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Affidavit of the Woman Who Jumped from Clay's Ferry Bridge

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I laid low for the first week and surfaced only once or twice the second. After sixteen days in the water, I came up, and now the fisherman who greeted me shits his pants every time he thinks of crappie fishing at the mouth of Dix River.

You see, I was hung up in a deadfall on the downstream side of the confluence. He told the authorities that he saw me, reached out, then I came right out of my skin. But the truth is that I came up exhausted and held out a hand. The bastard spooked and left me half naked, consumed, just like every other man I've ever known.

So I let my body dissolve in backwater where two rivers meet, where I'm occasionally kissed by small fish and where, beneath the calm surface, heavy, dark, vague, nightmarish things pass close by.

Jeffrey C. Alexander is professor and Chair of the Sociology Department at Yale University. He has written extensively in social theory. His books Theoretical Logic in Sociology (1982-83), Twenty Lectures: Sociological Theory Since World War Two (1987), Action and Its Environment: Towards a New Synthesis (1988), and Fin de siècle Social Theory: Relativism, Reduction, and the Problem of Reason (1995) are essential to understanding contemporary theoretical debates within sociology. Alexander's cultural sociology has had a great impact. His call for the autonomous status of culture in sociological analysis has been quite influential, as sociologists are theorizing culture in new and necessary ways. In his new book, Alexander develops a theory of the civil sphere emphasizing the role of culture in shaping the structures of our political life.

Alexander was invited as the 2002 Distinguished Author in Social Theory by the Committee on Social Theory at the University of Kentucky. During his visit, Alexander delivered two talks entitled "Theorizing the Possibilities of Justice: The Split Life of the Civil Sphere" and "Civil Society and the American Civil Rights Movement." Afterwards, disclosure had the opportunity to discuss these talks and his new manuscript with him.

Disclosure: You are just now completing a book on civil society. Could you discuss the origins of this project and situate your argument within recent studies of civil society?

Jeffrey Alexander: This book comes out of the experiences I had in the 1980's. Having come back from China in 1989, I realized there was a small body of literature that was developing about civil society and that there had been a transformation of Marxism into a kind of radical democratic theory. It coincided with my own interests in civil