a national paper-membership. This paper-membership may well include individuals from local intervener groups, and the national lobby organizations may well coordinate activities with groups expressing opposition in local licensing procedures.

By the mid-1970s a growing number of nuclear power oppo-
nents had become impatient with opposition through litigation. Despite the occasional successes of the intervenor coalitions, the nuclear regulatory agencies were seen as too heavily biased in favor of nuclear development for the intervention process to be effective. From the nuclear industry's viewpoint, government regulation may have held back the development of nuclear power, but many opponents felt that reliance on government regulation alone would never stop the expansion of nuclear power.

At this stage a series of direct-action organizations appeared, the Clamshell Alliance in New England, the Abalone Alliance in California, the Crabshell Alliance in Washington, the Catfish Alliance of the southern states, and others. The first major organization for direct action was formed in 1971 to oppose the construction of the nuclear power plant at Seabrook, New Hampshire. The license for this reactor had been granted despite opposition from ad hoc local groups, the Audubon Society, and the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests. The granting of this license provoked the formation of the Clamshell Alliance as a coalition of twenty intervenor, environmental, and new antinuclear groups dedicated to reversing the decision through direct action, including leaflets, petitions, alternative energy rallies and fairs, and nonviolent civil disobedience.

Since 1976 the Clamshell Alliance has coordinated several demonstrations and attempted occupations of nuclear sites. Clamshell focused its activities on resisting the construction of the Seabrook nuclear power plant. However, it emphasized that its opposition to Seabrook was merely a means of fighting nuclear power in general. According to its “Declaration of Nuclear Resistance,” “A nuclear power plant at Seabrook, New Hampshire would lock our region into a suicidal path. As an affiliation of a wide range of groups and individuals, the Clamshell Alliance is unalterably opposed to the construction of this and any other nuclear power plant. Action as Seabrook is a means of stopping this and any other nuclear power plant and of furthering the Alliance’s overall demands, which include:

Clamshell itself has now grown to include over ninety member organizations. These alliances are strongly decentralized, with very different capabilities in terms of resources, sophistication, and size. But they all share a commitment to direct action, internal democracy, and major social reform. They differentiate themselves from the local intervenor groups by being explicitly opposed to the system within which the latter are content to work.

The members of direct-action groups are usually younger than the local intereners. They tend to be white and, occupationally, few are involved in commerce, either as workers or managers. They are less often the immediate neighbors of a reactor site. Alan Sharaf notes that whereas three-quarters of the members of local intervenor groups live within ten miles of the proposed nuclear power site, of the 1,414 demonstrators arrested during one major protest at Seabrook in 1977, only one-sixth were residents of New Hampshire, and only one-fifth of these lived within ten miles of the site. Many of the major figures of the direct-action coalitions differ from the membership at large, whereas most of the rank and file may be in their twenties, many of their leaders are in their thirties and were active in the antiwar movement. Unlike the local intervenor groups, the direct-action alliances are constantly trying to expand the base of their membership. Members of the Clamshell Alliance see the absence of working-class support as a major obstacle facing the antinuclear movement (not least because the regional construction trade councils have been among the Alliance’s chief antagonists).
First we note the organizational differences between the two
types of movement. The local interveners groups do not have an
overriding concern with democracy. Because many of the
groups are organized on an ad hoc basis, the decisions are
made by those who have the time and energy to attend meet-
ings and to carry them out. Decisions may be made by simple
majority on a show of hands. The interveners' indignation over
violation of democracy is focused on decisions to build reactors
without consultation with local residents.

By contrast, the meetings of the direct-action alliances lack
even a chair. The preference is for a rotating facilitator whose
job is to summarize what has been done and to make sure that
the meeting reflects the ideas of everyone without moving pol-
icy in any particular direction. The facilitator has no special
powers and cannot, for example, select an agenda or rule on
procedures regarding how decisions should be made. One of
the aims of this egalitarian mechanism is to prevent individuals
coming to the fore and acting as spokespersons for the entire
movement. Members of direct-action alliances are particularly
suspicious of media-created superstars, whether from the en-
tertainment or political world, who may be seen by the general
public as leaders of the antinuclear movement. Many direct-
action groups have a history of acrimonious confrontation
with antinuclear politicians, such as Edmund Brown, Jr., because
they feel that the support of any politician (even a public oppo-
nent of nuclear energy) implies an acceptance of the political
system of larger society, as well as an espousal of leadership
and hierarchy. An opponent of allowing Governor Brown to
address an Abalone Alliance rally in 1979 protested:

The Abalone Alliance was formed as a direct action organization. It
is based, as I understand it, on the acknowledgement that the forces
which support nuclear power have enough of a stranglehold on the rest
of economic and political life to protect their interests against
challenges that confine themselves to the electoral, judicial or regula-
tory arenas. Direct action is organized activity that confronts the
interests of the ruling class outside the manipulatable forms of false
democracy. Providing platforms for candidates for elective office is
antithetical to its spirit.16
groups and meetings. Despite assurances that differences will be worked out and an acceptable agreement will be reached, individuals or groups can block consensus; and if holdouts happen often enough, decisions are simply not made.

When there were few people involved in the Abalone Alliance it was strengthening to work closely together, to agree on strategy, tactics and campaigns. Now, when the number of participants is much larger, this sort of complete agreement can be to our disadvantage. It becomes much harder to reach agreement when more people are involved. Attempting to get hundreds of people to reach consensus is usually exhausting and often impossible.

It is not uncommon to hear of meetings in which participants cannot reach agreement or in which they spend hours discussing procedural questions. But for most groups these delays are fully justifiable provided egalitarianism is maintained. As among the Amish, each man is a priest; in San Francisco's People Against Nuclear Power, each is a leader.

A contributor to *Its About Times* explains, "Our strength springs from the nature of our movement. A decentralized movement provides a strong foundation that can't be shaken by attacks from society's 'top.' We are our own leaders and there are simply too many of us with too many good ideas for them to counter and manipulate us in their normal manner."

More frankly, Betty Taylor recognizes, "There's a kind of paranoia about people taking leadership. . . . Anybody claiming leadership runs into problems in this movement because there just isn't anybody who is in a position of leading it. . . . In some places it's just torn groups apart because if you try to take initiative and do something positive you're criticized for trying to seize power."

One of the purposes of the direct activists' carefully maintained, small-unit structure is to avoid major disagreement within the alliance. When a group gets too large to make decisions communally, it is supposed to divide into component parts. Rather than growing until a major disagreement splits the organization apart, many alliances have, like the Hutter-ites, incorporated splits into their organizational structure. This mechanism has been largely successful in preventing major ideological rifts in direct-action alliances. Although they have often been paralyzed by the inability of member units to agree on a particular course of action, this has rarely led to the establishment of competing splinter groups. The independent action of local groups does not challenge the entire organization; they are expected to act on their own.

To summarize, whereas action groups have strict rules about how decisions are to be made and how the organization is to be administered, these rules are designed to prevent hierarchical-type leaders from taking control and to provide for the resolution of disputes in the absence of authority. In contrast, local intergroup groups have a much less formal view of their internal structures. They are organized as groups of equals because they join the movement through their friends and neighbors. A formal structure is generally deemed unnecessary. Most local intergroup groups value flexibility and speedy action. Elaborate rules and procedures designed to maintain absolute equality would hamper them. Leaders can and do emerge, and decisions are made by individuals or elites. Individualistic roles as public representatives. Almost all direct-action groups would consider a decision made in ten hours through consensus infinitely preferable to the same one made in ten minutes by a small group of leaders. Clearly, the activist groups conform more closely to the organizational practice of sects. Their strong barriers against the outside world are formed on the judgment that it is a waste of time to use legal and political processes to negotiate with central institutions or to participate in Nuclear Regulatory Committee hearings.

The strength of a group depends on one thing on how clearly members can be identified. The activists' test of membership is the stringent one of willingness to participate in direct action on a face-to-face basis. Let us compare the Charnell Alliance and the ECNP. Both encourage a periphery of supporters who are sympathetic to the cause, attend meetings, or write letters of protest without being involved in direct
action or legal intervention. This periphery protects members from directly experiencing hostile attitudes and insulates the group from the world at large. Along the group dimension we can further distinguish the Clamshell Alliance from the ECNP. The latter is organized on a central core of committed local members organizing meetings on an ad hoc basis, and people freely enter or leave the core; by contrast the membership of a Clamshell affinity group is supposed to keep the same personnel, an organization core of between five to thirty members. Each affinity group is further bounded off by its self-sufficiency; it is supposed to be able to perform for itself all its necessary functions in any occupation or demonstration. So we give the Clamshell Alliance a higher score for group boundedness than the ECNP.

On the grid assessment, the Clamshell Alliance comes up with a much lower score than the ECNP. It recognizes no leaders and no officers.

The Clam is supposed to be leaderless, but of course it isn't. Carlston Eldredge, the rather unpredictable district attorney of Rockingham County, has had to deal with the organization on several occasions, and he says, "The leaders resist identifying themselves, but when they want something, the same people show up to talk to you." ... The leaders, naturally, are the people who do most of the work between occupations... If they tend to hide in the crowd, it is not to outfox officials such as Eldredge but to avoid criticism from other Clams. Sam Lovejoy, the most obvious leader, was in deep hiding; he didn't even come to Seabrook this time.15

The de facto leader keeps a very low profile. He acts more as a guru or a primum inter pares, on the basis of perhaps a little more experience, a way with words, or a flair for tactics; but all the Alliance's rules pertaining to leadership are designed to prevent the emergence of individual leaders. While the ECNP also rejects formal leadership in the sense of elected officers, it lacks rules which are deliberately designed to prevent the emergence of leaders. Leaders of intervention groups tend to be entrepreneurial individuals who take on the leading roles in promoting local opposition to nuclear plants. Hence the ECNP rates higher on the grid dimension than the strictly egalitarian Clamshell Alliance.

This crude typification of differences in organization corresponds to a striking difference in cultural bias. The local interner groups that constitute the ECNP are concerned about safety and noise during construction, the effects on the community of locating a nuclear plant close by, and all the possible economic and social changes, as well as the potential nuclear dangers to the community and the effects that the perception of such danger might have on such things as property values. The ECNP accepts the established legal channels as appropriate for fighting the antinuclear battle. Its democratic concern is that the existing system is not working properly insofar as local residents do not have an adequate say in the siting of nuclear reactors. They do not, however, reject the existing social system as unworkable or fundamentally unjust. They have a precise target, to prevent one or another nuclear power station from being built. Clamshell places the social values of a non-nuclear society well to the fore of their campaign. In the pursuit of this democratic vision, the activist groups feel the need to bring workers and minorities into the struggle for reform.

There is... a growing realization that to be truly effective the antinuclear movement will have to build coalitions with organized labor. On this point there is still a lack of clarity as to how the vision of a world without nuclear power plants and weapons translates into a specific strategy that includes labor as a natural ally.16

Most members of direct-action alliances joined because of their opposition to nuclear power, both as a technology and as the manifestation of undemocratic unresponsiveness to individual needs within American society. Nuclear power is a capital-intensive and highly centralized industry which concentrates control of energy in the hands of the corporate leaders. Their concern for democracy is exhibited in almost every
aspect of their organization and activity. Their aims include
reforming society and developing democratically controlled,
localized sources of energy. "The politics of anti-nuclear pro-
test constitute one of the most potentially revolutionary forces
in contemporary America. Not only because of its commit-
ments in facing the question of energy development under
capitalism, but in the very way the movement has organized
itself, and its critique of issues such as leadership and power." 47
The Clamshell Alliance views all economic and social ills as
stemming from the distribution of energy in favor of large cor-
porate and governmental interests. Their aim in blocking
nuclear power is not merely to safeguard themselves from the
possibilities of exposure to hazardous radiation but to break
the stranglehold which they consider such interests have on
society. The extreme egalitarianism of their own organization
is seen as a model for future world government. Thus the
Clamshell Alliance concentrates all social, economic, and poli-
tical issues into the nuclear debate. And according to Harvey
Wasserman, one of the founders of the Clamshell Alliance and
a major speaker for the movement:

At its core, the nuclear issue is a confrontation between corporate,
technocratic domination and decentralized, community indepen-
dence. The choice is closely linked to a broad spectrum of issues—to
unemployment and high electric rates, to exploitation of Third
World people and resources, to the plagues of nuclear armaments,
environmental chaos, and our soaring cancer rates. 48

Once again we observe the trend for various issues to coagulate
into one global stand against evil in all its forms. This illust-
rate well the sectarian features of the cultural change we
have been examining:

To our explanation of cultural bias, we now have added a
method for identifying the changes in organization that go
along with changes in cultural values. The further the organiza-
tion is toward border values, the stronger we find the social
indicators for group membership and the weaker those for grid
distinctions. With more fieldwork we could put more precise
measures upon the conditions of voluntary organizations that
cause them to erect a boundary against the world and to
invoke dangers from technology. 49 We claim that the success of
the ecology movement in this country represents a shift of the
more vocal parts of American life towards the border. We still
have not explained how that shift came about or what main-
tains it. Until we answer the question of why America is more
passionately involved than any other Western nation in the
debate about risks to nature, we cannot explain what has been
happening here.