

# Culture

Section of the American Sociological Association

A Message from the Chair  
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## The Elephant in the Room: Toward a Sociology of Denial

Let me try to address here a somewhat unusual aspect of cognition — that which could yet nevertheless does not enter our awareness.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, I am talking about what is deliberately being left outside our consciousness, thereby referring to the active process of blocking information from entering our minds. I thus follow Freud's distinction between that which we simply forget and that which we actively repress from our awareness, thereby regarding ignoring as an active process of *deliberately not noticing*.

I shall not engage you in a discussion of the physiological level of attention, which addresses the natural constraints affecting what enters our field of vision, for example, which is something which psychologists and biologists are much more qualified to discuss. Nor do I intend to address the physiology of other senses such as hearing, taste, or smell, the disruption of which blocks the flow of information into our heads. At the same time, however, I shall also ignore the individual dimension of attention, therefore refraining from addressing strictly psychological phenomena such as dissociation, which explain how individuals block certain information from entering their consciousness, since they are quite irrelevant to my distinctly *sociological* concern with attention.

As I have demonstrated in *Social Mindscapes*, cognitive sociology addresses cognitive matters at a level that both cognitive individualism and universalism leave untouched between them. I am therefore particularly interested in the *social* organization of attention, a topic with which I have dealt before and

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## Editor's Note

It is a special honor to inherit the editorship of *Culture* from Karen Cerulo and her predecessor, Steve Hart. I will try to preserve their tradition of making these pages a forum of open, engaged, and informed dialogue about the direction of the section's work.

Please let me know your ideas for submissions!

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## The Road to Nowhere: Reflections on the Current State of the Sociology of Culture

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For quite some time now, I have felt dissatisfied with the ways in which the discipline of sociology has approached the study of culture, particularly the study of media-based cultural forms. I have felt disappointed, too, with the inadequacy of sociological theorizing when it comes to the question of just what "culture" is, or could be, amidst the postmodern conditions that are increasingly characteristic of daily life (in the United States, at least). I continue to be surprised that cultural sociologists seem uninterested in issues and questions that I think are inescapable in any critical account of contemporary culture. Now, however, I want to move beyond dissatisfaction and disappointment and engage sociologists of culture in a discussion about what is missing in the field, and why. So, let me just say it, up front: What is needed today in the study of culture is more talk and more writing that takes postmodernism

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## The Decline or Reaffirmation of Privilege?

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For sociologists influenced by Bourdieu, education is the nexus between the cultural realm and the stratification system in managerial capitalist societies. Universities, especially elite ones, consecrate the cultural distinctions that keep their collective investors, the professional and managerial classes, on top. In the process, they disguise and legitimate the reproduction of privilege as meritocracy, a "neutral" selection system that rewards intelligence and effort. Meritocracy is our form of social Darwinism.

The salience of universities to the modern stratification system does not lift them above social or political conflicts; structural significance does not deliver immunity from strife,

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The Return of "Books of Note" .....p. 8

am now expanding into a book. At the heart of this book lies the phenomenon of "the elephant in the room," the sociological equivalent of what psychologists call denial.

What makes this metaphor so evocative is the choice of such a large animal. While we may fail to notice a grasshopper on a twig because it is so well camouflaged that it blends with the surrounding background, the elephant has a commanding, essentially unavoidable visual presence. If we manage not to notice it, it can only be as a result of a deliberate act of ignoring, since naturally it would be impossible *not* to notice it. Not noticing an elephant thus involves "blindness to the obvious."

Notice the *visual* imagery. What is so striking about the elephant is its visual presence. Not noticing it is the equivalent of being blind. Note, in this regard, the abundance of visual metaphors related to denial — having a "tunnel vision," wearing "blinders," turning a "blind eye" to the obvious, or "looking the other way." Consider also statements such as "this time I shall overlook what you just did," or the way we much more easily ignore that which is not in the "spotlight," not to mention the "blind spots" we have in certain areas.

Yet as we come to focus on the proverbial monkey who "sees no evil," let us not forget those who hear and speak no evil. The conditions of being deaf or mute certainly complement the picture we get when addressing "mental blindness." And I definitely see the sociology of ignoring as complementing the sociology of silence as well as the sociology of secrecy. Secrets clearly help solidify structures of denial.

I am pointing here to a social phenomenon that sociologists cannot afford to ignore. Can you imagine formal, official social life without the mental process of relegating the "informal" and "unofficial" to the domain identified by Goffman as "out of frame"? Can you envision everyday social interaction without the element of tact, which involves assigning certain aspects of the situation an "unfocused" status to allow the interaction to flow more smoothly?

Blocking certain information from entering our awareness (or from allowing it to circulate among different individuals' awarenesses) is often done quite blatantly, as when judges explicitly instruct court stenographers to strike certain statements from the official record. Consider also, in this regard, the eraser, identified by my son as "the most deadly weapon of denial."

Yet blocking certain information from entering our awareness is also done more subtly. Note the striking contrast between an explicit denial of what one experiences, as when the watch commander of the secret service uniformed division, referring to an incident that happened several hours earlier when the President's mistress angrily stormed out of the White House, instructed one of his subordinates: "As far as you're concerned, this never happened," and what actually precipitated that statement, namely the way the President himself had told him, "I hope you use your discretion," which is only an implicit invitation to forget.

From a sociological perspective, of course, it is even more striking when even such subtle statements need not be uttered at all because it is implicitly clear to all participants that they are not "supposed" to know what they clearly *do* know! This is the basis of the social phenomenon commonly known as a "conspiracy of silence." The difference between explicit

hushes and such subtle conspiracies is the difference between deliberate, active repression and more passive negotiation of "blind spots."

As demonstrated by Freud (as well as by Simmel's discussion of the blasé attitude often displayed by dwellers of cities), blocking certain information from entering our awareness serves some obvious psychological functions. Yet the common saying that "Ignorance is bliss" has a rather significant social dimension as well. After all, in an effort to avoid internal turbulence, social systems are often willing to ignore any "inconvenient" information that might generate such turbulence. That is why women who are well aware of the fact that their daughters are being sexually molested by their husbands or boyfriends nonetheless choose to overlook such disquieting information and, like the proverbial ostrich, try to pretend that such abuse is not really taking place. The same phenomenon is also evident when, in the name of the survival of the organization, fellow workers choose to ignore obvious injustices inflicted upon one of their members who is structurally located at the bottom of the organizational totem pole.

Such conspiracies of silence have some very significant moral undertones, particularly when the act of ignoring inevitably allows, or even encourages, the perpetuation of some clear abuse of power. Hence the distinctive moral role of those stubborn disturbers of silence we call whistle-blowers, whether at the level of the family (neighbors who report child abuse), the organization (workers who file a grievance against an abusive superior), or even an entire nation (Emile Zola, Anita Hill).

In order to fully appreciate the social aspect of the way our attention is organized, we need to focus on the normative dimension of such organization. After all, as I have argued in *Social Mindscapes*, there are some unmistakably social rules of focusing our attention. A classic example are Goffman's "rules of irrelevance," as manifested in the way we "downplay" various aspects of social situations and treat them as socially irrelevant, thereby officially bracketing and systematically ignoring them. Statutes of limitations have a similar effect by curbing our historical attention so that certain "pre-historical" elements are bracketed out of our official awareness. Note also the social rules of establishing agendas of meetings, which include formal articulations of what is "on the table" and what is not, as manifested in the distinction between that which does or does not enter the official minutes.

Consider also various rules of etiquette that involve tact-related ethical obligations to "look the other way" and ignore things we otherwise would have noticed about others around us. As if to underscore the way in which ignoring complements secrecy, normative prohibitions against not being "discreet" are often complemented by similar prohibitions against being too "nosy"! Hence the rules of "civil inattention," whereby we learn to be like those monkeys who see and hear no "evil." And when we do see or hear it, we are expected to pretend as if we did not, so as to save the face of others with whom we interact, as evident in families of stutterers, alcoholics, or the terminally ill. This involves not just individual "niceness" but actual social, normative pressure to be "tactful."

As we are reminded by Hans Christian Andersen's delightful sociological parable "The Emperor's New Clothes," the only one who did see the emperor's naked body was a boy who had not learned yet how not to notice embarrassing things

about others! In other words, not noticing is clearly a result of *optical socialization*, as when we teach children how not to look too attentively at people who have physical deformities. By the same token, one needs to *learn* what to officially ignore when taking the minutes at a faculty meeting.

Such optical socialization is often done explicitly. Whereas some professions train their members to try to notice everything to the point of being deliberately nosy (police detectives, journalists, psychotherapists, insurance claim investigators), others try to systematically regulate what enters their members' awareness. Note, for example, how lawyers are specifically trained to focus just on what is legally "relevant" to their case, or how scientists are taught to specify in their research designs which variables to examine in their experiments. Even when looking through a microscope, noted Fleck, one needs to learn how to focus in order to notice anything. In order to notice things, one needs to also learn first what *not* to notice! In other words, only by becoming partly blind do we come to see anything in a "focused" manner.

Yet part of such optical socialization is also done implicitly. By merely noticing on what the camera focuses, young television watchers also learn what society normally ignores! By hearing our parents sum up in one minute how we spent an entire day together, we also learn from a very young age what is it that merits social attention and what can actually be ignored.

As I have shown in *Social Mindscapes*, this also applies to our concern. The striking manner in which our social environment leads different individuals to place the limits of their concern at the same place, which is often different from where members of other social environments place them (contrast, for example, meat-eaters' and vegans' respective spheres of moral concern) suggests a certain social "calibration" of concern. And what is true of concern also applies to curiosity. Consider the social organization of reading. The social curbing of our curiosity is quite evident in any reading list for doctoral

exams, as well as in the inevitably parochial academic pattern of citing only sources lying within the conventional confines of supposedly discrete bodies of "literature."

Such references to curiosity and concern underscore the implicit tension between the sociological and psychological perspectives on the mental processes of attending and ignoring. Yet we should acknowledge the inherent differences between those two perspectives and not treat those processes as lying exclusively within the psychologist's domain, as it traditionally has been. The fact that someone represses the memory of a traumatic experience because it is too painful to remember certainly belongs within the domain of the psychology of denial, yet when a superior tells a subordinate "This conversation never happened" it clearly calls for a *sociology* of denial! Similarly, when Kathryn Harrison describes in her book *The Kiss* how she tried to numb her awareness of the sexual relations she was having with her father through "selective self-anesthesia" that "leaves me awake to certain things and dead to others," she is referring to mechanisms of denial that are clearly intra-psychic. Yet when she describes how her boyfriend colludes with her in such process of *joint* forgetting, we are clearly also dealing with the inter-psychic process I call "*co-denial*," thereby acknowledging the social dimension of ignoring.

Only when both psychologists and sociologists turn their attention to the mental processes of attending and ignoring can we have a truly comprehensive understanding of those processes. That, of course, is a major intellectual mission of cognitive sociology.

#### ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> This is an abbreviated version of an article that will appear in Karen Cerulo's forthcoming edited volume *Culture in Mind: Toward a Sociology of Culture and Cognition* (Routledge, 2001).

### *The Road to Nowhere, continued*

*seriously*. (And here, I could just as easily say that poststructuralism or cultural studies should be taken seriously, since all of these terms necessitate a similar process of conceptual re-evaluation for sociologists. I chose the term "postmodernism" because it refers more directly than the others to "real world" conditions, which is where I want to begin.)

Sociology, and in particular, cultural sociology, is already on the brink of irrelevance when it comes to the study of postmodern conditions. This has become clear the more I talk with graduate students enrolled in various PhD programs (some quite prestigious) across the country. All too often, I have found, they describe how, in posing research questions concerning contemporary culture, questions pertinent to the work of cultural studies or poststructuralism, questions whose exploration would no doubt benefit from consideration of this scholarship, they are directed away from any further exploration of relevant and substantively valid aspects of this literature; and typically, this is accompanied by no small measure of defensiveness and dismissiveness on the part of their professors.

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As a result, empirical research into postmodern conditions, research that integrates aspects of cultural studies and poststructuralism, and in doing so, explicates them in new ways, is prematurely shut down. Consequently, potentially innovative work on the part of the next generation of sociologists is lost. Again, when it comes to the study of contemporary culture, especially media-based culture, the implications of this normalization, I believe, are profound.

Among many sociologists, particularly those who have played a leading role in defining the trajectory of the Culture Section of the ASA since the days of Donna Gaines, a defensive reaction that sets in at the mere mention of the terms cultural studies, postmodernism, and poststructuralism. For so many mainstream sociologists, these terms are linked almost immediately, it seems, with notions of arbitrariness—both in terms of *what* analysts aligned with these perspectives are understood to be referring to and *how it is* that the referring is believed to occur. All too often, cultural studies in particular is misunderstood as (only) something non-empirical, probably

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because cultural studies' analysts often make claims regarding "the empirical" with too much subjectivity for scientifically-oriented sociologists. And as for poststructuralism, well, this is a term that, for mainstream sociologists, is the most questionable of all, because it connotes theory that is too philosophical, too French, and too obscure, which, for them, is decisive, it seems, in eliminating any possibility for constructive dialogue regarding the meaning and significance of culture. "Cultural studies," "postmodernism," "poststructuralism"—it makes no difference, really, which term is used, because for most sociologists, *all* of them imply an intellectual practice mired in relativism; a relativism antithetical to the discipline of sociology, precisely because it is believed to make the pursuit, attainment, and defense of "truth" impossible. In the face of this kind of challenge, too many mainstream sociologists have retreated to a questionable defense of data, of facts, of objective methods, all of which lead automatically, the thinking goes, to "truth." Failure to adopt this defensive stance, so the thinking continues, would place the entire enterprise of sociology—empirical *and* theoretical—in jeopardy. Or, worse still, taking on the challenge of poststructuralism would require mainstream sociologists to reformulate their disciplinary focus in new and unprecedented ways, something they show little evidence of doing to date. In any case, sociologists have ceded ground unnecessarily to those outside sociology when it comes to conceptualizing distinctively *sociological* aspects of postmodern culture and theorizing an *emergent* social ground for practice amidst postmodern conditions.

Obviously, not all sociologists are guilty as charged. Some *do* take postmodernism seriously: witness the essays appearing in the culture section newsletter as well as the papers presented at conferences and meetings that interrogate one or another aspect of the postmodern condition by drawing upon the literature of cultural studies and poststructuralism. I commend those who have undertaken this work as well as those who have supported it. But none of this is to say that hegemonic tendencies of scholarship are not also operative in the culture section (indeed, in sociology more generally). They are. The vast majority of newsletter accounts and paper presentations (as well as journal articles and books) assume, among other things, that culture possesses certain kinds of coherence, and further, that it can be best documented *scientifically*. Practically speaking, it is the naturalness of these assumptions that requires the absence, if not the outright suppression, of anything postmodern; otherwise, there could be no mainstream to the discipline. It is precisely this mainstream and its hegemonic power, including the naturalness of its assumptions regarding culture, I wish to criticize. And at this point, I am most interested in challenging the conceptual underpinnings of cultural sociology, not its scientism, in order to open things up beyond the mainstream for sociologists who do (or might) take postmodernism seriously.

The idea of a postmodern condition has been used by many analysts to mark our entry, as a society, into what might be termed a new historical era; one characterized by, among other things, the predominance of mass media as corporately-controlled, and image-based, communicative forms. In this view, images are everywhere, all the time. Typically, these images are *fabricated* with some idea of real life in mind (advertising images that represent something of inner city street culture as

they sell basketball shoes, for example); or, alternatively, the images are *dissociated* from real life (e.g., the visual and audio images that make up a news story about an event). Fabricated, dissociated, or both, images are then routinely combined with other images on a mass scale to constitute the multitude of ever-changing *image worlds* that are seemingly in constant motion and always available to people.

Most sociologists have presumed that these image worlds work in *coherent* ways. Over the years, they have used the idea of *normativity* in its various guises—intersubjective, institutional, and even social structural—to center research and theorizing on the subject. This scholarship has investigated a wide variety of things, including: marketing imperatives that drive production and distribution; economic forces and institutional requirements that shape decision-making practices; patterns of inclusion and exclusion in the representation of various groups, events, and aspects of social life; regularities in format, formula, characterization, and narrative; interrelations between commercial needs, political pressures, cultural struggles, and artistic concerns that comprise the hegemonic process; uses of different media; taste cultures emergent from consumption; attitudinal and behavioral effects of media form and content; interpretive aspects of media reception, including class, racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, and other identities that give meaningful form to individual and group activity. Importantly, even when tensions, conflicts, and contradictions in the workings of image worlds are emphasized, it is *coherence* that is presumed. *of usual use*

When it comes to the study of television, there is a substantial body of research documenting what I would call the "normative aspects" of use. In my own research with people who worked, I found that many of them watched consistently in a narrative-based way: they mindfully reconstructed developments in the character interactions, scenes, and stories that unfolded on the screen, which led them to see the world "out there" with some consistency and coherence. They were often critical of programming, too, and used interpretive frameworks based in their own identities—of class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality—to negotiate what was presented to them. By viewing in these ways, people placed themselves in the larger society in normatively identifiable, and hence, culturally coherent ways. These "discrete users," as I refer to them, oriented themselves with a similar sense of coherence when it came to their use of other media and involvement in a various non-media activities as well.

Along with the other research referred to above, my findings exemplify a fundamental tendency at work in cultural sociology: to establish a correspondence between underlying conceptions of cultural coherence, as both property and product of a centered subject, and empirical accounts that document the coherence of things cultural. So fundamental to sociological thinking is this tendency that it is evident even when culture is understood to take more objective, institutional or structural forms, such as in films, television shows, status distinctions, or hierarchies of decision-making; or, when culture is seen as something contested or contradictory, as mentioned above. Practiced in this way, cultural sociology is undoubtedly a *modernist* enterprise, because the image worlds of the mass media, in any and all of their workings, are always imagined and operationalized with ideas of coherence in mind.

*so coherence here*

Winn's coherence assumption

Despite its obvious strengths, this approach is inadequate when it comes to the study of so much of the culture that emerges amidst postmodern conditions. In the first place, mainstream sociology lacks a theory of commodification as a *cultural logic*. Operating as it does within very broad parameters of what is acceptable to audiences, corporate capitalism not only increases continually the sheer number of image worlds available to people; it also relies on and generates anew an *indifference* toward any particular norm, or value, in the very production of these image worlds. As image worlds proliferate, stable meaning becomes a problematic thing. Commodification, then, signals a *break* with normativity, and hence, a break with the coherence typically associated with the workings of norms in social life. None of this is accounted for, however, in a mainstream sociology that sees culture only as something coherent.

Second, mainstream sociology has failed to develop the conceptions of subjectivity at its disposal to account for the ways that people shape, and are shaped by, this cultural logic of commodification as it works along with more coherent aspects of media symbolism. Because people now live much of their lives in a culture that is not always (or only) normatively-based, time-honored assumptions—about the *intersubjective* basis of selfhood, about the developmental course of meaning-making activity, and about coherent identities serving as stable reference points for social action—are of limited use and their relevance for the study of contemporary conditions questionable.

Alternatively, by taking postmodernism seriously, culture is acknowledged as something always already embedded in highly commercial, technology-driven, and discourse-laden image worlds that are as fragmentary as they are normatively consistent (in addition to everything else that it is). Because of this, conventional ideas of coherence are no longer as relevant, or valid, as mainstream sociologists would like them to be in the study of contemporary culture. So, in addition to recognizing this "embeddedness," sociologists must reformulate their ideas of coherence and give new meaning to familiar terms, such as sociality, self, and agency, in order to illuminate rather than ignore, or dismiss, the distinctive culture emergent from postmodern conditions.

I was forced to confront precisely this kind of conceptual (and later, theoretical) reformulation in my television research. Along with the normatively-based viewing mentioned earlier, I documented viewing practices in which neither the discourse of programming, nor identities brought to it, provided the kind of coherence mainstream sociologists look for in culture. And yet, this television viewing was a meaningful—indeed an emotionally rich and mindfully complex—activity for the people I interviewed. For example, I found that people engaged regularly in a process of "recognizing formula": seeing through the social realities depicted in programming to identify a commodity form of programming that, in their eyes, makes different characters, stories, and programs commercially equivalent and, hence, interchangeable, with one another. Furthermore, I found many people engaged in "image-based" viewing, where this recognition of commercial equivalence and interchangeability caused them to treat programming as a series of *manipulable images*, and therefore I needed to dispense with the idea that their mindful activity was normatively-focused and developed in

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coherent ways. So, for example, people watched television while simultaneously doing other things—reading, cooking, cleaning, hobbies; they switched back and forth between different shows, disrupting the continuity and consistency exhibited in any of them; and they used images in more creative and free-floating ways, playing with the colors, movements, symbolism found there. In these viewing practices, people cultivated an *indifference* toward so much of what is held out in the storytelling conventions as normatively appropriate for them. They used their television-fostered capabilities of self, not their previously formed identities, to distance themselves from discourse and, hence, from normative forms of power.

Theirs was a disengaged sociality, one that is increasingly characteristic of how people now live in an image-based culture. To be disengaged is to be situated outside the logic of social action depicted in images, but not outside the logic of the image itself. People can be seen, and see others, not as intersubjectively-based actors, but as *images*. Social relations are constructed through the projection and appraisal of images, rather than through the more conventional starting point of role or identity. People become image-objects to each other and consequently, image-objects to themselves. In fact, knowledge of intersubjectively-based role expectations regarding what other people do, or how they think, is no longer needed in order for social interaction to proceed in a meaningful way. Needless to say, mainstream sociology has yet to chart cultural territory such as this, conceptually, empirically, or theoretically.

Taking postmodernism seriously, then, will enlarge significantly what counts as culture. But to do that, to really take postmodernism seriously, sociologists of culture must take poststructuralism seriously, too, because it contains the conceptual tools needed to theorize culture differently. And let's face it, after everything else is said and done—the legitimacy of media cultures questioned, the relativism of cultural studies exposed, the politics of postmodernism debated (and disputed)—the fact remains that mainstream sociologists, especially those who see themselves as sociologists of culture, need desperately to theorize culture differently than they do now.

So, what is the relevance of poststructuralist thinking for sociologists who study culture?

Since poststructuralism, how is it possible to speak of culture as something self-created, or the self as an origin or ground for cultural practice? Furthermore, where, conceptually speaking, does one locate that ground and the social creativity associated with it? Where and how, empirically speaking, do we see this creativity of self and cultural practice in social life?

Whenever sociologists use the construct *culture*, they deal with issues of meaning. Similarly, when they use the constructs self, and identity, either alone or as aspects of cultural analysis, they deal with issues of meaning, too. Culture is understood, then, as a *meaningful form*, and self and identity give meaningful form to practice. It is in this way that the more broad-based concern in sociology with norms and normativity becomes grounded in the concepts, methods, and theories that have come to comprise the study of culture.

In the ways that they are typically used by sociologists, these elemental constructs—culture, self, identity, meaning, the giving of meaningful form to activity, normativity—presuppose something even more fundamental: an idea of *coherence*.

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I don't do this

7) Before anything else, culture is understood by them to cohere. By virtue of having a self, or identity, a person is believed to possess (at least this kind of) coherence. Importantly, constructs of identity and self are often used in a way that connotes a sense of origin, too, so that each is understood to be both rooted in time and place and to serve as a root, or a point of origin, for practice. Because of this, meaning, the processes in which people give meaningful form to their activity, and the norms that people establish, orient themselves to, and rebel against—all of this presupposes something coherent as well.

It is precisely this coherence, arguably the most basic of presuppositions for cultural sociologists, that is called into question by the work of the poststructuralists. Why? Because these elemental constructs of sociology, all of them, including the connotations of cultural creativity that they carry, are now understood as having already been bound up with the more impersonal and center-less workings of discourse, or in other words, signification. *diff order grants*

By itself, the idea of "having already been bound up with" is not so fundamentally challenging to an explicitly "culturalist" perspective. After all, within sociology, constructs of agency have always been bound up with constructs of structure, with analysts delimiting the reach of structures, the scope of agency, or both. Throughout the agency-structure debates in our discipline, sociologists have always presupposed that culture, even when it is understood to be shaped in powerful ways by structure, is still something coherent, precisely because it is understood to be ordered and organized, to be *made* meaningful, by people, distinct from structure. (I also think that the construct of structure presupposes this same idea of a coherence attributable to the meaning-making activity of people, despite the relatively abstract nature of structural power effects in comparison to culture.) In this respect, the workings of discourse, of signification systems, are really very similar to what sociologists call social structure, because in both cases, culture is understood to be shaped, systematically, in ways that are beyond the recognition and control of people.

But when this idea of "having already been bound up with" is combined with the idea of "center-less" workings of discourse, of signification, the outcome for sociologists of culture is quite

different. This is to say that, for poststructuralists, the workings of discourse, for example, are understood to order and organize cultural life, and in so doing, *produce* a meaning of cultural life (which is a distinctive kind of power effect). But, this is understood to occur without originating in any "agency" that is attributable to the subject, the person who acts in the world. Poststructuralists certainly recognize that meaning is made and culture is practiced in the world. It is just that, conceptually speaking, they refuse to privilege either the idea of culture, or of a capacity for meaning-making on the part of persons, as existing *apart from* discourse, signification, or power. In their view of things, the very capacities of self and identity that give meaningful form to practice, and generate coherence in things cultural, are understood as *emergent from* more broad-based and *impersonal* systems of signification. Such capacities, and the coherence we attach to their cultural forms, are understood to have *already* been structured in discourse, which means, at the very least, that it is no longer possible to conceptualize them as only, or always, centering the analytical enterprise. The sense of presence that people exhibit, say, in conversations, in social encounters and interactions, or in their inner dialogues and imaginings is, from the very start, entwined with discourse. From this perspective, the entire range of constructs that sociologists employ in the study of culture—self, identity, the giving of meaningful form to activity, normative production and reproduction, and so on—are understood to be *decentered*. That is, sociologists' presumption of coherence in the study of culture is revealed to be just that: an assumption that they have *made* in order to render their inquiry intelligible to other sociologists. And exposed as such, this presumption can no longer serve as an analytical centering device that explains away the gaps and disjunctures in meaning, and meaning-making, that poststructuralists identify with a profound *lack* of coherence in cultural life. It is only when sociologists of culture, particularly those who study media-based culture, take postmodernism and poststructuralism seriously, that they will be able to reformulate their presumptions of coherence and, hence, arrive at a more adequate analytical grounding for their scholarly practice.

### The Decline or Reaffirmation of Privilege?, continued

quite the contrary. Given their strategic functions, it is unsurprising that universities find themselves, on occasion, discomforted by a flare up in a "cultural war."

*Kulturkriege* may not mobilize masses, but they do enlist politicians and journalists, and their casualties include artists and academics. The plight of UK universities in the Thatcher years is a *Kulturkampf* cautionary tale. It is an example of a partisan debate about culture and national habits that mattered. During Thatcher's administration, politicians used British universities generally, and Oxbridge in particular, as a scapegoat for the economic decline of Britain. The national culture that once nourished aggressive entrepreneurs had allegedly been supplanted by a mandarin ethos uncongenial to wealth creation. Critics saw academics as having been particularly at fault. Britain's "best and brightest" were supposedly

miseducated by Oxbridge faculty into becoming softhearted, more concerned with social expenditures than with profitable reinvestments. The political class, with images from *Brideshead Revisited* clouding their collective memories of university, was willing to believe that universities were anti-industrial.

The Thatcherite *Brideshead* indictment was false. It drew on distorted memories of Oxford prior to the Second World War, before it changed from a private liberal-arts club with aristocratic pretensions into a state university, heavily committed to the natural sciences, with a middle-class composition. Contrary to the Thatcherite charges, the largest category of Oxbridge academics were natural scientists, and most graduates went to work in industry or commerce. The unreality of the Thatcherite case against Oxbridge did not stop Conservatives from using it as the ideological knife to sever the compact

between the state and academia. Since all UK universities were state institutions, Thatcher with one Parliamentary Act in 1988, abolished tenure, eliminated block grant funding, and put the machinery in place for micro managing universities down to their socks. By now, all English universities are experienced hands in the worlds of corporate accountability and efficiency – and witnesses to a faculty exodus to America.<sup>1</sup>

There are, however, good reasons to believe a Thatcher type of thrashing can't happen to US academics: federalism and the private sector of higher education are both impediments. Yet, perhaps it is unwise to ignore the parallel between those culturally negatively-endowed Thatcher supporters, offended by academic elitists, and the American cultural dichotomy between Bush's "valuecrats" and Gore's "meritocrats" (see: Jack Hitt's "The Great Divide" in *The New York Times Magazine* 12-31-00: 13-14). If Hitt is right, then Bush and Thatcher both successfully appealed to a sense of grievance felt by a middling-status, moralistic stratum against arty-cosmopolitan academic meritocrats. (Who needs the NEA or high SATs when one has Pat Robertson on TV?) Thatcher drew her intellectual case against universities from Martin Weiner's *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*, 1984; Bush could as easily reference a staff-prepared executive summary of Christopher Lasch's *The Revolt of the Elites*, 1996. The parallel does not end there. Thatcher, like Bush, was uncomfortable at a high status university, she at Oxford, he at Yale. (Dick Cheney was so troubled during his undergraduate days that he withdrew from Yale.) And then there's John Ashcroft, a "valuecrat" from Old Yale, before women got in, solidly against affirmative action, abortion, gays, opera, NEA, and dancing.

Although the comparison between the Thatcher effect and the Bush threat is overdrawn, it is true that external and internal groups, political and market forces all effect the university's cultural authority and its institutional field. My research examines how shifting forces impact "elite" universities as well as the role those institutions play in the cultural, social, and political life of their nations. In the elite sector (such as the United State's Ivy League, and Britain's Oxbridge) struggles over the valorization of cultural capital affects who gains entry; symbolic conflicts influence what gets taught; and social capital networks structure job market destinations. Until the 1950s, Oxbridge as well as the Ivy League admitted, almost exclusively, Protestant males from privileged families, to dabble in illiberal arts, before inheriting a gentlemanly occupation. Then came the "barbarian" invasion, in the UK: natural scientists, proletarians, and women; in the US: Jews, women, Blacks, and most recently Asians and uncloseted gays. My first book, *The Decline of Privilege*, 1999, (which won a prize from the Culture Section) offers an account of that elite transformation in the UK, while my second (tentatively titled *The Ivy Ascendancy*) will do so for the United States.

The decline of the white-male-monopoly of elite universities has been accompanied by controversy on intellectual qualifications and social equity. The tensions between intellectual merit and social fairness in the United States have been sharpest over matters of race. The most important empirical contribution to the debate on affirmative action, demonstrating that "race sensitive admissions" work, is the book by the former presidents of Princeton and Harvard, William Bowen and Derek

Bok (*The Shape of the River*, 1998).<sup>2</sup> When the University of Michigan recently scored a legal victory for racial diversity, they did so with friendly briefs filed by Bowen and Bok. Elite institutions loom large, not only in the pro-diversity arguments but in the parables offered by foes of affirmative action (see Herrnstein and Murray's *The Bell Curve*, 1994: 29-50).

The cognitive Darwinist argument made by Herrnstein and Murray (brilliantly refuted by Berkeley sociologists in *Inequality by Design* 1996) touched on a central problem: the increasing exclusivity of elite education. In the US, the elite sector of higher education extends beyond the Ivies to those private research universities, such as Stanford, and those private liberal arts colleges, such as Williams, that have highly selective admissions and very expensive tuition and boarding fees. Out of approximately 3,500 institutions of higher education, there are perhaps only 50 in the elite league. And those 50, as Herrnstein and Murray pointed out, enroll under five percent of the undergraduates in the United States but sixty percent of those who scored in the 700s on their verbal SAT (Herrnstein and Murray 1994: 43). The bell curve authors were right to express alarm over the effects, but wrong on the causes, of "cognitive stratification" in America's Ivy League and its kindred institutions (Herrnstein and Murray 1994: 37-50).

Genetic inheritance is not accountable for the predominance of privileged families in elite education; rather, economic, cultural, and educational disparities between families are responsible. It is no coincidence that nearly fifty percent of elite students are from families with incomes in the top five percent of American families (Soares 1999: 212). In addition to high parental incomes, there has been a steep escalation in the cultural and educational attainments of families with elite college graduates. Setting considerations of gender and race aside for the moment, there is much more family cultural-capital and scholastic-capital<sup>3</sup> distance between the US population and undergraduates at elite institutions today than in the 1950s.

My research for the *Ivy Ascendancy* book, using reunion class surveys as well as the Mellon Foundation's extraordinary data (enhanced by adding specific identifiers for parent's college), shows that contrary to predictions of a post-1960s decline in high culture, elite families with Ivy undergraduates in the 1970s were more involved with the "fine arts" than their predecessors. Bourdieu was right. Cultural capital, understood as taste preferences for and participation in "highbrow culture," was more widespread and played a greater role in the reproduction of Ivy families' educational status after the 1960s than before. If two families with Ivy educated fathers differed in their cultural tastes, their odds of getting children into elite colleges were dramatically different. The cultural environment of an Ivy household whose father prefers opera music and enjoys reading *The New Yorker*, would grant its children odds five times more favorable of achieving elite educational reproduction than an Ivy family whose dad listens to big band music and subscribes to *Reader's Digest*. Before the 1960s, neither opera nor *The New Yorker* was statistically correlated with college reproduction for Ivy families.

In terms of scholastic capital, the shift is equally dramatic. In 1951, only 7% of men over 25 in the US had four years of college, while 66% of elite undergraduates had fathers with college degrees. By 1989, 24% of US adult males had college

degrees, while 93% of fathers of elite students did (US Dept. Education, *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*, 1993:18; Mellon data). On father's college education, the gap between the US population and elite undergraduates grew from 59 to 69 percentage points. Turned around, in the 1950s, about one-third of elite students came from homes without college-educated fathers; by 1990, only 7% of them did. Today, a college degree in dad's hand may be a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for a youth's admission to an elite institution; so elite families do not rest there. Their rates of attaining graduate degrees have doubled since the 1950s. Now, approximately 55% of elite undergraduates have parents with graduate degrees (law, medicine, business, MA, Ph.D., etc.), and that is twice the rate of state universities (Soares 1999: 213).

In England, during this period, there was a decline of privilege at Oxbridge in that the social class composition changed, becoming more middle and working class, less upper class. Meritocratic newcomers, with tuition fees and living grants paid by the state, displaced old-boys who relied on family connections and titles. In contrast, meritocracy at elite US colleges went along with more, not less, social distance. It may make sense to speak of the process as "privilege transformed," rather than "privilege declined." Family ties to particular elite institutions have hardly changed. About 18% of elite students in 1951 were "legacies," with a blood relative who attended the same place before them; in 1989, legacies were 17%. The ranks of elite undergraduates with parents educated at any elite institution, however, grew between 1951 and 1989 from one in five to one in three (Mellon data). Family-to-particular-

college ties were relatively stationary, while family-to-any-elite-college ties increased. The last two decades of the twentieth century were for elite institutions a period of incorporation, when a new academic nobility was brought alongside, but not in place of, the old one. One can only hope (against the odds) that by the time higher education is placed on the Republican legislative agenda sociologists and others who work to defend and expand social and racial diversity at universities will be in a stronger position than now. It is a sure bet that if Republican "valuecrats" strike at "elitists," they will hit racial minorities and academics rather than upper-class families.

<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, Thatcher's cultural dementia is contagious beyond the ranks of Tory politicians; even respectable American sociologists, such as Elliott Krause (see *Death of the Guilds*, 1996:88), describe it as a real, rather than imaginary, condition. For lingering signs of the phobia, see *The Economist*, "Cents and sensibility," January 6, 2001; and the exchange on Oxford in *Prospect*, January 2001: 12-15.

<sup>2</sup> Bowen and Bok were able to draw on the incomparable data assembled by the Mellon Foundation on elite education and race: over 92 thousand individual records from the cohorts of 1951, 1976, and 1989, from 34 institutions (Bowen and Bok 1998: 291).

<sup>3</sup> I agree with Useem and Karabel's distinction between scholastic capital, "a term which refers to educational attainment" and cultural capital, "the class-based capacity to decode valued symbolic meanings and objects" (Useem and Karabel, "Pathways to Top Corporate Management," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 51, April 1986: 185).

## Books of Note

Richard A. Peterson, *Vanderbilt University*

Lieberson, Stanley. *A Matter of Taste: How Names, Fashions and Culture Change*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. What's in a (first) name? Lieberson shows this a chance to explore the pure mechanisms of fashion, unaffected by the commercial interests that drive changing tastes in the arts, clothing, consumer goods, etc. Analyzing name choices over long periods of time among African-Americans, Mexicans, and American Jews as well as in the general population, he shows a cultural dynamic independent of social change. Parallels in the fields of classical music, the decline of the fedora, and women's fashions are suggested.

Ryan, John and William M. Wentworth. *Media and Society: The Production of Culture in the Mass Media*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. In a readable text, Ryan and Wentworth blend the orthodox communications study perspective on mass media with the production of culture perspective. Useful in a wide range of courses.

Hall, John R., *Cultures of Inquiry: From Epistemology to Discourse in Sociohistorical Research*. Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press. Questioning Kant's proposition that pure reason can't contain social inquiry, Hall uses hermeneutic deconstruction to produce a 'critique of impure reason' in charting a 'third path' between science and humanities.

Caves, Richard E., *Creative Industries: Contracts Between Art and Commerce*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Caves grounds tastes in the sometimes simple, sometimes complex interplay of commercial and consumer interests. This work focuses primarily on the art market, films, books, and popular music. It is instructive to see payola (in art as well as commercial music) through the eyes of an institutional economist.

Falasca-Zamponi, Simonetta. *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. The rise and political longevity as well as ignominious end of Benito Mussolini are seen through the lens of the fabricated symbols of fascism and their link to the ideas of Roman glories. Public spectacle did not so much help the fascists come to power as to make it up.

Bagguley, Paul. *From Protest to Acquiescence? Political Movements of the Unemployed*. London: Macmillan Education Ltd. How did the British labor movement gain so much from protests in the 1930s and so little from the unemployment of the 1980s? Bagguley finds sharp differences in working class resource mobilization and symbolic potency in the era of the welfare state.

Bennett, Michael and David W. Teague, editors. *The Nature of Cities: Ecocriticism and Urban Environments*. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press. The authors focus on the nature of cities by employing 'urban ecocriticism' to bridge the gap between environmentalism, cultural studies, and urban experience.

Bradford, Gigi, Michael Gary and Glenn Wallach, editors. *The Politics of Culture: Policy Perspectives for Individuals, Institutions, and Communities*. New York: The New Press. The twenty-five authors ask whether establishment arts organizations can survive the loss of government support and draw sustenance from new audiences.

Waksman, Steve. *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Waksman examines innovators of the electric guitar and finds two explanations for the symbolic power of the electric guitar (beyond the phallus theme). One explanation sees the draw of the electric guitar in its purity of sound (cf. Chet Atkins) while the other focus on its capacity for distortion (cf. Jimmie Hendrix). Waksman gives the nod to Hendrix et al.

Smith, Suzanne E., *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Lest you think that Motown music of the classical period was just a whitened version of black music based in the genius of a handful of individuals, Smith shows the political bent of Motown, its place in the political-racial landscape of Detroit and the national Civil Rights movement, and brings new light to bear on the extensive series of speeches released on Motown's Black Forum label – records by Martin Luther King, Stokely Carmichael, Langston Hughes, and the Last Poets among others.

Ardery, Julia S., *The Temptation: Edgar Tolson and the Genesis of Twentieth-Century Folk Art*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press. Ardery shows how the valueless dolls carved by a North Carolina farmer were changed into invaluable examples of Outsider Art. More accurately, the book is an essential part of the conversion.

Sanders, Clinton R., *Understanding Dogs: Living and Working with Canine Companions*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press. Based on observations made in veterinary clinics, dog guide training schools, obedience classes, and his own experience, Sanders shows how dog owners come to see their animal companions as thinking, emotional, and trustworthy. But what do people mean to the dogs?

Thomson, Irene Taviss. *In Conflict No Longer: Self and Society in Contemporary America*. Landham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. Drawing on self-help manuals and social science analysis, Thompson traces the conflict between individual and American society from 1920 through 1995. She finds that as people abandoned the myth of individual struggle against society, a new myth of the socially-embedded self has developed.

Enzer, Hyman A. and Sandra Solotaroff-Enzer, editors. *Anne Frank: Reflections on Her Life and Legacy*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press. The Enzer's present a collection of more than two dozen articles and memoirs on the life, writings, death, and evolving interpretation of Anne Frank.

Reed, John Shelton. *Glorious Battle: The Cultural Politics of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press. Reed provides a thorough and often amusing account of how the Anglo-Catholic movement in the Victorian Church of England overcame vehement opposition to establish itself as a legitimate form of Anglicanism.

Levy, Emanuel. *Cinema of Outsiders: The Rise of American Independent Film*. New York: New York University Press. The most important development in American culture of the past two decades, Levy tells us, is the emergence of independent cinema as a viable alternative to Hollywood fare.

Dubin, Steven C., *Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum*. New York: New York University Press. Where public outrage was once focused on provocative work by upstart artists, now major public exhibition spaces are the focus of attention. In looking at the recent disputes about exhibitions having to do with ethnicity, slavery, Freud, the Old West, and the dropping of the atomic bomb, Dubin shows the traces of moral entrepreneurship and power.

Cole, Robert E., *Managing Quality Fads: How American Business Learned to Play the Quality Game*. New York: Oxford University Press. American manufacturers long depended on the efficiencies of the assembly line and continual style variation to fuel sales, but, though the lesson was long resisted by entrenched American concerns, the Japanese auto industry taught the sales potential of "quality." Tracing this cultural history, Cole shows how Hewlett-Packard learned from the experience.

Henderson, Hazel, Jon Lickerman, and Patrice Flynn, editors, *Calvert-Henderson Quality of Life Indicators*. Washington, DC: Calvert Group. A wide-ranging attempt to get beyond the obsession with the GDP and the limited set of production measures. Among the twelve chapters is one on recreation, or "recreation" as they call it, by Richard Peterson and Carrie Lee.

*The following are books with comments copped from a "Books of Note" on consumption studies compiled by Dan Cook dtcook@uiuc.edu. Check it out at socconsump@bsoslist.umd.edu*

Schor, Juliet and Douglas Holt, editors. *The Consumer Society Reader*. New York: Island Press. A useful collection of 28 previously published classical and contemporary essays.

Gottdiener, Mark, editor. *New Forms of Consumption: Consumers, Culture and Commodification*. Landham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield. New essays on the history, media, and politics of consumption.

Halter, Marilyn. *Shopping for Identity: The Marketing of Ethnicity*. New York: Schocken Books. Food, restaurants and clothes are only a beginning in the era of elective ethnicity.

#### Four from AltaMira

Lagerway, Mary. *Reading Auschwitz*. Trying to liberate the view of Jewish experience in Nazi Europe, Lagerway shows how gender, social class, politics, and ethnicity color interpretations of the experience.

Ho, Wendy. *In Her Mother's House: The Politics of Asian American Mother-Daughter Writing*. Ho shows how three generations talk and write about themselves and each other.

Smeins, Linda E. *Building an American Identity: Pattern Book Homes and Communities 1870-1900*. Smeins uses house-pattern book designs of the Victorian era to trace the evolution of ideas about the appropriate house for the suburban communities just then developing.

Walker, Patricia and Thomas Graham. *Directory of Historic House Museums*. Useful cross-references give a picture of over 3000 historic homes in the United States.

#### A New York Twelve from Cambridge University Press

Lamont, Michèle and Laurent Thévenot, editors. *Rethinking Comparative Cultural Sociology: Repertoires of Evaluation in France and the United States*. Researchers in France and the US present eight comparative case studies to demonstrate how people in these two contrasting cultures mobilize national repertoires of evaluation in making judgments about politics, economics, morals, and aesthetics.

DeNora, Tia. *Music in Everyday Life*. DeNora uses a series of ethnographic studies and interviews to show the ways in which music is a constitutive feature of human agency and highlights the aesthetic dimension of social order and organization in modern societies.

Wagner-Pacifi, Robin. *Theorizing the Standoff: Contingency in Action*. Wagner-Pacifi focuses on seven cases from the U.S. and Peru in which dissent groups confronted state force and shows how humans get in and out of such charged situations.

Eisenstadt, S.N. *Fundamentalism, Sectarianism, and Revolution: The Jacobin Dimension of Modernity*. Eisenstadt brings into focus the dramatic rise of fundamentalist movements in Israel and around the world. He sees parallels in the revolutionary periods of America, France, and Japan.

Marvin, Carolyn. *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag*. The authors argue that American patriotism is a civil religion organized around a sacred flag, whose followers engage in periodic blood sacrifice of their own children to reunify the group.

Krims, Adam. *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity*. Krims discusses in detail how rap music is put together musically.

Lembo, Ron. *Thinking Through Television*. Based on an empirical study of the use of TV by working people, Lembo develops a unique theoretical approach to explore the ways in which people give meaning to their viewing practices. He concludes that TV viewing is a distinct form of cultural activity.

Daly, Mary. *The Gender Division of Welfare: The Impact of the British and German Welfare States*. Daly traces the consequences of contrasting German and British welfare state and social policy arrangements for women and men and the households in which they live.

Feldman, Eric A. *The Ritual of Rights in Japan: Law, Society, and Health Policy*. Questioning the usual view of the Japanese as hyperconformists, Feldman uses the battles over AIDS policy to show how rights issues have become weapons in political battles.

Rajagopal, Arvind. *Politics after Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India*. Rajagopal provides a detailed study of the effects of political reporting in India between 1987 and 1993 and makes comparisons with the US. TV has been vital to the recent widespread revival of militant Hindu nationalism.

Warde, Alan and Lydia Martens. *Eating Out: Social Differentiation, Consumption and Pleasure*. Eating out, like periodic visits to exotic warm places, is one way the British try to get away and suggests why they generally come home.

#### Four on music from Continuum

Lentini, Peter. *Raging Against the Machine*. Lentini argues that the subcultures associated with post-Cold War rock genres all use the music to advance political agenda, to celebrate alternative life styles, and at the social cement of their "neo-tribes." These practices are placed in the context of global commercial culture and efforts of authorities to maintain cultural dominance.

Hayward, Philip. *Sound Alliances: Indigenous Peoples, Cultural Politics and Popular Music in the Pacific*. Hayward shows that the indigenous peoples of the Pacific islands appropriate Western pop music forms including punk, reggae, and rap as means of expressing their own distinctive cultural identities.

Shipton, Alyn, editor. *A New History of Jazz*. Shipton brings to light a great deal of information that puts into question the standard history of jazz, seen for example on the recent Ken Burns PBS series, "Jazz," and in particular that jazz had its

origin in the red light district of New Orleans. He sees the bop revolution in the context of Black Pride, Black Power movements and, he also argues that innovations didn't end with the passing of John Coltrane but follows trends through the end of the 20th century.

Laing, Dave and Sarah Davis. *The Guerilla Guide to the Music Business*. This is many cuts above the usual "how to ..." book by two writer-scholars with considerable experience inside the British music industry.

#### University of California Press's eight

Honey, Michael Keith. *Black Workers Remember: An Oral History of Segregation, Unionism, and the Freedom Struggle*. The remembered experiences of black Memphis workers from the 1930s to the present suggest a different view of the Civil Rights movement. In their view it was not led by young people and preachers.

Conley, Dalton. *Being Black, Living in the Red*. Conley shows to his satisfaction that the inequalities between blacks and white in America today are not due to the culture of race but but to the economic inequalities that have accumulated over the course of American history.

Wiener, Jon. *Gimme Some Truth: John Lennon and the FBI*. Tells the story of the author's remarkable fourteen-year court battle to win release of the Lennon FBI file and provides a concise annotation of the files. It shows the paranoia not only in the Nixon administration but also in those of Bill Clinton and Tony Blair.

Elliott, Anthony. *The Mourning of John Lennon*. Meanwhile out in another province of memory Elliott provided a provocative story of innocence lost by the boomer generation.

Klatch, Rebecca E. *A Generation Divided: The New Left, the New Right, and the 1960s*. The 1960s were not just a festival of the Left, but as Klatch shows, it was also the crucible of the New Right of Barry Goldwater, Ayn Rand, and the Young Americans for Freedom. While the Left captured the English Department, the right captured the White House.

Bonnell, Victoria E. and Lynn Hunt, editors. *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*. Meanwhile, in the English department the effort was to capture History and Sociology. The authors assess the successes of the postmodernist turn.

Mertus, Julie A. *Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War*. Interviewing participants on all sides Mertus shows how high-minded values and a self-serving reading of history lead people to kill and maim with gusto.

Banet-Weiser, Sarah. *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and the National Identity*. You thought it was all long legs and vacuousness, but, based on interviews with participants and judges, Banet-Weiser sees the beauty pageant

as the place where concerns about national identity and cultural hopes, as well as anxieties about race and gender, crystalized.

#### Five from the University of Chicago Press

Fox, Richard Wightman. *Trials of Intimacy: Love and Loss in the Beecher-Tilton Scandal*. A leading New York minister of the 1870s is accused by his intimate friend, a famous writer, of an adulterous affair with his wife, a woman "nearly Catholic in her piety." The sensational six-month trial ended inconclusively. There never has been a trial that so gripped the American psyche – remember it was a slow-news decade – except for the one in the *The Scarlet Letter* to which it was regularly compared.

Katz, Jack. *How Emotions Work*. Katz videotapes emotions that are freely evoked, including crying under police interrogation, road rage, laughing in a fun house, and young baseball players shamefully striking out. Katz finds that people are sensually, intimately, and aesthetically bound up in the landscape of their lives.

McClosky, Deirdre N. *Crossing: A Memoir*. A renowned economist and historian, a husband and father, Donald McClosky rather suddenly at age 52 sensed that he was denying his real identity and he needed to become a woman. *Crossing* is the story of this realization and its consequences.

Sherman, Daniel J. *The Construction of Memory in Interwar France*. World War One devastated France and raised a number of issues, not least of which was how to dispose of the bodies, commemorate their sacrifice and slake the pain of the living. Sherman shows why the local commemorative monument with its tall spire, somber statuary and long list of the dead – still the epicenter of town squares across the country – became the chosen form of collective remembering.

Rabinow, Paul. *French DNA: Trouble in Purgatory*. In an effort to discover the genes causing diabetes, an American pharmaceutical firm and a French genetics laboratory decided to collaborate. Just as the collaboration was begun the French government blocked the venture saying Americans could not be allowed to research that most precious of substances, "French DNA." Rabinow shows how the interests of science, commerce, and patrimony intersect in this era.

#### ENDNOTE

I'm back from England and it's good to dig into Books of Note again. There is a considerable backlog of interesting new work, so if you haven't seen your favorite, be assured, I've censored none out. Please send me the complete citation and a several paragraph statement of what's in the book. Send to Richard A. Peterson, Box 1811 Station B. Vanderbilt U. Nashville, TN 37235 or to [richard.a.peterson@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:richard.a.peterson@vanderbilt.edu)

Cheers,  
pete

## Announcements and Reminders

- Remember to **renew your membership** to the Section, if you haven't already done so. You can renew online: <http://www.asanet.org>.
- March 1 is the deadline for submitting nominations to the Section's various awards committees. For the **Best Book Award**, contact Albert Bergesen, Department of Sociology, University of Arizona, Social Sciences Building, Room 400, Tucson, Arizona 85721. E-mail: [albert@email.arizona.edu](mailto:albert@email.arizona.edu). For the **Best Article or Chapter Award**, contact : Sarah Corse, Department of Sociology, 539 Cabell Hall, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia 22904-4766. E-mail: [smc6r@cms.mail.virginia.edu](mailto:smc6r@cms.mail.virginia.edu). For the **Best Student Paper Award**, contact John Mohr, Department of Sociology, Ellison Hall, Room 2834, University of California at Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, California 93106-9430. E-mail: [mohr@graddiv.ucsb.edu](mailto:mohr@graddiv.ucsb.edu).
- The **3rd Cultural Turn Conference at UC Santa Barbara** will be held on Friday Feb. 23 and Sat. Feb. 24. The topic for this year's gathering is "Profane and Sacred." Check out the conference web page: <http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/projects/ct3/>. Conference organizers are John Mohr, Roger Friedland, and Richard Hecht. Direct any logistical questions to the conference coordinator, Drew Bourne. E-mail: [ct@sscf.ucsb.edu](mailto:ct@sscf.ucsb.edu).
- The theme of the **71<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society** is "Culture: Revived, Revised, and Relevant." The meeting will be held at the Loews Philadelphia Hotel, March 1-4. The Preliminary Program is now posted on the ESS website, [www.essnet.org](http://www.essnet.org).