

**From the Chair:  
Is Cultural Sociology Doomed?  
Robert Wuthnow, Princeton**

Now that I have your attention, let me explain why I think this is a serious question. As recently as a year or two ago, virtually everything I was hearing about cultural sociology was optimistic. Colleagues in other specialties described it as a growth industry. People in other disciplines remarked on its interesting contributions. Departments were trying to launch programs in it and excellent graduate students were being recruited. Much of that is still the case. But there are reasons for concern. Indeed, as I reflect on a variety of unrelated events—a conversation here, a conference there, a committee meeting—I realize that there are a number of worrisome developments.

◆ Budgets at many universities and colleges continue to tighten. New hires are sought in so-called service areas, such as criminology or medical sociology, or in core subjects, such as stratification or organizations. Cultural sociology is deemed a luxury.

◆ Departments with scarce resources want faculty who contribute prestige by bringing in large grants, working on quantitative data sets, and publishing in the right journals. Cultural sociology may not be the obvious choice.

◆ Although interdisciplinary work continues, disciplinary boundaries seem to be reappearing. For some, this means a return in sociology to tacit positivism. Cultural sociology may be suspected of not playing by the rules.

◆ Where interdisciplinary programs flourish, cultural sociology is often poorly received. Scholars in other fields perceive it as empiricist, philosophically uninformed, or ill-equipped to deal with important normative questions.

◆ In other settings, there is a growing reaction against postmodernism, relativism, identity politics, and arguments about the social constructedness of beliefs and values. In calls for a return to substantive knowledge, cultural sociology is dismissed as having little to contribute.

◆ National policy debates shape the interests of potential students and of funding agencies. Current concerns focus on taxes, welfare, immigration, poverty, aging, educational policies, and cities. Cultural sociology may not have a place at the table.

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**Toward a Sociology of Cyberspace  
A symposium edited by  
Karen A. Cerulo, Rutgers**

*All of a sudden, this morning, I realized that I was old. That's just it. I never noticed it before, not really. But this morning, I realized that there is no longer any given week in which I don't have a doctor's appointment. I thought about my diminishing energy . . . about how much more difficult it is to hear, to see, to endure long walks, the cold, the heat; I thought about how much more difficult it is to walk my black lab on a leash. . . . My children are angry with me. They want me to be vital, helpful, present. They simply can't accept that I just can't do it.<sup>1</sup>*

**Introduction to a Symposium**

The words above are difficult to read; they represent intimate, personal feelings. It is likely that most who review this testimony would identify it as a very private disclosure—a confidence shared between two close friends, or perhaps a sober exchange between a client and her/his therapist. Yet,

the testimony is neither. We know the narrator of this message only by a “pseudonym,” and the message is addressed to individuals that the narrator has never, and prob-

ably will never meet—members of an online discussion group. This interaction, one that most would automatically assume to be the product of an intense, copresent encounter, is really the stuff of a strange new realm—a borderless, bodyless cyberspace of action.

Such cyberspace “eavesdropping” should raise a red flag for sociologists. These data make clear that recent strides in communication technologies, with all that those strides have come to mean—e-mail and faxes, satellite transfers, internet chat groups, web sites, teleconferencing, etc.—are challenging us to rethink issues at the very heart of sociological discourse. The new communication technologies (hereafter called NCTs) are forcing us to revisit basic sociological concepts: the definition of interaction, the boundedness of collectives, the nature of social ties, the scope of experience and reality. For better or for worse, NCTs are expanding the social field; they are amending and altering a host of taken-for-granted social processes.

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**Culture Day in Toronto: Monday, August 11**  
Section sessions and events: see back cover

**ELSEWHERE IN THIS ISSUE . . .** Convention Information, back cover; Jason Kaufman on Humanities Computing, p. 10; *Books of Note*, p. 8; News, p. 14; Santa Barbara report, p. 15.

## Chair: Are We Doomed?

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♦ Cultural sociology is sometimes its own worst enemy. Some of its contributions are now taken for granted. But they are housed elsewhere (in feminist theory, gay and lesbian studies, or history of science). Other contributions have been adopted by the mass media and exaggerated, leaving them easy targets for debunking.

I don't know how serious these developments are. Certainly they are not entirely new. They are straws in the wind. To be sure, there are many exceptions and countertrends. Excellent books and articles are still being written. Good students are still interested. But cultural sociology cannot, as it were, simply rest on its recent successes.

What can be done? One adage is to play to one's strengths. There is wisdom in this. A philosopher with whom I was speaking recently put it this way (I paraphrase): Cultural sociology should do what it does best. It should go out and do research and provide interpretations. We philosophers can make good arguments but we seldom have much sense of the real world.

The point might be made more strongly. Cultural sociologists, it seems to me, sometimes tie themselves in knots trying to contribute major theoretical insights. Their colleagues sometimes expect them to have solved major epistemological or metaphysical questions. We wouldn't hold a sociologist of occupational mobility to the same standards. Perhaps it should be enough for cultural sociologists to make important empirical contributions.

But I think it may also be increasingly important for cultural sociology to blend in with other specialties, rather than presenting itself only as a distinctive subfield. If, as is often observed, culture is an aspect of all human behavior, then it makes sense for cultural sociology to work cooperatively on a broad range of topics. Indeed, it is possible to point to interesting work on the cultural aspects of, say, fertility decisions, paternity cases, status barriers, and economic transactions as examples. Good students, trained not only in cultural sociology but also in such fields as demography, immigration, race and ethnic studies, poverty studies, or family, should be in high demand.

Would blending of this kind spell doom for cultural sociology? Perhaps. But there is also wisdom in the idea that failure to adapt is a sure sign of decay. As this century comes to an end, cultural sociology is entering a new period of uncertainty. The next few years will be decisive. It is possible to envision a section composed of smaller numbers or of members who have little sense of why they have joined. It is equally possible, however, to envision a section composed of scholars who believe their work can make a clear contribution to the practical and intellectual problems of the next century.

### Newsletter Submissions

*Deadline for Fall issue:* Sept. 1. Unsolicited contributions welcome. Submission to *Culture* constitutes permission for abstracting and indexing in *Sociological Abstracts*. The editor reserves the right to edit all submissions. Editor: Stephen Hart; Sociology Department; SUNY-Buffalo; Buffalo, NY 14260-4140; e-mail: sahart@acsu.buffalo.edu; phone and fax: 716/886-5592.

## Cyberspace Symposium

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In the face of such a transition, one might guess that sociologists—sociologists of culture in particular—would be deeply entrenched in the study of NCTs and the socio-cultural phenomena that these technologies spur. Yet for some time, the sociological voice on such matters has registered as a mere whisper relative to the utterances of communication, psychology, and anthropology scholars. Happily, the past five years suggests a change in this course of affairs. The 1995 and 1996 meetings of the American Sociological Association saw two special sessions devoted to technologically generated communities. During the same period, several special collections and journal issues have addressed NCTs and social life. Currently, a growing number of sociological books and research articles are probing the social consequences of NCTs.

Not all of those writing in this area view NCTs as a positive occurrence. While some see NCTs as a tool for increasing social ties, others view these technologies as the stimulant of increased social isolation. Similarly, while many believe that NCTs will re-democratize society,<sup>2</sup> others view NCTs as weapons of authoritarian control. Clearly, sociologists disagree on the functions and potential effects of NCTs. Yet amidst conflicting views, one point draws consensus: NCTs are making a noteworthy impact on the very nature of social life.

This symposium brings NCTs to the sociology of culture's center stage. In this regard, my contribution rests in a "beginners" bibliography—a starting point for those who wish to tap new and relevant literature in the area. Two provocative and important essays precede my reference list; those pieces represent the true highlights of this symposium. In "Ecce Homo," Clifford Nass reflects on NCTs and the definition of humanness. Joshua Meyrowitz explores the flip-side of this issue in "What Are Media?"

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Taken from a *Compuserv* chat group and quoted in Katz, J. 1994. "The Tales They Tell In Cyberspace Are A Whole Other Story." *New York Times* 1/23/94:A 1; 30.

<sup>2</sup>Bill Gates expresses some interesting views on this matter in an interview with John F. Kennedy Jr. See "Of Mouse and Man" in *George* February 1997: 78-81; 101-102.

### Ecce Homo

*Clifford Nass, Stanford*

It's hard to be a person these days. I don't mean that daily life is somehow harder for homo sapiens than it is for canis familiaris (dogs) or felis domestica (cats). Instead, I'm concerned with the ability of someone (or something?) to say, "I'm a person and everyone agrees that I'm a person."

There is no more consequential label with which to be endowed than that of "human" or "person." Imagine that one day you are labeled "not a person." The consequences are dramatic. It no longer is a crime to take away your life or liberty. You no longer possess any rights or privileges. Once you are dehumanized, others have a license to perform almost any act upon you.

I am not worried about students of philosophy—they can take care of themselves. I was once explaining the idea of solipsism to a class of undergraduates. One of the students

said, "I really like solipsism, because it means that I wrote all of Shakespeare's plays." Another student replied, "Yea, but you're the only one who thinks they're any good."

I do, however, worry about the rest of us. The challenges to claims of being "human" come from many quarters. Supporters of abortion rights frequently distinguish a "fetus" from a "person," because the argument becomes much harder when the two are equated. Post-modernists argue that humans are fragmented into a number of variously-elaborated personae, each with a problematic claim on personhood. Anti-vivisectionists challenge the dichotomy of human/non-human as a way of undermining the argument: "we're human; they're not; tough luck for other animals." As a more general challenge, deconstructionist thinking questions the very idea of dichotomies like "human/non-human" (although even deconstructionists would likely hold fast to their own assignment to the category "human").

It is perhaps ironic that the ideas that make it most difficult to claim "humanity" come from an area that historically has little interest in people: the world of computing. While a number of recent writers have taken on the ways in which computers force us to think differently about ourselves (most notably Bolter [1984], Friedman [in press], Turkle [1984], and Weizenbaum [1978]), the root of the challenge is the Turing Test (Turing, 1981[1950]). The Turing Test asks the question, "When should a computer be classified as a person?" In the Turing Test, an evaluator sits at a terminal in front of a curtain. On the other side of the curtain is either a person or a computer. The evaluator has a free-wheeling five-minute interaction with the person or computer via the terminal. If the evaluator cannot determine whether he or she has been interacting with a computer or a person, then if it is a computer on the other side, then the computer deserves the label "human." (Pedants have argued that Turing was speaking about "intelligence" rather than humanity, but it's clear that Turing equated the two).

There is much that is appealing about the Turing Test: It is objective; it focuses on language, a trait that seems unique to humans (indeed, encyclopedias in the 1950s used to define "humans" as the language-using animal); it's proven to be a very tough standard, as no computer has even come close to "passing" the Turing Test; and no test for accepting a seemingly non-human entity as human has gained greater credence.

Although the Turing Test was posed as a way to determine whether a computer should be admitted into the human fraternity, it is revealing to think about how well actual humans would do behind the curtain in the Turing Test. Imagine that you are the judge in the Turing Test and you type in the question, "How are you today?" On your terminal appears the following: "Je regret que je ne parle pas anglais." You then say, "There must have been a problem with this terminal. Could you please repeat your comment?" On the terminal, the following appears: "Je regret que je ne comprend pas." You confidently conclude, "Not only is this a computer, it is obviously broken!" In a single stroke, the person from France has been dehumanized. In a similar vein, imagine that you are the judge, and you ask about baseball. The entity on the other side replies, "I'm sorry, I don't know anything about baseball." You then ask about an event on the news, and you receive the reply, "I'm sorry, I don't really

follow the news, either. However, I am intrigued by the proof of Fermat's little theorem." You might relegate this person, too, to the domain of the non-human, a victim of a lack of common ground.

What is remarkable about the acceptance of the Turing Test is that it has gained great sway despite its obvious inability to address cultural differences like the one above. It seems clear that we would want to include people from other cultures as human (although this is not always the case in human history), yet we have a test that fails to meet this basic criterion.

Even tests that seem acultural are not. For example, consider the Shakespeare Test. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock proposes the following test for humanity: "Hath not [I] eyes? hath not [I] hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? . . . If you prick [me], do [I] not bleed? If you tickle [me], do [I] not laugh? If you poison [me], do [I] not die?" (Shakespeare, 1975, p. 215). Despite its seeming objectivity, it is almost certainly the case that the assessment of whether an entity has "affections" and "passions" is culturally specific. Furthermore, this test excludes people with prosthetics and those born with various handicaps, and probably includes many non-human animals (depending on the definition of "laugh" and "passions").

I have developed a test that seems to be culturally independent and has a high rate of accurately identifying those that one would conventionally consider as human (the Nass Test): An evaluator stands in front of a curtain with his or her feet poking out through to the other side of the curtain. On the other side of the curtain is either a person or a computer. For five minutes, either a computer or a person is dropped on the person's foot. If the evaluator cannot determine whether the entity on the other side is a person or a computer, then it deserves the label "human." The Nass Test seems to have many positive characteristics. For example, it would not exclude people from France, nor would it rely on common ground. One would also be more likely to include as "human" babies, people who can't type, the blind, etc., all of whom would have a dismal fate under the Turing Test. Unlike the Shakespeare Test, it is objective and would likely exclude all non-human animals.

If we use the standard measurement criteria of greatest level of face validity (i.e., identifying humans as humans) and greatest level of agreement among judges, it would seem that the Nass Test is clearly superior to the other two. With that said, it is likely that all of us feel that the Nass Test is the most unsatisfactory of the three. But I suspect that the dissatisfaction would, to some extent, apply to the other two tests as well, as well as any other test one could come up with. (I have never seen a test that is as diagnostic as the Nass Test and that does not exclude babies, people with artificial limbs, people who are uncommunicative, etc., and that does not involve unverifiable characteristics, such as possession of a soul or passions.)

Now assume that you have found a test that is consistent with a particular set of societal values. Now imagine that a computer or a person from an ethnic group you wished to exclude passed your test. The entity then said, "I now have my bona fides. I am clearly a person now and deserve full human rights and privileges." What would the societal reaction be? We can turn to *The Merchant of Venice* for an an-

swer. It's quite clear that the people in the play were willing to grant that Shylock passed the Shakespeare Test, which seems an extraordinarily high standard. Indeed, he passed a test that many entities that they would like to consider human would not pass (e.g., those who lost eyes). As the play progresses, however, it becomes obvious that the society has no qualms about dehumanizing Shylock; that is, the passing of the test was irrelevant to his acceptance as a human.

How does each society resolve this apparent contradiction? There are two key mechanisms. First, despite the seeming clarity and firmness of the dichotomy, the assignment of "humanness" is an essentially arbitrary, societal decision. While societies might promulgate various checklists, there is an important sense in which decisions of humanness are made on a case-by-case basis. During periods of genocide, a particular group is dehumanized in what is basically an ad hoc fashion. Certain characteristics may become more or less relevant at various times, but the great degree of fuzziness is ruthlessly resolved for each entity who might make a claim to humanity. Although it might seem that there are hard and fast rules, the reality is that one day you're in, one day you're out; societal excuses aren't needed. The label "human" is essentially fragile.

The fluidity of the label "human" can be illustrated with the following thought experiment I present to my undergraduates. Imagine that you have known your best friend almost all of your life. You have shared numerous good times and bad times, have confided in each other, and have developed bonds that you will likely form with no one else. One day your friend comes to you and says, 'I have a confession to make. It turns out that I am a robot—see, here are my internal workings.'" I asked the class, "How free would you be to turn the robot on and off at will?" The vast majority of students said that they would have no problem with this—once they knew it was a robot, it would become perfectly acceptable to even "kill it" (him/her?). While I am mindful of the distinction between attitudes and behaviors and the problem of hypotheticals, and while I feel confident that most of the students in the class would not have dealt so harshly with their friend regardless of ontology, it was a quite worrisome response.

I then proposed the following: "Imagine that you are living in South Africa in 1960. One day your best friend comes to you and says, 'I have a confession to make. It turns out that I am black and have been 'passing' for all these years.' I then asked the students how comfortable they would be with throwing their friend out of their school, forcing them to move, etc." Of course, all of the students insisted they would never do such a thing, but one wonders what the frequency of genocide and the previous example tells us.

The dramatic consequences of losing one's claim to "humanness" lead to the second key mechanism by which dehumanization is facilitated. Imagine that a dehumanized entity mounted a protest to his/her/its status. In Shakespeare, this would involve Shylock protesting his sub-human treatment. In U.S. history, this would be a slave wanting to argue before the court that they should not be treated as property. In science fiction, it could be a robot arguing that to exclude it would logically necessitate the exclusion of many other entities that the society would like to retain as human. The elegant, though alarming, point is that once labeled

"non-human," the entity (no longer a person) would have no legitimate standing to protest its status. The arguments can be dismissed because only humans can make arguments. That is why Shylock could not move the society to grant him full human rights, and that is why the challenges to slavery were never brought by slaves—they did not have standing before the court.

It is a very scary world when the most consequential thing that can happen to you—receiving the label "human"—is also one of the most unreliable and fragile. Of course, computers and other advanced technologies have not created the problem of dehumanization. It is clear that at least by the time of Shakespeare, the problem was well understood. What does make it harder to be a human these days is that before computers, people could talk about Shylock's moving speech without thinking about the fact that it did him no good. We are now surrounded by technologies that mimic virtually every human capability, reminding us every day that the line we draw between human and non-human is an arbitrary one. This makes for a very scary world, as one's claim to humanity can be dismissed simply and quickly.

Rather than present an unabashedly pessimistic view, there is one key reason for optimism: People are evolved to be extremely liberal in their assignment of "humanness" (Reeves & Nass, 1996). For example, over the past ten years, colleagues and I have performed a series of over 35 experiments that demonstrate that people apply a wide range of social rules and expectations to computers and other technologies (Reeves & Nass, 1996). Even though people deny they are doing so and consciously believe it is inappropriate, people are polite to computers (Reeves & Nass, 1996, chap. 2) and will respond to computers as teammates (Nass, Fogg, & Moon, in press). Individuals will gender stereotype computers based on whether they have a male or female voice (Nass, Moon, & Green, in press) and will reciprocate when the computer does them a favor (Fogg & Nass, in press). People will even respond to a face on a television screen as if the person were physically present (Reeves & Nass, 1996, chap. 3).

Similar research by others demonstrate that we see people almost everywhere (e.g., an electric outlet looks like a face (McCloud, 1993), headlights are the eyes of a car (Norman, 1992), and people have no problem responding to a ventriloquist's dummy as an independent actor). All of these studies and others suggest that it is quite automatic to respond with a very broad and deep definition of "human." Thus, people are evolved to take the stance that everything is human unless proven otherwise. If our old brains can overcome societal tendencies, it may not be so hard to be human after all.

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## What Are Media?

*Joshua Meyrowitz, University of New Hampshire*

What are media? In a culture where TV is even more ubiquitous than indoor plumbing and there are more radios than people, this question seems too simple to deserve explicit response and debate. Yet our conceptions of media of communication, like other conceptions, are themselves mediated by mental constructs (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). In particular, we rely—often subconsciously—on metaphorical thinking to simplify and clarify what media are.

I argue that there are three core metaphors that have operated silently and simultaneously beneath the surface of research on communication technologies and lead to confusion and misunderstanding among those drawing on different metaphors. The three metaphors are: medium-as-vessel/conduit, medium-as-language, medium-as-environment. This essay very briefly outlines these three images of media.

### *Medium-as-Vessel/Conduit*

The most common media metaphor is that a medium is like a vessel or conduit. The medium-as-vessel/conduit metaphor looks at media as holding or sending important "stuff" that deserves attention and analysis. This leads to a variety of ways of studying the "content" of media.

Broadly speaking, the medium-as-vessel/conduit metaphor leads people to ask: What is the content? How did the content get there? How have patterns of ownership and control affected media content? How accurately does media content reflect "reality"? How do people interpret the content? What effects does the content have?

The vessel/conduit metaphor is so common because content is the most obvious part of both our mediated and unmediated interactions. We all have a sense that a message that someone loves us has power and meaning apart from whether we receive it in face-to-face interaction, by letter, by phone, by e-mail, or by videotape. There is something different about each of those conveyors, but we still react to the message first. Few would dispute that a message of love is different from a message of hate regardless of how it is conveyed.

Within the vessel/conduit metaphor, "content" is analytically separated from the particular presentation of it in a particular medium. Although one could define media content

more broadly, this narrow view of "content" has experiential reality. Many people are concerned with media violence, sexism, and sexuality regardless of the medium that conveys them. Indeed, much mainstream media research and criticism falls into these areas. Similarly, we should be troubled by government disinformation regardless of whether it is disseminated to us through live speeches, radio, television, newspaper, or the Internet.

It is commonly believed that a movie can be made of a book ("faithfully" or "unfaithfully"), and researchers act as if they can record and then transcribe an oral interview and somehow retain something of the "same interview" in all three forms (live, tape, transcript). These examples suggest that we often believe that there is some "content essence" that can be transported unchanged from medium to medium and from live interaction to medium. If you miss your favorite television program and you ask a friend to tell you "what happened," generally what you are told about is the content.

Of course, analysis of content can be much more sophisticated than a friend's description of a missed TV show. One can look beyond manifest content to the latent, underlying structure or form of the content. One can look, for example, at genres and genre codes, at unconscious or psychoanalytic motivations of producers of content, at implicit value systems, at the ways in which content is shaped by media industry structure and by ideological, economic, and political forces. One can explore the ways in which various audiences differentially interpret media content. One can also examine correlations between media content and reality or explore the potential effects of content. Content data can also be quantified and analyzed statistically.

But even in these more complex approaches, one is still looking primarily at the content. The medium of delivery is typically viewed as significant only in so far as people receive its content. The vast majority of media studies focus on some aspect of content—and thereby ignore at least two other dimensions of media.

### *Medium-as-Language*

A very different metaphor is that a medium is like a "language." The medium-as-language metaphor looks at each medium as having a unique range of expressive potential. This leads to the study of the "grammar" choices (or "production variables") *within* each medium and how their manipulation alters the resulting message—even when basic "content" elements, such as those discussed above, are held constant.

Broadly speaking, grammar questions ask: What variables can be manipulated within each medium? What are the roots of the grammatical code—both within the nature of the medium and in the structural codes of face-to-face communication? What are the effects of grammar manipulations in terms of perception, comprehension, emotional reaction, and behavioral response?

Grammar variables include size and style of type in print or computer fonts, camera angle and selection of focus in photography, pickup patterns of microphones in audio. Television and film incorporate all the variables of still photography and audio plus such variables as dissolves, fades, cutting speed, zooms, dollies, tilts, pans, and changes in focus.

Unlike content elements, which are often identical to objects, actions, and events in non-mediated interactions,

grammar variables are particular to media. While a person can exhibit violence or sexism in real life, for example, it is impossible for us to “cut to a closeup” or “dissolve to the beach” in everyday interactions. And we cannot change typefaces in oral speech.

Grammar variables are more difficult to perceive than content variables. Indeed producers often consider it part of their professional responsibility to *hide* the impact of production techniques. Newspapers rarely acknowledge the role that typeface and layout play in establishing their image and level of credibility. Similarly, television news programs do not highlight their use of those grammar conventions that give news sequences a documentary rather than fictional tone. Yet such directorial decisions are very significant in terms of creating all images and stereotypes in television and film.

The main character in a movie, for example, is almost always the first person seen in prolonged closeups. Closeups thrust a character into our vicarious intimate space. Viewers rarely have a particularly strong response—either negative or positive—to characters who are only shown in long shots. Unless one sees characters in medium shots or closeups, one usually responds to them only in terms of the social role they are portraying (secretary, jury member, soldier, etc.). Such grammar variations are almost always used to encourage us to “take sides” in war movies, crime dramas, westerns, space adventures—and even in news and documentaries. In most war movies, the camera places us next to “our” soldiers. We stand in their midst (as if we are their “teammates”); the other side fires at us. We rarely see prolonged closeups of the enemy.

While a content analyst exploring women’s “images” in media may be concerned with the roles held by the women (e.g., housewife vs. executive), a media grammar analyst might examine whether women in a film—regardless of role—are framed in intimate space, made to look weak through high angle shots, or sexualized by voyeuristic shots of their body parts.

Although grammar variables are typically out of the awareness of media audiences, they are there for all to see once attention is called to them (Meyrowitz 1986). The third aspect of media, however, is even more elusive to the average consumer—and researcher—of media.

### *Medium-as-Environment*

The third media metaphor is that each medium is a setting or environment or context that has characteristics and effects that transcend variations in content and override manipulations of production variables. This metaphor leads to what I call “medium analysis” (Meyrowitz 1985:16; 1994). I use the singular “medium” because those who draw on this metaphor examine the relatively fixed features of *each* medium.

Broadly speaking, the medium-as-environment metaphor leads one to ask: What are the relatively fixed characteristics of a medium that make it physically, psychologically, and sociologically different from other media, regardless of content and grammar choices?

Environmental features of a medium include:

- ◆ the *type of sensory information* the medium can and cannot transmit;
- ◆ the *speed and degree of immediacy* of communication;
- ◆ *unidirectional vs. bidirectional vs. multidirectional* communication;
- ◆ *simultaneous or sequential interaction*;

- ◆ the *physical requirements for using the medium*; and
- ◆ the relative *ease or difficulty of learning to use the medium* to code and decode messages and whether one tends to learn to use the medium “all-at-once” or in stages.

Medium questions operate on two levels: the micro and the macro. On the micro level, the key issue is how the choice of one medium over another influences a particular situation or interaction. On the macro level, the primary medium question is how the addition of a new medium to the existing media matrix may alter social interactions and social structure in general.

On the micro level, for example, one could argue that there is a big difference between choosing a telephone call over a letter to end an intimate relationship. On the phone, one’s verbal message may be overwhelmed by one’s own emotional vocal overtones, and one is interrupted by the words and sounds of the other person. Also, one often conveys a hesitant and rambling phone message; you cannot completely “erase” what you have said thus far and then start again. For many people, a “Dear John telephone call” is inherently paradoxical. Since the telephone is bidirectional and intimate, it maintains an informal, intimate, and fluid relationship, even as one tries to end it. A “Dear John letter,” in contrast, allows one to strip away one’s vocalizations and “have one’s say” without any interruption or response from the other party. Further the nature of letter-writing allows the sender to write and rewrite a letter until it has a formal and polished form.

On the macro, societal and global level, those who use the medium-as-setting metaphor to study the telephone might ask questions such as: How has the use of the telephone altered the texture of social relationship in general? How has the phone affected the speed and style of business interactions? How has it changed the frequency and function of letter-writing? How has it affected social hierarchies by changing the ratio of vertical to horizontal patterns of information flow? How has it restructured the boundaries of psychological vs. physical neighborhoods?

On the micro-level, a medium analyst might ask how the presence of a camera and/or microphone affects the specific behavior of a particular politician. On the macro-level, one might ask how electronic media alter political styles and our perception of politicians and world leaders in general.

Macro-level medium theory is often the most distinct from analyses of media content. A medium perspective might suggest that distinct roles for people of different sexes and races are supported by live and mediated contexts, such as books (which tend to segregate the experiences of the sexes and races), while electronic media such as television (which tend to integrate experiences for people of different races and both sexes) tend to have an egalitarian influence. Thus, it could be argued that television, in spite of its often repressive *content*, is a potentially liberating *medium*.

The same content in different media has different effects. Books for parents about what not to tell children tend to reinforce parental power, while a television show with the same content would undermine it. After all, with television, thousands of young, pre-literate children are typically “there,” learning about the very topics that are being recommended for secrecy, as well as learning about the “secret of secrecy”—the fact that adults conspire over what to tell and not tell children. Similarly, sexist content in one medium might rein-

force sexism, while sexist content in another medium might undermine it.

The use of new media changes “who knows what about whom” and “who knows what compared to whom.” Television—in spite of its often conservative and reactionary content, perhaps even more so because of it—has made many people less willing to stay in their old places—physical and social. For there is nothing more infuriating than being exposed constantly to activities, adventures, and excitements that you are told are reserved for another type of person.

The medium-as-environment metaphor has traditionally been the least understood and least employed by social scientists. Indeed, this metaphor’s most famous advocate, Marshall McLuhan, has been the target of many dismissive attacks within the academy. In the last few years, however, the widespread talk of “cyberspace” has brought new attention to the idea that media research should focus less on the messages and more on communication technologies as types of social environments.

### *Integrating the Metaphors*

The separate consideration of media content, grammar, and medium is, in many ways, an analytical fiction. Any communication through media encompasses all three simultaneously. Nevertheless, in analyses of media, the metaphors usually operate in relative isolation. Although some media observers draw on more than one image, the overwhelming majority of popular and scholarly examinations of media, including my own, draw primarily or exclusively on only one of these metaphors. And yet a full exploration of any topic related to media—children and media, gender and media, politics and media, media and culture, hegemony, ideology, semiotics, and so forth—requires as unified an approach as possible. A unified approach involves considering all three images of media, either simultaneously or sequentially *within* a research community, rather than across communities that rarely, if ever, speak to each other. Such bridging of typically competing metaphors will allow for a true meta-connection among those who will be studying media of communication in the next millennium.

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## Books of Note

Richard A. Peterson, Vanderbilt University

*Editor's note: Are you unhappy that your book hasn't been mentioned in Books of Note? If we haven't heard of it, we can't cover it. Send information to Richard Peterson at Dept. of Sociology, Box 1635, Station B, Vanderbilt Univ., Nashville TN 37235; petersra@ctr.vax.vanderbilt.edu*

Spillman, Lyn. *Nation and Commemoration: Creating National Identities in the United States and Australia*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press. By comparing the centennial and bicentennial celebrations of nationhood in Australia and the United States, Spillman shows the profound changes in the social construction of nationhood over the past century.

Garofalo, Reebee. *Rockin' Out: Popular Music in the USA*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. Balancing the influences of musicians, audiences, and the industry, Garofalo traces

the developments in popular music that led to rock in the 1950s and tracks the evolution of the music since. The politics of race, ethnicity, region, and gender are central to the story. Very useful as a sociology of music text.

Steinberg, Deborah. *Bodies in Glass*. New York: St. Martin's Press. Steinberg makes an extensive analysis of feminist approaches to the controversy over in vitro fertilization and related innovative reproduction technologies.

Stein, Arlene. *Sex and Sensibility: Stories of a Lesbian Generation*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Based largely on 40 extended interviews, Stein details shifts in lesbian identity and culture from the 1970s to the present as a generation of women moved from the bar scene to the world of alternative families, and for some, to the status of "ex lesbians."

Hunt, Morton. *How Science Takes Stock: The Story of Meta-Analysis*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation. Hunt reviews the emerging technique called meta-analysis which combines the results from a large number of studies on the same topic to arrive at results more reliable than those of any individual study.

McRobbie, Angela. *Back to Reality: Social Experience and Culture Studies*. Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press. McRobbie reprints a number of recent studies which illustrate the current reality turn in culture studies.

LaRossa, Ralph. *The Modernization of Fatherhood*. No, not the '90s dad. LaRossa traces the origins of the contemporary father who is simultaneously economic provider, pal and male role model in personal letters, popular magazines, and child-raising theories of the interwar years.

Nolan, James L. Jr., editor. *The American Culture Wars*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia. Acknowledging that most people hold moderate views, the authors seek out new evidence of winners and losers in the values skirmishes and James Hunter responds to his critics "for the first time in print."

### Ten from Sage

Tierney, William G. *Academic Outlaws: Queer Theory and Cultural Studies in the Academy*. Much as Howard Becker used marijuana use and jazz playing, Tierney uses the experiences of gay men and lesbians in academia to better understand the cultural construction of reality.

Riggins, Stephen Harold, editor. *The Language and Politics of Exclusion: Others in Discourse*. Drawing on examples from around the globe, the authors show how group membership is defined and consolidated by rejecting specific others, and also how othering works in merchandising inclusiveness.

Nehring, Neil. *Popular Music, Gender, and Postmodernism*. Who killed Kurt Cobain? Nehring suggests it was the rock journalists made jaded by postmodernist cynicism. The rage in rock, he says is real, as for example in the work of Riot Grrrls.

Kronenfield, Jennie Jacobs and Marcia Lynn Whicker. *Getting an Academic Job: Strategies for Success*. If you wait until you have almost finished graduate work, forget it.

Hall, Stuart and Paul du Gay, editors. *Questions of Cultural Identity*. The authors explore the dynamics of identity choice, and question whether the standard demographic criteria of identity have meaning now.

Hall, Stuart, editor. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. The authors explore representation as a signifying practice in a rich diversity of social contexts and institutional sites.

Fowler, Bridget. *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory: Critical Investigations*. Fowler places Pierre Bourdieu in the context of European intellectual practice and provides a critical reading of his key concepts.

Eder, Klaus. *The Social Construction of Nature: A Sociology of Ecological Enlightenment*. Nature is seen not as an object but as an ever-changing social construct. Goodbye Smokey the bear.

Messner, Michael. *Politics of Masculinities: Men in Movements*. The spread of feminist ideas, Messner shows, led to the discovery and contest over the meaning of masculinity.

Dear, Michael J., H. Eric Schockman, and Greg Hise, editors. *Rethinking Los Angeles*.

No sniggering from the New Yorkers in the back row please. The authors suggest why Los Angeles represents the megacity of the future.

### Five From the SUNY Press

Davis, Laurel R. *The Swimsuit Issue and Sport: Hegemonic Masculinity in Sports Illustrated*. Davis reveals some of the ways that sexism, racism, heterosexualism, and Western ethnocentrism have been woven into the cultural fabric of men's sport by analyzing the content of the "swimsuit issue" since its inception in 1964 and interviewing the producers of Sports Illustrated.

Wakefield, Wanda Ellen. *Playing to Win*. Wakefield shows how and why the U.S. military embraced sports in the years from 1898 to 1945. In the process the language and orientations of each sphere have suffused the other.

Lieblich, Amia. *Transition to Adulthood During Military Service*. The author examines the psychological effects of military service on contemporary Israelis.

Crosset, Todd W. *Outsiders in the Clubhouse*. Through ethnographic research, Crosset explores the world of women's professional golf.

Klein, Alan M. *Little Big Men*. Through studying competitive bodybuilders on the West Coast, Klein explores the construction of gender revealing narcissism, homophobia, hypermasculinity, fascism, and hustling.

### Five more from Routledge

Thornton, Sarah and Ken Gelder, editors. *The Subcultures Reader*. Beginning with some of the classical pieces from the Chicago and Birmingham schools of research, the editors complete this very useful collection with more recent articles that focus on subcultures of place, ethnicity, gender, occupation and lifestyles.

McCarthy, E. Doyle. *Knowledge as Culture: The New Sociology of Knowledge*. Recenters the sociology of knowledge in ideas rather than experience.

Chaney, David. *Lifestyles*. Chaney discusses numerous approaches to the study of contemporary lifestyles.

Robins, Kevin. *Culture and Politics in the Field of Vision*. Rather than accepting the fashionable idea that the new visual technologies are replacing the real, Robins shows how these technologies and their use are shaped by events in the real world.

Jenkins, Richard. *Social Identity*. An introduction to contemporary narcissism.

### Seven from Cambridge University Press

Ringmar, Erik. *Identity, Interest and Action: A Cultural Explanation of Sweden's Inter-*

*vention in The Thirty Years' War*. Contrary to the dictates of rational choice theory, Ringmar suggests that people act more for reasons of identity than interest. He uses Sweden's entry into the Thirty Years' War as a case in point.

McAdam, Doug, John D. McCarthy and Mayer Zald, editors. *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*. The authors show the role of ideology in shaping social movement mobilization and action.

Baumann, Gerd. *Contesting Culture*. Baumann shows the complex interplay of identity issues in contemporary multi-ethnic London.

Miller, Jerome. *Search and Destroy: African-American Males in the Criminal Justice System*. The so-called "war on drugs" has created an explosion in the U.S. jail population, and Miller shows how at each stage in the policing and judicial systems male African-Americans are discriminated against.

Reed-Danahay, Deborah. *Education and Identity in Rural France: The Politics of Schooling*. Through a careful ethnographic study, the author shows how parents of rural French school children subvert the teaching of the central government's educational system sustaining the sense of local difference.

Lindner, Rolf. *The Reportage of Urban Culture: Robert Park and the Chicago School*. Lindner shows that the new styles of newspaper investigative reporting developed early in the 20th century directly led to the development of Chicago school urban sociology.

Bicchieri, Cristina, Richard Jeffrey and Brian Skyrms, editors. *The Dynamics of Norms*. The authors see norm-formation as the outcome of tradition, rational choice and biological evolution that can be formally modeled.

### Three from the University of Luton Press

Puijk, Roel, editor. *Global Spotlights on Lillehammer: How the World Viewed Norway During the 1994 Winter Olympics*. These Olympics were available via TV in 120 countries around the world. The authors focus on the image of Norway that was projected in coverage to the United States and seven European countries, and of the ways in which diverse audiences interpreted Norway as depicted via the event.

Spa, Miguel de Moragas and Carmelo Garitaonandia, editors. *Decentralization in the Global Era: Television in Regions, Nationalities and Small Countries of the European Union*. At the same time that the media are becoming more global, more diverse local communicative spaces are being created according to the authors of this anthology.

Hayward, Philip, editor. *Picture This: Media Representations of Visual Art and Artists*. This is a collection of critical articles on how television depicts the visual arts, art history, feminist art, and particular artists.

#### **Syracuse Univ. Press Contributes Four**

Lavery, David, Angela Hague and Marla Cartwright, editors. "Deny All Knowledge": Reading the X-Files. The authors explore the conspiracy theories that suffuse "The X Files" and the popularity of this television program in the 1990s.

Dundes, Alan and Carl Pagter. *Sometimes the Dragon Wins: Yet More Urban Folklore from the Paperwork Empire*. This is an unexpurgated collection of "photocopylore" from the ever-popular "Why God Never Received Tenure" to rare items directed at highly specialized audiences.

Marc, David and Robert J. Thompson. *Prime Time, Prime Movers: From I Love Lucy to L.A. Law, America's Greatest TV Shows and the People Who Created Them*. The authors argue that in spite of the commercial constraints, the television producer is able to use TV as a medium of personal expression.

Daniel, Douglass K. *Lou Grant: The Making of TV's Top Newspaper Drama*. "Lou Grant" was far and away the most popular of the 23 newspaper dramas to air on commercial TV. Daniel chronicles character development,

plots, and censorship issues as well as providing plot summaries of all 114 episodes.

#### **A Vegas Dozen from Greenwood**

Newlin, George, editor. *Every Thing in Dickens: Ideas and Subjects Discussed by Charles Dickens in His Complete Works. A Topicon*. The title says it all.

Sandner, David. *The Fantastic Sublime: Romanticism and Transcendence in Nineteenth-Century Children's Fantasy Literature*. These stories are seen to show a transformation taking place in the conception of childhood.

Hooker, Mark T. *The Military Uses of Literature: Fiction and the Armed Forces in the Soviet Union*. Hooker analyses the themes of fiction written for the armed forces of the Soviet Union from the 1920s through 1991.

Knippling, Alpina Sharma, editor. *New Immigrant Literatures in the United States: A Sourcebook to Our Multicultural Literary Heritage*. This anthology reviews the fictional writing of groups who have come to the U.S. since World War II.

Ojo-Ade, Femi, editor. *Of Dreams Deferred, Dead or Alive: African Perspectives on African-American Writers*. This anthology provides the opportunity to learn of the views of Africans on what it means to be African-American as reflected in African-American literature.

Bernardin, Claude and Tom Stanton. *Rocket Man: Elton John from A-Z*. A comprehensive source book on the compositions and recordings of Elton John as well as a complimentary view of his life.

Cameron, Catherine M. *Dialectics in the Arts: The Rise of Experimentalism in American Music*. The focus is on John Cage, Henry Crowell, Charles Ives and the art worlds that they created.

Salter, David E. *Crashing the Old Boys' Network: The Tragedies and Triumphs of Girls and Women in Sports*. This is a chronicling of the debates over Title IX and its impact on women's and girls' sports as well as commentaries by Billie Jean King, Pat Summitt, Chris Berman and many others.

Bounds, J. Dennis. *Perry Mason: The Authorship and Reproduction of a Popular Hero*. Bounds uses a mix of neoformalist and production of culture approaches to understand how the popularity of the "Perry Mason" television show was sustained.

Koch, Tom. *The Message is the Medium: Online All the Time for Everyone*. Through a series of extended vignettes Koch shows how it feels to work ones way through the maze of information now available on the Internet.

Barfield, Ray. *Listening to Radio, 1920-1950*. Barfield uses the accounts of 150 listeners to radio during the "radio era" to understand the impact of the medium. See also the next item.

## **Computers and Cultural Studies** **Jason Andrew Kaufman, Princeton**

### **New Dogs, Old Tricks**

A quiet revolution is brewing in the hallowed halls of humanities scholarship, one in which sociologists of culture might want to take an interest. Like most revolutions (social, intellectual, or otherwise), this one is largely built on ideas developed elsewhere—in economics and sociology in this case, just one of the reasons why your interest should be piqued.

Imagine this: you are a distinguished professor of French languages and literature. You have spent decades perusing the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, developing a widely accepted theory concerning the theme of alienation in existentialist thought. One day, another scholar publishes a paper openly questioning your thesis, arguing that the subject of loneliness is no more prominent in an existentialist Sartre novel than in other 20th century novels published by non-existentialist authors. Unlike most scholarly works by professors of literature, this paper relies on computer-assisted quantitative analysis, not close textual recitation. A few hours with a scanner and some optical recognition software has afforded this critic the power to refute your epic book on the theme of loneliness in Sartre's works, declaring, as does Paul Fortier (1993, p. 384), "In the absence of conclusive evidence based on the structure of the novel... it must be concluded that Roquentin's

[the protagonist of *La nausée*] solitary nature is a formal characteristic of the type of text in which he exists, and so it is not open to evaluative commentary of the type which some critics have expressed." Proudly pronouncing your life's work dead, Fortier's paper points out the low z-scores produced by comparing the number of references to "solitude" in Sartre's *La nausée* with the average of those in eight other 20th century "autodiegetic" first-person novels selected from the electronic database, *Trésor de la Langue Française*.<sup>1</sup>

Work in this vein contradicts decades of traditional literary theory and criticism, relying on epistemological and methodological standards previously unheard of in the humanities. Computers are the new buzz-word in many of the nation's English and Comp. Lit. departments, and with them, new forms of scholarly production and consumption are being created. "With the advent of the Internet, electronic text technology is now firmly at the center of the scholarly arena in the humanities," states an editorial in the Princeton-Rutgers Center for Electronic Texts in the Humanities Newsletter (1996, p. 1). And, as sociologists of knowledge might have predicted, its new-found legitimacy has been sanctioned with the creation of an appropriately swank new name: "Humanities Computing."

Nonetheless, it is admittedly premature to label this a revolution, first because it is not entirely new, and second because it is far from clear what impact these techniques will

have on literary scholarship. Given the recent belt-tightening in universities across the country, the rise of Humanities Computing could have institutional as well as intellectual repercussions for both disciplines, an issue worthy of some pragmatic consideration. Focusing on the intellectual side, in this article I will discuss two reasons why sociologists, particularly cultural sociologists, should take note of these developments. First, there is a substantial methodological overlap between the rising practice of electronically-assisted textual analysis in the humanities and content analysis in the social sciences, offering fruitful ground for cross-disciplinary communication and collaboration. Second, the recent proliferation of electronic texts and their likely impact on the institutional and organizational structure of humanities disciplines offers sociologists fascinating new prospects with which to study institutional change and the production of culture in non-profit, “knowledge-producing” organizations. The question I will address here is the role sociologists might play in this ground-shift.

### *Humanities Computing: A New Paradigm for Textual Analysis*

Though word processors and computerized library catalogs have been nearly unavoidable for over a decade, the promises of multi-media technology and the Internet have only recently grabbed the attention of humanities scholars.<sup>2</sup> Encouraged by generous funding from foundations like the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Mellon Foundation, ambitious new university programs such as the Princeton-Rutgers Center for Electronic Texts in the Humanities (CETH) and the University of Virginia’s Electronic Text Center are enticing scholars, young and old, to utilize the wealth of resources offered by recent advances in optical scanning and global networking technologies. In addition to setting up web-pages and list-servers for undergraduate courses and scholars, the race to create, and in some cases sell, “electronic texts” is on.<sup>3</sup>

Thus far, projects have varied tremendously in scope, size, marketability, and scholarly content. Some are merely multi-media editions of old texts, which, in the case of a complex blockbuster like *Moby Dick*, can help familiarize the technically inept reader with the nuances of nautical jargon and biblical allusions. Other projects cater more specifically to advanced scholars, enhancing electronic compilations of texts with sophisticated search engines and multiple layers of indexing. “Electronic texts” are often indexed with “markers” that break the text down to its individual linguistic elements, identifying all nouns, infinitives, exclamations, quotations, chapter headings, and so on. Using a text-based search engine, one can examine every instance of a given word, phrase, or part of speech in an electronically indexed set of texts. Searching an electronic text is thus no more complicated than using a computerized library index, and many collections, such as the Complete Works of Jane Austen, Geoffrey Chaucer, and William Shakespeare, can be accessed for free on the World Wide Web.<sup>4</sup> You (or your students) could easily search the electronic edition of the Norton Anthology of English Poetry for every use of the phrase “to [blank], or not to [blank]”—guaranteed fodder for innumerable research papers and undergraduate essays to come. Recent research papers in this vein have ranged from analyses of Shakespeare’s

use of the word “bed” in Hamlet (Steele) to citation studies of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Taylor).

Surely a research tool as powerful and flexible as this is likely to spawn new forms of scholarship in the humanities, much as computer-assisted regression analysis has done in the social sciences. The question now is *how* humanities scholars will use them, and to what ends. Over a decade of computer-assisted textual analysis has produced only modest results, revealing the dangers, as well as the opportunities, offered by computer-assisted textual analysis. Most computerized textual analysis software packages include options for standard statistical tests, but it is as yet unclear what this means in a literary context. This has been an issue of much debate among humanities computing advocates and skeptics alike. One article (Winder 1996, n.p.) laments this fact, commenting, “*We still lack a clear statement of what the electronic text means for interpretation*” (author’s emphasis). Some leading critics, Stanley Fish (1980) among them, are firmly opposed to the quantification of literary analysis. They argue that it is inappropriate to apply the probabilistic assumptions of statistical analysis to something as systematic and stylized as literature. Others argue that computers are unsuitable for the analysis of single authors and texts, but that they can potentially be developed as a research tool for macro-cultural analysis of literary tropes, linguistic devices, and stylistic conventions particular to periods and genres.

Mark Olsen, Assistant Director of the ARTFL Project, an electronic text archive at the University of Chicago, laments (pp. 312-3), “Word frequencies and phonetic patterns, structures which can be easily identified by computer programs, tend to dominate computer-aided criticism, even though there is general dissatisfaction with the limited nature of the results of this kind of research.” The medium is still the message as far as recent scholarship goes. The consensus opinion among critics of humanities computing seems to be that publications in journals such as *Computers and the Humanities* let fancy new technology dominate their work to the detriment of substantive scholarship.

Humanists have available to them an enormous wealth of computing power and accessible texts but have yet to develop widely accepted methods for using them. Few practitioners of Humanities Computing appear properly trained in the use of quantitative methods, and those that do are at odds over its best application to the formal study of literature. Though papers in this vein are often filled with hyper-numerate charts and tables, standard measures of statistical significance are glossed over or outright ignored. Werner Gundersheimer, director of the Folger Shakespeare Library, comments (quoted in Goldfield, p. 366), “[at present] humanists don’t even have their learner’s permit, let alone their license and keys, for the technology machine.” To my knowledge, scholars in this emerging field of computer-assisted textual analysis have yet to account for the selection biases inherent in the production and canonization of literature. Appropriate means of applying conventional statistical measures to the analysis of literary texts is another issue which merits further attention.

Proponents of Humanities Computing openly admit that they have had very little effect on the discipline. One author comments, “Post-structuralists regard us as engaged in an in-

herently foolish enterprise, mistaking the modality of the text, absurdly unaware of the inadequacy of our categories, of all categories; feminists regard us as involved in the fetishizing of the machine, the toys for boys critique; Marxists disclose the political implications of the seemingly apolitical nature of our analysis” (Corns, cited in Goldfied 1993, p. 366). While the failure of Humanities Computing is probably related to a number of factors, including organizational resistance to change and technological obscurantism in the humanities, the greatest conceptual and methodological hurdle appears to be the lack of a clear research agenda. As Mark Olsen (p. 312) puts it, “By attempting to ask fairly traditional questions of traditional texts, computer applications in literary and language based research have failed to move from a curiosity to an important and respected position in these disciplines.” Proponents of humanities computing have yet to design projects that use computers as anything but a shortcut concatenation device and thus have failed to contribute to their respective disciplines in ways that justify the startup costs of turning to these new technologies as analytical tools.

Nonetheless, Humanities Computing may find a larger audience as it develops new and better methods for textual analysis and interpretation. It offers a powerful new research paradigm to whoever figures out how to package it right. As one critic of the new methods comments (Lusignan, 1985), “Computer-assisted research on texts will make no real progress unless it concentrates on perfecting models of analysis that are specific to the electronic texts.” If the idea of quantifying literary interpretation catches on—and I think it might—humanities scholars may want to progress beyond simple frequency charts and learn the basics of statistical analysis. The notion of searching for statistically significant trends across multiple cases is not unfamiliar to sociologists, and computer-assisted analysis may impact humanities scholarship in ways similar to those seen in the social sciences over the past three or four decades, changing the content of scholarly publications, the training of new scholars, and the broader aims of the discipline.

These new methods could very well initiate a renaissance in humanistic studies, changing the way scholars approach texts and the interpretations they make of them. If so, sociologists of culture are in an excellent position to help show them the way. Sociologists’ extensive experience in content analysis could be useful for literary scholars looking for new ways of analyzing old texts. Given the skill and foresight needed to design a survey, interview, or content analysis study, sociologists’ background in advanced research methods and project design could be quite useful. Social scientists’ well developed tradition of graduate training in quantitative methods might also be copied as a proven means of instituting new methods in the discipline. Perhaps sociologists of culture with the appropriate training should consider meeting with humanities faculty to discuss new methodology courses for “cultural studies,” interdisciplinary research conferences and seminars, and collaborative projects integrating linguistic and sociological analysis of electronic textual databases. Ultimately, one might envision a new multi-disciplinary synthesis of approaches under the larger rubric of cultural studies.

On the other hand, the development of computer-assisted analysis in the humanities could occur less smoothly. Con-

sider one especially bleak scenario (and I mention it so I can say “I told you so” if it really happens): Given the general ebb and flow of paradigms in literary studies and the recent fall-out of the Sokal (1996a, 1996b) controversy, some enterprising young Humanities Computer-er sounds a death-knell for deconstruction, initiating a quantitative Reign of Terror in literature departments across the country. The exacting and parsimonious nature of statistical analysis is the perfect foil to deconstructionists’ presentation of ‘the text’ as something “irreducibly plural, an endless play of signifiers which can never be finally nailed down to a single centre, essence, or meaning” (Eagleton 1983, p. 138). Though some in Humanities Computing circles embrace semiotic and post-structuralist approaches, traditional deconstructionists are likely to resist any such transformation. It is certainly possible that some statistical/literary whiz will incorporate content-analytic techniques into a deconstructionist perspective (though it might well consist of endless proofs of the null hypothesis that there is no consistent relationship between a given set of signifiers), but it seems far more likely that someone will strike upon the idea of using is an anti-deconstructionist weapon first.

The demise of deconstruction may be inevitable, but a violent backlash against traditional subjectivist techniques of textual analysis could have shocking repercussions on the humanities more generally. Such transformations are not unknown to literature departments, and the ensuing backlash often fails to benefit the discipline. While the rigors of epistemological reconfiguration may have institutional cachet for scholars looking for new ways to evaluate their peers, the old-world charm of the subjectivist disciplines may well be something worth preserving. Abandoning the interpretative tradition with which the literary disciplines were established could deeply damage their appeal to students and lay readers alike.

#### *Related Opportunities for Cultural Sociologists*

As you may have gathered by now, the computing revolution in humanities not only presents cultural sociologists with an opportunity to bridge the gap between disciplines but also offers sociologists of culture, knowledge, and organizations a chance for timely and innovative research.

At the most basic level, electronic collections of literary texts such as the English Poetry Database, the African-American Poetry Database, and the Victorian Women Writer’s Project offer carefully indexed, easily accessible data for content analyses. Using these electronic collections, sociologists can study the evolution and diffusion of certain stylistic tropes in specific literary genres, examine the development of social themes among an inter-connected circle of authors, or search collections for references to historically relevant actors, events, and objects. Furthermore, projects like the Dartmouth Dante Project match texts with subsequent collections of scholarly commentary, thus facilitating comparative studies of changing trends in textual interpretation and scholarly debate. While such endeavors would have been possible before the era of humanities computing, their new format makes them far more accessible to scholars, in both analytical and geographical terms.

Herein lies an unprecedented opportunity for humanists and social scientists to develop methods and paradigms in

cooperation with, rather than in opposition to, one another. Humanists' experience with close textual analysis might prove valuable for qualitative sociologists interested in improving their analysis of interview data, and sociologists' skills with data collection and quantitative analysis might be helpful to humanists interested in computer-assisted research. Furthermore, literary critics have yet to adequately theorize the role of gatekeepers in the institutionalization of literary genres, styles, themes, and language, an oversight which may handicap their efforts to produce analyses of period- and genre-specific styles using quantitative analyses of electronic texts (a developing field of study now called "Computational Stylistics"). Computerized compilations of selected period pieces may provide convenient samples for statistical analyses, but studies in this vein have yet to give serious consideration to the generalizability and selection bias of their "samples." This is an area where contemporary work in the sociology of culture could prove especially useful to students of literature, possibly breaking ground for new realms of inter-disciplinary communication between the humanities and social sciences.

As previously mentioned, the authoring and publication of electronic texts also represents an ongoing case-study in the production of knowledge. At the organizational level, Humanities Computing is a sub-discipline in progress, and its ultimate trajectory through the American higher education system is far from certain. With university resources dwindling, academic jobs (in the humanities) scarce or non-existent, and general enthusiasm about computers undiminished, literature departments may well be in for a wild ride. It might be worth sociologists' time to keep an eye on the institutional transformations which accompany this new trend in scholarly publishing. Analytically speaking, the future institutional trajectory of the humanities offers sociologists an excellent opportunity to study organizational and intellectual change; practically speaking, it may be a harbinger of larger institutional changes to come.

At a more macro-level, the computing revolution in literary studies will potentially redefine the notion of literature itself. Publishing electronic texts constitutes a radical step away from conventional textual production. Besides simply choosing which texts merit electronic re-publication, electronic "authors" must choose an appropriate edition, "mark up" the text (i.e. decide how it will be indexed), and format the final package to best serve the text's audience. In so doing, electronic authors are actively re-structuring literary texts for scholarly and lay consumption, hyper-text versions of conventional paper editions of texts. The Dartmouth Dante Project, for example, has assembled an electronic database which combines the text of Dante's classic trilogy with centuries worth of scholarly commentary on them, reinventing the classical notion of the Ur-text. Sociologists of culture, knowledge, and organizations would be well advised to consider these trends as a site for future research.

It might be equally as valuable to study the way new forms of publishing texts influence readers' reception of them. As the market for electronic texts develops (or fails to develop), new canons and reading audiences are likely to emerge among both lay and academic audiences. Future studies might col-

lect industry-wide statistics on publishing and purchasing trends across different media, conduct in-depth interviews with producers and consumers of electronic texts, or perform controlled laboratory experiments on individual cognition of various forms of literary publication.

### Conclusions

Returning briefly to the Sartre scenario discussed earlier, cultural sociology, cultural studies, and literary criticism may be stuck with one another for a some time to come, much like the characters in Sartre's *Huis clos*. Perhaps we can fare better than Sartre's miserable trio.

Those sympathetic to the troubles of the distinguished Sartre scholar may be shocked and dismayed at this potential turn of events. If, on the other hand, you are the least bit quantitatively or technologically inclined, you may empathize with the computer who, with the aid of the critic's page-turning and key-punching, was able to uncover the hidden secrets of Sartre's elusive *oeuvre*.

The rise of Humanities Computing marks a significant turn of events in the humanities, one in which sociologists of culture can potentially play a large role as both teachers and students. Some sociologists of culture may choose to feel threatened by the new trends in the humanities. Indeed, it is possible that humanists' work will begin to resemble that of some sociologists, diminishing the market value of both endeavors. Nonetheless, as the many fruitful collaborations between sociologists and historians already attest, interdisciplinary cooperation can be advantageous for both parties. In fact, one of the reasons for the recent success of the sociology of culture has been its ability to incorporate different methodologies and approaches. We can sit by and wait to see what happens, hoping that humanists don't start poaching on our turf, or we can join them in their effort to incorporate new methods and technologies into our shared tradition of cultural analysis. To borrow a phrase, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself"—except perhaps system crashes, hard-drive failures, and down-time on the Web.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The *Trésor de la Langue Française* is accessible on the Web at <<http://www.bib.uqam.ca/ARTFL/ARTFL.html>>. It contains an electronic compilation of approximately 2000 fifteenth through twentieth century French texts. Though offered only as an example of the capabilities of computer-assisted textual analysis, Fortier's paper criticizes several widely accepted interpretations of French Existentialist literature, including Frederic Jameson's (1961), *Sartre: The Origins of Style*, among others.

<sup>2</sup>Of course humanities scholars have been compiling concordances of texts for centuries—the first known textual concordance of the Vulgate Bible was in existence by 1247. The first computer-assisted concordance project began in 1947, the *Index Thomisticus*, a lexical approach to the philosophical and theological idea of inwardness in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas (CETH Summer Seminar, p3).

<sup>3</sup>On the other hand, an informal survey by H-NET, an Internet list-serve group devoted to humanities scholarship, finds that less than 20% of humanities professors have ever used the World Wide Web and fewer than 25% have accessed the on-line library catalog of schools other than their own (Jensen, p. 1).

<sup>4</sup>A good place to start a Web search for publicly-accessible electronic texts and further information on humanities computing is the Princeton-Rutgers Center for Electronic Texts in the Humanities' home page, at <<http://www.ceth.rutgers.edu>>.

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## Culture News

### New Publications by Members

- Nagel, Joane. *American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and the Resurgence of Identity and Culture*. Oxford University Press, 1996 (should be out in paperback soon).
- Laurel Richardson. 1997. *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life*. Rutgers University Press, recently issued in cloth and paper.

### Election System Centralized

The section elections are being run by the ASA this year, using a single centralized ballot. So no, your ballot didn't get lost. Another innovation is that for the first time we are electing a student representative on the section council.

## Cultural News Beyond the Section

The ASA Section on Race, Gender and Class (RGC) is working on an *Introduction to Sociology: Race, Gender and Class*. They would like us to know about and have a chance to be part of this project, they hope to build a "great working relationship" with the Culture Section. What they are most looking for is potential chapter authors for their book. Among other concerns, they are interested in treatments of how RGC intersects with such spheres as art, culture, knowledge, religion, and science. They are also open to other suggestions about what should be included. For more information, contact section chair Jean Belkhir at Queens College; phone 718/997-3070/3079; e-mail [jean\\_belkhir@qc.edu](mailto:jean_belkhir@qc.edu), or section council member Anna Karpathakis, Nebraska Wesleyan, phone 402/465-2425, e-mail [ak@NebrWesleyan.edu](mailto:ak@NebrWesleyan.edu). Please be in touch right away if you are interested, since the announced deadline for abstracts was April 30.

### Culture Section Refereed Roundtables (12:30 Mon.) Organizer: Mitchell Stevens, Hamilton College

This listing is partial and provisional. Check the section web site for full and final information, including paper titles.

1. *Who Are We? Cultural Dissension and Identity*: Phillip J. Gullion, UMass-Amherst; Amy Binder, Northwestern; Oz Almog, Emek Yezrael College; Ullica Segerstråle, Illinois Institute of Technology
2. *Serious Fun: Theme Parks and Fairs*: Aviad E. Raz, Harvard; Dianne Sykes, Texas A & M
3. *Collective Memory*: Mary D. Lagerwey, Western Michigan; Siobhan Kattago, New School; Daniel Levy, Columbia; Michael Lewis, Wesleyan (GA)
4. *Cultural Resources and Social Movement Mobilization*: Paul McLean, Chicago; Ann Mische, New School; Arlene Stein, Oregon
5. *Culture and Nation*: Janice Hill, York; Marc Ventresca and Xiaoli Yin, Northwestern
6. *Texts and Sex*: Judith Jackson Pomeroy, New Hampshire; Jessie Klein, CUNY Graduate Center
7. *Ethnographic Studies of Consumption*: Steve Derné, SUNY-Geneseo; Jennifer Smith, McMaster; Geoffrey M. Curran, Michigan
8. *Critics and Their Critics: Analyses of Critical Reception*: Grant Blank, Chicago; Susanne Janssen, Erasmus
9. *Social Studies of Music*: Linda J. Andes, UI-Chicago; Gene A. Fisher, UMass-Amherst; James I. Bowie, Arizona
10. *Cultural Boundaries and Trespasses*: Beth A. Eck, James Madison; Scott A. Appelrouth, NYU; Dana Greene, Michigan
11. *Critiques of Visual Culture*: Amir Marvasti and Chris Faircloth, Florida; Isabel Pinedo, Hunter; Virginia Husting, UI-Urbana
12. *Interpreting Artifacts*: James Dickinson, Rider; Barbara R. Walters Altizer
13. *Theorizing Technological Change*: Lauren Langman, Loyola; A. Javier Treviño, Wheaton College (MA)
14. *Theorizing Consumption*: Kent Grayson, London School of Economics and David Shulman, Northwestern; Sam Binkley, New School; Kees van Rees, Jeroen Vermunt, and Mark Verboord, Tilburg
15. *Theoretical Dilemmas in the Study of Culture*: Jeffrey A. Halley, UT-San Antonio; Robert D. Woodberry, UNC-Chapel Hill

## Conference Reports from Santa Barbara: "The Cultural Turn"

Richard A. Peterson, Vanderbilt

The Santa Barbara conference was excellently organized to show something of the richness of research and theorizing in cultural sociology these days, and the admixture of scholars from other disciplines suggested something of our parochialism as well. Though never highlighted, everyone at the UCSB conference seemed comfortable using the framework of "cultural sociology" rather than that of the "sociology of culture." Now if we could just convince our brethren who write Introductory Sociology texts of this shift in the discipline, real progress will have been made.

I was delighted that many of the conference participants were under 30, having come from as far away as Europe. But no new French theorists seem to have caught their fancy. Among the living theorists Foucault was probably mentioned most often, and there was considerably more of Durkheim than of Weber about the presentations. But rather than theorize, the young scholars preferred to talk about their own research and discuss their findings.

I was greatly impressed by the number and intellectual range of the cultural sociologists on the UCSB faculty. At the same time, many seemed to come to their own session and not participate in the rest of the conference. The school can become a national powerhouse of cultural work, I think, if they learn to build on each other's work, or at least train a generation of students who can bridge the gaps between orientations.

One of the participants from back East, speaking of the town of Santa Barbara said, "There isn't much here, is there?" It is too bad that, like most of the conferees, she didn't stay until Sunday and hear Harvey Molotch's analysis of the parallels between Ventura and Santa Barbara counties. Santa Barbara isn't just a naturally overgrown mission station. As Molotch vividly showed, the look, tone, and cultural characteristics of the town in which the university luxuriates so comfortably has been systematically fabricated from early in this century. If given early, his presentation could have served as a fitting introduction to Santa Barbara and powerful keynote for all our deliberations on how culture works.

The conference was a mix of plenary sessions, topical seminars, and author-meets-critics forums. Participants signed up beforehand for the topical sessions and book forums, and material was circulated before the meetings. Comments were also shared via e-mail so that participants could quickly get down to productive discussions on a topic of shared interest. It is a shame that the perspective-enunciating plenary session papers weren't circulated in advance, so that time together could be spent discussing the papers rather than being read to at length. Even so, there certainly was a great deal of energy in the audience for animated discussion, discussion that had to be cut short because of time constraints.

I for one would have liked to have heard more about the accomplishments of cultural sociology, and from those for whom culture is a "turn" I would like to have learned what have been the fruits of this turn, and where they are turning next. This said, I think the conference does mark a turn in cultural sociology—a turn West. I profoundly thank the UCSB organizers: John Mohr, Roger Friedland, and Rachel Luft.

*Eviatar Zerubavel, Rutgers*

I love to go every year to ASA meetings. But there is something about smaller conferences that is very hard to capture and reproduce in such a large context. The "Cultural Turn" conference at Santa Barbara was certainly one of the most memorable exemplars of this genre.

The conference was a successful experiment with a number of different formats ranging from large plenary symposia ("Cultural Analysis") and panels ("The Sacred") to small book seminars (Sherry Ortner's *Making Gender*) and discussion groups ("Boundaries"). Participants chose in advance the seminars and roundtables they would attend and sent one another by e-mail an abstract of their seminar-relevant interests, a most effective ice-breaker complementing the efforts of live facilitators.

Self-consciously multidisciplinary (an attempt to start a dialogue between cultural sociologists and people from "cultural studies"), the conference brought together sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers, historians, and various scholars from the humanities. That obviously forced presenters to try to achieve greater clarity, a necessity given how very little one can take for granted in

multidisciplinary discourse. (After all, even the roundtable-focus "Identity" means something very different within different professional subcultures.) My own favorites were a great roundtable on "narrative" and an electrifying keynote presentation by Nancy Fraser (a perfect embodiment of highly-disciplined multidisciplinary) on social justice.

The conference was wonderfully organized in one of this planet's loveliest towns by Roger Friedland and John Mohr with the great help of the sun, the ocean, and the flowers. A perfect retreat from a chilly February on the East Coast.

*Elisabeth Weber, Germanic, Slavic and Semitic Studies, UCSB*

The conference provided the opportunity for stimulating encounters and rich discussions. It also exposed what for me is a point of deep concern: the gap between disciplines for which the fact of language is one cultural phenomenon among others, and those for which it is the realm of the signifier that determines the unconscious, desire, the subject. In the sessions I attended, "evil," violence, injustice and apocalyptic sect behavior were discussed almost exclusively on the level of rational intentions and decisions. I was struck by the fact that proponents and critics of "cultural studies" did not seem to take into account what Freud, in the aftermath of World War I, identified as people's "discontent" with "culture" itself, nor Lacan's concept of desire whose erratic structure and imperative demands cannot be relegated to the merely "precodal" but must be seen as effects of the letter. In the case of the "Waco Armageddon" these effects revealed that none of the various actors was master of his or her actions, but rather all of them, as Wolf Kittler's response to Jeffrey Alexander and John Hall (a seminar on two of their essays, on the Gulf war and the Waco raid respectively) pointed out, "seemed to be blindly reading and rewriting an already existing script. For with regard to politics and religion we are not in the field of the exact, but in the realm of truth": in the realm of signifying systems, the signifier or the letter. The scholars I heard, sociologists and cultural theorists alike, seem to be more than reluctant to take that letter, or desire, marked by language, seriously in the analyses of their objects. Does the radicality of the psychoanalytic endeavor have a significant place in their methodologies?

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### Section Leaders

Officers: *chair* Robert Wuthnow, Princeton, wuthnow@princeton.edu; *past chair* Ann Swidler, UC-Berkeley, swidler@uclink2.berkeley.edu; *chair elect* Nicola Beisel, Northwestern, nbeisel@nwu.edu; *secretary-treasurer* Lyn Spillman, Lynette.PSpillman.1@nd.edu; *newsletter editor* Stephen Hart,

SUNY-Buffalo, sahart@acsu.buffalo.edu. The *council* consists of Craig Calhoun, NYU; Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, CUNY, cepstein@email.gc.cuny.edu; Andrea Press, UI-Urbana (Communications), press@ux1.cso.uiuc.edu; Magali Sarfatti-Larson, Temple, magalisl@temple.ocis.edu; Barry Schwartz, Georgia; and William Sewell, Chicago (Political Science). *Culture Online* is edited by Rita Melendex and William Holt, Yale, Rita.Melendez or William.Holt@yale.edu.

Convention Information—Culture Section Sessions (Nicola Beisel, Program Chair)

*Culture Day is Monday, August 11; all the sessions but one are on this day. The business meeting will be at 1:30, following the roundtables. Updates, details, and the all-important party information (plus the council meeting time and election results, for the truly committed) will be posted on the section web site, [|pantheon.cis.yale.edu/~rmelende/culture.online.html](http://pantheon.cis.yale.edu/~rmelende/culture.online.html). There are also regular sessions on cultural topics, including Sociology of the Body; Collective Memory; Sociology of Culture; Culture and Identity; Culture and Drinking Behavior; Sociology of Knowledge and Intellectuals; Mass Media; Religion; Sociology of Science; and Theories of Social and Cultural Capital.*

***The Return to Culture in American Sociology*** (10:30 Tues.)  
Culture in the Study of Organizations. Neil Fligstein, UC–Berkeley  
Culture and Social Movements. William Gamson, Boston College  
Culture and the Sociology of Law. Susan Silbey, Wellesley  
Culture in American Social Science. William H. Sewell, Jr, Chicago  
Comment: Wendy Espeland, Northwestern. Presider: Orville Lee, Northwestern. Organizer: Nicola Beisel, Northwestern

***The Sociology of Art*** (2:30 Monday)  
Cultural Catapult: A Simmelian Leap at Bourdieu’s Model. Julia S. Ardery, Appalachian Center, Univ. of Kentucky  
The Power of Style and Styles of Power. Albert Bergesen, Arizona  
Notes on an Atlantic City Cockfight: Categorical Crises from Fine Art to Barbie. Steven C. Dubin, SUNY–Purchase  
Artistic Definition in a Postmodern Age: Formalism, Aesthetics, and the Expansion of Value. Karin E. Peterson and Sarah M. Corse, Virginia  
Commentator: Vera L. Zolberg, New School. Presider and Organizer: Anne Bowler, Delaware

***Culture, Power, and Public Policy*** (10:30 Monday)  
The Cultural Boycott of South Africa: Did it Bring About Political Change? Zengie A. Mangaliso, Westfield State

Paths to Power: Religious Culture in the Public Realm. Richard L. Wood, New Mexico  
Economic Statistics as Symbolic Violence: The Politics of National Income Accounts. Daniel Breslau, Tel Aviv University  
Social Policy Discourse and the Institutionalization of Poverty. Ira Silver, Northwestern  
Presider and Discussant: Lyn Spillman, Notre Dame. Organizer: Orville Lee, Northwestern

***Culture, Politics, Policies, Culture Wars*** (4:30 Monday)  
The Cultures of Politics: The Model of the Standoff. Robin Wagner-Pacifici, Swarthmore  
Does “the Public” Think Politically? A Search for “Deep Structures” in Everyday Political Thought. Magali Sarfatti Larson, Temple  
Changes in the Institutional Framework of Cultural Production in Contemporary China: An Institutional Analysis. Miaoqing Zhu, Harvard  
Uzbekistan My Homeland: Culture Ward in a Post-Soviet State. Laura L. Adams, UC–Berkeley  
Moderator: Nancy Weiss Hanrahan, George Mason.  
Presider: Vera L. Zolberg, New School. Organizers: Judith H. Balfe, Staten Island, CUNY, and Vera L. Zolberg

***New Directions in Cultural Approaches to Historical Analysis*** (8:30 Monday)  
Cultural Analysis and Moral Discourse: Episodes, Continuities and Transformations. Sonya Rose, Michigan  
Material Culture Studies and Historical Sociology. Chandra Mukerji and Patrick Carroll, UC–San Diego  
The Textual Dynamics of Memory: Continuities and Departures in German Commemoration of May 8th, 1945. Jeffrey K. Olick, Columbia  
The Social Construction of the “Informed Citizen.” Michael Schudson, UC–San Diego  
Discussion: Nicola Beisel, Northwestern. Presider: Lyn Spillman, Notre Dame. Organizer: John Mohr, UC–Santa Barbara