

# CULTURE

SECTION OF THE AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



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CULTURE SECTION

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## REFERENDUM, ELECTIONS, WORK TO BE DONE by Richard A. Peterson

**VOTING** Enclosed with this issue of the newsletter is the ballot for next year's officers. John Hall and his committee have done an excellent job of finding strong candidates. I just wish they all could serve. Do vote.

**REFERENDUM** You are also asked to cast your vote sanctioning the \$2 raise in section dues. This was approved without dissent by the Board and at the Business Meeting in Chicago August, 1987 so another vote now might seem redundant. It does, however, deserve serious consideration because the ASA has changed the base on us. Dues have been \$5 all of which is kept by the ASA. Their audit shows that it costs just over \$8 to service each section membership and they want the very rapidly proliferating sections (which some see as rivaling allegiance to the ASA as such) to pay their own way. As it now stands, dues this coming year will be \$8, all of which goes to the ASA. If, as we have already voted, we want \$2 for the section to spend, dues will have to be raised to \$10.

What do we need money for? Not for parties, not for prizes, not for fellowships, not to fly Board members to meetings, and such. Money is needed to expand the number of Newsletter pages (we get 20 pages for the year and have to pay for any more); to pay part of the cost of the teaching package and the annotated membership list the section is creating; to subsidize start-up cost of a proposed computer-based network linking Section members with each other and with members of the International Sociological Association's Art, Culture and Communication section members around the world; to defray phone costs associated with putting out the newsletter, organizing the Section sessions at the annual meetings, and creating the slate of candidates for section offices, and the like. To this point we have had to call on donations from our employers, solicited friends, and ourselves, sources on which we should not have to rely.

For some, raising dues from \$5 to \$10 means more than to others. I suggest the option of \$8 dues for students and \$10 for the rest of section members. What say you?

**BRIEFS** Can you help with the annotated list of section members? Please send course outlines to Rosanne Martorella. Send requests for research resources and Newsletter contributions to Liah Greenfeld. Their addresses are listed at the left. Next issue, details of the Atlanta ASA meetings. Our section day is the next to last day: Saturday, August 27.



You didn't recognize the baby.  
Now that it's a kid.....?



## THE SOCIOLOGY OF CULTURE AS A SUBFIELD

Jeffrey Goldfarb, New School for Social Research



In my judgement, the sociology of culture ought to be considered a subfield, not a perspective. The objects of our investigations should be the arts and sciences broadly understood, but not so broadly understood as to include ideology or mass entertainments. In focusing on the arts and sciences, culture should not be viewed as a reflection of society. Rather, culture is an autonomous sphere in the modern world, interrelated with other spheres of life, but developing significantly apart from them.

Cultural autonomy emerges from the independent conversations cultural agents have in their work with their predecessors and contemporaries, thus constituting living cultural traditions and cultural publics. The life of these traditions and publics appears within a matrix of interpretation. The study of the multiple interpretations of culture and of the politics of interpretations amongst creators, producers, distributors and consumers should be the primary subject of the sociology of culture.

Considering the arts and sciences as the "culture" in the "sociology of culture," obviously is not the only way to proceed. There are several alternatives. Cultural sociology can just as well be identified as a perspective -- the (Weberian?) cultural approach as opposed to the (Marxist?) materialist approach. Culture can be viewed as the set of human tools, or the ideas upon which the tools are based. It can be identified with ideology, and it can be subsumed under religion. For me, each of these viewpoints has much to offer, some of the best work in the social sciences, especially in anthropology, has followed these paths, yet they often offer too much.

The problems with these alternatives can be stated briefly. Conceived as a perspective, as our colleagues Clifford Geertz, Ann Swidler, and Liah Greenfield suggest in different ways, the cultural is everything. Therefore, we must ask ourselves, is it anything in particular? Conceived as a highly mediated or subtle ideology, in the fashion and traditions of Marx and Mannheim, culture can become nothing. The beauties of line in the graphic arts and sound in music and poetry, the elegance and subtlety of mind in science, become but facades of interests, not embodiments of human reach and distinctiveness. Finally, if culture is but a component of religious belief, an extension of normative concerns or serving normative transcendent ends, as Talcott Parsons and the older T.S. Elliot suggest, the whole modern project of enlightenment would be lost.

If instead we follow Weber's analysis of the separation of spheres, we can appreciate and analyze enlightenment as it exists in the artifacts and accomplishments of the arts and sciences on their own terms, and relate them to other spheres of society. The cultural can then be appreciated as a separate part of a differentiated modern world. The modern age then would be characterized in our research not only by the rise of capitalism, proletarianization and the emergence of the modern state, as the "new" comparative historical sociologists from Barrington Moore Jr. to Charles Tilly to Theda Skocpol tell us. It would be defined in our research as well by science separated from religious dogma, and art that does not simply seek to reveal religious truths. The cultural worlds in this sense are at the center of the sociological enterprise, not as the study of, or approach to everything, but as a central subject matter, especially in a critical sociology.

### CULTURE 2

As these statements by Goldfarb, Namenwirth and Weber attest, the Newsletter welcomes statements concerning the nature of culture and its measurement. In addition, statements citing relevant literature that detail recent developments in specific topics are welcomed. Submissions are subject to editorial review and pruning. Ed.





## WHAT IS CULTURE AND WHAT ARE CULTURE INDICATORS?

J. Zvi Namewirth  
Department of Sociology  
University of Connecticut

and

Robert Philip Weber  
Office of Information Technology  
Harvard University

Students of culture disagree on three main issues: (1) Does culture consist of abstract systems of ideas or of concrete behavior? (2) Is culture real, or is it a convenient fiction indistinguishable from the sum of individual ideas or individual behavior? (3) Does cultural change cause change in society and other systems, or, does cultural change result from change in these same systems?

In our view (Dynamics of Culture, Winchester MA: Allen & Unwin, 1987), culture consists of systems of ideas rather than behavior or material artifacts. To be sure, ideas are imperfectly manifested in the dynamics of action systems such as society, polity, and economy, and in the behavior of individuals. Still, a fundamental premise here is the ontological distinction between ideas and action.

Our answer to the second question takes a realist rather than nominalist position. Specifically, culture is a system that has structure, an identity, and maintains boundaries. The dynamics of culture, moreover, are irreducible to the dynamics of subcultures and the ideas of individuals, e.g., opinions, beliefs, or attitudes. We maintain that cultural dynamics are the dynamics of culture as a whole and that both culture as a system and cultural dynamics exist apart from the cultures of its constituent elements.

This realist position does not imply the belief in cultural determinism, which holds that changes in culture determine changes in other realms. Rather, we find that changes in cultural themes sometimes are associated with political realignments, sometimes are caused by economic fluctuations, and that sometimes they intervene between changes in economic performance and political outcomes.

If culture consists of abstract systems of ideas, then what are the best indicators of culture? Culture indicators gauge the state of a culture allowing for a quantitative comparison of changes in that state over time or differences in states among cultures or parts thereof. Thus, culture indicators are time series which describe changing states of a cultural system--for example, moral values or political ideology--in contrast with social indicators are time series which describe changing states of a social system, e.g., changes in infant mortality rates or crime statistics.

However, our position is not now widely shared. Different conceptions of culture and society are the cause of the resulting disagreements. For example, Peterson and Horowitz, among others, include as culture indicators measures of culture production and consumption, statistics showing the quantity of plays, movies, books, dance, music and other art works produced or consumed within a society. Such statistics measure social and economic products (and thus might qualify as social or economic indicators of cultural activity) but they do not measure culture content, which in our view is the sine qua non of a culture indicator. Finally, the cultural statistics definition of culture indicators derives from a more restricted conception of culture. It equates culture with high art or with the popular arts.

New methods of measuring culture content drawing on recent developments in cognitive science and artificial intelligence may well replace current methods for generating culture indicators such as our technique of analyzing text content by counting words or other textual units. However, the current problem is not a dearth of measurement techniques. Rapid advances in culture indicators await greater precision in concept formation, maintaining distinctions among culture, society, the person, and charting their differing characteristics.





Thirteen new books from the University of Chicago Press

Eugene Kochberg-Walton. Meaning and Modernity: Social Theory in the Pragmatic Attitude. Pragmatism updated with semiotics is the answer, or rather the way of approaching how to answer the question, "Why are we here?" You may find this wide ranging romp exhilarating intellectual exercise.

Hugh Trevor-Roper. Catholics, Anglicans, and Puritans: Seventeenth-Century Essays. Beyond Weber and Merton, here we have a careful historian's look at the intellectual and religious movements that fueled the Puritan Revolution in England and Ireland.

Michael Kunze. Highroad to the Stake: A Tale of Witchcraft. It is 1600 and we trace the steps of a single Bavarian across a real landscape transformed by the belief in witchcraft. What we take to be real...

David Farber. Chicago '68. The 1968 Democratic Convention depicted in three realities: that of the Mobilization to End the War in Viet Nam, the Yippies, and Mayor Daley and the city police.

Svetlana Alpers. Rembrandt's Enterprise: The Studio and the Market. Score one for the production of culture perspective. Rembrandt's work as influenced by his mode of production and adaptation to market constraints. Is nothing sacred?

Wendy Steiner. Pictures of Romance: Form against Context in Painting and Literature. How paintings tell stories and novels paint pictures in depicting romance.

Houston A. Baker, Jr. Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance. A lively search for the distinctively modernist black "sound" that energized the Harlem Renaissance.

Howard Margolis. Patterns, Thinking, and Cognition: A Theory of Judgment. Thinking is seen to be based in an a-logical pattern-recognizing process.

Mart Johnson. The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason. If you liked Lakoff, you'll love Johnson.

Shanto Iyengar & Donald S. Kinder. News that Matters: Television and American Opinion. Shows how television shapes the body politic by creating priorities and feeding opinion.

Judith Lynne Hanna. Dance, Sex, and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance, and Desire. Dance art forms communicate sex stereotypes but women dancers protest male dominance while gays and lesbians call for tolerance.

Vivian Gussin Paley. Bad Guys Don't Have Birthdays: Fantasy Play at Four. Explores how kids fabricate beliefs to build and buttress a normative order.

Jacques Derrida. The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond. With this deconstructionist at work, one is left with a floating circulation of text elements. Aristotle says "No Birthday" for this "Bad Guy."

Seven new books from the Wayne State University Press

Jerry S. Herron. Universities and the Myth of Cultural Decline. The idea of "cultural decline" is seen as a myth fabricated by underemployed humanists, brave words for an un-tenured Assistant Professor in a Department of English. The crisis is not in the world "out there" but in the irrelevance of the academy. Herron advocates a new cultural literacy based in the effective sharing of information and experience.

Paul Mendes-Flohr. Divided Passions: Jewish Intellectuals and the Experience of Modernity. A series of essays exploring the contradictory tendencies of universalism and tribalism.

Daniel J. Elazar. People and Polity. Shows a dynamic of post-modern Jewry strengthening community, associational, political, and kin ties.

Siv-Ellean Prell. Prayer and Community: The Mizrachi Movement and the Recreation of American Judaism. A detailed analysis of the process of creating tradition among secularized Jews in America.

Lynda J. King. Best Sellers by Design: Vicki Baum and the House of Ullstein. Shows techniques of promotion, marketing and distribution devised in the 1920s by the German publishing house, Ullstein, to make Vicki Baum a best-selling author.

Constance Cappel. Hemingway in Michigan. For what it's worth, Ernest Hemingway learned to fish, hunt, drink, and chase women there.

Alan Dundes and Carl S. Pagter. When You're Up to Your Ass in Alligators: More Urban Folklore from the Paperback Empire. Sweet stories benefit of analysis, interpretation, or purported meaning.

Has your favorite new work escaped comment? If I don't see it or hear about it, I don't write about it. R.A.P.

Six new titles from Sage Publications, Inc.

James Lull, ed. Popular Music and Communication. Focusing on artists, industry, and audiences, this is the most comprehensive anthology on popular music to date. Bringing together European and American researchers, no one perspective predominates.

Ronald Berman. How Television sees Its Audience: A Look at the Looking Glass. No data here, this is a provocative personal essay. Berman feels that TV both reflects and teaches.

Teun A. van Dijk. Communicating Racism: Ethnic Prejudice in Thought and Talk. Shows how everyday discourse contributes to ethnic stereotyping and racial prejudice.

David G. Bromley, ed. Falling from the Faith: Causes and Consequences of Religious Apostasy. The numerous authors discuss disaffiliation from groups ranging from the Moonies to the Roman Catholic Church.

Peter K. Manning. Semiotics and Fieldwork. A text in the qualitative research methods series, the book contrasts the formalism of semiotics with the particularism of fieldwork and shows how they can productively be used together.

James W. Carey, ed. Media, Myths, and Narratives: Television and the Press. Features a number of careful empirical examples of mythmaking on television and in newspapers. The process of mythmaking is focal in looking at newspapers. Television is seen as a mythified product to be interpreted by the article's author or by differently situated viewers.

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Joseph J. Cors, ed. Imagining Tomorrow: History, Technology, and the American Future. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Authors trace the changing predictions about specific aspects of future life ranging from skyscraper cities and the marvels of future technology to computers, the many peaceful uses of atomic energy, and the home of tomorrow.

Catherine L. Covert and John D. Stevens, eds. Mass Media between the Wars: Perceptions of Cultural Tension, 1918 - 1941. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press. A mixed bag of topics from content analyses of Amazing Stories and cigarette advertising to studies of the media's role in shaping public issues between the first two World Wars.

Craig Reinarman. American States of Mind: Political Beliefs and Behavior among Private and Public Workers. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Based on interviews with six truck drivers and six welfare workers over a five-year period, Reinarman finds strong support of the welfare and regulatory functions of the state combined with alienation from the present political culture.

Edwin M. Schur. The Americanization of Sex. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press. Schur examines how our cultural priorities and social structures organize sex. He finds depersonalized sexuality, sex as a commodity, and coercive sex for heterosexuals and gays alike.

David Wachtel. Cultural Policy and Socialist France. Westport, CT: Greenwood. Explores why the French Socialist party has turned to the intellectual community and arts institutions to bolster its legitimacy. The impact of socialist support of theater, museums, music and the visual arts.

Charles L. Glenn. The Myth of the Common School. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press. How the idea of state-run public education came to Massachusetts out of fear of Catholic schools. Parallels drawn with France and the Netherlands.

Kathryn Grover, ed. Dining in America, 1850-1900. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press. Eating as class war. Seven scholars explore the creation of a distinctively middle-class etiquette, ritual, accouterments, furnishings, and architectural space for the battle of class distinction.

Jacques Ellul. The Subversion of Christianity. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. A fervent Doomsdayist, Ellul would convince you that the Second Coming will take place at the Vatican City - in order to tear it to the ground.

Emanuel Levy. The History and Politics of the Oscar Award. New York: Ungar Press. Impressive. Analyzes the careers of all 608 players and 141 directors nominated for an Oscar, all 352 Best Picture nominations, and all Oscar-winning male and female roles. What does it take to get nominated; what do movies reflect about society?

Emanuel Levy. John Wayne: Prophet of the American Way of Life. New Jersey: Scarecrow Press. John Wayne is all his splendor. What if it had been John, not Ron?

Harvey J. Graff, ed. Growing Up in America. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press. A masterful selection of solid research articles on the struggle of socio-cultural reproduction arranged in chronological order from colonial times to the present.

CULTURE 4

FORTECOMING MEETINGS OF NOTE

August 14-18. American Sociological Association Culture Section meetings in Atlanta GA. Vera Dolberg, Section Chair, Elect. Calls for papers listed in Issue V 1, # 1, and 2. Details of all the happenings in Atlanta in the next issue.

September 18-20. Fifth International Conference on Cultural Economics, Ottawa. Send paper proposals and abstracts to William S. Hendoo, Urban Studies, University of Akron, Akron, OH 44325.

September 30- October 2. "Popular Music in Social, Ethnic, and Regional Cultures" Conference sponsored by the International Association for the Study of Popular Music. Yale University. Contact Rebe Garofolo or Peter Winkler, Dept. of Music, SUNY Stony Brook 11794

October 1-1. "Modernity: the City, the Street." Invited conference, televised, kickoff by Prince Charles. All heavy hitters including Marshall Berman, Richard Jenett, Janet Wolff, Martin Jay, Nelson Polsky and David Harvey. For tickets write at once to Scott Lash, Institute of Contemporary Arts, The Mall, London SW1Y-5AH.

October 18-20. Social Theory, Politics, and the Arts. 14th. annual conference at American University in Washington D.C. "Paper topics include production of culture, public policy and the arts, cultural economics, art worlds, cultural consumption, philanthropy and the arts, critical theory, arts administration, aesthetic education, etc." Send five copies of paper abstract by May 1 to David Pankratz, Department of Performing Arts, American University, 4400 Mass. Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016.

also October 18-20 also. Society for the Scientific Study of Religion annual meeting in Chicago. For details contact Madeleine Adriance, St. Ida College, 777 Dedham St., Newton Center, MA 02159.

and again October 17-20. American Studies Association annual meeting at the Fontainebleau, Miami Beach. Contact Jane Sehart-Mathews, American Studies, U. of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742 for details.

advance notice March 1989. "Sociology, the Arts, and the Humanities" is the Southern Sociological Society program theme for 1989. John Seed of the University of North Carolina, President-elect of the SSS and Catherine T. Harris of Wake Forest University, Program Chair, would appreciate any and all suggestions.

