

# Culture

Section of the American Sociological Association

## A Message from the Chair

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### Historical Analogy: On the Social Typification of Memory

One of the most intriguing forms of linking in our minds the past and the present is through *analogy*, with the former essentially serving as a *model* for the latter.<sup>1</sup> This is done both consciously, as when Camilla Parker Bowles initiated her affair with Prince Charles by “reminding” him that her great-grandmother and his great-great-grandfather had been lovers, and unconsciously, as when we unwittingly “reproduce” our relations with our parents in the way we relate to authority figures or choose our sexual partners.

Like lawyers searching for legal precedents and generals “preparing for the last war,” policymakers often draw on the past when dealing with present situations. President Kennedy’s decision to increase the American military aid to South Vietnam, for example, was considerably inspired by the successful outcome of past campaigns against Communist insurgencies in Malaya and the Philippines. President Johnson’s decision to send American troops there was likewise inspired by the Korean War.

Such mobilization of memories often takes the form of learning “the lessons of the past.” Indeed, past traumas are often used to scare people, as evident from the deliberate use of the memory of the 1918 influenza epidemic to promote mass immunization during the 1976 swine flu scare, the way we learn to avoid job-related behavior for which others had been demoted or fired, and the “Never again” rhetoric of the Jewish Defense League.

Consider also the memories of the Japanese, Italian, and German aggression in the 1930s. As early as 1945 the United States was cautioned by Iran not to allow the Soviet Union do in Azerbaijan what Japan and Germany had done a few years earlier in China and Czechoslovakia. Five years later, when North Korea invaded South Korea, those memories (along

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## Editor's Note

Please let me know your ideas for submissions!

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## Does Culture Have Inertia?

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Several years ago, Howard Becker (1995) published a brief piece explaining the stability of particular artistic genres on analogy to the physical principle of inertia. Artistic genres have inertia, he argued, to the extent that working within them activates a set of institutions and practices that are complex and mutually dependent. The more differentiated and interdependent the institutions and practices involved, the higher will be the cost of stepping outside them to innovate, and this cost serves as an index of the inertia of the genre. Becker implied that the concept of cultural inertia can help us understand not just the formal conservatism of the art world, but the relative

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## Collective Memories of Terrorism: The Bologna Massacre, 1980-2001

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Some crimes take place twice: first when they occur, then when they are object of a structurally instigated amnesia. How are massacres commemorated? Are some forms of cultural memory more suitable than others? Which forms of commemoration have tended to prevail in Italy during the recollection of recent massacres? These are some of the questions which encouraged me to look at these massacres and their relationship with collective memory<sup>1</sup>. I was interested in trying to understand how in the case of these massacres certain commemorative artifacts have been produced, and have been seen as suitable — at least from an institutional point of view — to represent the memory of terrorism and of the “strategy of tension,” of one of the most controversial periods in recent Italian history. The memory of the massacres represents a clear “interstitial case” in the sense proposed by Wagner-Pacifici (1996): these are controversial events and in most cases there are trials that are still ongoing decades later or verdicts that have

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with that of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia) also played a major role in President Truman's decision to help the South. Indeed, the "historical lessons" of those events as well as the infamous British and French attempt to appease Adolf Hitler at the 1938 Munich conference were among the foundations of the "domino theory" that dominated American foreign policy during the late 1950s and early 1960s and affected the decision to get more deeply involved in Vietnam.

The significance of "Munich" as a historical analogy can hardly be overstated. Its memory played a major role, for example, in Britain's decision to attack Egypt when Gamal Abdul Nasser seized the Suez Canal in 1956. By the same token, when trying to mobilize both national and international support for the Gulf War, George Bush kept portraying Saddam Hussein as a present-day Hitler, thereby drawing on the analogy between Czechoslovakia and Kuwait and implying that by not attacking Iraq the West would only "repeat" its regrettable capitulation to the German dictator at Munich. Similar analogies to Hitler were made with regard to both Slobodan Milošević and Yassir Arafat to justify the bombing of Serbia by NATO in 1999 and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

The wish to avoid "repeating the mistakes of the past" often impacts what we do in the present. Consider, for example, in this regard, the deliberate efforts to incorporate "the lessons" of the 1815 Congress of Vienna into the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, or to avoid making at the end of World War II the "same" mistakes that had been made with regard to Germany at the end of World War I. Consider also Johnson's attempt to avoid repeating in Vietnam America's failure to anticipate China's intervention in Korea in 1950, or the way in which those who objected to the American involvement in Vietnam kept invoking the outcome of the French involvement there ten years earlier. The wish to avoid a "repeat" of the Cultural Revolution and of the 1992 and 1993 Ruby Ridge and Waco debacles likewise affected the way Deng Xiaoping and American law enforcement officials respectively approached the 1989 student demonstrations in Tiananmen Square and the 1996 standoff with the Freemen of Montana.

In fact, throughout the Montana standoff, people were explicitly trying to avoid "*another Waco*," in the same way that the American interventions in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic in the 1960s were respectively motivated by the wish to prevent "another" Korea or Cuba! (Consider also, in this regard, various calls for "no more Munichs," "Cubas," "Koreas," or "Vietnams"). By the same token, when Johnson wanted to avoid public criticism by General William Westmoreland during the Vietnam War, he actually invoked an analogous incident involving General Douglas MacArthur and President Truman during the Korean War and explicitly warned him not to "pull a MacArthur on me." On the eve of the Battle of Khe Sanh, invoking the historic French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, he likewise warned that he did not want "any damn Dinbinphoo."

Like the American fear of "repeating" in Vietnam the so-called "loss of China to the Communists" in 1949 (or characterization of the political situation in Bulgaria in 1945 as a Bulgarian "version" of the situation in Russia in 1917), the actual use of "Waco," "Munich," or "Dien Bien Phu" as generic terms is indicative of a special link we envision between the past and the present. By invoking "parallel" situations from the past, historical analogies help new situations seem somewhat

more familiar. Like legal precedents, they are essentially based on perceived similarity and thus presuppose some *mnemonic typification*. In general, we tend to remember not only specific historical figures and events but also certain "types" of figures and events. Thus, when Israeli nationalists protesting Yitzhak Rabin and Ehud Barak's conciliatory approach toward the Palestinians tried to portray them as "former military heroes who later, as political leaders, ended up betraying their country," France's Marshal Henri Pétain was a most evocative historical "precedent" on which they repeatedly drew.

The typified manner in which we tend to remember the figures and events on which we draw such analogies also implies that they become generic symbols that transcend their specific historical location. Thus, when drawing historical analogies, we do not feel particularly constrained by the considerable temporal distance often separating past signifiers from their corresponding present signifieds. Thus, for example, when the Israeli-Palestinian talks in Camp David about the future of Jerusalem broke down last summer, it was hardly surprising to see Arafat being hailed by his people as a modern version of Saladin, the Muslim warrior who had liberated Jerusalem from the Crusaders 813 years earlier!

Essentially drawing on the very same highly evocative historical analogy, right before the Gulf War Saddam Hussein made a similar attempt to link Saladin's historic victory over the Crusaders to the anticipated outcome of his own impending confrontation with the new invading infidels from the West. Just a few years earlier, however, during the Iran-Iraq War, he had a large billboard portraying him as Sa'd ibn-abi-Waqqas, who had led the Arab army that defeated Persia at the Battle of Qadisiyya back in 637. Positioning himself at the forefront of the next Arab war against Israel, he then also tried to link himself analogically to Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian (and thus "Iraqi") ruler who had actually managed to conquer Jerusalem almost twenty-six centuries earlier!

Such remarkably *transhistorical conflation of past and present* historical protagonists also characterized the portrayal of the wars between Rome and Carthage in Nazi history textbooks as a racial conflict between Aryans and Semites, as well as Sergei Eisenstein's 1938 cinematic tribute to Prince Alexander Nevsky, who had in 1242 stopped a German invasion of Russia, on the eve of an anticipated new invasion by the Nazis. And in 1942, when Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's army was about to enter Palestine, Jewish military commander Yitzhak Sadeh likewise linked the impending battle he anticipated to Masada's famous last stand against the Romans almost nineteen centuries earlier by presenting his troops as "a new edition" of the defenders of Masada!

Furthermore, when drawing historical analogies we also do not feel particularly constrained by the considerable geographical distances often separating past signifiers from their corresponding present signifieds. A perfect case in point was the use of the Exodus from Egypt as a particularly evocative metaphor by English Puritans in the 1640s as well as by eighteenth-century Americans who regarded their colonial bondage under England as "a second Egypt." Consider also, in this regard, the highly creative use of the Jewish victory over Syria in 165 B.C. by Handel in his oratorio *Judas Maccabaeus* to allegorically celebrate the crushing of the second Jacobite rebellion in England in 1746. Or the way Albrecht Altdorfer used

in his 1529 painting *Alexanderschlacht* the Persian army that Alexander the Great had defeated at Issus 1,862 years earlier to allegorically represent the Ottoman troops who were laying siege to Vienna that year!

As one might expect, however, the impact of such historical analogies is much greater when actual constancy of place helps eliminate any geographical distance between the past and the present, as in the case of Alexander Nevsky or Nebuchadnezzar. Yet it is even more powerful when some *symbolic simultaneity* helps reinforce such analogical “bridging.” Thus, when a large Israeli right-wing demonstration happened to fall on the week on which the traditional weekly portion of reading from the Torah included the story of the twelve spies who were sent by Moses to bring him the first impressions of the promised land, nationalist rabbis used the coincidence to draw an explicit analogy between the ten “defeatist” spies who

were intimidated by Palestine’s native population and Barak, who had already expressed his readiness to give up some West Bank territory for peace with the Palestinians!

The study of historical analogies offers a useful window into one of the most fascinating ways in which we try to mentally bridge the inevitable ontological gap between the past and the present. It also demonstrates the tremendous potential that looking at analogical thinking has for cultural sociologists interested in the process of social typification, an absolute prerequisite for the social construction of reality. Understanding the unmistakably social dynamics of the way we choose the conventional historical signifiers that come to analogically “represent” particular present situations is arguably also one of the most promising future contributions of cognitive sociology to the sciences of the mind.

<sup>1</sup>This is an abridged version of a section of a chapter from my forthcoming book *Time Maps: Social Memory and the Topography of the Past*.

## Does Culture Have Inertia?, continued

stability of social organization in general. Indeed, an appeal to it seems involved in analyses of cultural or institutional endurance that invoke concepts such as path dependence (Dobbin 1994).

My aim here is to evaluate the analogy, in a preliminary way, as a stimulus to further discussion. My interest in it was initially piqued by the fascinating work of Nisbett and Cohen (1996), who explain the current elevated incidence of argument-related homicide in the rural U. S. South and Southwest as a holdover of a culture of honor originally imported to the South by Scots-Irish immigrants roughly two centuries ago. Certain attitudes and practices associated with this culture remain alive (albeit etiolated), they argue, even though the circumstances that gave rise to them and made them functional have long since disappeared. This case could be ranked alongside numerous others, ranging from the supposed tenacity of the “culture of poverty” to the apparent influence of persistent folkways on aesthetic innovation (e.g. the African roots of breakdancing) that seem in principle to beg for analysis in terms of culture’s inertia. At the same time, inertia is so nearly tautologous as an explanatory principle that we need to be wary of resort to it. Here I look at two cases—the cessation of footbinding in China (Mackie 1996) and metrication campaigns in the U. S. (Watkins 1998)—that illustrate problems with the concept and the difficulty in avoiding its tautologous use, and I invite colleagues to suggest ways these difficulties might be finessed. First, however, some reflections on the concept itself.

As a physical principle, inertia refers to the resistance of a body at rest to being moved, or of a body in motion to being accelerated, decelerated, or redirected. Bodies are assumed to continue in their present state, whether at rest or in motion, without additional inputs of energy. In contrast, cultural systems always require continuous expenditures of energy to be reproduced across time. Let’s assume this does not destroy the analogy: it seems clear that it is meant to convey only the relative difficulty of inducing change in a cultural system (or at least of “bucking the trend” through innovation). Doing things differently is assumed to cost significantly more in human energy than keeping them as they are, though keeping them as

they are itself always costs something. For example, Becker points out that music that conforms to the twelve tone scale now standard in Western music is easier to get performed than is music that innovates formally by dividing the scale in a different fashion. Because musical instruments have been designed with the twelve-tone scale in mind, departing from it adds the extra cost of designing new instruments—something actually done by composer Harry Partch. Examples like this invite us to conceive of the inertia of a specific cultural system (like musical performance) as the ratio of effort needed to introduce a specific innovation to a genre to the effort needed to conform within it. The higher the ratio, the greater the inertia.

But while such a ratio may appeal at first glance as a way to estimate the inertia of a cultural system, it has the drawback of always being *ex post facto*. An attractive feature of an object’s physical inertia is that it is a function of its mass, and so can be calculated *beforehand* to estimate the force a specific change would require. Unless the inertia of a cultural system can similarly be estimated through some property comparable to mass (such as systemic complexity and interdependence), the notion will be practically useless. Indeed, to explain a cultural system’s resistance to innovation *ex post facto* through its inertia would be tautologous and uninformative unless some roughly objective measure of this could be devised that is independent of efforts to innovate—as two examples will illustrate.

Consider first footbinding and its cessation in China, as analyzed by Gerry Mackie (1996). The practice first appeared in the imperial court roughly a thousand years ago and spread downward in the stratification system until perhaps the majority of Chinese women underwent the procedure. It was extremely burdensome in terms of their pain, of effort expended upon the procedure itself, and of their consequent physical incapacitation—making it an “inferior convention” in comparison to natural feet. Despite this, bound feet were preferred aesthetically to natural ones, while morally, they were thought to betoken modesty. Hence they were a sign of status, and in a hypergamous marriage market became virtually mandatory if women were to have any chance of a “good” marriage. Thus

even families opposed to footbinding felt obliged to practice it, and mothers, who had experienced the pain of binding themselves, visited the condition upon their daughters. So apparently tenacious was the practice that various abolitionist campaigns, from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, often organized from the political center, failed.

Then footbinding was abandoned, rapidly, in the first quarter of this century. Mackie attributes this to three factors: a) propaganda emphasizing that it was not customary in other countries, which disapproved of the custom; b) propaganda emphasizing the benefits of natural feet and the drawbacks of footbinding; and c) natural-foot societies whose members promised not to bind daughters' feet nor to allow sons to marry women with bound feet. Mackie analyzes the impact of this last development by means of a Schelling coordination diagram, which shows that organized groups of innovators in a population, such as the natural-foot societies, can grow to reach a "tipping point" (still as a comparatively small percentage of the whole population) that changes a practice across the society quite rapidly and without great additional effort.

The case poses a significant problem for the inertial analogy. Clearly, footbinding was a practice of *apparently* great inertia. Bound feet were a major component of the stratification system and had been so for nearly a thousand years. Their significance ramified into the aesthetic and moral domains, while their impact had important economic dimensions, sculpting the labor force in significant ways. Thus they were part of a differentiated and integrated system in the way that Becker's invocation of inertia requires. Further, the practice was perceived by early twentieth-century observers as being difficult to extirpate, since previous campaigns against it had failed and pundits estimated that the transition between bound and unbound systems might take as long as 300 years. Yet the transition proved remarkably easy and rapid, once the right mix of tactics to induce change was fielded. Indeed, a practice of apparently great inertia could be "tipped" out of existence with *comparatively* minor effort—once the correct tactics were discovered. At the very least, this suggests that cultural inertia is not a linear property; at worst it suggests that it is not an objective one, but instead is always relative to the tactics used to innovate. The first problem calls for a different analogy, perhaps to a property like tensile strength; the second strikes in principle at the utility of the concept.

A less dramatic example underscores this second problem. The system of weights and measures in the U. S.—the English system—has for almost two hundred years been deemed an "inferior convention" by proponents of metrication. As Watkins (1998) has shown, numerous campaigns to bring U.S. measures into conformity with the metric standard have been launched. Each has begun with some enthusiasm and then stalled in relatively short order. Does this indicate that English measurement standards in the U. S. have great inertia? Perhaps so or perhaps not. On the one hand, the U. S. system is differentiated and apparently interdependent. Changing to a metric standard would have significant start-up costs and require some bothersome retooling of habits. On the other hand, there seems to be little penalty for defection from the convention, as specific industries (e.g. bottled beverages and scien-

tific research) have already made the switch. Further, Canada is undergoing metrication without significant difficulty, though in most other respects it is like the U. S.

What does the experience of the two countries say about the inertia of English weights and measures? First of all, though propaganda for metrication has always painted English measures as an inferior convention—the sort of sub-optimal institution in which we are trapped by path dependence—it has been hard successfully to dramatize its inferiority. For instance, U. S. exports have continued to increase as a component of the GNP at the same time metric proponents have argued that failure to metricate *must* result in export declines. The lack of demonstrable negative consequences argues that the case is different from footbinding, though we could also use it to argue how profoundly subjective are estimates of a convention's inferiority. At the same time, we could use the fact that certain industries have already switched to question whether the system of English measures is really interdependent, since it appears relatively easy to opt out of it. Finally, we could use the example of Canada to argue that the inertia of the system in the U.S. is only apparent.

As Watkins (1998) argues, the successful switch by Canada can be explained largely by more decisive leadership and successful organization. Political traditions in the U. S. have caused congressional metric conversion legislation to take a largely voluntary approach which is then ill organized and poorly funded. Canadian political traditions allowed for a decisive and well-coordinated centralized effort to change. This effort has clearly been more costly than those of the U. S., providing some support to the notion of inertia. At the same time, it suggests, as in the footbinding case, that the "inertia" of a convention may be uncomfortably relative to the strategies used to extirpate it—an idea that would make inertia practically useless as a concept. That is to say, a convention may appear to have great inertia only until we discover an effective strategy to challenge it, whereupon it may prove to have had little. Consequently, there might be no way to measure inertia except *post facto*, through the relative cost of effective challenge to the convention. If so, however, the owl of inertia would fly only at dusk.

The cases of footbinding and of English measures, then, suggest two basic difficulties with the metaphor of inertia. First, the physical property is linear while the cultural one may not be. Cultural practices may remain in place despite resistance and attempts to innovate, only to disappear quite suddenly when slightly more "force" is applied. If so, it might be more appropriate to speak of the "tensile strength" of cultural practices than of their inertia. Yet the value of any such analogy is thrown in question by a second difficulty: that the different "forces" or strategies of innovation that challenge stability may not be commensurable. That is to say, the "tensile strength" of a practice will appear to be high when confronted with ineffective innovative tactics and yet prove quite low when confronted by more effective ones—and there would be no way to know apart from successful low-cost challenge. This would render the concept useless as an explanatory or predictive principle, since we could never know whether we had fielded the lowest cost challenge, though this would be the only true measure of inertia.

Several routes around this problem are conceivable. On the one hand, we may be demanding more of the analogy than Becker originally designed it to offer. Footbinding and English measures are clearly more differentiated and interdependent practices than, say, use of the original floppy disk, and we might use these qualities to explain why they proved *more* resistant to change. Thus we salvage the concept by scaling back our use of it to occasions where it cannot easily go wrong. Alternatively, we might become more precise about what we mean by the differentiation and interdependence of a system, and get serious about measuring these qualities. We might then compare our measures with subjective estimates of inertia, as well as correlate them with the cost of successful challenges, so as to determine whether the concept can be given objective content. Finally, we can question whether differentiation and interdependence are the really important variables behind inertia. This route is suggested by Nisbett and Cohen, whose culture of honor explanation of elevated homicide rates in the South originally stimulated my curiosity. In attempting to explain why certain elements of a culture of honor persist, they point not to differentiation and interdependence, but to socialization and self image. Rural southern resort to violence in disputes persists because it has become “functionally autonomous”:

There is no longer any reason for southern males to show their physical toughness, yet they believe they will suffer social loss [in the opinions of others] if they do not. For individuals, it may be *socially* beneficial to continue with culture-of-honor norms, and the norms may be upheld for that reason. Hence, the culture could keep some of its properties indefinitely even in the absence of any material or rational reasons for retaining those properties, because “being a man” entails readiness for violence....[C]ultures of honor build their codes of conduct into definitions of what it means to be a man....[and] Once those ideals are...incorporated into gender roles, they may become much more impervious to change. (1996:92-93)

They point out that this persistence might also be driven by “pluralistic ignorance” of changes in people’s attitudes about violence: that is, while many individuals might no longer support the old norms personally, they might be afraid to reveal this, and thus be seen as “less than a man,” among colleagues they *incorrectly* believe still support the old norms. In principle, they could teach their children to be tough, believing this necessary, without supporting toughness themselves. Thus an “inferior convention” might be perpetuated in circumstances where few individuals personally support it—and lifting the veil of pluralistic ignorance could tip the custom out of existence in a nonlinear fashion. On the other hand, Nisbett and Cohen also note (1994:94) that the culture of honor has “an allure to which few people are utterly immune,” meaning that the convention can make claims to moral or aesthetic superiority that could be important to its perpetuation. These reflections point to sources of cultural inertia quite removed from differentiation and interdependence.

So does Frank Dobbin’s treatment of industrial policies in France, England, and the U.S.—one of the most intriguing recent studies of stability in cultural systems. He shows that

principles of industrial policy, quite different from country to country, have proven strikingly durable, in part because they are able to set the terms in which they are evaluated, and in part because of their deep connection to political culture:

turn-of-the-century industrial policy paradigms have shown remarkable resilience... because in developing those paradigms nations interpreted policies that upheld political order and liberty to be integral to growth. Each nation developed an industrial ideology that was isomorphic with its political culture, as the policies it adopted to guard political rights became associated in the public mind with economic growth....Because industrial policy paradigms became associated with policies designed to sustain political order and liberty, they became resistant to change. Changing the industrial policy paradigm would now require a new articulation of political order (1994:225-26).

Thus an industrial policy endures across time in each society because it incorporates political assumptions that are seen as producing social order. The basic schema of social order varies from society to society, but in each is seen as so natural and so fundamental that thinking “outside” it rarely occurs, further stabilizing the system. Here, as in the argument of Nisbett and Cohen, the stability of a “peripheral” cultural paradigm—an industrial policy or the interpersonal policy of toughness—is explained by being linked to a more central one—political order or gender identity.

It is unclear whether such accounts actually explain cultural inertia or merely displace the explanation into the supposedly more central realm—whose own inertia now needs explaining. They do, however, focus on contributing factors that are quite different from differentiation and interdependence, and thus suggest different variables to measure in an effort to give inertia objective status.

The above considerations are not encouraging. We do not yet have a clear sense of which factors cause stability in cultural systems—yet only by measuring them would we be able to rescue inertia from tautology. Further, were we able to settle upon variables and measures, we might find them behaving in non-linear ways that would call for an analogy to something other than inertia. Thus that the owl of inertia is presently impressionistic and flies only at dusk means that the practical utility of the analogy remains low. Contemplating its implications, however, can help us think better about the nature of culture—and I invite colleagues to add to these preliminary reflections.

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not given a definitive, clear version of events. In the collective imaginary these massacres are caught between diametrically opposed perspectives. In the resultant confusion certain more gloomy definitions seem to have attracted more support than others: state massacres, strategies of tension, “secret governments working against the interests of the country” (De Lutiis, 1986).

For the younger generation, the massacres are understood mainly through their commemorative artifacts. Analysing how effective these artifacts and structures is thus a crucial task. The “memory technologies” (Tota, 1999) available to successive generations are what make it possible or impossible to re-appropriate this controversial past. However, if the different versions of this past have never come together in an institutional or political synthesis able to understand them as a whole, and if the debates over what actually happened are still open, how can one produce artifacts of memory that are not too ambivalent, that are up to the task of passing on the inheritance and the historical memory of such a difficult past? This paper represents only the first results of a research project on the memory of the Bologna massacre, a highly controversial moment that has very weak roots in collective national memory. The starting point for my research is that it is important to look at the ways in which it has been possible to form commemorative practices able to represent and above all to transmit the memory of the massacres over the last three decades of Italian history.

### 1. Bologna Station, 2 August 1980: tale of an extraordinary day

At the moment of the explosion the Station building with its roof and the train formed a sort of tunnel and when the building blew up it did not collapse immediately. That way a kind of slippery soot cloud was formed which nearly suffocated us (we were under the train). Then the ground shook and the building collapsed opening a hole to the sky ... the smoke escaped and we could breathe, but we could also see what had happened to the others (18, B-VIII).

One of the interviewees, who was amongst those who went to the Station to help out that day, has described what he saw as “a vision of the apocalypse.” At 10.25 am on 2 August 1980 a bomb exploded in the waiting room of Bologna station. It was the first Saturday of August. This was a massacre that shocked the collective imaginary in part because of its clear class meanings. As many people have stressed since, this was a bomb that materially and symbolically struck at the working classes. The timing and the place of the massacre (the morning of 2 August in a station that was and is a crucial transport link between the North and the South) revealed the type of victim that the bomb was aimed at: the typical worker from northern factories, going back to the South to visit his or her relatives.

The device was placed in the second-class waiting room of the station. After the explosion a part of the building adjacent to the waiting room collapsed and debris fell onto an Adria Express train on its way to Basel, which was stationary at

platform one. When the bomb exploded the train was just about to leave: the guards were already “asking for the off,” which was the moment when their arms were raised to show each other that the doors were closed and therefore the station supervisor could give the for the train to depart. Two or three minutes later the train would have left the station. If it had done so, the number of victims would have probably been even higher because another even fuller train on its way to Rimini and Riccione was stationary at platform three. The outcome of the massacre was terrible: 85 dead and 200 injured. The city reacted very quickly, despite the fact that most Bolognese were already on holiday. The first help arrived within a few minutes. The people who lived opposite the station came with sheets, bandages and improvised tools for moving the rubble. They began to help the injured and to dig with their hands to free the trapped bodies. The emergency medical service immediately began to coordinate the arrival of ambulances. This service, with its own emergency number, aimed to coordinate all the information on the availability of hospital beds and ambulances (from a single point in the city); it had been set up on 28 July, and had therefore been running for only two days.

In the imagination of some of the interviewees the memory of those moments when help was organized frantically is represented symbolically by Bus 37 and its driver. This bus had just reached the station when the bomb exploded and was due to leave with its passengers. Instead, it was used to transport the dead, so as to allow the ambulances to help those who had been injured. The driver extended his shift without stopping until he had moved all the bodies:

one thing about that day remained impressed in many people’s minds: there were so many bodies to take away to the mortuary that they used a normal bus, they covered the windows with sheets, so that you couldn’t see inside, and took away the dead in a street bus ... the kind of thing that happens in wartime (16, B-XXXVIII).

In the citizens’ imaginary, twenty years on, Bus 37 with its cargo of bodies is still an important symbol of how the city reacted to the massacre, so much so that it is soon going to be placed in a new historical museum by the Bologna Public Transport Company (Azienda dei Trasporti of Bologna [ATB]). In other words, this bus has become an “object of memory” in relation to the massacre: the collective memory of these events has taken form in this bus, it has become objectified in it.

### 2. Bus 37. From “object of memory” to commemoration artifact

The process of objectifying memories is at the center of all the work on forms of commemoration (Middleton, Edwards 1990; Schwartz, 1990; Schudson, 1990; Assmann 1992; Wagner-Pacifi 1996; Zolberg 1996; Müller, Rösen 1997) and is thus central to this study. Bus 37 is thus a particularly interesting element because of its importance in objectifying the

memory of the massacre. It offers insights into the way memory is objectified in certain objects (in this case a city bus) and, also into how a memory-object, as a form of collective and individual memory of a certain moment, becomes a real commemorative artifact. This happened through a subsequent process of memory institutionalization: the ATB, having had the go-ahead from the city council and the “2 August Association” (the association which groups together the families of the victims), decided to place the bus in a museum. The distinction between these two notions — memory-object and commemorative artifact — is particularly significant in this case for analytical reasons, as it allows us to understand the institutional aspects of the process of memory-objectivization which involving Bus 37. A memory object can carry individual memory of the massacre (the jumper which one of the victims was wearing that morning, for example), a collective memory (the pen-drawn plan of the first emergency assistance center set up in the council offices immediately after the massacre), but not necessarily its ‘social memory’ (Namer 1991). The decision to place Bus 37 in the museum is an event which sets in motion both the institutionalization of that particular memory, and its objectivization. In other words, while a memory-object is an objective form, a commemorative artifact is the institutionalization of that particular objective formation which then becomes a symbol able in its own right to initiate the process of remembering an event. In the transition from “memory-object” to *commemorative artifact* it is as if Bus 37 moved from collective to social memory.

But how is a memory-object chosen? And above all how does a process of objectivization become so successful as to give it a key meaning in social memory? Many studies document that objects have a mnemonic power that renders them significant. This power does not derive from the object as such but from the fact that it incorporates meanings important for the particular context that is to be remembered.

Bus 37 is a particularly successful example of objectivization, because it exemplifies an efficient image of the city of Bologna; it symbolizes the efficiency and effectiveness of the relief efforts after the massacre and the speed and coordinated creativity shown by the city’s institutions and citizens in the face of such a dramatic event. Converting a city bus into a hearse is a highly tragic image (in the ways in which it highlights the broken bodies of the eighty-five victims of the bombing); it is also altruistic and heroic (because it reminds us of the altruism of the driver who continued to drive the bus until the next day in order to finish transporting his cargo of bodies); and it is also positive for the city (because it reminds us of the solidarity which citizens and institutions demonstrated towards the victims). The specific character of this objectivization derives from this combination of images. It is through objects such as Bus 37 that a continuity between past and present is created, and through them that the memory is kept alive.

### **3. The memory of a fascist massacre: the methodology of the research**

How can this case be studied? Originally I planned to reconstruct the institutional processes which led to this memory ensemble being set up on the site. This is a complicated history involving politicians, journalists, railway workers, and members of the association formed by the families of the victims. The goal of such a study was to take account of the complex network of relationships that go to shape the public view of an event and its place in collective memory. The reconstruction of these connections was carried out through interviews with various figures from official bodies and civil society: some of these people are the key players in creating memory, others are simply users of memory. Different levels of analysis were taken into account: from the recent problem of revamping the station, to the opinions of citizens and intellectuals who argued that the waiting-room should be conserved as it was; from the question of the visibility or invisibility of these artifacts of memory in the station, to the debates in the press over the relationship between the institutions and civil society in the process of commemoration; from the political issues arising from the fact that the massacre was blamed on fascist terrorists, to the long judicial process involving two extreme right-wing terrorists from the NAR group, Francesca Mambro and Giusva Fioravanti (They were found guilty of planting the bomb in 1995, but the case continues to provoke debate over the reliability or otherwise of various court decisions).

This research has been carried out through ethnographic observations in the waiting room of the station and on the day of the anniversary of the massacre (2 August 1999, 2 August 2000); interviews with travellers passing through the station; interviews with Bolognese citizens; and with some “memory authorities”, to use Namer’s term (that is the association, local politicians, journalists, those responsible for the redesign of the station). Moreover the research looked to reconstruct certain narratives relating to the description of the massacre and its commemoration in the local and national press. Particular focus was reserved for the period between 2 August 1980 and 31 December 1999 in the following newspapers *La Repubblica*, *the Corriere della Sera*, *Il Giornale* and *Il Resto del Carlino* <sup>2</sup>.

### **4. The commemorative ensemble, 1980-2001**

The commemorative site in the station is made up of three elements. There is the gash in the wall which symbolizes the pain the bomb caused to civil society and the state; the plaque with the names and ages of the victims; and the crater in the floor where the bomb had been left (in the second-class waiting-room). On the outside wall of the waiting-room (which looks out on the station concourse) there is a plaque dedicated to the victims; and on platform one there is an inscription. This is the text of a prayer written by the Pope in memory of the victims and placed on the wall during a ceremony marking one of the anniversaries of the massacre.

This set of artifacts was inaugurated a year after the massacre and since then, on every 2 August, a commemorative march has crossed the city of Bologna, through Piazza Maggiore and via Indipendenza, and on towards the station. At first there were the two plaques, the gash in the wall and the mark on the floor. The Pope’s inscription was added after a visit by John Paul II in 1984. The way in which the group is laid

out corresponds, according to the aims of the 2 August Association, to a series of functions. First, the memory of this event is located in a place that both the citizens of Bologna and tourists visiting the city pass through on a daily basis. (This type of reasoning led the Association to reject the plan for a commemorative monument on the hills around Bologna proposed by a previous Mayor). The aim is that the waiting room should be a kind of “living monument, which people pass by every day, without the need to visit it specifically” (1, B-XI). Second, there was a desire to situate the artifacts in a place that “can never be used for false ends” (1, B-VIII). Since the day of the bomb, one of the most worrying and traumatic aspects of the public experience of the massacre has been the constant circulation of false versions of events. This is probably connected to the series of cover-ups and false trails identified by investigators. What matters here is that the location and planning of the commemorative ensemble aims to leave few doubts. From this point of view the “authorities” (Namer, 1987) of this memory consider the crater left by the bomb and the gash in the wall as guarantees of the truth of any possible future versions of this past, a barrier against potential revisionist versions which could falsify reality.

Since 1996, the management of the commemorative site by the local council, the railway company and the association has undergone some developments. The commemorative site has been at the center of a series of cultural initiatives organized by the Bologna Town Council and some cultural cooperatives in the city. Every year, starting on 6 July and culminating 2 August, a series of events entitled “Under the sign of solidarity” in the waiting room and a part of the station known as the *transatlantico*, an area next to the commemorative site where there are usually book sales and other commercial activities. In this area, every evening between eight and eleven, private radio stations take it in turn to broadcast live from the station; in this way the waiting room and the commemorative site are filled with music, voices, noises and people watching the radio broadcasts.

Events like these link the collective memory of the massacre to various cultural activities: in the words of one of the participants, ranging from traditional rice-workers songs to rock music. They are based upon well-defined model of the commemorative site and its functions within the city, a model shaped by local institutions and pressure groups which have legitimately assumed the role of memory “authorities”. The public definition of the commemorative site and of the kind of actions that can be performed around it could well be encapsulated in the phrase “living monument”. Support for this definition is not to be taken for granted, especially as far as the victims’ families are concerned: what is at stake is the link between a family member lost in tragic circumstances and a rock concert set within an ambitious collective plan to transmit memory. To understand how such a project has come to be accepted cognitively and socially even by the families of the victims we need to take into account two types of question.

The first type of question concerns the status of these victims: in the eyes of the association they are “the dead of the whole nation” (3, B-IV). Implicit in a definition of this kind is the families’ recognition that the victims have a special status which means both that they deserve special treatment by a much wider community (i.e. more or less by the whole nation), and

that they belong to the collectivity and not just to the families. It is this delicate cognitive and psychological shift that has allowed even some of the oldest relatives, who feel least at home with the expressive codes of rock music, to reconcile the concert as a form of commemoration with their own individual and family matters. The concept of “family memory” (Halbwachs, 1976) is particularly useful for an understanding of this kind of dynamic. Here, a part of family memory and individual memories has become one of the components of the social memory of the massacre. In other words, their intense involvement in the work of the association has allowed the families to see the victims more and more as political and national figures: from being “dear departed” (which would be an appropriate term, for example, for a road crash victim), over time the dead have been transformed into “state victims,” with all the complex emotional dynamics and institutional re-writing that this has entailed. Within family and individual memories the massacre has moved from being a tragic event that destroyed the lives of a group of people, to being a political event that damaged the fabric of civil society. One contributing factor in this shift is the way in which the unique quality that emotional bonds and responses give to family memory has been replaced and in part compensated for by the heroic role that the victims assume when their relatives accept a more public and political definition of the event itself. The interconnections between family memory and social memory explain how this particular public definition of the commemorative site has found favour amongst Bologna’s citizens.

In general, the early results of the present research reveal that the association has developed a poetics of memory display which has increasingly distanced itself from mourning and come closer to the idea of moral testimony. Moreover, the public definition of the commemorative site as a “living monument,” as in the annual events organized by the council, seems to allow for new ways of expressing the importance of this collective event which has moved from “family tragedy,” to “national tragedy,” and then to a concerted effort to transmit memory. This public definition is possible only thanks to the central role assigned to the memory of the victims and to those legitimately entitled to speak on their behalf. The association has elaborated a kind of marketing project for “the sale of the memory of the massacre, as a national asset to preserve and transmit” (1, B-III). Such a project is made easier to organize by the way in which, twenty years on from the massacre, family memories, individual memories and collective memories have come together and stabilized within social memory of the event.

## **ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> A previous version of this work was presented to the conference of the European Sociological Association held in Amsterdam in 1999. I would like to thank John Dickie and John Foot for reading and commenting on a previous version of this work.

<sup>2</sup>For 1980 all the articles that appeared between August and the end of the year were taken into consideration, whilst for the other years the month of August was looked at as well as references to various trials. Important dates here include: 11 July 1988 (first verdict given at the Corte di Assise di Bolo-

gna); 18 July 1990 (second level verdict Corte di Assise di Appello di Bologna); 12 February 1992 (annulment of the verdict of the Corte di Assise di Appello di Bologna and referral to the Corte di Cassazione – Sezioni Unite); 16 June 1994 (decision of the Corte di Assise di Appello di Bologna); 23 November 1995 (verdict of the Cassazione where the life sentences for Mambro and Fioravanti were confirmed); 18 June 1996 (second referral, sentence of the Corte di Assise di Appello di Firenze). This part of the analysis is based on some sections from the first interviews and some of the ethnographic observations.

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## Reports of Conferences--East Coast, West Coast

### Culture Section Miniconference at George Mason University, August 2000 (organized by Barry Schwartz and Mark Jacobs)

*Mark Jacobs, George Mason University*

Last summer's miniconference sponsored by the Culture Section and George Mason University, with support from the Center for Arts and Culture, was designed to bring to the fore the most vital contemporary work among cultural sociologists. Rather than inviting or selecting presenters themselves, the organizers asked leaders of the section's various research networks to gear up their listservs to identify cutting-edge issues; the network leaders, in consultation with their networks, chose the topics, presenters, and discussants. Papers and responses were posted on the conference website in advance of the gathering itself, at which more time was devoted to small-group discussion than to the plenary presentations. The miniconference attracted over 120 participants.

Most striking about the papers and discussions are underlying differences of semantic presupposition. Thus, for example, Ann Swidler presents an argument which in effect refines her justly-famous conception of culture as a "toolkit" by considering the ways in which social contexts at various levels of social organization structure the intersection of culture and cognition. Swidler adopts a pragmatic, "problem-solving" orientation towards culture. Gerry Suttles, on the other hand, tries to relate that argument to a logistic orientation: he conceptualizes culture as an assembly of semiotic codes. John Martin, by contrast, works in a more comprehensive mode: he employs field theory, to conceptualize culture as primarily a property of institutional fields.

Magali Sarfatti-Larson worries about the prospects for meaningful civic participation, since globalization destroys the sovereignty of nation-states, while in another panel Jeff Goldfarb claims that intellectuals can remedy the "deliberation deficit" of modern society by mixing strategies of civility and subversion. These differences between Larson and Goldfarb are only in part ideological—the former emphasizing the hegemonic nature of institutions, the latter emphasizing their disorganization. The differences are also semantic: Sarfatti-Larson works in a dialectical mode, Goldfarb in a pragmatic one. Sarfatti-Larson's discussants—Lyn Spillman and Viviana Compadre, and Paul Lichterman—also answer her in a pragmatic mode, by proposing to search for expanded conceptions of civic life to match the new situation. Goldfarb's discussants—his own former students Anne Bowler and Anna Szemere, as well as Susan Silbey—qualify his claims dialectically, by calling attention to the institutional constraints on intellectual activity.

In proposing the formation of a new section on "Culture, Space, and Place," Bill Holt offers in effect an Aristotelian conception of space—the city as *topos*, the site of potential awaiting realization. David Brain and Sharon Zukin counter, in effect, with a more Platonic (and dialectical) conception—the city as a sort of large room or form that actively shapes the full range of possibilities within it. Similarly, among David Halle's rich findings about the "Sensations" art exhibit is a rather surprising degree of public approval for treating museums as

“bounded institutions,” with considerable curatorial discretion. Halle’s public, then, adopts what is in effect an Aristotelian conception—the museum as *topos*, insulating local activities from broader scrutiny. Al Bergesen, in his response, argues instead that museum has a Platonic power to reshape the meaning of activities within its space. In the context of the museum, according to Bergesen’s interpretation, Halle’s interviews reveal that “Sensations” loses its sensational character.

In emphasizing a sense of existential possibility, Eviatar Zerubavel’s miniconference paper on the construction of historical genealogies elicited a plea from his former student Vered Vinitsky-Seroussi to recognize some baseline of historical re-

ality. These and other pervasive differences in the architectonics of argument indicate a state of healthy confusion, appropriate to a period of intellectual uncertainty and transition.

These few examples only suggest the richness of dialogic exchange. Limitations of space preclude reporting the contributions of such other presenters and discussants as Glenn Wallach, Jeffrey Olick, Suey Spivey, Gladys and Kurt Lang, Jan Marontate, Chelsea Starr, Fumkio Nawa, Andrea Press, Jeffrey Broadbent, Anne Kane, and Sachiko Takita-Ishii. The conference proceedings will form the basis of a book, with royalties assigned to the Culture Section.

## **“New Directions in the Sociology of Culture: Where is the Cutting Edge?” Panel, Eastern Sociological Society Meetings, Philadelphia, March 3, 2001.**

*Diana Crane, University of Pennsylvania*

Organizer and Presider, Diana Crane (University of Pennsylvania); Panelists: Paul DiMaggio (Princeton), Cynthia Epstein (CUNY Graduate Center), Mark Jacobs (George Mason), Robin Wagner-Pacifiçi (Swarthmore), Eviatar Zerubavel (Rutgers), and Vera Zolberg (New School for Social Research).

Members of the panel were asked to discuss their views concerning directions in which the sociology of culture is heading or ought to be headed. The following brief summaries of their comments provide an indication of their thinking.

Two of the panelists, Cynthia Epstein and Robin Wagner-Pacifiçi, stressed the importance of studying symbolic boundaries. Cynthia Epstein stated that “one of the most important developments in the field of Sociology of Culture has been the particular focus on the consequences of categorization, as part of the symbol system, for both the informal aspects of everyday life and for the institutionalization of social structures. One aspect of this research has been an emphasis on boundary setting and boundary maintenance, specifically, the processes by which conceptual “others” are socially produced and the ways in which categorization creates and maintains identities. She said: “From this type of analysis we have learned how and under what conditions individuals may acquire repertoires of selves and role and the conditions under which any become activated... This analysis is useful analytically and even confrontational in that it undercuts essentialist formulations that are found all across the political spectrum.”

Robin Wagner-Pacifiçi talked about the importance for understanding “edge work”, the relationships between specialties and between disciplines and the difficulties of working on materials related to other disciplines and specialties. She pointed out that when one crosses into another discipline, for example, one of the humanities, to do research, questions and terminologies shift their foci while one’s perspective on one’s own research changes.

Two other panelists, Eviatar Zerubavel and Paul DiMaggio, proposed agendas for overcoming current dualisms in the sociology of culture. Zerubavel recommended a Simmelian formal sociology to bridge the distinction between macro- and micro- analysis. A sociology of culture that emphasizes socio-cultural forms, he claimed, transcends case-study agendas by searching for structural equivalences across different contexts to identify general properties of social life.

DiMaggio suggested an overarching research problem “when do groups and societies switch from one frame to another?,” to bridge competing conceptions of culture as coherent and internalized, on the one hand, and fragmented and superficial on the other. He proposed focusing on cultural frames—institutional logics, logics of action or justification, stories, conceptions of control—as primary cultural objects. He assumed that there are multiple, discontinuous cultural systems, which map onto institutional domains rather than onto individuals. Following Harrison White, he proposed analyzing how personal networks channel the diffusion of abrupt switches among competing frames.

Vera Zolberg lamented the lack of attention to high culture and the sociology of art, topics that are much less active now than when the Section was founded in 1987. Zolberg pointed out, however, that this change is peculiar to American sociology of culture. These topics are still being actively studied in Europe.

Diana Crane emphasized the importance of studying culture and globalization, specifically, patterns of cultural flows and the characteristics and impacts of global cultures. How are global cultures influenced by the cultures of countries, like the United States, that are major exporters of culture? How do countries that are primarily importers of global cultures use and assimilate these cultural flows? How do countries, cultural organizations, and global cities frame their cultures for global consumption?

Based on an analysis of papers presented at a miniconference at George Mason University, Mark Jacobs argued that the position of culture in the discipline today is very different from thirty years ago. In the earlier period, culture was an important part of general sociological theory. Today, it is a specialty that is largely concerned with middle range topics and specific levels of analysis. The field exhibits “a state of healthy confusion” and “a shift towards a sophisticated orientation.” He concluded that many “sociologists of culture tend to emphasize the constructed nature of reality. In the absence of confident prescriptions for remaking the world, the primary aim of their analysis is to subvert established cultural categories.” His assessment is equally apt for the views expressed by the ESS panel.

## Dynamic Exchange on Cultural Dynamics at Princeton Conference

*Nina Bandelj, Princeton University*

The Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies and the Sociology Department at Princeton University co-organized a two-day conference on “Cultural Dynamics: Perspectives on Cultural and Social Change,” from March 30 to 31, 2001. The organizers brought together a diverse group of scholars who were welcomed by an even more diverse audience from surrounding universities, including Rutgers, University of Pennsylvania, NYU and Columbia.

In presenting their recent work in the areas of popular culture, the Internet, public opinion and cultural globalization, four keynote speakers discussed how cultural expressions vary over time or place.

Albert Bergesen (University of Arizona) opened the conference with his “Sociology of Monsters: Embodied Philosophy Uncovered in Japanese and American Popular Culture” and addressed how representations in folk and popular culture, as revealed in the depictions and portrayals of mythical, cartoon and film monsters, reflect the legacy of political and state structures in the US and Japan.

In his keynote address, Russell Neuman (University of Pennsylvania and the University of Michigan) spoke about the evolution of the Internet and its embeddedness in the social environment. Neuman called for a sociology of the Internet, pointing to the many questions that remain yet unanswered about the social and policy implications of this communication medium.

David Zaret’s (Indiana University) keynote address outlined how the act of petitioning has been an enduring cultural form, which was transformed from an expression of private grievances into an expression of public opinion. Tracing a cultural form that was remarkably consistent across historical places, Zaret put forward an argument about the development of a public sphere from the bottom up, and contrasted his contribution to the prevailing emphasis on the bourgeois origins of the public sphere.

In her talk “Cultural Globalization: Theoretical Models and Emerging Trends,” Diana Crane (University of Pennsylvania) provided a synthesis of the literature on the production and dissemination of cultural objects in the contemporary globalized world. Crane identified three existing theoretical models (cultural imperialism, cultural flows/networks, reception theory) and offered one of her own (cultural-policy strategies). She emphasized, however, that none of the theoretical models suffices individually in explaining the multifaceted aspects of cultural globalization.

The panel presentations were organized around the themes of Identity, History and Memory, Cultural and Social Change, and featured both graduate students and faculty. Speakers on the topic of identity conceptualized this broad notion from micro and macro perspectives. Within the framework of individual identity in a mass society, Sara Igo (Princeton University) presented her findings from an analysis of the Kinsey Reports, describing how many Americans found the numbers Kinsey compiled personally meaningful, placing themselves within a statistical distribution to assure themselves that they were “normal.” Igo used this analysis as a key example to explore the

effects of voluminous, broadly accessible social data on mid-twentieth-century Americans’ understandings of themselves and the communities to which they belong.

Michelle Fowles (Princeton University) and Penny Becker (Cornell University) spoke about group identities based on race and ethnicity, and religion and gender, respectively. Fowles’ study of the understandings of racial and ethnic identity among Blacks from “African-American” and “West Indian” ancestries pointed to the contingent nature of identity frames, which depend on the ways Blacks situate themselves in relation to the other Black ethnic group or to Whites in terms of legal categories, differential access to economic resources, expressions of cultural cues and religious identity, among others.

Analyzing the contemporary religious and gender identity based on a study of congregations in several upstate New York communities, Becker proposed that we rethink the relationship between institutions and identity. She argued that the shifting institutional matrix during the times of social change means that over time, old “identity” spaces narrow or close, and new ones enlarge or open up. With changes in work and family, for example, women’s religious identities are no longer so tightly linked to their identities as wives and mothers, and center more around spirituality, while for men, religious identity is a seamless fit with identities centered in work and fatherhood.

Some speakers conceptualized culture in terms of national identity. Nina Bandelj (Princeton University) studied how local assertions of national identity and nation building in the transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe are negotiated with increasing global foreign investment flows and pressures from international organizations. Bandelj’s analysis showed that economic actors differentiate between foreign investors on the basis of their national origins, suggesting that seemingly universal global economic processes are social processes, mediated, among other things, by actors’ understanding of whom they envision as potential exchange partners.

Julian Dierkes (Princeton University) presented his analysis of postwar middle school teaching materials from Japan and the Germanys to argue that the substantive and historiographical orientations of portrayals of national history are influenced crucially by two factors: (1) the nature of the policy-making regime in educational policy and the distribution of power within decision-making bodies, and (2) the construction and perception of the collective interests of actors involved in decision-making.

Robin Wagner-Pacifici (Swarthmore College) and Eviatar Zerubavel (Rutgers University) both linked culture to history, but in very different ways. Wagner-Pacifici’s paper used artistic renderings of Western military surrenders, viewed as historical, symbolic and political events, to analyze the way in which they mark and make territorial and political boundaries. In particular, Wagner-Pacifici studied Diego-Velazquez’s “Surrender of Breda” to interrogate the representations of “dignified humiliation” as victor and vanquished reconfigure their social identities across the divide and witness-soldiers look on.

Zerubavel's paper, a part of a larger book project on social memory and "the social topography of the past", dealt with the phenomenon of ancestry and descent as viewed from a cognitive sociological perspective. Specifically, it examined the socio-cognitive elements that help us organize the relation we call "kinship" by looking at the mental process of constructing genealogical "connectedness."

In their analysis of university building names, Miguel Centeno and Kelly Hoffman (both Princeton University) explored how collective memory is expressed and "cemented" in the buildings and major architectural landmarks. Their findings confirmed what have until now been largely anecdotal impressions that U.S. universities reserve honors of naming the buildings for those who have led them and those who donated large monetary gifts.

Margaret Usdansky (Princeton University) presented her study of the production of public discourse about the family in relationship to behavior changes within American families over the course of the twentieth century. Usdansky's aim is to understand how interaction among the media, scholars and the general public shape the quantity and content of public discourse and how they influence private behavior.

Some speakers conceptualized culture as communication. In her talk, "When Old Media Were New: Historical Lessons for the Study of the Internet," Eszter Hargittai (Princeton University) presented an analytical framework for studying the implications of new communication technologies for social and cultural change. Through the historical examples of the telegraph, telephone and radio, she showed that any such research must consider user agency, actions of the business sector, and government regulation. Hargittai pointed out that the latter could both enhance a technology's spread (e.g. through subsidies) or halt its diffusion and limit the patterns of its use (e.g. through censorship).

Understanding culture as communication at the individual level, Ann Mische's (Rutgers University) presentation addressed the links between culture and networks in the social movements literature by focusing on processes of political communication across intersecting movement networks of youth activists in Brazil. Mische described a core set of conversational mechanisms that are highly contingent on (and constitutive of) crosscutting network relations (identity qualifying, temporal cuing, generality shifting and multiple targeting), and discussed the ways in which these mechanisms contribute to relation formation within social settings.

Overall, speakers tended to invoke multilevel explanations for the emergence and consequences of culture. Those who talked about the technology and change, for example, argued that there is a relationship between users, policy and the technology. Emphasizing that we should avoid technological determinism, they claimed that certainly none of the forces could individually explain change. Tracing cultural and social change over time, several presenters also pointed to the unintended consequences of cultural practices (including technology). Other common themes included the role of the state as an active player in cultural dynamics. Speakers asserted that political institutions and state action are relevant to the processes by which culture persists or changes.

From notions of identity and discourse, to petitions, monsters and names of buildings, all the speakers were very creative in how they operationalized the broad notion of culture for their particular study. Invariably, however, presenters appealed to the social and historical embeddedness of cultural forms when talking about the cultural and social change implicated in their perspectives on cultural dynamics.

## **Two Reviews of UC Santa Barbara's Third Cultural Turn Conference (organized by Roger Friedland, John Mohr, and Richard Hecht)**

### **1. Cultural Turn III: Profane and Sacred**

*Isaac Reed and Jeffrey C. Alexander, UCLA*

Cultural Turn III was framed, for us, by Jonathan Z. Smith, the renowned historian of religion who demonstrated intricate knowledge of Durkheim and delivered the opening lecture with charisma worthy of the shamans he studies. The concerns raised by Smith's talk, "The Topography of the Sacred," can be interpreted as providing a frame for much of the lectures and discussions that occupied the following day and a half.

Starting from Levi-Strauss' point that "being in their place makes the sacred sacred," and from Durkheim's desire to develop a physics of morals and rights, Smith emphasized the spatial dimension of the sacred and also the connection to ownership, which Durkheim emphasized in his lectures XII-XIV on Roman Law in Professional Ethics and Civic Morals. Smith's point was that the exclusivity of the sacred is mirrored in the exclusivity of possession, and the contagiousness of the sacred in the rights of accession. Because Durkheim believed that only landed property could have a sacred character, the consideration of sacred property returns us to space, and to Smith's observation that sacrality can be considered a material force.

From this, Smith went on to suggest that three related classificatory systems merge in so-called primitive religion: sacred/profane, clean/unclean, and permitted/forbidden. The first is a royal system, the second cultic, and the third legal. Following Durkheim, Smith argued that the moral community developing around these classifications can be conceived as a church, which in modern Western language is indicated by the concept of the *église* as an assembly of citizens. Churches actively create the sacred through rituals — "sanctioned profanations" — that particularly emphasize sacrifice.

The upshot of these ideas is a paradox, which set the tone for the rest of the conference, regarding the ways in which modern western societies are and are not like the societies of the Australian Aborigines. On the one hand, Smith clearly wants to draw parallels between the sacred in the West and Australia. In both, the sacred has a spatial dimension that helps constitute, and often dominates, people's understanding of the sacred and their classificatory schemes. In both, it is actively created. In modern societies, the sacrality of private property is created by elaborate legal rituals, among the Australian tribes by the ceremonies of collective effervescence.

Despite these similarities, however, Smith wished also to emphasize discontinuities between the two systems of being. Durkheim's "explanation" he insisted, was a translation, as incomplete as every translation must be. In fact, Durkheim's explanation of Aboriginal sacrality is twice translated, once by the descriptive ethnographers, and then again by his theoretical, explanatory, "scientific" model. Pointing to such methodological difficulties, Smith wants to open a chasm between the 'primitive' and the 'modern.' He insists that the sacred/profane system is different, for example, from contemporary classifications of Good and Evil. While we remain unconvinced – Smith offered only methodological grounds, and said little about contemporary societies – we would have liked to hear more.

Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi's talk on the Collège de Sociologie, the French school of social and literary thinkers led by Georges Bataille and Roger Caillois, also centered on the role of the sacred in modern society. In a world which they viewed as profaned by capitalism and instrumental rationality, the members of the Collège struggled to find the sacred, for they were convinced by Durkheim that sacrality was essential for the solidarity that underlies social life. Given their starting point – their insistence on capitalist instrumentality – their challenge was to find a manner of embracing the "irrational" sacred without implicitly advocating or allowing room for fascism, for the latter rhetoric and philosophy also rested upon a critique of modernity. In contrast with Adorno and Horkheimer, who tried to dialectically salvage Enlightenment by a turn from instrumental to critical rationality, Caillois and Bataille embraced eroticism and the carnival as sacred spheres of non-rational effervescence.

The College de Sociologie deserves much more serious exploration by contemporary sociological theorists, who should be inspired by the seriousness with which postmodern literary theorists have celebrated their work. Such thinkers as Caillois and Bataille represent a mediating generation between the original Durkheimian vision and its contemporary applications. As this research continues, however, the wheat must be much more intensively separated from the chaff. We would regard the major contributions of Bataille and Caillois as separating "profane" (as in sacred-evil) from mundane (as in routine), and for emphasizing so clearly that the profane, or sacred-evil, remains a significant force for establishing the sacred-good, on the one hand, and the possibilities, attractions, and punishments for transgression, on the other.

Thomas Carlson's lecture suggested, however, that the technological world may not be so free of the mystical after all. Drawing upon some recent insights of Derrida, and reflecting on the post-modern, networked world in which the information system has no vital center, Carlson challenged Weber's assertion about the nature of scientific knowledge in modernity. Weber, in his famous "streetcar" passage, held that while a given individual may not know how every piece of technology she uses works, she could, at least in principle, find out. Accessible and complete scientific knowledge, in other words, is available to explain human's mastery of nature. According to Carlson, however, the information systems developing today may indeed render this assertion false. Drawing upon the insights of Frederic Jameson, he suggested that technology is developing in such a manner that the information required to understand the functioning of a given system can never be completely ascertained by a single individual or single node in the network.

If this were true, it would raise important theoretical issues about the agency of humans in their relationship to the technological products of human knowledge. Accompanying Weber's modernist vision of the accessibility of scientific information was the strict separation of between active human subjects and the passive objects they manipulated. Carlson suggested that, through-

out history, even such simple technological objects as the hoe may be understood has entering into, and reconstructing, human subjectivity. This in turn suggests that the strict division of the world, by modern laypersons and theorists alike, into sacred interior subjectivity and disenchanting, exterior objectivity is an erroneous one. Whether or not there has been some qualitative change in contemporary technology, we are inclined to agree that the modern world of machines and information systems is not nearly as profane as Weber led us to think.

Ed Linenthal's investigation of the memorial shrine to the victims of the Oklahoma City bombing explored further the contemporary relevance of the sacred/profane classification. He offered a detailed examination of the rituals, contestations, and what we would describe as the "meaning-full" symbolics that surrounded the design, construction, and maintenance of the elaborate memorial, thus highlighting the continuing "profanity" of heinous violence in secular life. Linenthal's vivid reconstruction of the symbolically freighted actions and discourse of everyday Oklahoma City residents drove home the point that contemporary consciousness, while secularized in the sense of being post-traditional, remains deeply connected to divisions between sacred and profane as sources of collective identity and collective endeavor.

In the seminar centered on Clark Roof's *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion*, the discussion addressed empirical and theoretical issues central to the sociology of religion. Here the question that had guided earlier discussions was inverted. Rather than asking what modern, religious-like phenomena – religion with a small 'r'— substitute for the Religion of old, the discussants explored the ways in which the earlier axial age religions continue to hold sway. The focus was on Religion in a not fully secular world. Still, as Roof emphasizes in his book, there are certain distinctive aspects of modernity, in particular the desire for reflexive self-determination, that influence the way contemporary Religion is taught and practiced – in the language of Roof, how it is "sold" in the "spiritual marketplace." As Giddens pointed out in *Modernity and Self-Identity*, the modern world is one in which there are many traditions from which individuals can choose. In America, this means that individuals increasingly choose their faith rather than having it handed down to them. Roof explored the ramifications of this increasing reflexivity for our understanding of the way churches work and for how people think about their own religiosity or spirituality.

Jeffrey Alexander's "The Engorgement of Evil: The Holocaust from War Crime to Trauma Drama" provoked a vigorous discussion of the interpretation and reconstruction of the Holocaust beyond the American Jewish community. Because of the presence of Ed Linenthal, who has researched the construction of the Holocaust museum in Washington D.C., the group was in a better position to consider Alexander's claim that the Holocaust has become an important symbol of universalism on a world-wide scale. Was this extension a deepening of the Jewish symbol that expands civil solidarity, to some degree to a global reach? Or did this move, by universalizing the Holocaust, profane and commodify a symbol that once was sacred for a particular religious community? Attempts to answer these questions led to a discussion of the various films, books, and other media that have represented the Holocaust publicly, and of whether this involvement in the market leads necessarily to commodification in the Marxist sense. This connected the debate about sacred and profane to the debate about mass culture.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the combination of professors and students from the two fields — sociology and religious studies — proved fruitful for both the lectures and, most importantly, for the seminars in which various papers were discussed and debated. The seminars combined the sociological imagination with the sensitivity to meaning characteristic of religion ex-

perts, producing a mindset that, in our view, exemplified the cultural turn in modern social science. In varying and sometimes conflicting ways, this confirmed Durkheim's insistence, at the beginning of *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, that sociology's "purpose above all is to explain a present reality that is near to us and thus capable of affecting our ideas and action [and] to help us comprehend the religious nature of man, that is, to reveal a fundamental and permanent aspect of humanity."

## 2. Turning to the Sacred – Fieldnotes from CTIII

*Penny Edgell Becker, Cornell University*

Okay, so part of the reason I went to Santa Barbara in February was the weather which, though "cold" and "rainy" according to the apologetic locals, was nevertheless quite warm by northeast standards. But mostly I went because so seldom does a conference intersect so neatly with the intersection of my own varied interests.

This year, the conference was organized thematically, with all of the panels and workshops addressing the boundary between the sacred and the profane. Out of the 95 who had registered, about 85 people braved the temperate climate, including anthropologists, historians, sociologists, and the largest group from religious studies. The format included time for a relaxed dinner Friday night and, though Saturday sessions ran a little late, the care that went into the organizing of the event showed, as things proceeded smoothly throughout. The atmosphere was relaxed, and the people were diverse in age and background, although there were relatively few persons of color present.

The thematic focus was important to the success of the conference. The previous two conferences have established some protocols for carrying out interdisciplinary dialogue between those with more linguistic/humanistic and those with more social scientific approaches to the study of culture. The thematic focus added two important elements. The first was a set of shared, meta-level questions. What is the sacred? How is the category of "the sacred" useful for understanding religious groups, religious experience, and communities that may or may not be "religious"?

The second element was investment in the answers to the questions being asked. That meant that, while conversation was carried on with goodwill, it was not "polite." People contested, debated, and pushed each other to consider things from a new angle, not in an exercise of one-upmanship but in a genuine desire to use the conversation to think through issues they cared about in their own work. The conversations had a dynamism and continuity lacking in many of the exchanges in the previous two conferences, spilling from workshops into hallways and lunch and then threading again through the questions asked of the featured speakers.

The choice of kick-off speakers was particularly appropriate. Jonathan Z. Smith talked about the categories of "sacred" and "profane" as a theoretical language that could prove a useful translation tool through which relatively less known groups (or communities, or practices) might be made relatively more comprehensible. The translation/description is always partial, but that is not a problem. In fact, it's a strength, he argued, because it reminds us that we only always partially compre-

hend social reality through language. This is a useful reminder to sociologists of culture, who are all too prone to forget the exercise in analytical abstraction we engage in as we designate, for example, the cultural models present in organizations or practices, or the boundaries used to organize social life.

If Smith presented what would be an organizing theme of many of the talks given by those of a more linguistic bent, Karen McCarthy Brown hit a very responsive note in me, and presaged a major theme in all the social science papers, by pointing out that categorizations are not simply abstracted out of social life and employed by theorists as tools for analysis. Categories are contested in actual practice, and the politics of defining the sacred – sacred space, sacred ritual, sacred bodies, sacred time – works to include or exclude real people in real communities. This is true of any set of boundaries drawn, of course, but Brown offered a useful way to think about the fact that to designate someone (or something) as "profane" is to rule him/her/it out of community by definition.

The other panels, more outside my own areas of research, were nevertheless informative for me. One paper explored the politics of the sacred in the academy, while another focused on how communities memorialize the victims of violence, war, or holocaust. It raised the crucial question of the link between commemoration and the sacralization of victimhood. Another paper was a romp through the symbolism of blood and money in South Africa's post-apartheid society, which nevertheless made a serious point that, if the sacred has a political economy, these are the forms of exchange and mediation through which the politics of the sacred are carried out. The possibility of mystical experience of the sacred through suspension in the reconstituting matrix formed by "the Net" was explored in the only paper bringing a focus on individual experience in the study of the sacred.

The workshops gathered those working in similar areas for a more focused discussion around a single paper. This solved the problem experienced by many in the last two conferences of having small-group discussion being too diffuse (either in topic or through having too many people to carry on a real conversation). I walked away from the discussion of Wade Clark Roof's work on the spiritual marketplace with two pages of notes on how the study of religious practice can open a critique of dominant theoretical accounts in the sociology of religion. The discussion of Roger Friedland's essay on religious nationalism gave me a way to think of how religion and family are intertwined as a matter of basic cultural logic across many contexts, not simply through historical, mutually-supporting institutional arrangements within a given context.

For a sociologist of culture grounded in both social science and the humanities, who studies religion, the very idea of this conference was exciting. Too often I find myself at some professional meeting either engaging in very one-sided and partial conversations or else in a constant process of translation. Sometimes the translation is internal (figuring out how work on a similar topic but using a fundamentally different approach might bear on my own) and sometimes it's explicit (translating my work into a discrete sub-disciplinary vocabulary for a particular audience).

What happened at CTIII was more like participating in a conversation carried on in two or three dialects, one of which is my native tongue, but with the others familiar enough that, at

least some of the time, I could understand them on their own terms. It reminded me of my graduate student experience in the interdisciplinary workshops at the University of Chicago, where a focus on a similar set of questions kept us talking long enough to learn enough about each others' assumptions to maintain a genuinely multivocal conversation.

Was my experience of the conference a typical one? I made some effort to ask those around me this question, and I think that the metaphor of translation captures better the experience of some CTIII participants. This is especially true for graduate students, or for those centrally grounded in one disciplinary perspective, who are not in academic settings that promote this kind of dialogue. What made it worthwhile for them was the discovery of the similar kinds of questions being asked across the boundaries, and a chance to explore more fully their own taken-for-granted assumptions and methods through juxtaposition with those working from another framework entirely.

It strikes me as supremely important for the sociology of culture to continue to foster venues for this kind of interdisciplinary conversation. In the last few years these conferences, along with some fine edited volumes and thematic issues of some journals (like *Poetics*), have provided space for a kind of talk that most of us simply do not experience in our home institutions. Most departments are not Santa Barbara or Princeton, and we find ourselves being the only "culture person" in sight. Sometimes we find conversation partners in the humanities but often there is no institutional structure to facilitate any kind of constructive, on-going talk that gets past the translation stage and really grapples with substantive questions in a way that moves forward in interesting ways. When

I came back from this conference I had several pages of notes on ideas for my own work, because my conversations there had provoked a kind of creative, lateral thinking that sees new connections and asks new questions.

From a more practical perspective, sociologists of culture should be aware of how many of the questions our humanities counterparts are asking that are really, at heart, social questions. Does the Internet provide a space for a different kind of encounter (with a network/matrix, not a "community") and, perhaps, foster mystical or transcendent experiences? Does the category of "the sacred" help us to understand the Vietnam Memorial, or the empty chairs at the Oklahoma City memorial and why they work, symbolically? These are questions to which we want to be actively contributing answers, not leaving to another discipline entirely.

Anyone who has comprehended the format of this essay realizes it's time for me to say something negative. It did rain, including the one time I had free to go swimming, and that was unfortunate. I was disappointed there were not more sociologists of religion present, and believe this was because the conference was not actively promoted through that section's web page or email list, an unfortunate oversight. The question of the relationship between "the sacred" and "religion" was raised and danced around several times, but without satisfying and sustained dialogue. But I hope more thematic, cross-disciplinary conferences of this sort will come to pass, as we move past the observation that many areas of work are experiencing a "cultural turn" toward a profitable exchange of ideas that carries forward the development of work on common questions and problems.

## Books of Note

*Richard A. Peterson, Vanderbilt University*

### SAGE's Seven Didactic Works

Robbins, Derek. *Bourdieu and Culture*. Light, but another take on Bourdieu may yet add something for the reader.

Beilharz, Peters. *Bauman, Zygmunt: Dialectic of Modernity*. A social theorist not well appreciated in America, Bauman's later works on culture, intellectuals, utopia, the holocaust, modernity, and globalization are always provocative. Beilharz provides a useful introduction.

Rubenstein, David. *Culture, Structure and Agency: Toward a Truly Multidimensional Sociology*. Again a useful introduction to contemporary debates about determinism and free will. Rubenstein offers analyses of the most influential social theories in the sociological canon.

Scott, Allen J. *The Cultural Economy of Cities: Essays on the Geography of Image-Producing Industries*. Scott focuses on the concentration of the jewelry industry in Los Angeles and

Bangkok, cinema in Paris, the emerging "visual effects" industry in Silicon Valley, and the use of arts and cultural tourism as a strategy of urban renewal in Paris and Los Angeles.

Hepworth, Julie, editor. *The Social Construction of Anorexia Nervosa*. The practice of voluntary starvation provides an excellent site to look at the social construction of cultural reality. The authors show the competition among medical, psychoanalytic, gendered, and ideological views of the practice.

Lehtonen, Mikko, *The Cultural Analysis of Texts*. In this useful overview Lehtonen finds ways to synthesize textual, contextual, and audience analyses into an overall picture of meaning making.

Miller, Toby and Alec McHoul. *Popular Culture and Everyday Life*. Miller and McHoul provide an informally written, informative, and sometimes delightfully Quixotic introduction to cultural studies and ethnomethodology. The inventive and insightfully used examples coax the reader on.

Expanded Coverage of "Books of Note" in the next issue!

## Announcements and Reminders

•Remember the **ASA meetings in Anaheim, Aug. 18-21**. The **Culture Section day is Sunday, Aug. 19** (with additional culture sessions on Monday, Aug. 20). **On Monday, Aug. 20, from 6:30 until 8:30, the Section will have a joint reception** with three other sections: Comparative and Historical Sociology, Political Sociology, and Collective Behavior and Social Movements. Please consult the **ASA preliminary program at <http://www.asanet.org/convention/homepage.html>**.

•**News from the Symbolic Boundaries (dot) Network**: The Symbolic Boundaries Network **website** is up and running at **[symbolicboundaries.net](http://symbolicboundaries.net)**, thanks to the technological know-how of Bethany Bryson. The site includes a description of the research interests of forty network members, as well as fifteen papers pertaining to boundaries. It also includes information about network activities, upcoming conferences and calls for papers. Please visit the web site to add your name to the network email list, which already includes over a hundred people. You are also invited to post a description of your research interests or submit a working paper.

As in previous years, the network will gather during the **roundtable** session of the Sociology of Culture section. The goal will be to exchange informally about ongoing work. We will also discuss future network activities. I am delighted that Bethany Bryson will be joining me in coordinating the network. You can reach her at [bryson@virginia.edu](mailto:bryson@virginia.edu).

—Michèle Lamont, Department of Sociology, Princeton University ([mlamont@princeton.edu](mailto:mlamont@princeton.edu)).

•The **Culture and Religion Network** will be having a **roundtable** during the Culture Section's roundtable period. We urge all those interested in the Culture and Religion network to attend the roundtable, which we will use to discuss both intellectual issues and possible network activities.

Table Presider: Rhys Williams, Southern Illinois Univ., Carbondale. Presenters: Kelly Besecke, Univ. of Wisconsin, Madison, "meaning and Meaning: A Cultural Reconceptualization of Religion"; William MacDonald, Ohio State Univ., Newark, "Family Structure and Intergenerational Transmission of Religious Culture"; Rhys Williams, SIU-C, "Religion and the Sociology of Culture: Academic and Intellectual Issues."

—Rhys Williams ([willrhys@siu.edu](mailto:willrhys@siu.edu))

•The **Political Culture Network** will have a **roundtable** during the Culture Section's roundtable period. The network's **listserv** has a new address (thanks to Andy Perrin): **[p-culture@listserv.unc.edu](mailto:p-culture@listserv.unc.edu)**. You can subscribe or otherwise manage your presence on this listserv by pointing a web browser to **<http://listserv.unc.edu>** and following the directions. The listserv will light up again this June, in preparation for the roundtable at ASA.

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