



*Message from the Chair*

*Feature Article*

## Cultural Sociology and its Others Culture Section 20th Anniversary Symposium

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On July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2008, we will conclude our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration with a symposium on “Cultural Sociology and its Others.” I hope that you can be there!

The 2007 symposium organized by Chandra Mukerji on the implicit models we bring to our work on culture provided an opportunity to reflect on our own “epistemic culture(s).” Against this background, we can turn to questions about our “external relations”— how we draw on, challenge, and contribute to projects of our intellectual “others.” What exactly should that mean?

Cultural sociologists’ focus on meaning and meaning-making has been exciting and productive because it puts few restrictions on the empirical domains we might explore. We use culturalist perspectives to examine many different sociological topics— stratification, work, organizations, politics, religion, gender, crime, social movements, economic sociology, social psychology, and so on. Moreover, since our models, conventions, and analytic tools are often turned to problems formulated differently by other scholars, our research frequently demands engagement with epistemic “others.” We build on and challenge sociological research conducted with other presuppositions, and sometimes offer fully alternative explanations. And we often integrate scholarship from other disciplines like history, anthropology, law, the humanities, cultural studies, psychology or communications in our analyses.

This scholarly omnivorousness is well recognized, but I think it needs a new sort of attention. First, I want to reflect here, especially for those of you who have recently joined us, on just how persistent a theme it has been. But I want to go on to suggest that we should push these reflections in new and more productive directions.

The evidence that scholarly omnivorousness is a subcultural tradition is striking. For instance, it emerges as a persistent theme in our newsletter. Vera Zolberg argued early that “The Sociology of Culture is a Capacious Field.” Pete Peterson wrote of “Melding Ethnographic and Humanist Definitions of Culture,” and Michele Lamont reflected on “Crisis or No Crisis: Culture and Theory in Sociology— The Humanities and Elsewhere.” A few years later, Mark Jacobs wrote “Against Closure: Amplifying the Semantic Richness of the Section’s Culture...” In 2003 John Mohr argued that “cultural sociology will necessarily involve a kind of rapprochement between the hermeneutic and the scientific;” and Robin Wagner-Pacifici made a “pitch to look abroad, to other Social Sciences and to the

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## Higher Education and the Organization of Culture

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In March 2006 a diverse group of scholars convened at New York University to discuss the intellectual future of the sociology of higher education. Funded in part by a grant from ASA/NSF Fund for the Advancement of the Discipline, the conference was intended to formulate useful and provocative research goals for the field. The conference program, attendee list, and final report are available at <http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/sihp/index.php?page=31>. Conversations commenced at that event have proven fertile and, we believe, pertinent to the sociology of culture. Our goal here is to convey the general contours of these conversations as they have developed over that last eighteen months. A fuller elaboration of this effort will appear in the *Annual Review of Sociology* next year.

We seek to create new dialogue among heretofore distinct research traditions. Our work has proceeded through a series of metaphors. We argue that sociologists have regarded colleges and universities as *sieves* for regulating the mobility processes underlying the allocation of privileged positions in the society; *incubators* for the development of competent human actors; and *temples* for the legitimation of official knowledge. Additionally, its location at the intersection of multiple institutions encourages us to conceive of higher education as a *hub*, connecting multiple social processes

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Humanities” and urged “our learned familiarity with the way other disciplines take on culture.”<sup>1</sup>

Other expressions of the theme have not been so consensual. Just over a decade ago, Robert Wuthnow worried about our future and suggested that it might be “increasingly important for cultural sociology to blend in with other specialties, rather than presenting itself only as a distinctive subfield.” In 2004, Andy Perin, John Sonnett, and Ron Breiger debated the value of linear regression and more relational quantitative techniques for cultural sociology. And earlier, in 2000, Ron Lembo challenged cultural sociologists to move beyond what he saw as a “defensive reaction that sets in at the mention of the terms cultural studies, postmodernism, and poststructuralism.” His challenge was extended by Arvind Rajogopal (“Western Sociology and its Limits) and John Foran (“...Towards a Third World Cultural Studies) and still has not been fully engaged— although answered, perhaps, with silent marginalization.<sup>2</sup>

Many cultural sociologists have also called for or reflected on connections with other substantive subfields, as in Paul DiMaggio’s 1993 notes on “Reaching out to Sociologists of Religion, Science, and Law.” On my brief review, political sociology and the sociology of religion have been the most common “others” of interest, but such different topics as social movements, aesthetics, sport, inequality, music, race, television, art, urbanism, and emotions have also drawn attention.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, our meetings have frequently emphasized boundary work. U.C. San Diego conferences over the past couple of years have explored this theme, with speakers looking at “how cultural perspectives inform their sociological subfields”— economic sociology, race/ethnicity, sexuality, comparative religion, inequalities, popular culture, social movements, and education so far. And participants frequently remarked on the stimulation – or challenge— of the boundary crossing in the earlier “Cultural Turn” mini-conferences organized by John Mohr and Roger Friedland at U.C. Santa Barbara. The theme has also turned up in other culture meetings over the years, at George Mason, New School, Yale, Princeton, Emory, and Rutgers.<sup>4</sup>

And of course boundary crossing has been a theme of many of our ASA panels. Most recently, our 2007 anniversary panel on “Cultural Sociology and Disciplinary Change,” organized by Jeff Alexander, drew a huge crowd to hear about culture and network analysis, culture and economic sociology, culture and comparative historical sociology, and culture and stratification. And the day after our July symposium this year there will be a section panel organized by Susan Silbey: “bringing into dialogue divergent perspectives about culture.”

Overall, I think our shared attitude to this issue of scholarly boundary crossing is a sort of exasperated celebration. All of us have probably expressed at one time or another Mitchell Stevens’ assessment, in his review of the Jacobs and Hanrahan collection, that precisely because “the sociology of culture enjoys little theoretical or methodological consensus” it was “so perennially exciting and so generative of new ways of seeing the world...” Personally, I would hesitate to say that we

don’t share theoretical or methodological views, but I know what he means.<sup>5</sup>

More informally, we sometimes speak to each other of important ideas in other disciplines, and of how we’re addressing our sociological colleagues in other subfields. We sometimes admonish our colleagues, in culture and beyond, for their failures to fully engage others. We sometimes congratulate ourselves on bringing topical sensibilities and hermeneutic techniques common in the humanities to enlighten our more positivist sociological colleagues— indeed, this could be considered one of the founding projects of the section. And we sometimes bemoan the difficulties of communicating with colleagues who stubbornly cling to unenlightened criteria of assessment and do not attend to the meaning-making involved in the subjects they study— taking for granted, instead, a thin rational choice or simplistic structuralism. It’s also quite common to suggest that while the humanities offer us a lot, they sometimes re-invent the sociological wheel or, on the other hand, miss the most interesting questions.

In July, we will be thinking together about the various ways cultural sociologists have experienced the marking and crossing of scholarly boundaries— and the implications of those experiences. The symposium provides an opportunity to compare our particular experiences and strategies as we attempt to address scholarship in different fields and in different registers. What salient differences have we encountered? How do we address them? How does culturalist work contribute to the work of others? How does our border-crossing in turn influence the work we do? How have we each experienced its advantages and disadvantages? What have we learned by crossing boundaries? What can we learn from the experience of other culturalists?

It would be easy to spend the day, triumphant or commiserating, on war stories about boundaries. Such stories are no doubt good for our collective identity and can energize our scholarly projects. But I think we can talk of something more analytically interesting and ultimately more productive when we put together our ideas about “cultural sociology and its others” this summer.<sup>6</sup>

What I have in mind is best captured by Peter Galison’s intriguing metaphor of “trading zones” – thick borders between subcultures of knowledge production where full paradigmatic translation never quite happens but “pidgin” and even “creole” languages develop for practical communication. Galison’s deeply researched history of twentieth century microphysics is fascinating in many ways, not least in its illustration of epistemological fragmentation in physics of the sort which sociologists sometimes masochistically like to think of as peculiarly their own. Here, though, I want to highlight his resistance both to positivist and anti-positivist philosophy of science. While he is sympathetic to Kuhnian challenges to positivism, he opposes their totalizing implication that communication across paradigm boundaries is impossible: “my question is not how different scientific communities pass like ships in the night. It is rather how, given the extraordinary diversity of the participants in physics... they

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speak to each other at all." Complete translation might be impossible, but in practice scientific subcultures with "sharply different global meanings" "can share some activities while diverging on many others" -- "... in the local context of the trading zone, despite the differences in classification, significance, and standards of demonstration, the two groups can collaborate...." His metaphor for this process is drawn, of course, from linguistic anthropology. Pidgin languages are constructed at thick borders or trading zones where two subcultures "restrict and localize symbolic systems for the purposes of coordinating them at the margins..." Sometimes, pidgins become usable as full languages and creole subcultures are established. Both pidgins and creoles "are defined by having enough autonomous structure to be self-sustaining while at the same time serving to link other, distinct and much larger bodies of practices..." Moreover, work in these "trading zones" can subsequently influence how problems are formulated in the "home" subcultures.<sup>7</sup>

In my view, Galison touches here on an experience many of us share as we draw on and address work in other subfields and other disciplines. We might sometimes worry that we may not be doing justice to some core interpretive principles of problem formation or evidence when we are writing for disciplinary others. Or we might recognize (or be told) that in drawing topics or analytic procedures from history, or literature, or economics, we are not really getting the point, not fulfilling some alternative evaluative criteria. Most of my own work on national identity was devoted to getting the history right, or at least good enough, for the argument I wanted to make about culture (which was easy). Similarly, my current work on business culture would have been a lot easier— and probably more elegant to cultural sociologists— if I hadn't been constrained by pesky considerations of significance and evidence more pertinent to scholars more fully grounded in economic and political sociology.

But the more fundamental point is that we can learn a lot if we set aside concerns about protecting sub-cultural purity or getting others to understand what we are doing (at least well enough to publish it.) These considerations are certainly important. But what is actually happening in the trading zones? What do our "pidgins" look like? And how does our engagement with epistemological or topical others in turn influence our own problem formulation, analytic tools, and criteria of assessment? As Robin Wagner-Pacifici put it nicely a few years ago, "something happens when you cross over the boundary— questions shift, certain things that were in the foreground are now in the background, terminology shifts. Some of these shifts are as subtle as discerning a different resting point for an analysis... some are pretty explicit..."<sup>8</sup>

The metaphor of pidgin languages in trading zones is helpful in several ways. It lowers our expectations about maintaining our own paradigmatic purity when we communicate across boundaries, and reminds us that our prospective interlocutors have their own larger intellectual loyalties. It moves us away from grandiose expectations of conversion, and their mirror image,

fears of absorption. It can help us examine and share our conclusions about what pidgins we've developed while talking to scholars more fully embedded, say, in social movements research or in economic sociology or in literature. What particular differences of classification, significance, and standards of demonstration do we encounter, and, more importantly, what are the features of the more restricted codes which have worked to communicate with our "others"?

Mark Jacobs and I took a first stab at this sort of question several years ago when we examined what cultural sociology was contributing to other subfields, and what cultural sociologists should learn from that process. There, though, we were looking at the results of the exchange, on both sides.<sup>9</sup> What I hope to learn more about when we gather at the end of July is our various experiences and observations of the process— of the pidgins we've developed in different encounters, of their advantages and limitations, and, hopefully, what they share.

The symposium is scheduled for the day before the culture section panels at the ASA meetings in Boston, and will be held at Harvard. As at last year's absorbing and energizing meeting, we will be reflecting together in larger groups and smaller workshops, with contributions from many of our colleagues. You'll be hearing more about the program and registration process as details are finalized. Be sure to register as soon as it's possible, because places at last year's symposium went quickly. Together, these two symposia will orient and connect us as we move into our third decade.

### Notes

1. Vera Zolberg, "The Sociology of Culture is a Capacious Field," *Culture* 2(4) Spring 1988, 3; Richard A. Peterson, "Melding Ethnographic and Humanist Definitions of Culture," *Culture* 6(3) Spring 1992, 10-11; Michele Lamont, "Crisis or No Crisis: Culture and Theory in Sociology— The Humanities and Elsewhere," *Culture* 6(3) Spring 1992: 8-9; Mark D. Jacobs, "Against Closure: Amplifying the Semantic Richness of the Section's Culture," *Culture* 14(1) Fall 1999: 1, 3-6; John Mohr, "The Cultural Turn in American Sociology— A Report from the Field," *Culture* 17(2-3) Spring 2003, 1-5; Robin Wagner-Pacifici, "Edgework in the Sociology of Culture," *Culture* 18(1) Autumn 2003: 1-3.

2. Robert Wuthnow, "Is Cultural Sociology Doomed?" *Culture* 11(3-4) Spring-Summer 1997: 1-2; Andrew J. Perrin, "Who's Afraid of General Linear Regression?" *Culture* 18(3) Spring 2004: 1, 11-13; John Sonnett and Ronald Breiger, "How Relational Methods Matter: A Reply to Perrin," *Culture* 19(1) Autumn 2004: 1, 8-10; Ron Lembo, "The Road to Nowhere: Reflections on the Current State of the Sociology of Culture," *Culture* 15(2) Winter 2000, 1, 3-6; Arvind Rajogopal, "Western Sociology and its Limits," *Culture* 16(3) Spring 2002: 1-3; John Foran, "In the Margins of Culture: Towards a Third World Cultural Studies," *Culture* 16(3) Spring 2002, 1, 3-6.

3. Paul DiMaggio, "1993 Program Notes: Reaching Out to Sociologists of Religion, Law, and Science," *Culture* 7(2) Winter 1993: 5-6.

4. You can see reports of these conferences in our *Culture*

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## Higher Education..., Continued...

that sociologists often presume to be distinct.

### Sieve

Sociologists long have recognized that schooling is central to stratification in modern societies. Formal education historically has been a “social sieve” regulating access to privileged social positions .

With their benchmark *American Occupational Structure* , Peter Blau and Otis Dudley Duncan transformed sociologists’ approach to stratification from a narrow focus on measuring rates of social mobility to a broader identification of the determinants of individual status attainment. Higher education was a crucial part of Blau and Duncan’s analytic machinery. Their work demonstrated that for the cohort of men they examined in the United States, occupational destinations were strongly associated with educational attainment, but that this attainment itself was greatly, though not entirely, determined by family background. Subsequent research repeatedly has demonstrated that socioeconomic background predicts college entrance and completion, holding other factors constant .

Increasing mass participation in higher education since World War II has steadily complicated the task of scholars in the status-attainment tradition, however. The meaning of “years of schooling” has become ever more variable in the face of the myriad ways to participate in post-secondary education. Even among four-year institutions, diversification increasingly undermines the analytical coherence of the meaning of a bachelor’s degree . Hout (1988) has argued that once individuals attain four-year diplomas, social background has only negligible additional effects on occupational position. Nevertheless there is mounting evidence that variation in how people move through their college years has significant consequences for overall life outcomes.

Schooling also contributes to stratification through the structuring of marriage markets. Schwartz and Mare find that college graduates have become increasingly likely to marry each other, leading to a widening class divide between well-educated and well-compensated couples, and all married and unmarried others. DiPrete and Buchmann demonstrate that advantage in marriage markets is a key benefit of increasing college completion rates for women . While the college-educated typically do not marry until relatively later in life, they frequently marry individuals they met while in school. Arum, Roksa and Budig found that one third of college graduates who married or cohabitated with an individual possessing similar levels of educational attainment, did so with someone who attended colleges with identical institutional characteristics. The benefits of “old school” ties for business and political careers among the most privileged social groups appear to confer parallel advantages in romantic pursuits.

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newsletter archive, online at [www.ibiblio.org/culture/](http://www.ibiblio.org/culture/) The UCSD conferences are reported in the Spring 2006 and 2007 issues; the UCSB “Cultural Turn” conferences in the Spring 2001, Fall 1999, and Spring-Summer 1997 issues; the George Mason conferences in Spring 2001 and Fall 1995; the New School conference in Winter 1997; the Princeton conference in Spring 2001; Rutgers in Spring/Summer 2000; and Emory in Autumn 2003. Thanks to all who helped create this record..

5. Mitchell Stevens, “In Praise of Uncertain Futures,” *Culture* 19(3) Spring 2005: 3.

6. Thanks to Fred Wherry for pointing out that the title “Cultural Sociology and Its Others” could be taken as too politically charged. As the remainder of this essay makes clear, I think it would be tedious to spend our time building “team spirit” by demonizing. I agree with Cynthia Epstein, although not quite in the sense she intended in context, that “ideologies of identity politics in the academy as well as outside the academy often slow the engine of revelation”— see “On Boundaries, Conceptual and Actual,” *Culture* 16(1) Autumn 2001, 1-3. Of course, an active section network and a prominent contingent of section members— including Bethany Bryson, Cynthia Epstein, Michele Lamont, Christena Nippert-Eng, and Eviatar Zerubavel— have been developing our theory of symbolic boundaries: see Lyn Spillman, ed. *Cultural Sociology* (Malden MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 87, 106-107, 118-119, and 231-232 for beginning bibliography on this work. One way of approaching our discussion in July would be to use the theory of symbolic boundaries to analyze our own collective scholarly positioning and trajectory. However, I think the more epistemologically-inflected approach here leavens that theory in interesting ways.

7. Peter Galison, *Image and Logic: A Material Culture of Microphysics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997); 63, 803-804; 837; 826-27. Galison makes a convincing, well researched case for the felicity of his metaphor, but sometimes seems to bracket the issue of whether or how much it matters that parties to subcultural encounters at “thick borders” might have different amounts or types of power. I doubt most cultural sociologists would bracket this question.

8. Wagner-Pacifici, “Edgework,” 2.

9. Mark D. Jacobs and Lyn Spillman, “Cultural Sociology at the Crossroads of the Discipline,” *Poetics* 33(2005): 1-14. Among our observations there is the continued pertinence of causality issues in what I am now labeling “trading zones.” I hope to expand on this point in the next issue of *Culture*.

### **Incubator**

In recent years the study of what we call the experiential core of college life – the space between the elaborately studied moments of college entry and exit – has been left largely to the field of education and to a handful of anthropologists and historians. This is a significant oversight. Higher education affects stratification outcomes beyond the conferral of credentials and human capital. Classic studies of U.S. higher education suggest that colleges and universities, especially elite ones, are crucial sites for the coalescence of privileged identities, group boundaries, and social networks – in a word, incubators for young adults and the social ties that divide and solidify them into groups .

Colleges and universities are quintessentially social places, shaping the number, quality, and type of social ties that particular individuals and groups enjoy. These ties may have lifelong consequences, as people often find jobs, marriage partners, medical care, homes, and schools for their children through people they know. The effect of college attendance on network formation may partially explain how social class comes to be “positively related” to the “size, complexity, and diversity of networks” and negatively related to network “density and average tie strength” . While research has indicated the career benefits of networks formed in college , this strain of scholarship is still in its infancy.

Higher education also creates contexts for the development of cultural capital in ways that are useful for establishing an upper-middle class life. Bourdieu viewed social class as constituted not only by occupation, income, and wealth but also by cultural dispositions and styles of embodiment. While he argued that most cultural capital is acquired at an early age in the context of the family, scholars have recently demonstrated that cultural dispositions continue to evolve throughout the life course . We know that the cultural capital of both parents and students plays a role in earlier levels of schooling . Scholarship on elite colleges and boarding schools posits that learning to embody privilege – through physique, dress, speech, manners and style – may be a crucial aspect of college learning . Stevens argues that the athletic activities that are so pervasive on elite U.S. campuses help produce the fit, healthy, attractive bodies that facilitate their owners’ movement through privileged circles during and after college. Social and cultural capital are of course, intertwined, as “wide-ranging networks require broad repertoires of taste” .

Sociologists would do well to attend more carefully to college peer cultures, since within them social networks are built and distinctive cultural styles are cultivated. Particularly at residential colleges, students devote considerable attention to friendships, “party-ing,” scouting for sexual and romantic partners, competing for popularity, practicing sports, and either

participating in or observing athletic competitions. Many of these activities are explicitly “social,” oriented around forging, maintaining, and displaying bonds with peers. That the non-academic side of college life matters greatly to students is not news to college administrators or to parents, who seem to understand that the social and cultural aspects of college are fundamental to higher education. Personnel at highly selective residential colleges, especially, are keenly aware that they purvey not only quality academics but also quality peers to prospective students and their families (Stevens 2007). College presidents, admissions officers, and status-conscious families have long viewed network coalescence as an important utility of selective colleges .

We know that social and cultural capital influence whether students attend college, the kinds of institutions they attend, and whether they stay to complete their degrees . We know also that the number and kind of social ties students build while in college are associated with patterns of academic achievement and degree completion . Yet there are few studies which investigate just how social and cultural capital are produced and exchanged in college, or how such processes may be implicated in larger patterns of social inequality.

We believe that the individual and group variation behind the aggregate benefits enjoyed by those who attend and graduate from college warrant further investigation. Students form intramural hierarchies that mirror the larger society and resemble high school status systems . Prior economic, social, cultural, and even physical capital may influence whether students gain access to the most desirable networks when in college. For example, Stuber found that working class and upper-middle class college students were not equally culturally equipped to engage in network expansion. Upper-middle class students tend to arrive at college with an orientation to sociality: they have been “primed” by parents and friends to be as “outgoing” as possible and have learned techniques for “meeting people.” Additionally, in the social worlds of school, having the “right” clothes, body, hygiene practices, hair style, accent, cell phone, and musical tastes matter . Acquiring appropriate cultural accoutrements requires time and money, both of which often are in short supply among first-generation college students. Such cultural rules tend to produce class- and race-endogamous networks – unsurprising in light of theory and research on homophily .

### **Temple**

The most prominent intellectual alternative to the status-attainment paradigm in the sociology of education is the work of John Meyer and his colleagues out of Stanford University, who

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connections between the university and the modern nation-state. For the Stanford school, formal secular education is an essential component of nation-building, through which the state assumes jurisdiction over the production of competent citizens and workers. On this approach formal education's central purpose is to produce a distinctive kind of social actor: the legally and normatively autonomous, rights-bearing, rationally cognizant "citizen" of Enlightenment modernity. Because this production process entails the formal organization of knowledge into curriculum, it also defines what counts as legitimate knowledge. Higher education enjoys pride of place in this production apparatus since it produces and certifies the best and brightest citizens and the most complex and rarefied knowledge. As the organizational instantiation of intellectual "progress," the university is the secular temple of modern societies.

The traditions of scholarship that we here describe with the metaphors of sieve, incubator, and temple only rarely have been made mutually informative, despite the shared organizational housing of the empirical phenomena they investigate. We find it compelling, for example, that the status of universities and their students is reciprocally generated. In the U.S., the academic quality of schools is assessed, in part, on their admissions selectivity and admitted students' *prior* academic performance – for example, class rank and SAT scores. Stinchcombe once theorized that student matriculation decisions are based on the assumption of a connection between the amount and quality of faculty research, quality of instruction, and the prestige of an institution's credential. Yet social scientists only rarely have systematically assessed the closeness of fit between these three dimensions of university life.

Ironically, our reluctance to consider such connections directly mirrors organizational sociology's famous insights about "loose coupling" between disparate components of complex organizations – insights which themselves grew out of the study of schools. Because colleges and universities have so many different functions and so many different constituents (e.g., parents, professional organizations, philanthropic organizations, wealthy alumni, trustees, state funding agencies, legislatures and the National Collegiate Athletic Association), loose coupling is often the most reasonable or even the only means of organizational survival. Sociologists have taken this idea a long way – so far, perhaps, that we have lost sight of a crucial fact: In modern societies much of the work of class stratification, knowledge production, and legitimation is relegated to the *same organizations*, universities. Social scientists generally have been less appreciative of this fact than they should be.

### Hub

We propose that higher education is a *hub* connect-

ing some of the most prominent institutional sectors of modern societies: the labor market, the philanthropic sector, the professions and the sciences, the family, and the nation-state. This structural arrangement is historically specific and cross-nationally variable. Conceiving of higher education systems (even perhaps all formal schooling systems) as hubs is an apt extension of the three sociological traditions specified by the other three metaphors, and also opens large new terrain to empirical inquiry.

The notion of the modern university as a hub connecting multiple institutional sectors was implicit in the benchmark analysis of U.S. higher education by Christopher Jencks and David Riesman (1968). The university was the primary organizational catalyst of Jencks and Riesman's "academic revolution," which they defined succinctly as "the rise to power of the academic profession (xiii)." During the middle decades of the twentieth century, academics accrued considerably more influence over American life in at least three ways: first, the expanded higher education sector that employed them became the nation's official portal to middle-class prosperity; second, academics' formal authority over the terms and content of academic credentials grew with the mushrooming number of professional certifications; third, the amassing esoteric knowledge and ostensible objectivity helped get them work in leadership and advisory positions across a wide spectrum of social institutions.

The dramatic expansion of the instructional and research capacities of U.S. higher education after WW II through to the 1970s provided much of the infrastructure for an increasingly technocratic society, in which coveted occupational positions and status honor came to be distributed largely on the basis of postsecondary schooling, and in which the university became the official locus of knowledge production. Over the course of fifty years and through the massive financial largesse of state and federal governments, U.S. universities were transformed from respected if archaic organizations into virtually unavoidable passageways into the upper-middle class and central nodes in the professional networks of literally all fields of expert knowledge and practice.

Sociologists have shown that the multi-purpose, research-and-teaching university form developed in the U.S. after WW II and quickly became the definitive organizational model for universities worldwide. The boundaries and content of academic disciplines developed in the West have similarly diffused. Yet important questions remain about the extent to which higher education should be appraised as a coherent global phenomenon or a nationally variable one. We note that variation in the structure of higher education systems throughout the modern world is related to other enduring differences

in the character and cul-

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ture of social inequality. Specifying this variation would reveal a fascinating feature of modernity: the expansion of higher education is truly global even while its expressions tend to remain nationally peculiar.

Recent scholarship suggests linkages between the structure of higher education systems and national class cultures. Stevens argues, for example, that the exceptionally populous and competitive organizational ecology of U.S. higher education is both an outcome and a cause of Americans' enduring ambivalence about class distinction. Because, historically, U.S. elites have been unable to fully agree on the proper relationship between higher education and class exclusion, they have supported an extraordinarily large number and variety of colleges and universities. While American culture has a thin language for talking about social class per se, it maintains an exquisitely elaborate discourse about college. Upper middle-class life in America is characterized by endless discussion of where one attended college and where one's children are headed. Affluent parents care about not only about whether their children will be admitted to college, but also about which among the prestigious schools will offer their children spots. Testament to the cultural significance of college choices and admissions, many people embellish their car windows, homes, and wardrobes with the insignia of their alma maters and of the schools their offspring attend.

Unlike anywhere else in the world, intercollegiate athletics are a constitutive feature of U.S. higher education's prestige system. Intercollegiate sports leagues are "status clubs" that serve as a shorthand for relative organizational status (the paradigmatic example is, of course, the Ivy League). The athletic contests that give this system its official purpose enjoy millions of fans and generate billions of dollars in ticket and advertising revenues. The human capital essential to the system is produced by the vast organizational infrastructure of youth athletics, which simultaneously grooms the talented athletes coveted by college and university sports programs, defines the rhythms of middle-class American family life, and provides inspiring narratives about the possibility of social mobility through athletic accomplishment.

Things are different in other societies. Canada maintains a government-funded, centrally administered higher education system with a relatively flat inter-organizational status hierarchy. While there is modest variation in the prestige of degrees from different Canadian universities, competition among applicants for seats at particular schools is much less intense than in the U.S.

In contrast with the North American systems, French higher education is both centrally administered and intensely competitive. In France the highest-status schools are the *grandes écoles*, which generally are regarded as having the most elite academic fac-

ulties and have the most competitive admissions. Different *écoles* confer different kinds of status, which parallel the intended futures of their graduates as technical professionals, government officials, or intellectuals. Beneath the *grandes écoles* are the more numerous French *universités*, which have less competitive admissions profiles and which confer degrees of lower prestige. The relatively rigid and explicitly hierarchical character of French universities parallels the character of the French class system, as one of its most famous sociologists well understood.

Since about 1980 the British higher education system has been in transit between a binary, categorical prestige hierarchy – with Oxford and Cambridge enjoying unquestioned preeminence over all other national universities – to a more complex and finely calibrated status gradient in which government financial support is tied to measurable performance on standardized metrics of organizational quality. Oxbridge degrees remain marks of social and academic distinction in the UK, but much less definitive ones than they were thirty years ago. The transformation of the British university system has been part of an explicit and ongoing government effort whose officially stated purpose has been to render class distinctions more porous throughout British society.

We believe that the relationship between national higher education systems and class cultures is an important area for further research. We here reiterate the overarching sociological paradox: even while higher education is implicated in modern state systems and stratification regimes globally, quite visible forms of national organizational and cultural distinctiveness remain. This insight is hardly our own; it received eloquent expression in Turner's classic essay contrasting the sponsored and contest mobility educational logics in mid-century Britain and America. Yet the remarkable simultaneity of higher education's universal diffusion and particularistic expression remains largely unexplored by sociologists, and provides a starting place for multiple research hypotheses in the sociology of culture, organizations, and stratification.

**Works cited for this article may be found at:** <http://www.ibiblio.org/culture/newsletter/cult222/stevens-refs.html>

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### The Sociology of Culture and Cultural Sociology

There is a strong consensus today that the study of culture by sociologists has been a latecomer in the discipline of sociology. This is true both of the sociology of culture (Crane 1995) and cultural sociology (Spillman 2007). The former has been virtually reinvented since the early 1970s. Cultural sociology has also emerged since the 1990s with what is called 'the Cultural Turn' (Bonnell, Hunt 1999).

Although both the sociology of culture and cultural sociology have a common conceptual repertoire, the former sees culture as a *dependent variable* while the latter treats it as an *independent variable* with relative autonomy in shaping both human action and social institutions.

The sociology of culture's new perspectives deal with the reinterpretation of perennial issues in sociological thought. That's is, how to define and conceptualize culture in all its contemporary ramifications, how to conceptualize the relationship between structure and culture and to conduct systematic studies of culture in its social context in a time when traditional notions of cause and effect no longer seem relevant (Crane 1995 : 17).

On the other hand, cultural sociology is defined by Spillman as "about meaning – making. Cultural sociologists investigate how meaning-making happens, why meanings vary, how meanings influence human action, and why meaning-making is important in social cohesion, domination, and resistance"(Spillman 2007 : 1).

The terms 'weak program' and 'strong program' are widely used today by sociologists to distinguish sociology of culture from cultural sociology. Both recognize the importance of culture for society and appear to have a great deal in common. However, the apparent similarities are only superficial. The sociology of culture regards culture as something "soft" and dependent rather than a truly independent variable. In other words, in the sociology of culture, an "insignificant" role is assigned to culture and, as such, it is given a 'thin description'.

Within this outlook, the classical period (pre-1960) of the social theory of culture, including the sociologies of Weber, Durkheim, Marx, Parsons, Mills and others belong to the 'weak program'.

Furthermore, the modern (post-1960) period has at least four types of 'weak program': the Birmingham School, Bourdieu, Foucault and 'the theory of the production and consumption of culture'.

It should be emphasized here that the 'weak program' still dominates today the over all sociological studies of culture, even though cultural sociology of a 'strong program' is gaining ground especially in Amer-

### Flirting with the Development of Theoretical Social Science Perspective

On my part, my involvement in cultural sociology developed rather independently from my Western academic studies and readings in the social sciences.

My story with cultural sociology began around 1990. My interest in this new branch of sociology took place in an indirect way. I was then flirting with the idea of establishing my own perspective or a paradigm or a theory which can help comprehend and explain both individual behaviours and the dynamics of human societies and civilizations.

Such a research goal required a suitable methodology that could put me on solid ground for this ambitious work. I told myself that my best methodology would be to chart, so to speak, those traits/characteristics which radically and categorically distinguish the human race from other species. Because I assumed that a perspective, or a paradigm or a theory which is based on fundamental human distinct traits/characteristics would strongly and more likely qualify to be credible and reliable as far as understanding and explaining the behaviors of individuals as well as the social dynamics of human societies and civilizations. In other words, I argued that distinctly human traits/characteristics must be square one where the social scientist should begin his her work in attempting to build a valid theoretical social science framework for the understanding and explanation of human affairs. Thus, a set of distinctly human traits/characteristics is considered to be the major key for seeking articulate understanding and explanation of what goes on in the human world.

### Human Symbols are Central to Human Identity

The comparative charting process of common and uncommon traits/characteristics between the human race and the other living species has led me to realize that the human race has certain features which the other species either do not have or they have a lower level of them. These are what I call **Human Symbols (HS)**: spoken and written language, thought, religion, knowledge/science, myths, laws, cultural values and norms... My definition of HS is similar to that of culture of Edward B.Tylor "Culture, or civilization... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom, and any other capacities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Encyclopedia of Sociology 1974 :69).

Starting the enquiry for the understanding of humans and their societies from the basics of HS is seen as compatible with the concept of the 'return to basics'. Since HS are what distinguish humans from the other species, they should be seen as the basis of human identity and of the action of human agency. Because HS are the most outstanding founding components of human identity, they can be viewed as very central to the form-

ation of human nature itself. This allows us to say that *the human race is by nature a symbolic race*. That is, my conceptualization of HS strongly advocates that HS (culture) are independent and autonomous variables as would argue today cultural sociologists of the 'strong program' orientation.

### **The Legitimacy of Return to Basics**

The focus on the study of HS is a strong stand in favor of the principle of returning to basics adopted by social and natural scientists alike, such as Noam Chomsky in his study of language and Edward Wilson in his invention of sociobiology.

On my part, the exploration in depth of HS is a direct return to the very center of the human identity. As outlined before, HS are what radically distinguish humans from the other species and grant the former overwhelming domination over the latter. If Man has always presented a puzzle for philosophers, social thinkers and scientists as well, I consider HS the first source through which we can come closer to the discovery and the understanding of that intriguing puzzle. As such, the establishment of a solid corpus of knowledge on HS would be classified as the top scientific knowledge ever that is highly qualified to offer well grounded understanding and explanation of the behaviors of social actors and the dynamics of human societies and civilizations.

My perspective's intense focus on Man's HS has led me to say "Humans are by nature cultural symbolic beings" before "being social by nature" as stated by philosophers and social thinkers of all times and civilizations. That is, Man possesses a complex and unique high quality HS system made of spoken and written language, cultural values and norms and the ability to use the symbols for making knowledge and science. Man also has high cognitive skills, which allow for tangible and abstract thinking which may reach very complex and sophisticated levels. These examples and others of Man's intense and complex use of HS make Man legitimately qualified to be uniquely called *Homo Symbolicus*.

### **Disorder in the Study of Culture**

In their efforts to study culture, contemporary and modern anthropologists and sociologists have tended to study it separately from from the subject (the social actor). They have focused instead on culture as a collective phenomenon in society. Various definitions of culture show this clearly. Edward B.Tylor's famous definition of culture is a good example : "Culture or civilization... is that complex whole which includes knowledge , belief, art, morals, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as member of society"(Encyclopedia of Sociology 1974 : 69). So, culture is a collective phenomenon that is a complex whole and is the direct outcome of human society. Such a

definition speaks of culture as the result of social context and consequently remains completely silent on the role of Man's (the social actor) symbolic being in the making of human culture as a collective phenomenon in human societies. It could be said that anthropologists and sociologists have adopted an upside down/inverted approach in their study of culture. They simply concluded that culture emerges from society without raising a fundamental epistemological question: could human culture, that complex whole, exist in a given context without having humans who are by nature the strongest users of symbols? In other words, being innately equipped with the ability to intensely use the HS, humans become the legitimate candidates for the production of the phenomenon of culture in human society.

My approach is different from those of the anthropologists and sociologists in the explanation of the origin of culture. While they see culture as simply the result of society, I see first that the human symbolic beings as the central agent who determines the making of culture "that complex whole" in human society. Human culture is a very sophisticated collective phenomenon that can hardly be conceived without the full presence of HS as deeply inherent in the human identity. This explains the absence in animal societies of the high standard human culture. HS make that big difference.

The French sociologist Alain Touraine has criticized sociologists for their neglecting to focus on the social actor. He claims that sociologists are interested instead in the study of systems like the industrial and the capitalist societies. He argues as well that contemporary thought has in general minimized the subjective side of the social actor as Nietzsche, Marx and Freud had done (Wieviorka 2007 : 25-27). Touraine stresses the importance of social sciences' combining the social system and the social actor in their analysis to understand and explain social action in society. It is neither excessive nor paradoxical to say that the idea of society is a major obstacle which bothers the development of social sciences because they are based on the separation and even the opposition between the system and the social actor, while the idea of society implies their direct link (Ibid : 28).

In the study of culture, that 'complex whole,' my approach is in line with Touraine's thought. It is made up of two steps :

1-a strong recognition of social actor as great HS user by nature and the need to understand the inside and outside nature of the HS system. Thus, Geertz's 'thick description' of HS is in order here.

2- explanation of the impact of HS on the behaviors of social actors and the dynamics of human societies and civilizations.

### **Independent Exploration of the HS World**

My view that HS are very central to human iden-

tity is hardly adopted by the contemporary discipline of sociology: both its founding Fathers and their followers in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This has made my exploration into the HS world independent and lonely.

On the other hand, my HS exploration deals with new features of HS/culture on which sociologists and other social scientists have remained rather silent, such as the facts that HS have neither weight nor volume and that HS have transcendental/metaphysical dimensions. These new features give HS trustworthy epistemological foundations which grant HS the central role they play in determining both individual behaviors and the dynamics of human societies and civilizations.

Sociology's failure is twofold with regard to the study of HS/culture. On one hand, western sociologists including the founding fathers have not dealt with culture as a major independent and influential variable in the making of human social action and the dynamics of human collectivities. They have rather treated culture as a dependent variable shaped mainly by social structure or/and economic imperative. On the other hand, to my knowledge, there is hardly any reference today even by cultural sociologists, let alone analysis and discussion, of the new features mentioned above in my exploration of the nature of HS. As such, cultural sociology cannot progress and provide solid knowledge without focusing on the understanding of the latent/inside nature of cultural elements/HS as we have done in our exploration of the HS universe. In other words, it is absolutely not enough for cultural sociologists just to pay more attention to culture to establish a credible cultural sociology with a 'strong program'. The road map to the foundation of a solid cultural sociology can be achieved by cultural sociologists if they adopt in their study of culture two steps :

1-They look at culture as an independent variable and central to human identity.

2-They map profoundly (introspectively) the inside/hidden nature of culture/HS. That is, there is a strong need to go beyond the external/manifest aspects of cultural elements and get a deep knowledge of the nature of the other (hidden) sides of HS. Are not HS, like all phenomena, dualistic in their nature? Only with a good grasp of the latter can cultural sociology rightly claim both that it is different from the sociology of culture, on the one hand, and it has, on the other hand, a real 'strong program' in the study of culture as the central basis of human society.

### **The Hunt for the Other Sides of Phenomena**

The search for the other hidden aspects of HS in my work in cultural sociology since the 1990s may be a consequence of my previous tendency to look for those neglected features in social and human phenomena. For instance, in reading sociological books and articles in different journals about underdevelopment in the

Third World, It has struck me that all of them have hardly referred to, let alone studied and discussed, another dimension of underdevelopment in the societies of the South. This is what I have called "The Other Underdevelopment" (Dhaouadi 2002). I use the OU concept to mean the psycho-cultural underdevelopment in those societies. This type of underdevelopment can be measured in underdeveloped societies by such manifestations like the desire to imitate the West, suffering from inferiority complex, using Western languages (English, French...) instead of native ones, Third World heavy dependency on Western modern science and knowledge, and the diffusion of Western cultural values in the societies of the South.

In response to this academic and intellectual silence on the OU, I have set out to explore the forgotten underdevelopment, especially in the Third World. My intense exploration into the HS territory has led me to discover other hidden dimensions in them. I asked why humans, on the one hand, grow and mature very slowly on the body level compared with the rapid body growth and maturation among the other species and why humans, on the other hand, have longer lifespan than most of the other living beings.

My search to answer these questions has made me discover that HS play a crucial role in both the human slow body growth and maturation and, consequently, in the human longer lifespan. This hidden link is hardly explicitly mentioned both in natural and social sciences. In Randall Collins' terms, this may be seen as a sociological insight of the Non-Obvious Sociology (Collins 1992). The hidden/non-obvious aspects of phenomena may be more important for the understanding and explanation of things.

**Works Cited for this article may be found at:**  
<http://www.ibiblio.org/culture/newsletter/cult222/dhaoua-direfs.html>

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## A Note From the (New) Editor

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I take over the reins of what has become a venerable tradition—the *Culture* newsletter—with big shoes to fill. Mark Jacobs has stewarded the newsletter admirably for the past seven years, as have his predecessors Karen Cerulo, Stephen Hart, and Vera Zolberg. The newsletter has become a vibrant space for intellectual exchange among the disparate roots and branches of our section.

I remember a conversation a few years ago with Lyn Spillman about, of all things, the venues being chosen for ASA annual meetings. The value of hotels vis-à-vis convention centers, she explained to me, was the agora they offered in the form of lobbies, bars, coffee shops, and such arenas for informal interaction among sociologists with intellectual affinities. My aim in directing the newsletter is to allow it to be such an agora while maintaining the high standards Mark and his predecessors have set.

For this venture I am fortunate to have been able to recruit a group of five very talented UNC graduate students who will help in myriad ways with bringing it a Tar Heel flair. They are:

- Kyle C. Longest, with interests in the sociology of sport and in adolescent development, with special attention to identity, education, substance use, and the transition out of high school. He has written software for performing fuzzy-set qualitative-comparative analysis (fsQCA) in Stata.
- Katherine McFarland, in her second year in the program. She is completing her Master's thesis on media frames for and against anti-same-sex-marriage amendments across the states that held referenda on such amendments in 2004.
- Andrew Payton, in his third year in the program. His research interests locate him within what tend to be two mutually exclusive camps: theory and culture on the one hand and mental health/illness and medical sociology on the other. He is currently putting the finishing touches on two manuscripts, one focused on the relationships among mental health, mental illness, and psychological distress and one exploring the relationship between cultural values and subjective well-being.
- Vanesa Ribas, in her third year in the program. Her research focuses on stratification, migration, and social movements; she recently completed fieldwork in Puerto Rico on a community organizing project's interaction with state policy. Her MA thesis examined the occupational mobility and wages of nurse's aides.
- J. Micah Roos, in his second year in the program, with interests in Culture, Class, and Theory. He is currently serving as associate editor for *Social Forces*, and holds an MA in Cultural Anthropology.

As a group, we are diverse in our interests and even our approaches. There is no Carolina School of cultural sociology, despite a burgeoning interest and expertise in culture here. We plan to bring this catholic approach to the newsletter's content.

By our third issue, this fall, we hope to have the newsletter fully integrated with the website, which we also happen to manage. Each item in the newsletter will appear on the website with space for further consideration and discussion by section members. Newsletter items will therefore be beginnings for discussion and debate, whether it remains online or migrates back to the newsletter itself or other venues.

Longtime readers will certainly miss Pete Peterson's invaluable "Books of Note" column. We have plans to resurrect a similar review of new books in the field—stay tuned! We also hope to begin an informal "What I'm Reading" column for thoughtful, provocative, laudatory, and critical notes on books members read. If you read a book you think culturalists would be interested in and want to comment on it, please send it my way.

Finally, a few notes on style in the newsletter. The masthead was designed around the logo John Mohr developed when he was section chair in 2003. All the layout is now being done using the open-source package Scribus (<http://www.scribus.net>). This provides three benefits: a financial one (no need to purchase commercial software); a solidaristic one (Scribus, like other F/LOSS software, is the "product" of a voluntary, widely-dispersed community of programmers); and a pragmatic one (Scribus runs on my Linux computers, Micah's Macintosh, and everybody else's Windows machines with equal facility). The primary typeface in use is the classic Century Schoolbook, with Luxi Sans for URLs and e-mail addresses. We will tweak the design over the next few issues, so please offer your thoughts.

In order to encourage the kind of informality I think belongs in the newsletter, I will not generally be including "Works Cited" sections. Instead, these sections will be posted on the website as supplemental material for others to consult as needed. Of course, authors are free to integrate the references into the text of their articles.

Please bear with me as I and the team learn the ropes of the newsletter. And please send submissions, contributions, comments, and concerns to me: andrew\_perrin@unc.edu.

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## **The ARDA Offers Researchers New Tools For Studying Religion**

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The Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) has recently developed new tools to provide researchers with access to the most comprehensive collection of data on religion. The ARDA's web site, <http://www.thearda.com>, allows visitors to interactively explore data on national and international religion using online features that generate national profiles, maps, church membership reports, denominational heritage trees, tables, charts, and other summary reports.

One new tool, QuickStats, features data on religious attitudes and behavior from the recent Baylor Religion Survey and the General Social Survey and allows researchers to track trends over time. QuickStats also provides demographic breakdowns for every survey question. Another new tool, known as QuickLists, provides popular data on religion in rank order for U.S. counties, nations, and global regions.

Another online tool, National Profiles, provides

statistics on religious freedom, persecution, and rates of adherence for virtually all nations. The profiles, now featuring Google mapping, make use of indexes created by the ARDA that measure religious freedom and regulation worldwide. In addition, new opinion profiles are now included for each nation, drawing on statistics from the World Values Survey. The opinion profiles cover religious beliefs and behavior as well as attitudes toward the role of religion in society and politics.

Among the new and upcoming additions to the ARDA's collection of over 400 data files on national and international religion are the 2006 General Social Survey, the Baylor Religion Survey, the 2003 National Study of Youth and Religion, the 2001 Center on Philanthropy Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), the 1948-2004 National Election Studies Cumulative Data File, and a growing list of cross-national data sources. All data files can be downloaded free of charge.

The ARDA is housed at Penn State University and is funded by the Lilly Foundation and the John Templeton Foundation. Visit the ARDA website at <http://www.thearda.com>.