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Culture

A Message from the Chair

Our Nixon:
The Presidency in a Culture of Ridicule

Barry Schwartz
University of Georgia

"The emblem is not merely a convenient process for clarifying the sentiment society has of itself; it also serves to create this sentiment; it is one of its constituent elements"(Durkheim 1915[1965]: 262). The American presidency, in Durkheim's sense, is the emblem of American political life. As the millennium election season approaches and absorbs an increasing portion of the nation's attention, three questions direct our thinking about presidential reputation. How are presidential reputations formed? What functions do they serve? What values do they express?

My interest in President Richard Nixon's reputation began when Lori Holyfield and I (1998) analyzed the media coverage of his funeral. The viciousness, often bordering on obscenity, of so much of the newspaper and magazine commentary, growing during his funeral rites and peaking on the day of his burial, impressed me more than any other aspect of the occasion. Something was in the air that Nixon's presidential conduct could not explain. I want to speculate on why Nixon remains so thoroughly disdained by so many and, above all, why so many journalists and social scientists characterize him in ways that conform more to melodrama than investigation.

Melodrama is a story based on a romantic plot and developed sensationally with constant appeal to the emotions and little regard for convincing motivation. Melodrama captivates an audience by the awakening, no

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Space, Place and Culture Establishing a New Network

William G. Holt, III
Emory University

Mind takes form in the city; and in turn, urban forms condition mind. For space, no less than time, is artfully reorganized in cities: in boundary lines and silhouettes, in the fixing of horizontal planes and vertical peaks, in utilizing or denying the natural site, the city records the attitude of a culture and an epoch to the fundamental facts of its existence.

(Lewis Mumford: The Culture of Cities, p. 4)

Studies of space and place originated with urbanists such as Lewis Mumford who provided early sociological links between space, place, and culture through his work on world cities. Interests in these issues continued primarily in the areas of architecture, design, and urban studies both in academic and professional pursuits. Lynch's (1960) use of cognitive mapping in the 1950's highlighted the impact of race and class on individual's perceptions of urban environments. In the 1960's, Jacob's (1961) work challenged the dominant attitudes in planing and design toward ur-

Specifying "The Worst": Issues in Conceptualization

Karen A. Cerulo
Rutgers University

In April, the news was ablaze with stories of the Elian Gonzalez raid. Like many, I followed the media coverage, captivated by the "pro" and "con" framing of this child's seemingly endless ordeal. Traveling from television to newspaper to magazine, I eventually arrived at George Will's contribution to the debate. There, I found what, for me, was an utterly gripping statement. In his usual tone of blustering indignation, Will declared Janet Reno to be "the worst" attorney general in American history (Will 2000). "The worst" . . . Wow! . . . tough words, even for George Will.

matter how, of strong feelings of pity, horror, or joy (Thrall, Hibbard, and Holman 1960:81). Melodramatic characters are one-dimensional types--morally either good or evil. Applied to public figures, melodrama makes reputation "sticky" (Fine 1999), sedimenting it in the collective consciousness and immunizing it against mitigating evidence.

Greatness and evil, as Gary Fine (1996) has observed, may be objectively established but cannot be consequential until successfully identified by "reputational entrepreneurs." Taking Fine's point a step further, I wish to explain why the reputational enterprise must itself be contextualized and understood. In principle, Richard Nixon can be imagined not only as an embodiment of evil but also as a tragic figure whose personal flaws offset his accomplishments. In fact, Nixon's tragic image rings weakly, and this weakness cannot be explained until we know how reputational enterprise works.

Reputational enterprise makes culture tangible, bringing its values into the open where they can be seen and contemplated. The critical, deconstructive values of our era, I submit, magnify Richard Nixon's mistakes and diminish his achievements. True, Nixon's establishing regular relations with China and improving relations with the Soviet Union are acknowledged, but his forming of even-handed Middle East policies, even while facing down the Soviet Union and supplying Israel directly during its perilous Yom Kippur War (when every European nation denied the U.S. access to its airfields) has been forgotten.

Richard Nixon's domestic achievements contribute almost nothing to his place in American memory. In the context of severe economic problems, most acute during his second term in office (inflation, an oil embargo, and a weakening stock market), Nixon broke with conservative tradition by establishing the Environmental Protection Agency, initiating legislation to control noise, protecting scenic rivers, expanding national parks, improving water quality, maintaining coastlines, and prohibiting ocean pollution.

Nixon had reduced and eliminated many of Lyndon B. Johnson's programs, but his goal was to fine-tune, not abolish, the Great Society. He doubled the food stamp program from 340 million to 640 million during his very first year in office, and from 1970 to the end of his presidency he tripled Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Nixon's total social service budget grew from 55 billion dollars in 1970 to 132 billion dollars in 1974, and while increasing the Social Security tax he also increased domestic spending generally from 28 to 40 percent of the gross national product while decreasing defense spending from 40 to 26 percent. When the economy turned downward, he rejected advice to allow the market to regulate itself and instituted wage and price controls

Nixon also instituted federal supports for elementary and secondary education, quadrupled federal support for the arts, established the National Student Loan Association for students from low income families, the Career Education Program for community colleges, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Nixon gave native Americans unprecedented assistance--from the establishment of legal rights and favorable economic legislation to material relief. In addition, he strengthened the EEOA and established strong measures against school segregation and sex discrimination. Set-aside contracts for minority businesses rose from 8 million dollars in 1969 to 243 million in 1972. Grants, loans, and guarantees increased during this same period from 69 to 472 million (for documentation, see Schwartz and Holyfield 1998). Richard Nixon's critics assert that his decent deeds were self-interested and cynically motivated. I cannot know Nixon's *thoughts,* but I know that Nixon's *discourse,* including that which is dramatically preserved on tape, was contradicted more often than affirmed by Nixon's *practices.*

The reasons Nixon's iniquities carry so much more weight than his achievements seem to reside in the cultural circumstances of his presidency and retirement. He was elected in November, 1968, the zenith of the Cold War and peak of American political disillusionment, which is why his reputation was not the era's sole casualty. During 1960's to the turn of the century, all presidential prestige ratings, from George Washington through Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt to Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy, fell sharply and never recovered.

The reduction of Nixon's reputation was precipitated by Watergate but hastened by the erosion of "foundational" principles--pre-given values, beliefs, and norms assumed true beyond mere demonstration. Erosion was manifest not only in diminished admiration for elected officials, including presidents, but also in dramatically weakened trust of national institutions and weakened attachment to the nation. "Our case is astounding," wrote Paul Goodman (1969). "For the first time in recorded history, the mention of country, community, place has lost its power to animate" (p.97). Nixon-hatred is symptomatic of this loss of political self-confidence and the declining dignity of America's political institutions.

Late twentieth-century inclusive forces also contribute to the presidency's decline. The same conditions that blurred the line between dominant and minority communities eroded the distinction between great and ordinary people. "What is more newsworthy than information contradicting the public image, or demonstrating at last that the 'hero' is, after all, 'just like us,' or worse?" (Gergen 1991: 202-6). In 1968, the year Nixon was elected president, R.J. Lifton observed that absurdity and mockery had become part of the post-World War II culture. The contemporary American takes nothing seriously; "every-

thing he touches he mocks"; everything, present and past, he ridicules (1968:22). The stature of Washington, Lincoln, Wilson, and Franklin Roosevelt was once morally imposing, Robert Nisbet (1975) said, "but great as these individuals were, they had audiences of greatness, that is, individuals in large number still capable of being enchanted. How, in all truth, in an age when parody, self-parody, and caricature is the best we have in literature, could any of the above names rise to greatness? . . . The instinct to mock the great, the good, and the wise is built into this age" (pp. 109-110). Richard Nixon was neither great nor good nor wise. His imperfections, however, not only led him to commit impeachable offenses but also made him the preferred target in a culture of deconstruction and ridicule. The brutal intensity of Nixon-hatred must, at long last, be recognized and understood.

Reputational enterprise is a pairing process that aligns the character and achievements of the man with the ideals of the culture. Showing how culture promotes discursive forms that destroy rather than build prestige, the Nixon case extends Gary Fine's analysis of reputational enterprise. I suspect, however, that many students of reputational enterprise are eager to become entrepreneurs themselves. Their embarrassingly uniform leaning to the left renders anti-Nixon bias unsurprising, but the extent and emotional intensity of this bias is troubling because it demonstrates how easily our chosen field, while claiming to be a sheltering canopy of reason, can be shaped by the very culture it purports to understand.

Ironically, the cynicism that undermines the dignity of the presidency in the late twentieth-century is driven by a late nineteenth-century melodramatic attitude. Richard Nixon was, in truth, "one of us" (Wicker 1991), but we have

replaced the real man possessed by good and evil with a fictional villain, utterly and irredeemably vile. The anomaly makes for interesting tabloid journalism but bad sociology.

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Holt: Space, Place and Culture, continued

ban renewal and modern architecture that were destroying local neighborhoods. Her research brought gender and community movements into debates on urban space. Boyer (1983) examined the roles of institutions involved in attempts to controll spaces through the city planning process.

Over past decade there has been a renewed interest of space and place issues both inside and out of its traditional area of urbanism. Postmodern urbanism flourished after Lefebvre's (1991) work on the production of space and its social representations. He illustrated how commanding space results in social control. Drawing from heavily from Lefebvre, Harvey (1989) continued this emphasis on space in his argument on postmodernity. Foucault showed how space is a metaphor for loci of power typically constraining but at times liberating processes of becoming (p. 213) from the imprisonment of self-repression and desire by state power. Drawing on the geography of Los Angeles, Soja (1989) argued for the analysis of space as well as history and time in social theory.

Sociologists have also begun to re-examine spatial issues.

Logan and Molotch (1987) showed land has not only an economic "exchange" value but also an "use" value associated with individual and collective memories of a property. Zukin (1991) compared built environments, studying landscapes diverse as an industrial plant, suburban shopping district and Disney World. Mukerji's (1997) examination of Versailles illustrated the links between nation building and landscape architecture.

With a myriad of interests in space and place, informal discussions grew among sociologists about establishing a new Space & Place network within the Culture Section. Those of us concerned with these issues work on the boundaries of many different disciplines -- from architecture and urban design to geography, political science, and economics. Sociology permits us to examine all these factors that are typically segregated in other disciplines. Sociology also provides frameworks for analyzing spatial issues in terms of class, race, gender and sexuality. We should also consider spatial issues at all levels from micro-studies to regional level work and cross-national perceptions of space. We should extend

existing geopolitical spatial debates to examine identity construction around specific places. We should expand work on control and dominance, examining those organizations and institutions responsible for controlling these spaces. Spatial research also opens new possibilities for studies concerning time and collective memory issues.

As coordinator of the Space & Place network, I hope we will create a forum for lively debate. In August, the Space & Place network will participate in the Culture Section's Conference at George Mason University. As the ASA returns to Washington, D.C. for our annual convention in August, the national capital provides us an opportunity to examine how the planning process for the national capital reveals some of these spatial issues. As an urban planner who was part of the National Capital Planning Commission's design team for the 2050 monumental Core Plan, I think the evolution of the National Mall embodies many of the issues we hope to address in the Space & Place network.

Washington, D.C.: Planning America's National Capital

Space is by no means an empty void. As a space becomes a place, this transformation expresses a society's culture shaping geographic, economic, political, and temporal influences on interrelationships among race, class, and gender. In this brief account of the planning and design of Washington, D.C. we see how these elements influence the creation of place from space.

Weintraub (1995) discusses four ways of distinguishing public and private spaces. The liberal/economist model separates space between the market and state administration. The republican virtue model introduces political community and citizenship as a public space separate from both market and state. A third model views the public sphere as fluid sociability. The fourth model takes a feminist approach to space by separating the public as market and the private as family.

In my work, I define place as a space that has been given specific meaning by members of that culture who set this space apart as being special. Place may have a specific meaning for an individual who has ties to the place from personal experience, or it may represent a collective memory for a group or entire culture. The interpretation of this place may change over time as we see in the planning for Washington, D.C.

The District of Columbia is a planned city. Early on, the Continental congress realized the need for a permanent national capital and even examined potential sites along the Delaware river. Between 1783 and 1789, federal legislators searched for an appropriate location for the new nation's capital. Congress selected a ten-mile square site (the maximum size of land they could take as prescribed by the *Constitution*) in the Potomac River basin, edging out Philadelphia and an undeveloped site along the Delaware River near Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania.

From the start of Washington, D.C.'s creation, the space chosen for the federal district was to be a symbolic place. Geographically, the Potomac location was the midpoint between the thirteen northern and southern states. The site provided navigational East Coast seaport access as well as being near Appalachian passes connecting the city with new northwest territories targeted for national expansion. Businessmen saw an opportunity to connect Chesapeake Bay with the Ohio River. The city, originally only a small portion of the federal district, was to be divided and sold for real estate speculation in order to finance the federal building construction. Politically, Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson brokered an agreement between norther financial interests and southern regional interests. Temporally, the new capital's design would embody the prevailing cultural beliefs of the new democracy. The design draws from classical Greek and Roman civilization for inspiration. The plan was designed in a period when the 18th Century idea of democracy only included white male landowners. Women and people of color would not be physically or symbolically represented here until the 20th century.

After selecting the exact place for the new capital city, George Washington picked Pierre Charles L'Enfant to draw plans for the city. L'Enfant was a French native who served in the Continental Army and became a noted New York architect. Washington's choice of L'Enfant represented a desire to break with the English colonialism. This break was more than just architectural. L'Enfant would depart from the small cobblestone streets and red brick structures of cities like Annapolis and Savannah. He also forged a symbolic tie to the French nation who supported the Americans against the English. The L'Enfant Plan included a grid street system overlaid with broad Parisian inspired avenues creating interesting circles, squares, and rounds where the two systems intersected (NCPC 1977).

In L'Enfant's plan we see the cultural influences on his design choices. During this period engineering, architecture and landscape design had not separated into distinct professions. L'Enfant used the space's geography— rolling hills, streams, and the rivers to frame the new symbolic place as well as developing a canal system that would serve dual functions for transport and sewage. Because his planned city would be subdivided for real estate speculation, L'Enfant's avenues over a traditional street grid opened more land for future development. The ten-mile square city would dwarf America's largest cities of this period such as New York, Boston, and Charleston. The design harkened to the origins of classical western civilization with its obvious Greek and Roman designs. This pleased the American elites who drew on these civilization's concepts of democracy.

While President Washington and Congress planned a grand world capital, they did not foresee that Washington, D.C. would still see little development as the District entered the 20th Century. The real estate plans to finance federal construction collapsed due to overspeculation. America's major business centers emerged in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. Not foreseeing Washington

ever growing into a ten-mile square city, Congress returned the Virginia portion of the district. During the 19th century, Congress approved numerous smaller plans with more modest ambitions than L'Enfant's. Carriage paths and overgrown shrubs covered the National Mall. National leaders pushed for new memorials and monuments to join the existing Washington Monument obelisk and the Smithsonian museum both started in the 1840's. Also, during the 19th century people began building lives and personal histories in Washington developing their own memories of this new city (Eldredge 1975).

Although the nation's capital growth was slow, the country was emerging as a world power. The 1893 World's Colombian Exposition in Chicago became the catalyst for the next major plan for Washington, D.C. Daniel Burham's White City on Lake Michigan, started the City Beautiful movement in the United States. City leaders developed plans for large municipal and cultural facilities design in neoclassical style and situated in large municipal park settings. Other influences included Henry Thoreau's return to nature movement as well as the British Garden Town movement of the mid-1800's. The City Beautiful movement was a reaction against the gritty and noisy polluted cities created by the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century.

The 1901 McMillan Plan for the nation's capital reflects influences from the City beautiful movement. Senator James McMillan organized a well-known team of architectures and designers included Daniel Burnham, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., and Charles McKim. All had ties to Harvard University and shared common ties to the Republican Party. Their plan would guide Washington for the next century.

The McMillan Plan provides us with the basis for the modern National Mall. This plan resulted in the creation of the Smithsonian Museum complex along The Mall with open greenswards replacing the overgrown carriage paths. The plan also resulted in the creation of the Tidal Basin with sites for what would become the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials. The McMillan Plan retained the classic Greek and Roman influences. The plan also borrowed heavily from Parisian design with the Mall resembling the Champs Elysees and Union Square at the base of the Capital similar in design to the Place de la Concorde.

The McMillan Plan geographically tried to tie the city back to the Potomac and to reclaim the Anacostia River flats as well as reestablish L'Enfant's original views and vistas. The plan created places for more monuments and memorials. Union Square at the Capitol's base recognized the preservation of the country after the Civil War by memorializing major Union War heroes. The plan also encourage growth of the Smithsonian Museum complex which emerged as the showcase for American culture.

Neither the McMillan Commission nor L'Enfant could have envisioned the changes to Washington, D.C. in the 20th century. The city grew enormously due to the country's involvement in both World Wars. The McMillan Plan for greenswards between the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial were placed on hold as the government covered this area with temporary war offices in the 1910's. By the 1960's Washington, D.C. emerged as one of the country's largest metropolitan areas, stretching from Baltimore to Richmond and from the Chesapeake Bay to the Appalachian Mountains in West Virginia. In the 1970's local residents won the right to limited self-government through home rule provisions by Congress. The city represented the nation's racial divide—eventually exploding into riots in the mid-1960's. As a separate district surrounded by Virginia and Maryland suburbs, the now majority African American city was still beholden to the Congress for funding but only had symbolic representation in the House of Representatives and Senate.

In a century that saw the United States involved in two World Wars, Korea and Vietnam as well as experience the Suffrage Movement, Civil Rights Movement, and the ethnic pride movement, symbolic representations of American individuals, events, and society were changing. The National Mall became a backdrop for protests and marches from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *I Have a Dream* speech to abortion protests to homeless rights advocates living in Lafayette Park across from the White House. Other news events include the AIDS Quilt Project and the Million Man march.

At the same time a complex system of institutions and organizations including the National Capital Planning Commission, the Commission of Fine Arts, and the National Capital Memorial Commission emerged. These organizations, formed by legislative authority, created a triumvirate making recommendations and design suggestions for all new memorials on General Service Administration (GSA) and National Parks Service (NPS) properties in the National Capital region. By 1990 Congress approved authorization for over 200 monuments and memorials for this region. Congress charged the National Capital Planning Commission to develop a plan for the national capital that would take the city into the 21st Century. The Monumental Core/ 2050 Plan was the outcome.

America's cultural attitudes by the 1990's are drastically different than those of the 1790's. There is a growing movement to recognition of previously excluded groups and individuals. Some of these efforts include memorials to the black soldiers of American Revolution and Benjamin Banneker, L'Enfant's African-American surveyor. Others include a World War II memorial to Japanese War Veterans and American Citizens placed in interment camps. Controversies swirled around Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial—a drastic departure from the classically inspired work dominating the city. This abstract/non-representational memorial constantly received additions as veteran's groups added a flag and statue. Later, female veterans added another statue since they were excluded from the all-male first statue. The physically challenged wanted the memorial to Franklin Roosevelt to depict the President with his physical handicap. Everyday citizens challenged depictions in museums such as the Smithsonian's controversial Enola Gay exhibit. Congress authorized the last open site on the National Mall for the Museum of the American Indian. Private muse-

(Holt, continued)

ums emerged such as Holocaust Museum, with Congressional authorization.

The Monumental Core/2050 Plan addresses these modern day considerations. The planning commissions as well as staffs now include women and people of color but with little class diversity. The plan reestablishes L'Enfant's desire to represent the three branches of government in a symbolic form by proposing a new Supreme Court site. The plan continues to open the city to the waterfronts with sites for new memorials along the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers. The plan expands potential memorial sites into the District beyond the federal city while recognizing existing neighborhoods.

Sociological examinations of urban planning activities present but one possibility for examinations of space and place. In this brief overview of the planning for Washington, D.C., many issues and topics are interrelated. Politics, economics, and geography all combine in this planned space as well as issues of race, class, and gender. As part of my larger examination of the National Capital Planning Commission, I pursue these issues in greater detail. As the coordinator of the new Space & Place network, I encourage all of you who are interested in these issues to join us at the ASA Culture Section conference in August where we will engage in a lively debate.

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Cerulo: Specifying "The Worst," continued

Is Janet Reno "the worst" of U.S. attorneys general? I wondered. I might be tempted to nominate John Mitchell or Richard Kleindienst for the notable ranking of worst. After all, attorneys general aren't supposed to commit felonies, right? Or perhaps Edward Meese? While never convicted of a crime, Meese was named by Independent Council Lawrence Walsh as a key player in the Iran-contra scandal. According to Walsh, Meese "departed from standard investigating techniques," thus contributing to the secret sale of weapons and the subsequent cover up (Walsh 1993). Now, I can't say I'm an avid fan of Janet Reno. But when it comes to evaluating U.S. attorneys general, is overzealous law enforcement significantly worse than blatant lawbreaking?

As I pondered the question, I realized that something beyond Janet Reno was at the center of my reflection. George Will's statement raised a broader issue in my mind. Specifically, Will's ranking of Janet Reno directed my attention to the very concept of "the worst." What exactly does this classification really mean?

Contemporary American society suffers no shortage of performance standards and assessment criteria. Each day, we encounter a host of scales and measures said to identify the finest and the poorest, "the best" and "the worst" of people, places, actions, and things. In the U.S., we grade everything from students to steaks, wines to web sites, movies to mutual funds to minivans. We eagerly rank the relative impact of world leaders, world cup contenders, and world class storms. In creating these rankings, we claim to maintain a dual focus - to consider both ends of the perfor-

mance scale. But, despite our tireless efforts to delineate both "the best" and "the worst" of people, places, actions, and things, I would argue that the idea of "the worst" remains a hazy concept at best.

What makes "the worst" such a slippery notion? Several factors contribute to this conceptual dilemma. First, "the worst" of people, places, actions, and things often lack the visibility of "the best." Indeed, standard cultural practices systematically foreground "the best," while just as systematically relegating "the worst" to the background of collective attentions. For example, we create official titles and roles to designate "the best" – i.e. the class valedictorian, the poet laureate, or the master craftsperson. We create special symbols to honor "the best;" gold medals and blue ribbons decorate "the best" athletes, cooks, or livestock in a competition; a spray of roses marks the year's "best" beauty queens, singers, or winning race horses. Coveted awards such as the Nobel, the Pulitzer, or the Oscar denote "the best" performances of the year. And top ten lists remind us of an era's best songs, books, restaurants, fads, etc. To be sure, American culture spotlights "the best" with some degree of vigor. But what of "the worst"? How often are "the worst" of people, places, actions and things so visibly engaged? . . . "And now, presenting the Oscar for the worst performance of the year by an actor in a supporting role . . ." It will never happen. "The last place horse is now approaching the loser's circle . . ." Not likely. To be sure, you may have read a few "ten worst" lists this year, perhaps Blackwell's "Ten Worst Dressed" list or David Spohn's "Worst of the Web" list.[1] But such lists represent a fraction of any year's "ten best" offerings. And don't search this fall's issue of *Culture* for the section's "Worst Book Award!" In contemporary American culture, our worst performers are often our best-kept secrets.[2]

The standards for measuring "the best" versus "the worst" are also strikingly different. While assessing "the best" generally involves highly rigorous criteria, identifying "the worst" typically involves far less precision. Consider, for example, the absolute best grade we can bestow on our students. An A+ is often reserved for students who master 98-100% of the material at hand; it is a mark that designates quality in highly specific terms. Now contrast the A+ with "the worst" grade of the academic repertoire. An F can signify a mastery of anywhere from 0-50% of material! Thus in the classroom, "the worst" can run the gambit from "clueless" to "halfway there."

Different levels of precision also characterize the rankings of "the best" and "the worst" consumer goods and services. "The best" entities typically stand alone; they are clearly distinct from their nearest competitors. In contrast, "the worst" of goods and services are often members of a cluster. In such cases, no single entity necessarily commands the position of "the worst." Table 1 helps to illustrate the distinctions I am describing. The table displays summary qual-

ity ratings for the fifteen largest e-brokers operating in 1999. (Ratings were derived from data collected in an online survey.)

Table 1: Summary Satisfaction Scores for the 15 Largest E-Brokers of 1999.

Broker	Level of Satisfaction
Charles Schwab	20
National Discount	18.5
DLJ Direct	17.5
Suretrade	17
Datek Online	16.5
E*Trade	16
Fidelity	15.5
TD Waterhouse	15
Quick & Reilly	14.5
ScoTTrade	14
Discover	14
A.B. Watley	13
Ameritrade	13
Web Street Securities	11.5
Brown & Co.	11.5

(Data taken from <http://www.money.com/money/broker/>, 5/9/00)

Charles Schwab, ranked "the best" of online brokers, displays a summary score of 20. Note that this score is unique. It is also significantly higher than that of its nearest competitor, National Discount. Now contrast the precision of this ranking with that surrounding the classification of "the worst" broker in the survey. Interestingly, the survey cannot identify a single "worst" broker. Two firms, Brown and Co. and Web Street Securities are tied for this dreaded position. Further, the table suggests that "bad" quality is apparently more difficult to specify than "good" or "average" quality. While each of the survey's top nine brokers display unique ratings, each of the survey's bottom six brokers is tied with a competitor for its position.[3]

The pattern displayed in this money.com survey is not unique. Indeed, I reviewed the 29 products rated in the May and June 2000 issues of *Consumer Reports*. While the magazine specified a single "best" product in 83% of these cases, they specified a single "worst" product in only 65% of cases. Over a third of the reports tied two or more products for the designation of "the worst" consumer good.

The lack of precision that characterizes ratings of "the worst" may be due, in part, to the very definition of the category. While "the worst" suggests a unique, exclusive designation, the category is often defined or operationalized as the opposite of "the best." A recent survey sponsored by the *National Mental Health Association* illustrates the point. This survey, entitled "Best & Worst Practices in Private Sector Managed Mental Healthcare," was designed to identify the finest versus the poorest care facilities in the nation.

(Cerulo, continued)

According to the report's methodology section, forty-five criteria were used to gauge "the best" of private sector care. Consider the first three of these criteria:

Best Practices Involve:

1. Truly making the level-of-care criteria available to the public.

2. Including detailed bibliographies and literature reviews.

3. Basing criteria on the American Psychiatric Association's DSM IV and/or practice guidelines developed by the APA and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.

Now compare these criteria with those established for evaluating "the worst" of private sector care. In so doing, one can see that "the worst" was measured simply by referring to the opposite of "best practices" criteria. Note the first three entries on the "worst care" criteria list:

Worst Practices Involve:

1. Limiting public access to the level-of-care criteria.

2. Failing to including detailed bibliographies and literature reviews.

3. Failing to reference the DSM IV and/or practice guidelines developed by the APA and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.[4]

By comparing the measures of best and worst care, one can see that considerable effort was taken to establish the parameters of "the best." "The worst," however, was treated as a default category. It was defined as the absence of positive qualities rather than the presence of negative qualities. In many ways, "the worst" care became that which was not "best."

In considering the slipperiness of "the worst" as a concept, the consequences of the label prove relevant as well. Given that "the best" and "the worst" are said to signify polar opposites, we might expect that these rankings would lead to opposite outcomes. Often, however, this is not the case. To be sure, acquiring the title of "best" can open doors and afford opportunities for further advancement and great reward. Winning an Oscar, for example, significantly increases an actor's salary per picture or the types of parts for which she/he is considered. Being voted an "all star" wins an athlete significant salary bonuses. In academic circles, awards for the year's "best book" or "best article" contribute powerfully to one's chances for promotion or merit increase. In each of these examples, being "the best" affords one with an outcome not available to those of lesser quality. Contrast this pattern with the outcomes afforded to those identified as "the worst." Interestingly, this designation often elicits outcomes no different than those bestowed on the simply "bad." Returning to the topic of grades, for example, one finds that the consequences for receiving an F are sometimes no different than those exacted for receiving a D or D-. In some institutions, both grades can place a

student on academic probation. Similarly, in some institutions both Fs and Ds can result in no credit towards one major or in no credit for a course. Thus while an F is defined as a worse grade than a D, both grades can result in identical outcomes. At some institutions, earning "the worst" available grade can carry no distinct consequence.

Indistinct outcomes also apply in comparisons of "the worst" versus simply "bad" crimes. Consider, for example, that some refer to infamous figures such as Timothy McVeigh (Oklahoma City Bombing) or Jeffrey Dahmer (Serial Killer and Cannibal) as "the worst" of criminal offenders. Many suggest that both the magnitude and nature of these men's actions make them more heinous than other murderers. However, the designation of "worst" resulted in no special consequences for these men. These individuals received no worse punishment than those convicted of fewer counts of murder or murders of a less shocking nature. Their terms and conditions of incarceration were no different than those of any other homicide perpetrator. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Americans typically contest efforts to distinguish "the worst" in the eyes of the law. For example, while most Americans agree that hate crimes are especially heinous in nature, few support legal initiatives to enhance punishments for such crimes (United States Sentencing Commission 1997). Currently, federal law allows for such sentence enhancements via the "Hate Crimes Sentencing Enhancement Act of 1994." However, few states have followed the federal government's lead. At this writing, only four of the fifty states allow juries or judges to enhance sentences for hate crimes.

Some of the slipperiness that plagues the concept of "worst" may result from cultural values as well. To be sure, American culture discourages us from focusing on "the worst" of people, places, actions and things. Remember the old song? . . .

> ♪♪ You've got to acc-en-tu-ate the positive
> E- li-mi-nate the negative . . . ♪♪

The cultural message is clear. Americans are encouraged to "look for the silver lining" and "make lemonade out of the lemons of life." Focusing on "the worst" is viewed as destructive and self-defeating, and those who do so are negatively labeled as "Sad Sacks," "Sourpusses" or "Wet Blankets."

As a strategy, diverting attention from "the worst" is more than a life lesson for individuals. The tactic is also an institutionalized method of collective narrative construction. Note, for example, that while "the best" and "the worst" of people, places, actions and things contribute equally to a nation's history,[5] "the worst" of these entities are often de-emphasized in the construction of collective narratives. So strong is this norm, that attempts to feature "the worst" of an era can meet with routine resistance. Recent editorial decisions at *Time* magazine help to illustrate such resistance. In 1999, the editors at *Time* initiated a search for the "Person of the Century." According to *Time*, the "Person of the Century" should be an individual who, "for better or worse,

most influenced the course of history over the past 100 years."[6] Adolf Hitler was among those considered for this position. But while Hitler gained mention in *Time*'s list of runners up, he was ultimately rejected as the representative of the era. According to the editors, it seemed inappropriate to commemorate a century with someone best noted for acts of hatred and aggression. "The worst" of human actions should not be forwarded as the mark of the twentieth century.[7] In recent work, Gary Alan Fine (forthcoming) suggests that decisions such as those made by *Time*'s editors are part of a broader social pattern. Not only are social actors encouraged to divert their attentions from "the worst" of historical figures, they may find that focusing on "the worst" draws negative sanctions. Says Fine:

> The evil that is embedded within our memory of such figures) is so powerful that there are circumstances in which (the evil) - like sympathetic magic - can rub off on the identity of one who strays too close to a defense of such figures, causing the loss of moral credibility. For reputational entrepreneurs, negative exemplars have their use to discredit opponents who can be likened as being similar to that discredited figure. Who, today, wishes to be known as a McCarthyite or a Stalinist?

In this same spirit, official narratives often camouflage "the worst" of historical events. Indeed, "the worst" of times are often framed in language that typically signifies "the best" of people, places, actions, and things. Consider, for example, World War I. At its completion, this war was considered "the worst" war in history. Yet, it quickly became known as "The *Great* War." Similarly, many assess the stock crash of 1929 and the economic demise that followed as "the worst" depression in U.S. history. Yet historical accounts typically describe the era as "the *Great* Depression." And consider an event that many believe to be the biggest mining swindle of the nineteenth century. This ruse is commonly called "the *Great* Diamond Hoax of 1872." In each of these cases, "the worst" of times have been recast in terms of exaltation and magnificence, suggesting the ambiguity that surrounds the very meaning of the concept.

Is the slippery nature of the concept "worst" a consequential matter? Do we lose or risk anything by accepting this loose fitting designation? Under certain circumstances, the answer to both questions may be yes. It was, after all, two sociologists who suggested the importance of maintaining a dual focus with reference to ratings and performance standards. In studying group behavior, Robert Dentler and Kai Erikson (1959) demonstrated that delineating both the best and worst of group members' performances positively contributed to a group's stability. Indeed, the authors contended that normative behaviors are effectively established only by referencing "the best" and "the worst" of actions and achievements. For Dentler and Erikson, fail-

ing to fully itemize both positive and negative extremes threatens a society's ability to maintain some predictable middle ground.[8]

What else do we lose by failing to pinpoint and unravel the meaning of "worst"? Sociologists studying risk, danger, and decision-making raise some intriguing possibilities. Several studies strongly suggest that the failure to make visible or fully specify "the worst" of people, places, actions, and things may restrict social actors' perceptions of danger and risk. Further, the inability to conceptualize "the worst" can hamper our efforts to prepare for it or protect against it. For example, in studying large scale disasters such as the Chernobyl nuclear accident, the Bhopal chemical-plant accident, and the Challenger explosion, Charles Perrow (1999) concludes that the increased complexity of technological systems has made it nearly impossible to conceptualize the "worst-case' scenario. These inadequate visions of "the worst," according to Perrow, have spawned protective strategies that often beckon rather than avoid disaster. Diane Vaughan draws a related conclusion in her studies of intimate relationships, the Challenger disaster, and most recently, air traffic controllers (1986; 1997, forthcoming). Vaughan demonstrates that certain cultural contexts and the cognitive patterns situated within them can block the perception of danger signals and worst case scenarios. When interactants are unaware of "the worst" possible outcomes, Vaughan contends that strategies of action can be misdirected; actors can adopt behavioral scripts that provoke rather than avoid danger. In yet another arena, students of natural disasters and warning systems contend that worst case scenarios must be tangible and fully itemized within the minds of potential disaster victims. If "the worst" is not fully crystallized, warning messages and evacuation plans inevitably meet with limited success (see e.g. Kirschenbaum 1992; Perry 1994; Sorenson and Mileti 1987).

Clearly, the slippery way in which we conceptualize "the worst" is not without consequences. Glossing over specifications of low-end quality may seem like positive thinking. Yet, this practice may eventually place broader performance standards into question. Because evaluations are relative, failing to fully define the meaning of "the worst" both detracts from the splendor of "the best" and blurs the boundary between the average and the unacceptable. Further, hazy conceptualizations of "the worst" may, under certain circumstances, threaten social stability, particularly when the practice impedes efforts to protect us from the most dire of consequences. If we hold as our goal a balanced view of culture and society, we must diligently engage the full spectrum of quality. In essence, we must do our best to accurately delineate the worst of people, places, actions, and things. For as I have argued elsewhere,[9] blurred concepts have no place in the sociological eye. Such haziness can hopelessly divert our analysis from the empirical realities before us.

(Cerulo, continued)

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ENDNOTES

[1] See <http://www.webworst.miningco.com/entertainment/webworst/>.

[2] To be sure, we have no trouble focusing on that which is bad: bad news, bad hair days, bad weather, etc. However, being bad is not quite the same as being "the worst", just as being good is not quite the same as being "the best".

[3] It is interesting to note that, eventually, money.com did identify a single "worst" broker. But in order to do so, the writers had to weight the various measurement dimensions in complicated ways, thus forcing the data into a normal distribution.

[4] Note that all 45 "worst care" criteria were simply reversals of those items appearing on the " best care" list. A descriptions of the survey and the survey results can be accessed at <http://www.nmha.org/shcr/bestprac/key.cfm>.

[5] Recall Dickens' balanced description of the French Revolution - "it was the best of times, it was the worst of time," (Dickens 1950[1859], Book 1, Chapter 1).

[6] See: (<http://www.time.com/time/time100/poc.century.html>, accessed 5/11/00.

[7] Background information on the editors' decision making processes was derived from a CBS News television special entitled *Time 100: Person of the Century,* broadcast on December 27, 1999.

[8] Erikson's (1966) work on the Puritan Witch Trials reinforced the importance of evil. His analysis specified the functions served by those accused of "the worst" of behaviors.

[9] In Cerulo (forthcoming) and Cerulo and Ruane (1998) I demonstrate that certain ways of conceptualizing social relations have misdirected perceptions of both community and individualism.

Anne Bowler
University of Delaware

An exploratory venture into the relationship between culture and cognition provided the intellectual foundation of this innovative and exciting national conference. As organizer, Karen Cerulo observed in her invitation to participants, "a small but growing chorus of voices has argued for the utility of a sociology of the mind. Proponents of this agenda, a group rooted primarily in the study of culture, contend that targeted sociological work on cognition would significantly enhance the existing literature addressing human thought."

To date, research on cognition and the functioning of the human mind more generally has been dominated by other disciplines – namely, cognitive and developmental psychologists, linguists, and neuroscientists – disciplines, in large part, favoring a universalistic approach emphasizing cognitive uniformity. Few would dispute the fact that this line of inquiry has produced numerous contributions to our understanding of the working of the mind. Using the example of research that has demonstrated the human propensity for classification, Cerulo nevertheless cited the relative silence of these disciplines on questions concerning the variability of classification systems across time and space. Such questions, Cerulo noted "urge us to move beyond issues of sameness and toward a deeper engagement of difference and distinction...to move toward a study of the mind that simultaneously considers *culture* and cognition." [Emphasis added]

Organization and Structure

What followed was an intensive two-day series of dialogues designed to lay the groundwork for the establishment of a sociology of culture and cognition. One of the best features of this conference, from my point of view (although similar assessments could be overheard from various sources throughout), was its size and organization. The relatively small number of participants (approximately 125) allowed for the much-needed, in-depth interaction with colleagues so typically missing from larger conferences and meetings. The organization of sessions produced, for the most part, similar results. Single formal sessions in succession (as opposed to multiple and competing panels) made it possible to sit through an entire session without the usual dashing about to catch this or that paper – a phenomenon most of us have come to be all too familiar with at conferences like the annual meetings of the ASA. Informal discussion sessions proved a bit more difficult. Day one, for example, featured three competing sessions: "Cognitive Processes in Action," "Meaning and Measurement," and "Wrestling with the Micro-Macro Divide." Such a line-up, each featuring some of our most respected colleagues, made

choosing a difficult enterprise. (I found this true on day two as well during my own discussion session, "Point Horizons" while "Scripts and Repertoires" featuring presentations by Karen Cerulo, Michele Dillon, Joshua Gamson and Sharon Hays took place in the room next door.) Offsetting this minor frustration, however, was the creation of a web page prior to the conference in which presenters were asked to submit abstracts describing the general thrust of their work. Equally significant was the creation of a listserve for each discussion group in which participants were urged to engage in informal dialogues about the nature and direction of their research, an innovative feature of which future organizers of conferences would be well-advised to take note. The net effect of the intelligent planning that went into the organization of this conference, from formal panels to informal discussion sessions and a user-friendly web page contributed to the overall feeling of participation in a common intellectual project.

Highlights

The most important part of any conference, of course, lies in the intellectual quality of the actual proceedings. *Toward a Sociology of Culture and Cognition* succeeded in superior fashion in this regard featuring a group of leading sociologists including, but not limited to, Barry Schwartz, Paul DiMaggio, Robert Wuthnow, Viviana Zelizer, William Gamson, and Robin Wagner-Pacifici. Day one opened with a panel entitled "Mapping the Field: Cognitive Processes in Action" with presentations by Diane Vaughn, Harrison White, and Eviatar Zerubavel. Arguably, Zerubavel set the tone for the conference with his paper, "The Elephant in the Room: Notes on the Social Organization of Denial," a fascinating and provocative exploration of the social bases of a phenomenon generally perceived to be, if not exclusively then at least primarily, psychological in nature.

Other highlights included an incisive account of averted lynchings in the Jim Crow South by Larry Griffin, theoretical reflections on ritual in advanced industrial societies by Carolyn Marvin, and "Niche Narratives," a work in progress by John Mohr exploring the role of competing interpretative schemas in the organization and structure of institutional power during periods of social change. The conference closed with a plenary session, "Culture and Cognition: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue," with participants Myron J. Aronoff (Political Science, Rutgers), Paul DiMaggio, and panel moderator Eviatar Zerubavel.

Directions for the Future of a Sociology of Culture and Cognition

Inevitably, even the most successful conferences leaves one with unanswered questions, conceptual gaps and the occasional series of omissions. As indicated above, *Toward a Sociology of Culture and Cognition* was an intellectually

(Bowler, continued)

stimulating event that participants will remember as a significant step into an emerging field of intellectual inquiry with a decidedly serious future. Nevertheless, a few critically suggestive comments are in order. The specific connections or conceptual links among the work of presenters were not always clear. In many cases, the issue of the (albeit complicated) relationship between culture and cognition remained nascent or tacit rather than explicitly analyzed or addressed. What is cognitive and what is cultural? What are some of the specific means by which we might begin to convincingly map the intersections between the two? To what degree *is* cognition culturally conditioned, modified, etc. in a given field of action or moment in time? To some extent, these questions imply the need for a deeper engagement with the universal and the particular. An empirical example may best illustrate these points. "The Cultural Construction of Mental Diseases," a presentation by Sociology Department Chair (Rutgers) Allan V. Horwitz challenged the prevailing psychiatric view of mental illness as a universal disorder, emphasizing the degree to which the very concept of mental illness is both culturally contingent and, importantly, intimately linked to broader professional, political and economic concerns subject to historical variability. "The Concept of Mental Disorder: Intersection of Cognitive Universals and Cultural Particulars" by Jerome Wakefield, a psychologist at the School of Social Work (Rutgers) similarly addressed the question of cultural relativity in the definition of mental dysfunction. At the same time, however, Wakefield explored the degree to which the concept of mental disorder as "harmful mental dysfunction" is widely shared across cultures. In this sense, Wakefield, while mindful of cultural variation, challenged the common sociological view of mental disorder as a cultural construction. What I have in mind here is the potential fruitfulness of dialogues among individuals working on the same topic from different points of departure. The implication of this example, of course, is to underscore the importance of both inter-disciplinarity and cross-cultural research; i.e., the need to create and encourage greater dialogue *across* as well as within disciplines and to pay special attention to the empirical cross-cultural research that will ultimately inform the theoretical contours of this dialogue.

In conclusion, I want to stress what a positive experience it was to participate in this exciting and innovative endeavor. The greatest credit, both in terms of intellectual conception and organizational design goes, of course to Karen Cerulo – an achievement repeatedly applauded at various points throughout the conference but one well worth mentioning here in print. Special thanks also to Ruth Simpson for her superb coordinating skills. And on a final note, I want to encourage readers of *Culture* to check out the conference web page and join in what promises to be an innovative and informative ongoing dialogue!

Christena Nippert-Eng
Illinois Institute of Technology

It was a little after two o'clock, East Coast time. According to my stomach, lunch was well overdue. So once Dan Ryan and I got our food and found a table that would suit our group, I settled in quickly to the job of negotiating my sandwich. Tearing done, chewing begun, I glanced up and came the closest that I will ever get to that trademark double-take of Robert Redford's.

The Gamsons – Bill and Josh — were directly across from me, queued up in front of a rather beleaguered cashier and waiting to pay for their repast.

I'd never seen the Gamsons together. It was nothing short of remarkable. The father and son were as near a perfectly matched set as I could have imagined. Similar profile, similar patience and resignation showing in their wonderfully similar, slightly sardonic smiles. Occasionally one would lean forward or partially turn around to share a brief comment with each other. They even moved alike, for goodness' sake! The *piece de resistance* — and this was just too much to think about for long without risking a serious Heimlich Maneuver — were similar backpacks strapped in similar fashion on their respective backs.

In that moment it occurred to me that the chance to think more intensely, more collectively about an image such as this was exactly why I had come to Karen Cerulo's and Rutgers University's conference on culture and cognition. And I couldn't help but hope that my ethnographic skills would let me savor the unexpected poetry of the situation without being noticed.

As a cognitive sociologist, I had got on the plane the day before for two highly interrelated reasons. First, I wanted to witness and help make further progress in our ability to explain people as thinkers. To consider, for instance: 1) the intersection between biology and culture – whether it is biology at the universalistic or particularistic levels; 2) the relationship of collective and individual contributions to the whole of thought and to specific ideas – especially within a given thought community; 3) the fact that thought is embodied into and disembodied out of people through very specific processes; and 4) the various cultural manifestations that emerge from the inextricable synergy of more invisible (cognitive) and visible (practical) behaviors. Second, I came to the conference to *see* other people engage in these questions, literally, and to further embed my knowledge of our knowledge — and the quest for it — in a greater understanding of the people who are my colleagues.

What we think is as much a function of the culture in which we live as it is of any hardwiring that we possess – either as members of the human species or as a unique specimen of that species. In fact, individual cognition is fused with group culture. They each replicate, innovate, challenge, and otherwise constrain the other. They are two sides of the same coin. And while we are free to call the side of the coin that we wish to study, we cannot under-

stand one side without understanding -- or at least making room for -- the other. (This is true no matter what specific kind of coin you wish to study, by the way. This conference encompassed incredibly diverse currency in this regard, which is all the more remarkable because it is just a smattering of how varied our coinage might be in the future.)

This is why, in that moment of being torn between my sandwich and the Gamsonian view in front of me, I suddenly realized that in a sense, explaining the Gamsons -- and the Vend Diagram that might represent the distinctive and overlapping aspects of their superb thoughtstyles and scholarship -- was the whole point of being there. From our networks of intellects, family and friends to our daily habitual and serendipitous interactions, and even the genetic codes and chemistries that influence each of us, here was the challenge in front of us -- right in front of me! To whit, where and how, precisely, can we as sociologists best carve out and elucidate a distinct body of knowledge in understanding how people think?

Cerulo's opening remarks and Eviatar Zerubavel's closing remarks articulated this focus well. It was demonstrated through nearly every speaker's offerings, constituting a stellar line-up, indeed. Without question, the sessions were thoroughly enticing and provided a properly indigestible amount of exceptional food for thought. By the time we got to my epiphanous lunch I already concluded that people were delivering the goods with such gusto that it was becoming a problem. I would be a very happy woman if only I could experience the content and conversational possibilities of this conference over the next year instead of the next two days.

The event was so stimulating, in fact, that it wasn't long before the bathroom comments of one particularly eminent scholar became a kind of mantra for me -- and well summarized the feelings of other participants, too, from their appearances. "You know," this distinguished professor said while looking into the mirror, "It's bad enough when I *feel* exhausted. But I *really* hate it when I look it."

As a matter of fact, the value I place on a social, cultured, embodied approach to understanding thinking rather inevitably means that -- for me -- the story of this conference has to include attention to the individuals who attended the event. I don't think we pay quite enough (positive) attention to importance of scholars as people, for we express the quality as well as the content of our thoughts through a full range of wonderfully human behavior. If culture constrains individual thought and more visible behaviors or practices, it is the contribution of quite specific individuals and their innovative variations that challenge, transform, and sustain that culture even as it is being created. Just as an individual cannot inspire and innovate without a shared culture to build on, there is no culture without individuals, who are so much more than the hints we get of them in their books and classrooms.

Disembodied thought is provocative, but one of the most important and delightful aspects of my work always has been the moment when I actually see some revered (or, frequently in my earlier years, despised) scholar in person for the first time. Even if someone's published work might sustain me during long months of isolation it is not what stimulates me most. Seeing that person, perhaps even having a face-to-face conversation, does that. I not only enjoy whatever companionship and sense of community and shared purpose that emerges from these encounters, but these encounters help me frame an author's work in ways that make it come even more alive.

Without question, the collection of people at the Rutgers conference was just too delicious for words. Cerulo and the Rutgers crowd (particularly those wonderful students and recent graduates like Mary Chayko) did an unprecedented job managing all of us and providing excellent opportunities for memorable face-to-face encounters. The atmosphere, creature comforts and guest list seemed designed so that some of our most treasured scholars could command even the corners of the stage in their typically colorful and wonderfully unselfconscious fashions.

I cannot -- and definitely should not -- list all the wonderful moments that linger in my mind from this conference. However, I was certainly happy to finally meet Diane Vaughn, who is at least as compelling, stately, important and amazingly approachable as her work. I was delighted to see Magali Sarfatti Larson in attendance, too. I just adore her. She looked as elegantly striking and sounded as cosmopolitan and socialist as ever despite very recent hip surgery. I would give up much to be able to write books like her, but even more, I think, for one day in which I could look like that in leather pants. I found out about another side of Paul DiMaggio. Passing ever so casually near the cafeteria's forsaken piano, the fingers that would look more at home on a meatpacker than an Armani-suited Princeton Man of Letters twinkled out a one-handed rift that astonished me. This guy is an amazingly accomplished pianist! (Okay, okay, you may have known that, but I didn't! Geez, how many *other* disciplines has he mastered?)

Josh Meyerowitz proved that while '60s Marxists might lay low in Communications safe houses for years they never change their true colors. Barry Schwartz absolutely tickled me with his exasperated gratitude to Gary Fine for acknowledging that World War Two really did happen. And Gary was equally amusing in his "There but for the Grace of God go I" confession of a truly dangerous liaison with unconstrained social constructivism. The twinkle in Harrison White's eyes and the slightly ascerbic tone in his delivery were just perfect for his talk. He did the business folks better than they do themselves, thus disproving the objective reality of markets at the same time that he proved, yet again, (and especially in his hands) that Sociology Rules!

John Mohr surely gets the award for Technological Bravery, Conference Flexibility and Good Will. And he gets another for demonstrating Bateson's/Goffman's notions of framing so well. His postponed-due-to-technical-difficul-

ties Power Point presentation simultaneously proved to one part of the audience that they were absolutely correct in never trying any of these new-fangled computer programs while leaving the others itching to also have a go at making words fly on to the screen or spin around themselves. Vivianna Zelizer left us properly challenged as only she can, arguing in her deceptively charming, fashionable, and devastatingly accurate way that we must take our interest in culture and cognition into the realm of the economy in a much more serious and pervasive way. I could not possibly agree more.

Mentor and disciplinary turf-marker par excellence Eviatar Zerubavel was surrounded by his usual coterie of students at this conference. But I just couldn't stop smiling at the sight of his entire family seated together in the audience and beaming from ear to ear during their dad's talk. Now that's a goal worthy of any scholar. And of course, Cerulo was everywhere – whispering logistics into attentive students' ears, giving gifts of smiles to everyone, and delivering not one, but two talks on completely different matters over the course of the event.

Someday perhaps I will be brave (powerful? stupid? senile?) enough to do a proper ethnography of a conference such as this. Then I will properly make my point about how important it is to know a scholar as an embodied entity in order to understand and appreciate her or his published work and role in a network of thought communities and their members. In the meantime, I will add only that an overwhelming tone of interest, respect, joy, fun, and sometimes downright tenderness permeated the occasion of this conference.

This wonderful ambience extended from the quiet breakfast conversations at the University Inn each morning (with the exception of a particularly gross conversation in which I found myself that ranged from the multiple, rather horrifying options for killing slugs to how and why one might eat another human being,) to the wine and cheese reception of Saturday evening. This reception, by the way, came as close to "raucous" as any meeting of respected colleagues that I've ever seen. The wine flowed freely and definitely influenced the wrap-up session that followed. John Martin, for instance, another enchanting new acquaintance, gave us all a good laugh after moderator Eviatar Zerubavel "called on" him for his reaction to a speaker's response to Martin's earlier remarks. Martin only slightly abashedly proclaimed in ringing tones, "I'm sorry. I wasn't listening." (Not that he needs it, but Martin's already smart work will always get extra points for me for how he handled that one.) Later, the audience displayed the same good will and sentimentality with a spontaneous outbreak of applause for the comments of Yael Zerubavel, summarizing her view of the value of the conference to a(n allegedly) non-sociologist.

A few questions for the remarkably committed and talented hosts at Rutgers remain. How many times can you eat Jamaican and still resist the urge to reggae? How can Rutgers grad students produce such great work on the sociology of time and space and still not be able to find their way around their own university? Where does that airport shuttle company get those drivers from, anyway, and have they already been to the School of the Americas?

But perhaps the most serious one is: when, oh when, are you going to do this again?! We need more conferences like this, and soon. They are critical to the further development of the field, for they foster the kinds of multifaceted exchanges and understandings that the mere exchange of written work will never accomplish. And if Rutgers can't do it, then somebody else needs to. I would love to see the Gamsons waiting on a similar line twenty years from now at the 20th annual "Culture and Cognition" conference.

Throughout the conference, it became clear that we are living at a time when individual thoughts — individual works – are embedded within, arising from, and merging into an identifiable, social mentality. A thought style that reflects the sociological imagination while directing itself toward (and emanating from) the intersection of culture and cognition is clearly in existence. It is past its infancy. However, it has quite a way to go before reaching the peak of maturity. This way of thinking not only reflects a shared (learned) conceptual framework, but creates the shared cognitive space for personal innovation that will continue long past this moment of collective endeavor. The boundaries of time and space in which we gathered at Rutgers clearly reflected what came before as well as what was happening then. But they also helped propel each of us into creating new interpersonal riches that may not appear for quite some time, in quite a different place. These as yet unknown treasures, too, – and not unlike the Gamsons – will be the result of a wonderful merger of the intimately personal with the profoundly public, and what is biological with what is social.

So, if this conference was at least in part about explaining the Gamsons — articulating how and where sociology can best account for them as well as when it would be better to look to other disciplines to do so – it was also about celebrating the Gamsons. And every other individual who was there in body and/or spirit, especially our hosts. It is our individuality, as well as our collective synergy that has brought us to this shared point of scholarship and companionship — and left us with such rich possibilities for more to come. I just can't wait.

Editor's Note: Toward a Sociology of Culture and Cognition was held at Rutgers University on November 12-13, 1999. The conference gave birth to a new network in the Culture section. Interested individuals can visit the Culture and Cognition network's web site at:

http://sociology.rutgers.edu/cultcog/

The site lists the network's ongoing activities. It also posts info on both new books and bibliographic materials in the area. The November 1999 conference program can be accessed at the site. Finally, the site provides instructions for joining the network's online discussion group.

Early Days: Founding of the ASA Culture Section
Richard A. Peterson
Vanderbilt University

Editor's Note: As we begin a new millennium, it seems wholly appropriate to reflect on the history of this section and consider its future. In this issue, Richard Peterson offers his thoughts on the matter. As a founder of the section, his offering provides an "insider's" perspective.

Though it may be difficult to understand now, in the early 1980s it was not clear that there should be a culture section of the ASA. To begin with, there was no such field as cultural sociology or the sociology of culture. To be sure, "culture" formed a chapter in introductory sociology text books and had a exalted place in the theoretical scheme of Talcott Parsons, but even Parsons said that, in practice "ideas and sentiments ... are more dependent manifestations" and recommended reforming Germany after WW2 by manipulating its institutional system.

If cultural sociology (in the US at least) didn't exist as a recognized field in the early 1980s, groups of interested scholars were forming around the sociology of art, literature, ideology, values, religion, mass communication, ethnography, popular culture, and symbolic interaction, to name just a few of the often contending tendencies which, so it seemed at the time, would not unite happily under any one banner. There were special conferences, and informal newsletters were circulated. In 1979, I weighed in with an *Annual Review* piece, "Revitalizing the Culture Concept."

That said, the idea of forming a section was in the air at least from the late 1970s. I remember conversations about it with Howard Becker, Ann Swidler, Vera Zolberg, Paul DiMaggio Gary Fine, and others. A number, including Becker, Fine, and I, argued against trying to form a section. We rejoiced in the growing informal meetings (such as the Social Theory and Art conference founded in 1975), but having a deep suspicion of formal organization, we thought the informal sharing of ideas would give way to bickering over the scope of the section and fights for organizational control. For his part, Gary Fine was concerned about the fractioning of sociology into many diverse sections, but as he sees it now, the sections have proved the vital core of the discipline in the years since. At a practical level, would there be two hundred ASA members willing to join a "culture" section? After all, symbolic interactionism had been marginalized, and American sociology had not been welcoming to the study of symbolic activity.

Then in 1986 everything changed, a letter arrived from Donna Gaines, a graduate student of Louis Coser at Stony Brook, on behalf of a number of young sociologists who had already petitioned the ASA to become a "Section-in-Formation" under the banner "Culture." My answer was easy, "Of course, I'll do everything possible." When several friends who knew my view asked why the abrupt change, I said now the fat was in the fire, and it would be far worse to have culture not attract enough members to make a section. The aim became to sign as many members as possible while making the section just as open and non-fractious as possible.

As a graduate student of Al Gouldner's I had seen the needlessly destructive effects of fights with colleagues, and several years later as a young sociologist at Madison, Wisconsin I had benefited greatly from the intense friendly rivalry among young colleagues. An older generation of sociologists interested in the symbolic had divided into warring factions, often factions of one person. Such divisiveness had to be avoided to move forward.

A useful model for avoiding divisiveness was provided by the practices of economists. They contended bitterly among themselves but presented a united front to laypersons. To outsides, their differences were presented as reasonable alternative estimates of a world whose parameters are fixed and known through the science of economics. The opposite tendency is illustrated by actions of theoretical sociologists. According to a former Editor of the *American Sociological Review*, the paucity of theory papers was, in part, due to the difficulty of getting balanced reviews. Manuscript reviewers either uncritically praised or roundly condemned each submission depending on its theoretical stance making it difficult for an editor to accept any.

I had already tasted the fruits of rapprochement. My first public meeting with Howard Becker about 1968 had been quite acrimonious, but by the mid-1970s we both had come to see the "art world" perspective that he championed as complementary to, not as competing with the "production of culture" perspective, which, with others, I was deploying. Praising each other's work, it was possible to see these rival schemes as usefully linked but distinct levels of analysis. My watchword was to affirm the importance of the symbolic, ignore what doesn't seem useful, and highlight the positive in all work.

My opening article in the first issue of the Newsletter reflects the theme of rapprochement. The second paragraph begins: "What is culture and what sorts of researchers should be included in the Sociology of Culture section? These questions were widely debated at our first business meeting during the ASA conference in New York this Fall. It was generally agreed that there was no need to draw hard boundaries, and that people with diverse substantive and methodological interests could be accommodated. But clearly the section is for those interested in the study of values, art, popular culture, material culture, ideology, communication, all those, in fact, whose work includes a

focus on the symbolic realm."

The eclecticism is also seen in the composition of the first section Council. It consisted of Stanley Aronowitz, Muriel Cantor, Diana Crane, Todd Gitlin, Michael Schudson, and Gaye Tuchman.

It is fortunate that the 1986 ASA meetings were in New York City, because the area was home to a number of different groups actively interested in culture. Once the meetings had begun, Donna Gaines quickly convinced me of the desirability of forming a section, saying that while established researchers didn't need one, her generation of young sociologists needed to show doubting dissertation supervisors and sceptical recruitment committees that culture comprised an established and well represented area of intellectual activity.

The ASA provided us part of a day at a "recruitment" booth but we also commandeered a table and set it up in one of the major hallways to work the passing delegates. It was a ball being able to actively promote culture. Moving out from the table we lured older acquaintances into conversations at the table while the young organizers created a continual buzz. Remembering my Wisconsin years, I got a particular kick out of trying to convince Bill Sewell the elder, to become a member. The ebb and flow of people at the table convinced me of the wide appeal of the culture idea, what a delight!

Along the way, Donna Gaines pulled me aside and said that I had been selected "as the best possible compromise candidate" for Chair of the section. I guess that, as with US Presidents, people resident in the central South are presumed to be least offensive. Vera Zolberg was to be the Vice-Chair, and Judy Balfe Secretary.

The business meeting to organize the section was amazing. The large room was packed, and it seemed there were over one hundred right there! It was like a gathering of tribes. There were people over 30 from all the old factions — from theorists to ethnographers, quantoids to interpretive types. More importantly, there were lots and lots of young people. In an effort to make sure that the section did not remain in the hands of a small self-perpetuating group, the By-Laws crafted by Judy Balfe and her committee included a provision that the members of the Nominations Committee charged with selecting future candidates would be selected openly from the floor during the annual business meeting.

The reps from the ASA were impressed with the numbers and sense of direction, but, in the language of the ASA staff, being "launched," it was vital to "make." In spite of the enthusiasm, nowhere near 200 people signed membership cards. The Emotions section was organizing the same year, and it seemed important to get a fair share of the people who might initially choose just one or the other.

Between annual meetings the one tangible manifestation of section activity is its newsletter so its success was vital to the success of the section. An editor was named and in due course a copy of the first issue arrived along with a copy of the bill for the services of several graduate students who the editor had write and assemble it. The ASA financial officer noted that Sections received no budget to pay staff and denied the request. But it was the content of the brief newsletter that alarmed me. Among other things, the name of a prominent cultural sociologist was twice misspelled on the first page, the news, as I recall, was about local New York area events, and the two book reviews focussed on works tangential to cultural sociology.

The editor insisted that the students deserved the chance to grow into the job. Since the newsletter was so important, I didn't think the section could afford that luxury. I called several people from various perspectives and asked their advice then, convincing the elected Vice-Chair, Vera Zolberg to take over the job of editor. She agreed on condition that I would assemble issues. The art of composing page-copy on the computer was technically complex then, so I simulated it by sizing type on the photocopy machine and physically pasting it on a sheet to be re-photocopied. In addition to articles, there were pictures, hand drawings, numerous tid-bit fillers, and notices of up-coming culture-related conferences. It looked amateurish, but it was full of names and news about the widest possible cultural sociology interests.

It seemed right to recognize new work in the field, but for every book author we pleased with a review, we would slight many more whose work was not reviewed. Also, reviews couldn't be timely. A convenient solution was to mention and describe in a sentence or two all the culture-related new books that were advertised. It proved easy to write by drawing on the statements from the blurbs regularly distributed by publishers. Called "Books of Note", what began as strategic filler became one of the most widely commented-on newsletter elements.

Fortunately for us, Caroline Bugno of the ASA office was very helpful in facilitating the section in those early days. Always encouraging, she had a hearty disrespect for red tape. Among other things she allowed us a good many more newsletter pages than were possible within the small section budget. She argued that we could have the unused page allotments of several other sections.

By the second issue of the newsletter in the Spring of 1987, it was possible to report a payed-up membership of 293, well past the minimum 200 member-mark, and the section was well on its way. By the winter of that same year the Newsletter was able to proclaim, "Not Yet Two But Growing Up: 400+". By the Fall of 1988, the newsletter's front page featured an article by Vera Zolberg headed: "Outsiders as Insiders: Will Success Spoil Cultural Sociology?" And beside the article was a cartoon of two trackers deep in the forest. I had the one looking back say: "Most of the sections are behind us!" while the other moving forward prompts: "Keep Moving. We're not out to beat anyone, but to save the discipline." Fifteen years on, how far have we gotten?

Culture Section Miniconference
August 10-11, 2000
http://chnm.gmu.edu/miniconf/

The Culture Section, with support from the Center for Arts and Culture (an independent think tank concerned with cultural policy) and from George Mason University, will sponsor a miniconference to mark the millennial meeting of the American Sociological Association. Reflecting on past achievements and future directions, this conference will address major issues in the sociology of culture. Many members of the Section have involved themselves in the process of identifying those issues over the past months. We are planning to publish a book based on this minconference, with proceeds going to the Section.

Participants will assemble at George Mason University for opening remarks and a banquet on Thursday evening, August 10 and hold plenary and workshop sessions during the day of Friday, August 11. Eight plenary paper-workshop programs are planned for Friday. The morning and afternoon plenary sessions will each include four speakers presenting position papers. In the morning and afternoon workshops, smaller groups of participants will discuss and debate the content of plenary position papers in terms of their own research interests. All attendees will be considered participants and asked to submit brief descriptions of their present research, to be posted on the miniconference website in advance of the meeting.

On Friday evening, August 11, participants will be transported to Washington for the Annual Meeting. The Culture Section's sessions and roundtables are scheduled for the following day, which is the first day of the Meeting.

Registration is required, although there is no fee. The deadline for formal registration is July 15. It will be impossible to guarantee housing or a place at the opening banquet to people who do not register by that date. Everyone who has already indicated provisionally their intention to attend the miniconference will be contacted via email to confirm their registration. Others should contact Mark Jacobs (mjacobs@gmu.edu) or Deborah Gelfand (dgelfand@gmu.edu) as soon as possible. A registration form is also available on the miniconference's website (http://chnm.gmu.edu/miniconf/) .

George Mason University is located in Fairfax, Virginia,

midway between Reagan National and Dulles Airports, 15 miles west of Washington D.C. (The cab ride from either airport to the university will take about half an hour in non-rush hours.) Parking passes, as well as day passes to the Olympic-class Aquatic Center and the Fieldhouse will be available for nominal charges on site. Directions to the Fairfax Campus for those traveling by air, rail, car, or public transportation are posted on the website. The bus that transports participants to the ASA's hotels on Friday night will be free of charge. The bus will arrive downtown by 7:30 PM.

Participants should plan to arrive on the Fairfax campus at about 5:30 PM Thursday. The opening banquet will start at 6:30. Much of the cost of the banquet will be subsidized. Participants will purchase their own breakfasts and lunches the next day in a campus food court.

Housing will be available in an air-conditioned dorm on campus for the night of August 10. Single rooms will cost $45, doubles $30 per occupant. Again, it will be necessary to register in advance. People can pay as they register on arrival. Participants who choose to stay instead at a nearby luxurious bed and breakfast (for about $130) or a nearby motel (for about $60) will need to make their own reservations (at these special university rates), and will be responsible for their own cabfare to and from campus. The locations and telephone numbers of those alternative housing options are available on the miniconference website. It will be more convenient (and generate a greater sense of Gemeinschaft), however, for people to stay on campus. The Friday morning plenary session will start an 9AM.

Deborah Gelfand, a doctoral student in Cultural Studies at George Mason, is helping with arrangements for the conference and has constructed the miniconference website. In addition to the registration form and various logistical details, that website provides discussion boards for debate about each plenary position-paper. The texts of those papers, along with brief comments by designated discussants, will be posted on the website in advance of the miniconference. Finally, the website will feature the brief (less than one page) statements of research interests that participants will submit.

MINICONFERENCE PROGRAM

1. Culture and Art

Organizer:	Gary A. Fine, Northwestern University, (g-fine@nwu.edu)
Plenary speaker:	David Halle, University of California, Los Angeles
Discussants:	Gladys and Kurt Lang, University of Washington
	Albert Bergesen, University of Arizona
	Jan Marontate, Acadia University, Canada

2. Culture and Causation

Organizer:	Jefferey K. Olick, Columbia University, (jko5@columbia.edu)
Plenary speaker:	Jeffrey K. Olick, Columbia University
Discussants:	Jeffrey Broadbent, University of Minnesota
	Second discussant to be announced

3. Culture, Gender and Class

Organizers:	Sharon Hays, University of Virginia, (sh2q@virginia.edu)
	Andrea Press, University of Illinois, (press@uiuc.edu)
Plenary speakers:	Sharon Hays, University of Virginia
	Andrea Press, University of Illinois
Discussants:	Chelsea Starr, University of California, Irvine
	Second discussant to be announced

4. Culture and History

Organizer:	Ewa Morawska, University of Pennsylvania, (emorawsk@sas.upenn.edu)
Plenary speaker:	Eviatar Zerubavel, Rutgers University
Discussants:	Sachiko Takita-Ishii, Yokohama City University
	Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, Hebrew University

5. Culture, Space, and Place

Organizer:	William Holt, Emory University, (wholt2@emory.edu)
Plenary speaker:	William Holt, Emory University
Discussants:	David Brain, University of South Florida, Sarasota
	Second discussant to be announced

6. Culture and Politics

Organizer:	Paul Lichterman, University of Wisconsin, (lichterm@ssc.wisc.edu)
Plenary speaker:	Magali Sarfatti-Larson, Temple University
Discussants:	Lyn Spillman, University of Notre Dame
	Second discussant to be announced

MINICONFERENCE PROGRAM, *continued*

7. Culture and Cognition

Organizer: Karen Cerulo, Rutgers University, (cerulo@rci.rutgers.edu)

Plenary speaker: Ann Swidler, University of California, Berkeley

Discussants: John Martin, Rutgers University

Second Discussant to be announced

8. Culture and Theory

Organizer: Nancy W. Hanrahan, George Mason University, (nhanraha@gmu.edu),

Plenary speaker: Jeffrey C. Goldfarb, New School

Discussants: Ann Bowler, University of Delaware

Susan S. Silbey, Wellesley College

Anna Szemere, Guilford College

Conference Organizers: Mark Jacobs, George Mason University (mjacobs@gmu.edu)

Barry Schwartz, University of Georgia (cmsbarry@arches.uga.edu)

Conference web site: http://chnm.gmu.edu/miniconf/

Don't forget to register!!!

Culture Day at the ASA
August 12, 2000

Eviatar Zerubavel has announced the following sessions for this year's ASA meetings.

1. Language and Social Life
Organizer: Jonathan Rieder (Barnard College)

2. The Social Organization of Identity
Organizer: Wayne Brekhus (University of Missouri)

3. The Culture of Everyday Life
Organizer: Gary Alan Fine (Northwestern University)

4. Symbols and Power
Organizer: Lynn Chancer (Barnard College)

5. Social Structures and Mental Structures
Organizer: Eviatar Zerubavel (Rutgers University)

6. Section Roundtables
Organizer: William G. Holt III (Emory University)

And be sure to consult the preliminary program for other sessions of interest. For example, Susan Watkins the chair of the Population Section, asks members to note "The Social Construction of Demographic categories."

Culture

Journal of Sport and Social Issues

"Children, Sport and the Politics of Value"

Children and sport exist in profound and dynamic inter-relation and tension. On the one hand, as participants in sports, children are expected to be schooled in the ideology of fair play, camaraderie, teamwork and self-discipline; on the other, as spectators or fans, children find themselves entangled in a web of signs, symbols and icons which often contradict or otherwise subvert the purported positive value thought immanent to "pure" competition.

Woven throughout these tensions are mechanisms of power which produce the imagery and interpolate the meanings of sport in gendered, racialized, classed and sexualized ways. Through the lens of commodity production, sport becomes a medium for the globalization of childhood. The values of "free market" and "free competition" are becoming conflated under the sign of the child—a figure who stands for a future unified not by valuing difference, but by the equalizing pressure of exchange value.

How sport means to children and childhood and how childhood means to sport—on the playground, on the television and across the globe—are issues which only now are receiving both scholarly and public attention.

Papers are now being sought for a Special Issue of the *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* (Sage) on "Children, Sport and the Politics of Value." The target date for this issue is the second half of 2001. Abstracts are due by: September 5, 2000.

For More Information:

Dan Cook, University of Illinois, 104 Huff Hall, 1206 South Fourth St., Champaign, IL 61820 USA
Phone: (217) 244-3887; Fax: (217) 244-1935
dtcook@uiuc.edu

C. L. Cole, University of Illinois, 221 Freer Hall, 906 South Goodwin, Champaign, IL 61820 USA
Phone: 217-333-6380; fax:217-244-7322
c-cole@uiuc.edu