



Message from the Chair

Culture and Cognition at the Intersections

Karen A. Cerulo, Rutgers University

In the last issue of *Culture*, I talked about the ways in which cognitive sociologists might interface with cognitive scientists and complete the stories presented by certain cognitive science findings. In this regard, I spoke about two cognitive processes which deserve sociologists' attentions: automatic versus deliberate cognition, and graded membership. In this essay, I would like to continue the discussion. Here, I focus on the ways in which cognitive sociologists can continue the stories presented by scientific research on hot versus cold cognition and cultural acquisition.¹

Hot and Cold Cognition

Cognitive neuroscientists have written much about two processes called hot and cold cognition. By their definition, hot cognition involves a heightened response to stimuli that is driven largely by emotion. In contrast, cold cognition refers to unemotional, painstaking thought that involves rational analysis. (Considerations of emotions make the hot-cold continuum somewhat different from the automatic-deliberate continuum. See Abelson and Rosenberg 1958)

Technological advances play a major role in cognitive neuroscientists' increasing emphasis on emotions and their increased attention to hot and cold cognition.

Using fMRI technology (magnetic resonance imaging scanners), these scholars believe they can "see" thoughts and emotions as they develop in the brain. To get these pictures, researchers typically present people with images or situations; they then track the areas of the brain that seem most active in information processing. Jonathan Cohen and his colleagues provide a good example of this approach; their work explores the links between moral dilemmas, emotions, and cognition (e.g. Greene et al. 2001; Cohen 2005). Subjects in these studies react to descriptions of two moral dilemmas. In the "trolley dilemma" – what Cohen calls an impersonal dilemma – a runaway trolley speeds directly toward five people. To save the group, a subject must agree to hit a switch, diverting the trolley to a side track where it will kill only one person. Contrast this scenario with the "footbridge dilemma" – what Cohen calls a more personal dilemma. Here too, a trolley threatens to kill five people. But in this scenario, the quintet

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Feature Article

The Problem of the Cultural Determination of Cognition in Institutional Theory

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Institutional theory is the primary line of social science scholarship in which cultural sociology intersects with the study of organizations (Dobbin, 1994). Because of this, it is also a subfield that has wrestled with some very important (and still unresolved) issues in the sociological study of culture, including the connection between objectified cultural patterns and cognition (Zucker, 1983), the relationship between interests and agency (DiMaggio, 1988) and the relative (dis)connection of action from prescriptions in concrete social settings (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). In many ways, it can be argued that institutional theory deals with the most important issue in cultural sociology, since the mechanisms of institutionalization are the ones that account for the persistence and "patterning" of culture in the first place (Zucker, 1977, 1988). This means that metatheoretical issues in the study of institutions and institutionalization are of relevance for scholars who study culture more broadly.

In this short communication, I would like to explore one key ambiguity that plagues certain cultural definitions contemporary definitions of "institutionalization." This ambiguity cuts to the heart of a certain (mis)conception of the relationship of cultural to cognition that was first noted by the anthropologist Maurice Bloch (1977; 1986), as implausible. This is the idea that a given set of collective cultural

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can be saved only if the subject agrees to push an adjacent stranger into the trolley's path. While the stranger is killed, his body will prevent the train from reaching the larger group.

In presenting these two dilemmas, researchers ask: are subjects willing to flip the switch ... to push a stranger ... and how do they arrive at these decisions?

While subjects are making up their minds, researchers are watching fMRIs hoping to discover what goes on when people think, emotive, weigh options and choose a course of action. Findings reveal that subjects seem agreeable to "sacrifice" when it means flipping a switch. But they are less likely to entertain pushing another human being onto the tracks. Further, subjects' reactions to the two different scenarios activate a different part of their brains. The impersonal "switch flipping" elicits activity in the dorsolateral areas of the prefrontal cortex – areas associated with cold cognitive processes such as working memory, abstract reasoning and problem solving. In contrast, the personal "pushing" activates the medial frontal cortex, an area associated with emotional processing.

Similar findings appear in studies addressing fear and self protection. Ohman and Mineka (2001) find that when faced with dangerous objects, individuals process the images in very different ways. For example, "natural" dangers as depicted by pictures of spiders, snakes or crocodiles activate the brain's emotional centers, while "modern" dangers such as guns or electrical outlets activate the brain's centers of rational thought. How do cognitive scientists explain these differences and why should sociologists care?

Cohen clarifies the cognitive neuroscience position this way:

Perhaps emotional aversion to harming other humans evolved as an adaptation that allowed early humans to aggregate more effectively into stable social structures, conferring upon them a competitive advantage ... However, this adaptation would have arisen at a time when the scope of aggression was limited literally to a stone's throw; that is, there would not have been strong pressure to develop an emotional aversion to harming other humans at greater distances since this was simply not possible. ... The evolution of our emotional apparatus did not anticipate a world in which aggression can be expressed impersonally over large distances (2005: 12).

Here, as in much of cognitive neuroscience, evolution seems critical to understanding of neural activity. But therein rests sociologists' opportunity to tell the rest of the story. I am afraid of the snake, but not the gun. I can flip the switch but not push another human. The differential reactions to these scenarios may be just as powerfully explained by situating these objects in social interaction.²

Consider the snake versus the gun. When it comes

to a snake, I am likely to see the encounter in terms of a simple dyadic exchange. The two of us typically will meet in a restricted number of environments, thus narrowing the parameters of the interaction. The snake's modes of attack are limited – a bite or a squeeze. The outcomes are clear-cut – I will be the victor, the victim, or one who cleverly (or luckily) escapes the confrontation. The gun, however, presents a far more complicated story. Is it my gun or someone else's? Am I aiming it or is it aimed at me? What part of me is the gun targeting? How skilled is the shooter ... how willing ... how far away? Is the gun in good working order? Is it real or a good facsimile? Where am I upon encountering the gun ... will the shot be heard by someone nearby? If so, how will that affect the shooter's willingness to use the gun? In essence, the gun is part of a broader interactive scenario.

Indeed, actor-network theorists such as Bruno Latour (2005) would say that the gun is an equal participant in social interaction – an "actant" that can make things happen. But a full understanding of this actant's role demands cold cognition – careful, painstaking thought that considers all of the nuances and options present in the interactive situation in which the gun is embedded.³

To fully understanding thoughts and emotions, one must attend to interactive patterns and contexts.

Several social movement scholars have demonstrated the point, studying hot and cold cognition as it occurs in the interactive history of a collective action (see e.g. Gamson 1992; Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2001a; Hercus 1999; Jasper 1998; Robnett 2004; Taylor 2000; Taylor and Rupp 2002). One important contribution of these works rests in delineating the path from hot cognition to action. For while certain cultural events or arrangements may initially trigger hot cognition, successful movement organizers must create the organizational strategies and processes that will transform feeling into action, (see e.g. Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2001b; Reger 2004). Often, this involves re-directing the attention of movement participants' from hot or emotional triggers to cold or deliberative triggers, as emotionally hot cognitions can escalate rather than overcome social conflict (Harcourt 2002).

Beyond social movements, those studying decision making are increasingly attending to hot and cold cognition, exploring its role in evaluation and subsequent action. In this regard, some researchers find that entities which trigger hot cognition are better remembered, and thus, more readily applied than those that trigger cold cognition. This finding proves important, for example, to those constructing surveys and questionnaires; certain questions or probes may be associated with specific cognitive styles and, as a result, significantly influence subjects' evaluative responses (van de Veld and Saris 2004). The

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finding also proves important to our understanding of the judgments and evaluations people make with regard to social justice (Kunda 1999; Stapel 2003) organizational sense making (Weick 2005), management decisions (Kennedy and Vining 2007), and mathematical calculations (Roth 2007).

In an interesting treatment of hot and cold cognition, DiMaggio (2002: 277-278) suggests that sociologists think about these forms of thought in conjunction with the automatic-deliberate continuum. DiMaggio proposed that we treat the hot/cold and automatic/deliberate continua as “two correlated but analytically distinct dimensions, one having to do with degree of affect, the other having to do with degree of planfulness and deliberation.” Doing so provides four distinct orientations to action. Automatic cognition paired with cool affect corresponds to scripted, routine action such as that studied by ethnomethodologists.

The coupling of automatic cognition with hot affect directs us to impulsive, stereotyped action such as mob behavior. The pairing of deliberate cognition with cool affect corresponds to the kind of thoughtful deliberation so central to Habermas’ theories. And deliberate cognition that occurs with hot affect bespeaks competitive, strategic action that is so central to rational choice theory. DiMaggio argues that this typology captures forms of action that are distinct both psychologically and sociologically. Further, the model beckons a uniquely sociological research platform – namely identifying the social and cultural conditions that either enable or constrain actors from switching their action strategies.

The future of sociological studies in this area is ripe with possibility. Those studying hot and cold cognition with a sociological eye stand at the intersection of thought, emotion, and action. From this vantage point, one can imagine new ways of understanding social action and new policy approaches designed to steer or impede it.

Culture Acquisition

Some of the most controversial work of the past ten years comes from sociologists who challenge well entrenched ideas on enculturation and socialization.

Bergesen (2004), for example, urged sociologists to reconsider “blank slate” notions of mind as promulgated by Mead and other symbolic interactionists. He also questioned social constructionist models of thought, arguing that concepts such as typification and habitualization are insufficient for a full understanding of cognition.

Bergesen directs sociologists to cognitive neuroscience studies – particularly those involving babies. For Bergesen, these studies suggest that mind, especially our language skills, precede humans’ interactive capacities (2004: 358). If this is the case, Bergesen contends that: “Symbolic interaction may turn out to be

a more Chomskyan than Meadian process.” A finite number of mental rules may drive our understanding of the social world well before enculturation and socialization have a chance to begin. As such: “It is our mental ability ... to create an infinite number of interaction possibilities from a finite number of mental rules that enables us to interact with so many different people, in so many different situations, at so many different times, with so many different agendas on our- and their-minds” (2004: 368). For Bergesen, it is the sociology of culture’s mission to continue this story – to explicate that intricate process.

Omar Lizardo took a promising step in this regard, merging cognitive neuroscientific work on “mirror neurons” with sociological work on “habitus”. In so doing, he suggested some new and exciting ideas on the study of enculturation. Lizardo begins his work with an explanation of mirror neurons. Mirror neurons exist as a neural network located in the pre-frontal motor cortex of humans and other primates. They “fire” in response to visual stimuli that require a motor response from humans, primates and certain birds.

They also fire when one simply witnesses or hears others making motor responses. (For example, the same neurons will fire when I clap my hands or when I see or hear another clap their hands.) In essence, mirror neurons take practical information based on specific observations and create generalized conceptual knowledge about the way objects “work.” Thus, instead of knowing what objects are in a decontextualized sense, mirror neurons allow us to know what objects are good for (Lizardo 2007: 22) .

Why are mirror neurons important to sociologists?

Lizardo contends that our understanding of mirror neurons may help us fill important gaps in practice theory. If cognitive neuroscientists are right, mirror neurons provide social actors with 1) “the practical capacities productive of action” and 2) “the practical, representation, coding and comprehension of practical action – both for the self and others” (Lizardo 2007:13, 14). Lizardo continues that story, writing:

In its ability to generalize from one observed use to other uses and from one sensory modality to the next ... a mirror neuron system subserves the practical capacity for what Bourdieu (1990) refers to as “bodily generalization”, where the same set of practical schemes are transposed by the actor from one object to another, and thus to different areas of practice. ... Practical transmission, rather than being ‘little short of magical’ (Turner 2002: 11), is in fact commonplace (Lizardo 2007: 14, 17).

This observation is sociologically important. It means that the most central practical competences constitutive of Bourdieu’s class habitus need not be the subject of explicit instructions or imitation. They can be “picked up” by the actor simply by virtue of

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Remembering Pete Peterson

Paul DiMaggio, Princeton University

It is difficult to imagine a discipline or a world without Pete Peterson. Many know him as the founder of the production-of-culture school and as one of two or three central figures who created sociology of culture in the late 1960s and early 1970s; as an institutional innovator and first Chair of the ASA Culture Section; and as the generous mentor to several generations of cultural sociologists. Pete was the helmsman of sociology's cultural turn, always supportive of new ideas and always moving in new and compelling directions in his own work. We are all the poorer for his passing.

I have written at length of Pete's scholarly contributions in an analytic vein ("The Production of Scientific Change: Richard Peterson and the Institutional Turn in Cultural Sociology," *Poetics* 28, 2-3 (2000): 107-36). Here I will remember his human side in a more personal way. Pete is more responsible than anyone else for my choice of Sociology as a career.

Forty years ago this spring, as an almost college graduate with few prospects, and having decided nothing about my career except that it would involve no further schooling, I applied for an NSF undergraduate research scholarship at Vanderbilt – attracted far more, I regret to say, by the music and exotic locale of Nashville than by the job itself. Pete took me on as his summer R.A. and, by the sheer example of his intensity of purpose, intellectual playfulness, and love of rigorous puzzle-solving scholarship, set me on a path that I have never regretted. (Some of what follows draws on correspondence with Pete through 1992, after which our exchanges were by e-mail and thus unpreserved.)

The two things that struck me most about Pete when I met him in 1971 were, first, how hard he worked and how much he cared about his work and, second, how much fun he had doing it. Pete was utterly dedicated, returning to the office each night after dinner, and stopping by my desk (in a corner of his large office, separated from his own work area by two rows of back to back metal bookshelves) throughout the day to share books or articles that caught his attention, new ideas, or bits of information about the country music industry. This was the gestation period for the production of culture approach, when he was writing his two classic papers with David Berger (one on entrepreneurship for *ASQ*, the other "Cycles in Symbol Production," published in *ASR*), a period of remarkable excitement and creativity. Yet even as he became recognized as a rising star and significant innovator, he was never for a moment pretentious. In 1975, after his promotion to full professor, he wrote (in a letter about the "Production of Culture" symposium he was planning for that fall): "Fredonia [Social Theory and the Arts] was really fine. A concentrated dose of people interested in cognate fields ranging from Kurt Wolff and Joe Bensman to data-rich graduate students. I have got to practice playing senior scholar. I am not good at it at

all."

As is well known, however, he became very good at it indeed, mentoring several generations of sociologists of culture – not just his own students at Vanderbilt, but dozens of young scholars from the mid-1970s to the present. In the early years, graduate students, whose interests were often unappreciated in their own departments, followed him about like the Pied Piper, finding in his work and collegial interest in their own research validation of their work. Even after the field became well established, Pete remained as interested as ever in new research and in the development and careers of the people doing it. Just as his sphere of influence expanded beyond Vanderbilt to the rest of the U.S. in the 1970s, by the 1980s it became international, as European travels brought him into contact with an even broader range of cultural sociologists.

Pete never stopped growing intellectually: His early work in the production of culture came out of his experience as an industrial sociologist, a specialty attained through his work with his Ph.D. advisor Alvin Gouldner. He followed the questions that work raised into the study of audiences, of cultural policy, of artists' networks, and of music scenes. Pete never confined himself to a particular method or style of research, and he never allowed himself to rest on his laurels, instead always moving forward to the next project and the next set of problems. He read voraciously, absorbing everything from Bourdieu to blockmodeling to cultural studies as his interests developed. His scholarly values were impeccable: In 1973, when I expressed frustration about the failure of data to line up properly in a paper on which he and I were working together, he wrote "As for the 'migration' paper... – great, let the facts fall where they may, we are not being paid to find some particular truth... Write, write, let me know all there is you have, let me have some of the fun making sense out of it, and remember, the night looks blackest just before dawn."

(He was an early adopter of technology as well as ideas. From 1986: "Presently I am on the VAX because I am involved in the BITNET network....It is so quick – it is possible to compose on one's own PC and then feed things onto the system, which is a great convenience." In 1989, he chided me for my own backwardness: "When you need to communicate quickly, remember there are typically four days between the time you write a letter and Yale mails it out. Are you up on Bitnet yet?")

Behind Pete's intensity and seriousness of purpose lay a wonderful playfulness, an almost childlike delight in discovery. (This carried over to his personal life as well:

On a visit in 1989, he stayed up late rearranging our 3-year-old son's dinosaurs, then wrote the next week, "how did Daniel like my rearrangement of his playthings? It was great fun making up the various scenarios...")

Although Pete published very little formal ethnography, he was an extraordinary fieldworker, logging hours of interviews and observation in the country music industry (among other things, he took a course in recording-

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session production in order to understand the processes he was observing better), and the results are evident in book and papers on country music. He was equally exemplary for his reflexivity. Although he was a man of strong opinions, he never became unduly attached to his ideas for their own sake. This made his academic presentations unpredictable, as one could sometimes witness him revising his opinions or interpretations in mid-sentence. His reflexivity was fundamental to the quality of his work. In a circular letter in 1986, when he was based in the U.K. at the University of Leeds and traveled extensively throughout Europe, he wrote of what would become *The Fabrication of Authenticity*, "When eating alone at a good restaurant and wanting to avoid loneliness I have several times re-outlined the book from scratch. In the process, I have found what I want to say...In one of my outlining sessions, at the Kasak in Helsinki, it came to me..."

Ultimately, I remember Pete most clearly as a man deeply devoted to his family and as a warm and caring friend. As Gabriel Rossman wrote last week, Pete was "a cynic in theory, but incredibly generous in practice."

When I worked with him in the early 1970s, he took an active interest not just in my grad-school applications, but in my abortive musical career. From 1972: "If you get a chance, play some of your recent material into a tape recorder. I would love to hear it...Next semester, I plan to take a course in producing at Peabody, and after that maybe I can make you a rock 'n roll star. The Dead played here Saturday, a free concert outdoors— a very pleasant afternoon." Thirteen years later, when I sent him a paper and complained in the cover letter that our infant son's colic was making serious work next to impossible, he wrote back: "What has induced me to respond post haste is not your manuscript but the accompanying letter — especially the long first paragraph which is the loud wail of a newborn parent...I won't preach, but you HAVE tenure and a number of things are in the works.... It is easy to say from a distance, but I would say it to you WITH the crying kid and a George Jones record on — Try to love every moment with your kids. " I shall never forget the hospitality that Pete and his wonderful wife Claire offered when I lived in and visited Nashville and the many kindnesses they showed me.

There is much more one could say, but I would simply suggest that we all drink a toast in our own way, be grateful for the many gifts that Pete gave his friends, his students, his colleagues and his field, and remember, as he often ended his letters, that "The beat goes on."

Considering Cognition and Ontology for a Cultural Sociology

Stephen Ostertag, Tulane University

Lately I've been considering the benefits of scholarship that openly connects two powerful areas of both sociological and broader social scientific inquiry, that of ontology with that of cognition. Psychologists note that one fundamental aspect of being human is the need generate some level of understanding of our social world, even if it's a superficial, rudimentary understanding of a select range of issues (Ji, 2005).

Yet, as social actors, we are awash in a cultural environment that is in many ways cluttered and disorienting. Such an environment may pose significant challenges to establishing social understandings. To prevent ourselves from suffering from bouts of mental anxiety and even paralysis that may arise due to prolonged senses of uncertainty and confusion, we mentally establish a basic perceptual understanding of our social environments, including what is real, what is not, and how things are related. This phenomenon speaks to the intimate connection between cognition (itself a growing area of sociological interest) and ontology. Scholarship that considers the linkages between ontology and cognition will help illuminate some of the processes involved in establishing a sense of reality, how it's characterized, and the cognitive work that maintains and develops it. Fortunately, cultural sociology seems especially poised to pursue this endeavor given its overall interests and inquiries into meanings and meaning making, and the numerous theoretical and conceptual tools such inquiries have yielded over the years.

Cognition and Ontology

Indeed, over the past decade there has been a growing interest in cognition among cultural sociologists. Recent scholarship has examined mental classificatory systems, systems of representations such as frames and packages, schemata, metaphors and domains to name a fraction of this growing interdisciplinary field (Cerulo, 2010). These lines of inquiry highlight the intimate workings of the mind in recognizing, assessing, processing, and categorizing our cultural environment. In so doing, they speak rather directly to ontology, as they lend themselves to questions of social existence, such as what can and cannot exist, the conditions of existence, and the relations among things believed to exist.

Mass Media

Ironical as it may be given that the contemporary mass media's often chaotic and sensational character, sociological research here may offer one example of how to link cognition and ontology, and the benefits of doing so. I'm beginning to see in my own scholarship on people's conceptual engagement and

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interaction with the news that as a cultural object as well as a system of signs and symbols, people use the contemporary news in ways directly related to cognition and with ontological implications. For example, my current work draws on Giddens' concept of "ontological security" as particularly useful in understanding the relationship between ontology, cognition and our cultural and media environments.

According to Giddens (1991: 243), ontological security is "a sense of continuity and order in events, including those not directly within the perceptual environment of the individual." While the methods and resources involved in establishing ontological security may vary, it ultimately involves creating a grounded, stable, and trusted sense of reality. In my scholarship, I note how people's evaluations (e.g., criticisms) of both the contemporary news environment and individual outlets, in conjunction with the reasons they offer for their evaluations, work together as cognitive mechanisms to foster ontological security. From here, people are able to ground a sense of at most—adamant confidence, and at minimum—passive tranquility, over what they believe exists in the world and why. Such mental phenomena may help us understand other things that are of importance to cultural sociologists, such as the maintenance and reproduction of boundaries and schemata.

In fact, I'm reminded of a recent conversation I had with a colleague whose scholarship is with Latina Lesbians. My colleague noted how some of the Latina lesbians with whom she spoke refused to acknowledge the existence of bisexuality (and the fluidity of sexuality in general), arguing that those who identify as bisexual are confused and will eventually "make up their mind." Our conversations introduced attractive questions about the cognitive work involved in maintaining ontological systems.

What is more, cognitive and ontological inquiries may also incorporate another important sociological phenomenon, emotion. In fact, cognitive and ontological practices are awash in emotion as, in the words of Stephen Colbert, we may indeed think with our "guts." Emotion may supply the motivation behind our interest in and engagement with particular aspects of our cultural environments, as well as the commitment we may have towards cognitive orientations and ontological systems (Zerubavel, 1997).

Together, we begin to see some of the processes involved in developing and maintaining some level of understanding of some aspects of the social world upon which we can trust and proceed forward in our lives.

Some Useful Conceptual Tools

Scholars interested in these linkages may benefit from two social phenomena that together help illuminate some of the cognitive practices implicated in ontology. One is lay theorizing and the other is a term I refer to as "ignorant othering" and they are both

important cognitive mechanisms that people use to foster and reinforce their ontological security.

Lay Theorizing

Sometimes referred to as "implicit, naïve, intuitive, common sense, and background beliefs" (Hong, et al., 2001), lay theories are "the informal, common-sense explanations people give for particular social behaviors..." (Furnham, 1988). Quite simply, lay theories are reasons people construct to justify and explain what it is they perceive.

They are cognitive tools that people draw on for ontological reasons as they help in making social life somewhat predictable, stable and orderly by placing mental boundaries around what may seem as an infinite number of ways of defining, interpreting, and understanding the social world. Additionally, lay theories help explain relationships among social entities, which are used to support our cognitive orientations and justify our ontological systems. Together, lay theories help people manage their social realities in ways that reduce potential anxieties that may arise due to uncertainties about the social world.

My research on news consumers shows how people draw on different lay theories to criticize and explain their perceptions of the U.S. news. Doing so provides the cognitive rationale that they can draw on to reaffirm their social understandings of what is true, what is false, and why.

Ignorant Othering

The second phenomenon that I wish to draw attention to is what I call "ignorant othering." I noticed this phenomenon in my research on news consumers and it refers to an awareness, knowledge and understanding of the social world that is believed to be superior to that of others. Ignorant othering speaks directly to the practice of people comparing themselves against and casting themselves as "better off" than an imagined "average" American whom they see as less informed and knowledgeable about the social and cultural environment. People use this constructed "other" to compare themselves against and in doing foster a belief that their perceptions of what is real and true are more grounded and measured than are those of most other people, and therefore more accurate, certain, and trusted. Ignorant othering allows for an added barrier of protection against potential threats to peoples cognitive orientations and general ontological systems.

Together, lay theorizing and ignorant othering play important cognitive functions for the establishment and maintenance of ontological systems of understanding as they allow people to ground and justify a sense of reality that they can trust as correct and true. In doing, they help foster a sense of order regarding the social world that exists

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being surrounded by other actors who display the same competencies (Lizardo 2007:17, 19).

By connecting the dots – cognitive neuroscientific and sociological -- Lizardo doubles the power of Bourdieu's work. For while Bourdieu rejected imitation as the means by which we acquire practical knowledge, he had no satisfying alternate explanation for the process. Lizardo's insight comes in merging Bourdieu's arguments with those of cognitive neuroscience. In so doing, he emboldens the findings of both traditions. (See also Lizardo 2004.)

Other sociologists are turning fresh eyes toward cultural acquisition and the intersecting role of brain and society. For example, Ji, Peng, and Nisbett (2000) studied the relationships between race, perceived control and attention. Gabriel Ignatow (2007; 2008) examined the role of embodied knowledge in cultural acquisition. And Phaedra Daipha (2010) explored professional enculturation by examining computer visualizations in the world of meteorology. While computer visualizations were designed to streamline the prediction process, Daipha shows that a full understanding of the weather forecasting process requires us to study the grounded, embodied logic that guides particular practices of seeing.

In my next essay, I will discuss the role of schema and domains in cognition. That discussion will lead to some preliminary thoughts on where cognition truly resides and what it really means for sociologists.

Works cited and further readings are available at <http://www.ibiblio.org/culture/newsletter> .

Determination of Cognition, Continued

patterns (a “cultural” or “symbolic” system) can come to so suffuse the individual's cognitive process that it prevents her from thinking outside its own parameters. Bloch (1986) referred to as the “anthropological” theory of cognition. His main argument was that this view of the relationship between culture and cognition was self-defeating, and that any theory that postulated such a relationship between the person and the symbolic order was bound to be unable to explain social and cultural change (Bloch, 1977), or even its very own conditions of possibility.

I argue that when institutional theorists define “institutionalization” in a way that harks back to the notion that cultural patterns constrain cognition in the way described by the traditional anthropological argument, they run into similar problems. My recommendation is that this notion of “cultural-cognitive” institutionalization should be abandoned, because it is empirically unsustainable and substantively vacuous. I close by noting that there exist a weaker version of cultural-cognitive institutionalization that does the analytical job that institutional theorists require (and that is distinct from regulation and normativity), without resulting in the predictable aporias of the strong cultural-cognitive model.

Defining Institutions and Institutionalization

What are institutions? According to Scott (2008, 48), institutions are “...comprised of regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life.” This definition of institutions—however vague—is not necessarily incompatible with all manners of specifying the relationship between rules, norms and cultural patterns and individual (or group) cognition. However, we can begin to detect some important conceptual tensions when the notion of cultural-cognitive institutionalization is more explicitly spelled out. What does it mean for something to be “institutionalized” in a cognitive-cultural way? Relatedly, what model of “culture” does the notion of cognitive institutionalization presuppose?

From the cognitive-cultural viewpoint,

...[c]ultures are conceived of as unitary systems, internally consistent across groups and situations...For cultural cognitive theorists, compliance occurs in many circumstances because other types of behavior are inconceivable; routines are followed because they are taken from granted as ‘the way we do these things’ (Scott, 2008, 58).

The “many circumstances” qualifier notwithstanding it seems like Scott (correctly I think) isolates what marks cognitive-cultural institutionalization as different from the notion of regulative institutionalization

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An addendum on the Sociology of Art in France

Howard S. Becker

It's typical to write the history of sociology and its subfields as the history of ideas and theories, which is what Bruno Pequignot did in his excellent 2005 review of the sociology of art in France (which appeared in this newsletter). It's important, however, to present (along with the ideas and theories) the history of research: studies done, things learned about how the world works, ways of proceeding invented and codified. Such a history of exemplary research, which Pequignot didn't have the space to provide, gives a somewhat different picture, taking account of the many dissertations and other works he mentions but does not elaborate on. This short note calls attention to a few of these works. (Bibliographical details will be found on the Culture Section website; in the few cases where an English translation exists I've cited that. I also want to note that I've been involved in the production of many of the works mentioned, as informal editor, member of a thesis committee, or author of a preface.) My review parallels, on a very small scale, Philippe Masson's masterful history of research trends in French sociology since WWII.

Most anglophones who write about the sociology of art in France concentrate on Pierre Bourdieu, noting his empirical studies of photography and art museums, but more interested in such major theoretical statements as *The Rules of Art*. Much of Bourdieu's work has been translated into English, which is true for only a few of the works I'll cite, so this impressive body of research is little known among English-speaking sociologists.

I can only, in the available space, call attention to a few examples from a much larger body of empirical work which describes and analyzes specific forms of art practiced under specific circumstances by specific people, as well as providing more general ideas about art, its organization and its role in society.

Raymonde Moulin, whom Pequignot rightly singled out for special mention, towers in this landscape. A student of Raymond Aron in the 1960s, her dissertation, originally published in 1967 (an abridged English edition in 1987), is a large volume, in the tradition of the old-style French doctoral thesis, reporting on her comprehensive study of the world of French painting at that time. She interviewed hundreds of painters, collectors, gallery owners, curators, and critics, and clearly spent a lot of time hanging around the places where they operated. The book is informed by a deep knowledge of that world of contemporary painting. She has not done another major research of the same kind, but has published many articles and books which draw on her continuing participation in the world of contemporary French art.

Her work is conceptually very rich. I will just give

one example. Her book demonstrates that, in a world of artmaking in which the market is the major form of distribution, the aesthetic value and the financial value of any work become completely and irretrievably confounded, so that no one can make a judgment of aesthetic worth without simultaneously, whether they want to or not, making a financial judgment. If a work is aesthetically good and/or historically important, it is inevitably and unavoidably worth a lot of money, which creates vast moral confusions for everyone involved. She pursued that insight in a number of further books and essays, including a detailed comparative study of the problem of the "rarity" of art works and how it affects their making, selling, and judging.

She has been important, as well, in the organizational landscape of the sociology of art in France, for a number of years directing a major research center devoted to the sociology of art. In that capacity she nourished a generation of excellent researchers--Dominique Pasquier and Sabine Chalvon-Demersay, who individually and together produced an impressive area of studies of the television industry; Pierre-Michel Menger, whose work I take up below; , Alain Quemin, who studied art auctioneers; Françoise Dubost, who wrote about gardens--to name a few (the shortage of space allowed Pequignot to mention only Menger).

Moulin also organized a great event, which Pequignot rightly emphasizes, the 1985 Marseille conference on the sociology of art. The several days of meetings (to which she invited a number of non-French scholars, mostly Americans) produced a volume, still in print and often referred to as a landmark, which brought the field to maturity and recognition. Many contemporary researchers cut their teeth at that event, and some of the talks given there (e.g., the closing lecture by J.-C. Passeron) are classic references.

Of course, many other people work in the field, some who were still in their teens when the Marseille conference took place. I will mention just a few and give a brief indication of the kind of work they've done, necessarily leaving out many more whose work furnishes the meat for the many meetings and publications Pequignot could only allude to briefly.

Pierre-Michel Menger, who took over Moulin's laboratory after her retirement, at first worked in the sociology of music (making clear that sociology of art meant more than literature and painting, to which there is always the danger that the field will restrict itself). One major work focused on the role of Pierre Boulez, at a time when the centralization of the arts in France allowed this one musician to control an extraordinary percentage of the money the national government spent for the support of music. Some of his later researches looked at the theatrical labor force and the kinds of careers it provided for actors and other theater workers. These studies, and much of his later work, had a strong policy orientation, at a time

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popular in institutional economics or the notion of “normative” institutionalization characteristic of the “old” institutionalism in sociology. As Scott is clear to note, something is institutionalized in a cognitive-cultural way if actors are literally unable to think of (hence the cognitive part) a different way of doing things. This “constraint on individual cognition” (Bloch, 1977) is then thought of to emanate from large scale cultural patterns that are taken for granted (and therefore not “perceived” as being really there, like fish are unable to take notice of the water in which they swim).

Problems with the cultural-cognitive definition

A simple moment of reflection should reveal that this “cognitive” criterion (inconceivability) for something being institutionalized is simply too strong. In fact it is so strong that it is unlikely that anything could really be shown to be institutionalized in that way. Furthermore, it is clear that in some circumstances, a researcher cannot claim that something is institutionalized in this way without committing herself to the “liar’s paradox.” What circumstances are these?

For an observer to say that something is institutionalized in this way, he or she must be a clear outsider to the social system in question. That is, a sociologist cannot say “X (e.g. the state) is cognitively institutionalized in modern Western societies” (Meyer et al., 1997) if the researcher is part of modern Western society. The reason for this is that if we follow Scott’s definition, when a cognitive-culturalist says “X is institutionalized in Western society” what she is saying is that “for members of Western societies it is literally inconceivable to think of a different way of doing things.” But the researcher can only make this statement if he or she has already isolated the relevant behavioral pattern, and has already “de-naturalized it” (for instance, by showing it to be “socially constructed”). This means that the researcher has in the very process of thinking as something being institutionalized come to the conclusion that “things could have been otherwise” and therefore is performatively showing that “somebody” in this case the social-scientist observer herself can conceive of a different way of doing things.

Thus, whatever it is, if it can be thought of as being “socially constructed” it is ipso facto not institutionalized in the way that cognitive culturalists say it is. In essence, if we hold on to the inconceivability criterion (and remove the possibility of a social-scientific observer who has a god’s-eye point of view on the social system in question) then if something were to be institutionalized it would be impossible to ascertain whether it is in fact institutionalized in the cognitive-cultural way. Now notice that this problem is not an issue if the social

scientist is making the claim for societies that she is not a part of (thus, Durkheim could have made a cognitive-cultural institutionalization claim about totemism among Australian aborigines), but his (Durkheim, 1969) claim about the institutionalization of “individualism” as a sort of secular religion in contemporary Western societies suffers from the above issue. Notice also, that this self-reference problem is only a problem for the cognitive-cultural definition; it is not a problem for the normative or regulative definition because neither makes the strong inconceivability claim about the actor’s cognitive and imaginative capacities (and Parsons (1967) interpreted Durkheim’s claim about individualism as implying a normative definition of institutionalization not a cognitive-cultural one).

That is, from both a regulative and normative institutional point of view, something can be institutionalized in the manner that they describe it and at the same it could be perfectly possible (and in fact it routinely is!) for the relevant social actors to be capable of thinking that things could be otherwise. For a regulative-institutionalist, it is possible think that things could be otherwise, but if you act on those thoughts you would be punished. For a normative institutionalist you are perfectly capable of thinking of alternative arrangements but they are to be rejected because none of the possible candidates are as inherently desirable as the one that is currently institutionalized. In essence, neither of these two approaches put as strong constraints on individual cognition as the cultural-cognitive approach does.

Beyond the logical difficulties, there are strictly empirical intuitions that militate against the strong “inconceivable” definition of institutionalization. That is, a clear way to find out empirically whether something is institutionalized in a cognitive-cultural way would be to ask the relevant actors whether they can think of alternative arrangements other than the one that is currently held to be institutionalized. The cognitive-cultural institutionalist predicts that actors simply cannot perform this task under conditions of institutionalization. If actors instead can think of alternative arrangements but reject as undesirable, then that something is not institutionalized in a cognitive-cultural way, but “only” in a normative way. If they can think of alternative arrangements but report that they would not be able to endorse them because they would get punished by the relevant authorities (or endorse current ones because they get rewarded), then that something is clearly institutionalized in regulative way.

A quick review of the usual things that cognitive-culturalists say are institutionalized in the way that they say they are suggests that most of these things are “really” institutionalized in a

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when "intermittent" careers of the kind that characterize the theater had caused serious strikes and interruptions of theater life in France. Still another study by Menger deals with the career and work of Auguste Rodin, especially as that brought up the problem of when an art work is finished, a promising point of entry into the perennial problem of how sociology can deal with the analysis of individual works of art.

Antoine Hennion also worked in the sociology of music and produced volumes on the recording industry, on how children are taught music in school (particularly interesting to North American anglophone sociologists of music because the teaching of music through sight-singing and dictation, common in most of the world, is so foreign to what we learn), the introduction of Bach's music in France in the 19th century, etc., and the nature of "music loving" as a collective activity. Alain Quemin's large book on the men and women who conduct sales at the great Parisian auction houses emphasized the nature and consequences of their peculiar occupational monopoly. Researches like all these foreshadowed the many studies to follow which approached the arts from the point of view of the sociology of work.

Today's landscape contains works by a new generation of researchers. Here are one-sentence summaries of a few of their empirical studies.

Marc Perrenoud studied the working lives of what he called "ordinary musicians," who played whatever kind of popular music they were called on to play, in passing showing how they manipulated the system of unemployment assistance for artists Menger studied from another direction.

Did I say "men"? Yes, but not because of sexism. Rather, as Marie Buscatto's book on women singers in jazz shows, jazz professionals are overwhelmingly men, for organizational reasons she makes clear. Hyacinthe Ravet explores the same phenomenon in classical

music. Bernard Lehmann finds, among many other interesting results, more women in the major Parisian symphonies, but concentrated in the strings. Florent Bousson's novel study focuses on an instrument, the guitar, and builds a sociological picture of the world that creates, uses, and supports it.

Laure de Verdalle studied the East German theater company that grew up out of the remains of Brecht's Berlin theater. Celia Bense provides a penetrating look into the internal workings of a major modern theater company. Roberta Shapiro studied the evolution of French hip-hop dancing from an art practiced in the street to a state-supported form coordinate with ballet and modern dance. Catherine Pessin told the story of the *chanson réaliste*, from Aristide Bruant (the guy in the red scarf in those Toulouse-Lautrec posters everyone has) to Edith Piaf. Fourmentaux, finally, has reported on work practices in the developing world of digital art.

A fuller look would include many more such works and would require inspection of the many journal articles and conference proceedings still routinely published in France in a way inconceivable in North America. I have left out as much more good work than I have mentioned.

The chief characteristic of this largely unknown (in anglophone North America) body of work is its deeply empirical character, in the style of the ethnographic studies of artists and art communities done here. A body of serious work has accumulated which combines a theoretical sensitivity hard to avoid in France with a deep commitment to long-term observation. The result is a series of monographs that add to the body of materials any serious sociology of art should take into account.

References available at
<http://www.ibiblio.org/culture/newsletter> .

Cognition and Ontology, Continued...

outside people's realm of personal experience.

Developing scholarship that incorporates elements of cognition and ontology may provide a promising future for work addressing questions about meaning and what's involved in the process of making and maintaining systems of meaning. As we develop a strong program in cultural sociology these questions become even more pertinent as they may help explain cultural structures and codes (such as rhetorical dichotomies and how they're reproduced), as well as what's involved in successful communication and the transmission of meaning.

To be certain, this is only the tip of the iceberg and there is much that needs to be asked and investigated. To begin, we need to develop stronger theoretical

linkages between ontology and cognition than what I discussed here. Also, how might issues of cognition and ontology differ for local social spheres versus broader state level, national and international spheres?

Ontology is not a static phenomenon, so how does it fluctuate for different issues and what cognitive trends do we note with these fluctuations? How can we draw on theoretical tools developed in cultural sociology to understand and assess these trends? Likewise, how can we apply the theoretical tools we've developed in cognition and ontological scholarship to cultural sociology? These questions will help us build upon the field of cultural sociology in new and fruitful ways and should provide greater insight into questions about social meanings and realities of all sorts.

normative and regulative way. From capitalism, to the state, to democracy, to women's rights, civil rights for racial minorities, etc. It is clear that if you give two seconds to a reasonably literate person, they can come up with alternative ways of arranging the relevant social realm in question (i.e. polity, family, economy, etc.). It is clear for instance, that capitalism is not institutionalized because people cannot conceive of a different way of doing things, but it is institutionalized on normative and regulative grounds. The same goes for current arrangements regarding civil rights, multiculturalism and women's rights, etc. We can think of alternative (and morally obnoxious) ways of arranging society according to hierarchical racial and sexual classifications, but we reject them as undesirable.

In essence, the inconceivability criterion of cultural-cognitive institutionalization is incoherent. It is simply too strong to ever be able to be empirically confirmed and it suffers from logical self-referential problems better known to our sociology of knowledge friends. More damaging, any claim that something is institutionalized in a cognitive-cultural way (that is actors are simply not able to think otherwise) is actually better thought of as being institutionalized in a normative or regulative way: actors are perfectly capable of thinking otherwise but find the present arrangement (a) inherently desirable or (b) backed by authorities endowed with coercive power.

Coda: A (tentative) Solution

So do we end up in a place where the "cognitive" part of institutions (the defining feature of the "new institutionalism" according to DiMaggio and Powell (1991)) disappears for lack of logical coherence and empirical confirmation? Surprisingly, I think not. In fact, I believe that there is a way to save a place for the cognitive component of institutions that sidesteps the above issues. This requires abandoning the overly strong "inconceivability" criterion postulated by cultural-cognitive intuitionists. My inspiration is a passage from Weber's (1993, 166-183) famous essay on "Asceticism, Mysticism and Salvation Religion" where

he discusses the hypothetical attitude of an ideal-type mystic when confronted with the lifestyle of an ideal-type ascetic and vice versa. The ascetic and the mystic represent for Weber, to distinct ways in which the "world-rejecting" cultural pattern could be institutionalized: the ascetic rejects the world as fallen but attempts to modify it, while the mystic rejects the empirical world as arbitrary and retreats to contemplation. For Weber (1993, 171), from the point of view of the ascetic, the mystical option is not "inconceivable" but simply appears as senseless or meaningless. The same goes for the decision on the part of the ascetic to remain engaged in the world from the point of view of the mystic.

Notice that this is not a "normative" judgment (although Weber also suggests that mysticism is ethically undesirable from the point of view of the ascetic and vice versa), it is not only that a given pattern of world-rejection appears "undesirable" but that in addition to this property they literally are not understood as meaningful (or applicable). In fact from this point of view it is possible to bring back the "primacy of cognition over values" that DiMaggio and Powell argued for: alternative theodicies are undesirable because they are meaningless. This stance appears to me to be more advantageous because the "meaninglessness" criterion is much weaker than the inconceivability one: a person could be perfectly capable of conceiving of an alternative arrangement and reject it because it "does not make much sense" to them (this is also actually more faithful to Berger and Luckmann). Furthermore, this judgment of meaningfulness is analytically and empirically separable from judgments of normative desirability and judgments of regulative propriety, which can make the claim of something being institutionalized in a cognitive-cultural way amenable to empirical application.

References available upon request

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