

Letter from the Section Chair, Francesca Polletta (UC Irvine)

In his forthcoming book on the 2008 Obama Internet campaign, Dan Kreiss punctures the myth that the campaign was a grand experiment in bottom-up democracy. The Obama “brand” was about the transformative possibilities of grassroots participation. The Obama campaign was not. Centrally and hierarchically organized, relentlessly focused on “money, message, and mobilization,” the campaign’s New Media Division figured out how to persuade supporters to donate millions of dollars and thousands of hours of volunteer time while supplying the ever-more precise data that allowed campaign operatives to target their fundraising appeals. Campaign analysts systematically tested what color buttons led website visitors to contribute more money; what tone the personal emails from “Michelle” (Obama) and “Joe” (Biden) should strike; and how people could be motivated to participate without thinking they should have a say in setting campaign strategy. A staffer who was in charge of writing engaging profiles of Obama’s supporters was deliberately kept insulated from the rest of the campaign. Getting “too close to the sausage making,” his boss told him, would make the ring of people-power in his posts seem less authentic.

But Kreiss argues that supporters didn’t much mind. They wanted their candidate to win. And so, all talk of democracy aside, they were content to serve as foot soldiers in Obama’s high-tech army.

If Kreiss is right, he raises all kind of questions. Did Obama’s supporters give up the chance for input into their candidate’s platform on the belief that campaign operatives knew better than they did what winning required? Did they experience the campaign’s rhetoric of citizens controlling the political agenda as just

rhetoric? Or did they feel that they were controlling the political agenda? Has participatory democracy come to mean collaborative effort rather than collective control?

I ask these questions because they’re part of what I think of as an emerging cultural sociology of democracy. Not democracy at the level of the nation state, but democracy as people encounter it in their workplaces and schools, in volunteering and mobilizing. I mean a cultural sociology of democracy not in the sense of the cultural conditions for democratic organizations, but rather the study of how and why certain understandings and practices of democracy come to be taken for granted. What does democracy mean today? Where do people’s models of what democracy is and requires come from? What are the consequences of those models for how much people want and get from their political and economic institutions? There is plenty of scholarly work on the gaps between democratic ideals and the institutional practice of democracy; I wonder about how people experience those gaps.

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“Conversations With Vera”

A paper prepared for presentation at *From the Art of Memory to the Memory of Art*, a one-day conference honoring Professor Vera L. Zolberg’s Career
April 28, 2012, The New School for Social Research
Jeffrey C. Goldfarb, Michael E. Gellert Professor of Sociology

When I hear the word “reflection,” applied to the study of culture, I reach for my red pencil, if not my gun. My problem with the word is that it stops inquiry just when it should begin. While it may be generally true that the ruling ideas of the times are the ideas of the ruling class, I think our job as sociologists and students of culture is to actually explain how this happens, what are the specifics, and the exceptions, avoiding reductionism, understanding both the significance of cultural creativity and accomplishment, and the complexity of the social world.

I am thinking of this pet peeve of mine today for two reasons: because I think that the work of Vera Zolberg stands as a model of what can be learned when we move beyond sociological truism in thinking about the sociology of the arts and memory, and culture broadly understood, and also because I am, ironically, tempted in opening my presentation today with a “reflection note.” As in: the intellectual quality of Zolberg, as a sociologist of the arts, collective memory and culture, is a reflection of the quality of Vera, as a person.

Vera and I studied with the same teachers, Morris Janowitz, Donald Levine, Terry Clark and Edward Shils. I would say they, particularly Janowitz (Vera’s chair), only tolerated our interests. But there is no doubt that Vera’s accomplishment in analyzing the sociological complexities of the Art Institute, made it so that they accepted my work on Polish theater more readily. She showed how significant a study of an art institution could be in understanding social structures and processes more generally. I had an easier time of it, because she preceded me by a few years. I think that in a similar way all who study the sociology of the arts have benefitted from Zolberg’s writings, especially after her publication of *Constructing a Sociology of the Arts*.



Dr. Jeffrey Goldfarb reads to
Professor Vera Zolberg

As for many of you, I at first only knew Zolberg as an author, who showed in her dissertation on the Art Institute of Chicago how careful institutional analysis of the workings of a museum over time could start an inquiry into the big questions about the relationship between art and politics, culture and social life. As a student, I perceived this in her work. She has acted upon it in her research and writings ever since.

Only a bit later after I read her dissertation, we actually met. It was towards the end of my studies at the University of Chicago. I can’t remember who arranged the meeting (it may have been Janowitz), but I do remember the place we met and (vaguely) the reason why we met. It was in the cafeteria in Cobb Hall, a building that no longer exists at the University of Chicago. We met on some business connected to the Social Theory and the Arts conference.

This was the beginning of our life long conversations about the sociology of the arts and culture, with collective memory to be added as we both went along.

At that time, I was struck by the personal qualities of Vera as a person. She was elegant, warm and respectful, reaching out to me, taking me more seriously than I took myself. She had broad and interesting experience and knowledge.

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(‘Conversations With Vera,’ continued from Page 2)

She seemed to know many accomplished scholars and cultural figures. And most strikingly, she was friendly. It was, in fact, at this time that I noticed her most special quality, her gift for friendship. She cares about the person she is talking to. She makes human connection.

Vera and her husband Ary, are perfect hosts. An invitation to their loft for dinner is an invitation to a world of fine food, fine conversation and fine art (art which is drawn from their travels and reveals their unorthodox taste). Vera’s gift for friendship clearly has contributed to a rich and warm personal life. It also has contributed to scholarship. Over the years, the sociology, liberal studies and the politics departments of the New School, and our Graduate Faculty more generally, have been enriched by occasions at the Zolberg’s.

In a similar way, Vera’s sincere social embrace, I think, helped develop the circle of scholars who institutionalized the sociology of culture in American sociology and beyond.

We sociologists have concepts to describe such developments: social capital and social networks. The inadequacy of the concepts, their thin coolness, is revealed in Vera’s life. As I said, I first saw this at the Cobb Hall cafeteria, and because we both moved from Chicago to The New School, I have regularly enjoyed her friendship ever since. And this has not been separate from scholarly exchange and learning. Rather, friendship and scholarship have been intimately connected. Today’s conference vividly reveals this. The issues and problems we have been discussing grow out of our conversations with Vera’s work and with her person.

Thus, we have been talking about the institutional practices of art and around art. Zolberg returned to the topic in an important article published in *Theory and Society*, “Conflicting Visions in Art Museums.” From my point of view, the most upsetting move in the piece is her summary of it. In her abstract, she maintained: “the macro-trends in society which are most germane to museum formation are professionalization of occupations, bureaucratization, elite formation, democratization of education, and market rationalization. These are reflected at the micro-level in institutions founded and developed in their context.” Reflection once again: yet, in the article itself what Zolberg studies is not an automatic process of reflection, but the social actions that constitute both the macro and the micro. She shows how the move from pre professional laymen’s, to art professional curators’ to post professional managerial executives’ leadership has shaped the development of American museums, but also that this leadership has always met with a variety of different forms of resistance in museums and from the greater society, that push and pull them in different directions. She describes and analyzes the professionalization of the leadership and the staff of museums and then, the rise of bureaucratic managerial control as a challenge to art standards. The big story is of the developing autonomy of the art world in opposition to the control by gilded wealth (the founders and original administrators of American art museums) and then the re-colonization of the art world by corporate powers. But she also highlights resistance.

We could observe that the museum does imperfectly “reflect” developments in the greater society. But the real interest, as Goffman would say, “where the action is,” is how this imperfection works, which Vera nicely explains. The macro and the micro are constituted by action.

This textured account of art museums informs Zolberg’s approach to collective memory, another theme we have been talking about today, a conversation which has also been one of her major contributions to sociology, as was most nicely revealed in Zolberg’s great study of collective memory, “Contested Remembrance: The Hiroshima Exhibit Controversy.”



Dr. Zolberg and her sister, Fay Barrows

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Announcing the *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*

Editors:

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From modernity's onset, social theorists have been announcing the death of meaning, at the hands of market forces, impersonal power, scientific expertise, and the pervasive forces of rationalization and industrialization. Yet, cultural structures and processes have proved surprisingly resilient. Relatively autonomous patterns of meaning – sweeping narratives and dividing codes, redolent if elusive symbols, fervent demands for purity and cringing fears of pollution – continue to exert extraordinary effects on action and institutions. They affect structures of inequality, racism and marginality, gender and sexuality, crime and punishment, social movements, market success and citizen incorporation. New and old new media project continuous symbolic reconstructions of private and public life.

As contemporary sociology registered the continuing robustness of cultural power, the new discipline of cultural sociology was born. How should these complex cultural processes be conceptualized? What are the best empirical ways to study social meaning? Even as debates rage around these field-specific theoretical and methodological questions, a broadly cultural sensibility has spread into every arena of sociological study, illuminating how struggles over meaning affect the most disparate processes of contemporary social life.

Bringing together the best of these studies and debates, the American Journal of Cultural Sociology publicly crystallizes the cultural turn in contemporary sociology. By providing a common forum for the many voices engaged in meaning-centered social inquiry, the AJCS will facilitate communication, sharpen contrasts, sustain clarity, and allow for periodic condensation and synthesis of different perspectives. The journal aims to provide a single space where cultural sociologists can follow the latest developments and debates within the field.

We welcome high quality submissions of varied length and focus: contemporary and historical studies, macro and micro, institutional and symbolic, ethnographic and statistical, philosophical and methodological. Contemporary cultural sociology has developed from European and American roots, and today is an international field. The AJCS will publish rigorous, meaning-centered sociology whatever its origins and focus, and will distribute it around the world.

Our first issue will publish in the first quarter of 2013 but accepted articles will appear earlier online. Submissions will be anonymously reviewed.

For more information about AJCS, and to access our online submission system, please visit our website at www.palgrave-journals.com/ajcs/.

NEW RESEARCH NETWORK on CULTURE AND SEXUALITY

Contact new coordinator, Amin Ghaziani, University of British Columbia



Four Questions For... Vera Zolberg

1. How did you become interested in the study of culture? I believe I've always been interested in the study of culture, though I should specify that the term meant different things to me (as to others) than it does today. Like many Europeans, I had been raised to think of culture as primarily related to the aesthetic domain of the fine arts, literature, history, philosophy, institutionalized in official academic systems and higher education that became hegemonic throughout Europe in of 19th century. Only as an undergraduate, when I encountered culturally relativistic anthropology did I become aware of a non-Eurocentric orientation that might have validity in its own right. But as a major in romance languages (including Latin) and literary studies, it was only later that I discovered at second hand the social sciences, and was drawn into my husband's Africanist interests. Almost by accident I gravitated to the African Studies Program at Boston University, where I spent the next year or two learning the intricacies of British social anthropology to add to the American cultural anthropology that had been my intellectual foundation up to that point. Incorporating what was then the new challenges to Eurocentric, psychoanalytically oriented culture and personality study, the sociological analysis

that C. Wright Mills developed in *Character and Social Structure*, and basic courses in sociology. Culture in one way or another, imbued these studies, indebted to the works of Weber, Durkheim, Freud, Malinowski, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead. But the overarching frame that came to be hegemonic was, of course, the early writings of Talcott Parsons: *The Structure of Social Action*, *The Social System*, etc.

Even though it was assumed that culture was the central concept of anthropologists, being in the African program meant that "primitive" was far from pure. Rather, culture crossed the path of modernizing trends - imperial dominance, colonial structures of governance, urbanization, all of which led to independence movements, nationalism, economic development, along the lines of the then hegemonic modernization theory that permeated most of American social science. In that context, culture was not a high priority for American sociologists, unless they could find important functions, of psychological character, perhaps cognitive, but more likely emotive or cathectic, as in Parsons developing framework. Nor was the view of culture in the "conflict perspective," derived from Marxist theory, any more attractive to them, since culture tended to be relegated to the superstructure based on production relationships.

The "cultural turn" of recent decades largely rejected both the Parsonian conception that culture comprised a consensual system of values and norms that functioned to hold societies together. It embraced a more diverse conception of culture, with greater openness to cultural actors, and especially to greater emphasis on meaning, structures of feeling, and less emphasis on determinism, and more searching for human agency.

2. What kind of work does culture do in your thinking? I like to think that in my own work I try to combine some of what has seemed valuable from my early "education" (in the sense of *Bildung*) as well as formal education in the various disciplines I've mentioned. I try to bear in mind that whatever the meanings the concept has embraced, its use should always be critically informed within the social context with which it intersects.

3. What are some of the benefits and limitations to using culture in this way? Among the benefits, I think, are that the researcher remains open to possibilities that an overly strong commitment to a particular framework of analysis cut out. This was clearly the case among both "consensus" and "conflict" theorists, where different sorts of reductionism was rife. The main limitation, I suppose, is that it may be difficult to come to a clear conclusion or interpretation.

There is also the danger of losing sight (or sound) of the substance of culture – whether educational content or, in my later research, of art forms themselves. This is a reproach – a well deserved one, I'm afraid, that "aestheticians" (art historians, musicologists, literary scholars) address to social scientists.

4. How does your approach to culture shape the types of research topics and settings? Perhaps as a result of my varied experience as an immigrant (albeit very young indeed) and association of culture with aesthetics and learning, combined with the strong attachment to social equality and democratic ideals of my family, I have tended to choose research topics where I try to explore in those areas. I started by studying the activities of Christian missionaries in East Africa; went on to comparisons of British and French educational policies in African colonies; pursued educational institutions in Europe and the United States as avenues of and/or barriers to social mobility. From there I turned to some of those questions in cultural institutions, especially art museums, symphony orchestras, opera companies, etc. Eventually, however, I came to understand that cultural institutions include more than these – museums of history, natural history, science, share many organizational features with those devoted to art forms, but they also clearly address matters of collective memory. And it was through cultural institutions that opened my research interest in a field that was not immediately thought of as closely related to cultural analysis. It has now given rise to a major field of interdisciplinary study, in which I am happy to participate.

The State of Cultural Sociology in Italy

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As the country of Vico, Pareto, Gramsci, Eco, Agamben, and microhistory (e.g. Carlo Ginzburg), Italy could have nurtured a vibrant cultural sociology. But this is not the case, at least *not* as an effect of the aforementioned sources. Pareto and Gramsci have been promoted over many decades to an object of historical investigation and have no impact on current sociologists' work. (Vico has even less of an impact.) Eco is the main reference in the field of semiotics, which has proudly gained disciplinary autonomy in Italy. Agamben and Toni Negri are too philosophical *and* radical to be appealing, and at least the latter is too compromised in the tragic page of Italian left-wing political violence to be academically welcomed. Microhistory, as history in general, is more an antagonist than a resource for Italian sociology. If we are looking for cultural sociology in Italy, we have to search in other places than these seemingly more obvious sources.

To be sure, many streams of cultural research have been active since the fifties and sixties. Especially relevant are the sociology of religion (related to the strong Catholic component in Italian sociology) and the sociology of communication, an area that is especially relevant to Catholic sociologists because of the media's influence on public morality. A lively research tradition in the study of political cultures started in the sixties (under functionalist influence, thereafter revitalized through Robert Putnam's studies on civiness) and developed in ways also attuned to phenomenology and critical theory. More recently, the sociology of consumption has attracted attention, also contributing to the "culturalization" of a strong local tradition in economic sociology. Among recent topics, memory has been especially successful; and the study of science and technology is proving to be even more successful as the domain of a new and growing associational endeavor (STS-Italia). The sociology of music is a growing mini-industry that attracts young scholars interested in aesthetic issues as well as the creative industries. The cultural study of migration, crime and violence is also expanding. As it appears, it is not some established and prestigious intellectual tradition that is meaningful, but rather specific topics and subjects. How much the latter are being integrated in a larger field of "cultural sociology" and not fragmented into different and poorly communicating research streams is a clear point at stake.

One of the places to start our quest for cultural sociology in Italy is the Italian Association of Sociology (AIS), which has existed since 1982. A section entitled "Cultural processes and institutions" (PIC) was constituted in 1986. Today it has 231 members, typically students of media, memory, gender, and consumption, and is the largest among the twelve currently existing sections. Cultural matters are also of interest to members of the section devoted to "everyday life"; indeed, the two sections largely overlap topics if not people. Education and religion each have a section of its own, but both incorporate some cultural sociology. Like gender and consumption, art lacks an autonomous section; the topic is a reserve for a very small group of sociologists in Italy, although some of its members have strong international links.

Then, we should look at the official academic positions. In Italy, university professors are public functionaries and are recruited after a formal public competition, which follows standardized rules of law. A special concourse class for a self-styled "Sociology of Cultural and Communicative Processes" was created in the early nineties by the government and the late Alberto Melucci was the first full professor to be recognized in this class. Nowadays there are around 300 tenured or tenure-track professors (full, associate, assistant) in this class, which is the second largest in Italy after "General Sociology." It clearly has the highest rate of growth and recruitment opportunities in the last fifteen years. In a small country

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Junior Scholar Spotlight: Matthew Norton

Matthew Norton completed his dissertation, *Culture and Coercion: Piracy and State Power in the Early Modern English Empire*, at Yale University this spring. It examines the role of cultural structures in the production of coercive power against piracy between 1670 and the 1720s by foregrounding the semiotic dimensions of coordinated state action. Based on an analysis of legal treatises, trial reports, accounts of executions, and archival materials documenting the challenges piracy posed for early modern state agents, his dissertation identifies culture-structural, hermeneutic, and performative problems at the heart of early failures and eventual successes in mounting an effective coercive deterrent against piracy.

While a graduate student, Matt published an article in *Theory and Society*, "A Structural Hermeneutics of 'The O'Reilly Factor'," that analyzed the cultural system used by the popular TV program to make political sense of the news, and an article on emotional mobilization and narrative structures in the humanitarian appeals of the Congo Reform Movement in the early 20th century, published in the *Journal of Human Rights*. He also co-edited a book, *Interpreting Clifford Geertz*, with Jeffrey Alexander and Philip Smith, that calls for a re-assessment of Geertz' work as a foundation for advancing cultural sociology.

In September, Matt will join the sociology department at the University of Oregon as an assistant professor. He will teach courses in political sociology and theory, among other topics. Matt is currently working on an article based on his dissertation research that focuses on the problems that English state agents in the later 17th century faced in devising a system for classifying pirates. He is also working on projects that address the situational microfoundations of deep cultural structures, and on the contribution of processes of semiotic consolidation to bureaucratization.

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like Italy, it is not surprising that this rapid increase also means a certain weakness or at least looseness in scholarly standards. At least from the point of view of this writer, this is the main challenge in the field.

Sociologists of “cultural and communicative processes” are variously distributed in 55 of the 89 large and small, public and private universities existing in Italy. Typically, you may find them in Faculties (equivalent to Schools) of Literature and Philosophy, Political Sciences, Education, and Communication. They are located more in the Centre and South than in the North of Italy, and geography is extremely important. Local specializations exist for historical, ecological and personal reasons. Rome is the political capital and the site of the Italian public broadcasting system headquarters; it is also the privileged home for sociologists of communication. Milan and Bologna gather the bulk of the sociologists of consumption and fashion, especially at the Catholic University in Milan, home of the Centre for the Study of Fashion and Cultural Production. Padua and Trento are specialized in the sociology of science and religion. The sociology of music is cultivated mainly in Bologna and Naples. The sociology of tourism and leisure is mostly based in Sicily and Sardinia. Finally, you can find a cultural sociology of migration in Genoa, Milan and Trento and, often in parallel, a culturally oriented urban ethnography in Milan, Trento and Rome. Bologna’s Istituto Carlo Cattaneo, a private social research foundation established in the sixties, has strong links to the local university and in 2007 launched a book series of empirical studies on cultural life in Italy (aptly named “Cultura in Italia”) that has focused on the sociological study of cultural production since the 90s.

Last but not least are the journals. The closest to a cultural sociology review is possibly “Studi Culturali”, founded in 2004, which has worked hard to introduce an Italian sociological audience to recent trends in cultural analysis through a trans-disciplinary perspective. But other more specialistic journals should be recalled: “Comunicazioni sociali”, “Sociologica della comunicazione”, “Comunicazione politica”, “Etnografia e ricerca qualitativa”, “Tecnoscienza,

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Italian Journal of Science & Technological Studies” (www.tecnoscienza.net). Cultural sociology is also well covered in general sociology journals, including the well established “Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia”, “Studi di Sociologia” and the younger but influential “Sociologica: Italian Journal of Sociology online” (www.sociologica.mulino.it).

Cultural sociology clearly does exist in Italy, but what kind of cultural sociology is it? What has passed for cultural sociology (or sociology of culture) in the United States since at least the Seventies is still relatively rare in Italy. Foundational contributions in the field, such as works by Becker, Peterson, and Swidler seem esoteric to the majority of the practitioners, especially the elders. A revealing index is the different status enjoyed by Bourdieu in the US and in Italy: whereas it would be hard to imagine American cultural sociology without the (positive or critical) contribution of this French scholar, it is indeed possible in Italian cultural sociology (This doesn’t mean Italians are still troubling with the Parsonian legacy, however; although Italy is still home to strong scholars on Parsons.)

The study of culture (e.g. literature, music, philosophy, architecture, religion, etc.) has deep roots in Italian academic life, but this has precisely been one of the barriers to the development of cultural sociology in this European region of the Mediterranean area. Since the rebirth of the discipline in the 50s, sociologists in Italy have been striving to present themselves as scientists, and a focus on cultural stuff is not exactly the first choice for a would-be scientist. In their quest for conceptual and methodological tools, even sociologists coming from philosophy (an influential minority, especially in the seventies and eighties) are more interested in drawing on philosophy and philosophical social theory of cultural objects than on empirical research. Phenomenology and critical theory – i.e. scholars like Schutz, Adorno and especially Habermas, whose book on the public sphere was translated in Italian in 1963 – have longstanding intellectual influence on Italian sociologists sensitive to cultural matters. Foucault had a direct impact on Italian scholars, some of them acting as his students in Paris. But sociology has been resistant to incorporate Foucault in Italy because he is not considered scientific enough for some or modernist enough for others. It comes as no surprise that it took a while for Italian sociologists to really notice a cultural turn had occurred in the social sciences.

To be sure, British Cultural Studies (e.g. Williams, Hoggart, Thompson, Hall) entered Italy earlier, but not through sociological roads. And in the eighties they were already old stuff for Marxist aficionados, the presence of an unofficial Neapolitan beach-head of the Birmingham School notwithstanding. The new millennium has brought the return of CS, only this time with the clear perception among its bearers of working on the edge of something (even if two decades had been lost and had to be re-gained). Two journals started, “Agalma” and the already mentioned “Studi Culturali,” the latter founded by an interdisciplinary collective where sociologists are the majority. Something like a mini-intellectual movement on cultural studies coalesced around the issues of race, gender and postcolonialism. The impact of CS on Italian sociology has however been modest, at least until now. Cultural and cognitive anthropology had more of an impact than CS on the field, especially through relatively influential translations of seminal works by Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner, and Mary Douglas.

One consequence of this particular intellectual trajectory is that scholars who are currently reference points in the Anglo-American world have still to have a real impact on Italian current sociology. This is the case, as already mentioned, of Pierre Bourdieu, who entered the Italian intellectual debate very early (at the end of the sixties) as a neomarxist sociologist, and after a few years disappeared exactly because of his point of entry. At the beginning of the new millennium, Bourdieu’s identity as a cultural theorist and cultural analyst was still stuck in small intellectual circles. Only recently has he started to become the “Bourdieu” whom American sociologists know. Strange as it may sound to American ears, in Italy it was Touraine and then Boudon who gained a wider audience. And as mentioned, Habermas had entered the Italian debate very early, and his impact on philosophy and social theory remains strong, not the least likely because of his more immediate resonance with Italian public culture, where idealism is hegemonic.

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Amuses

Recent articles collected and reviewed by the Newsletter Graduate Student Editors

Fourcade, Marion. 2011. “[Cents and Sensibility: Economic Valuation and the Nature of ‘Nature.’](#)” *American Journal of Sociology* 116(6): 1721-77.

Navigating the terrain of a rocky beach. Savoring the sweetness of locally caught shellfish. The knowledge that the rare beauty of a place still exists. How do you determine the value of these things, especially if they have been lost? Using the cases of the Amoco Cadiz and Exxon Valdez oil spills in France and the United States, respectively, Fourcade explicates the relationship between processes of valuation and broader cultural and institutional conditions. She provides a rounded discussion that addresses the “why,” “how,” and “then what?” of monetary valuation. That is, the varied ways in which money is used as a measure of worth, with reference to the social context; the techniques and knowledges deployed in order to determine value; and the consequences of valuation on social representations and practices. Economic valuation is contingent on cultural and institutional acceptability of money as a measure of value and, in this case, the way “nature” is locally conceptualized. In the US, nature is seen as a wild frontier, sometimes worthy enough to be preserved from commercial use; in France, nature is bound up with the lived reality of rural life, a lieu de vie—an understanding markedly different from American untouched wilderness. Moreover, in the US, money is more culturally acceptable as a metric of value, and this idea is supported institutionally, particularly through the use of punitive monetary compensation in the legal system. These differences in cultural assumptions and institutional practices entail corresponding ways in which nature is valued—considering lost reputation and local enjoyment and the cost to restore the area (France); or the amount people are hypothetically willing to pay to protect “nature” (US). These contrasting methods of valuation resulted in significantly higher damages paid by Exxon to US plaintiffs (over six times higher), even though the spill was less than one-sixth the size of the Amoco Cadiz spill in France. All this illustrates what she highlights as the “performativity” of economics—“the capacity of economic models and technologies to remake the world in their own image” (1724). That is, economic valuation is not neutral and, to some extent, rely on and work with political and legal institutions to advance notions of value that only appear to be culturally overdetermined. In both contexts, nature is deemed priceless. Having some understanding of American and French “culture,” it only makes sense that pricelessness in the US is represented by the highest possible price, while in France it is low or no price. What Fourcade offers is a multi-layered account that, while resisting cultural reductiveness, takes seriously the role of culture alongside the various institutional logics and technologies that correspond with and thus help reproduce the coherence of culture.

Violi, Patrizia. 2012. “[Trauma Site Museums and Politics of Memory: Tuol Sleng, Villa Grimaldi and the Bologna Ustica Museum.](#)” *Theory, Culture and Society* 29: 36-75.

In this article, Violi examines trauma sites, or memorials that serve as links to traumatic events in the past on the sites in which they took place, as a window to better understand memory and history in post-conflict societies. Unlike other memorial museums that are not situated on the sites of previous events of mass suffering, trauma sites are more of a direct indexical and spatial link from the past to the present and future. In particular, she examines three trauma sites with three different representational forms: Tuol Sleng in Phnom Penh, Cambodia; Villa Grimaldi in Santiago, Chile; and the Ustica Memorial Museum in Bologna Italy. In Tuol Sleng, the museum was intentionally designed to be felt instead of understood. No additional information is provided to visitors. The impressionistic exhibits create an embodied experience that attempts to make visitors “witnesses” to the horror themselves. In the case of Villa Grimaldi, it was decided that the museum be a “Park for Peace” instead of the re-presentation of past horrors as in Tuol Sleng. Villa Grimaldi was intentionally designed to be beautiful; and there are only a few symbols and markers that signify the horrors that took place there, which leaves the meaning of the park up for interpretation. Villa Grimaldi thus creates contradicting representations of peace/violence and horror/beauty that in many ways reflect contradictions within Chilean society. Finally, the Ustica Memorial Museum combines “the features of indexical realism, while at the same time transcending reality with a move towards a creative, imaginative, fictional work of art.” (pg 68) In conclusion, the article provides an excellent examination on how horrors from the past, aesthetic forms of representation, and the politics of memory are used in trauma sites.

Pereira, Virgílio Borges. 2011. “[Experiencing Unemployment: The Roles of Social and Cultural Capital in Mediating Economic Crisis.](#)” *Poetics* 39: 469-490.

Millions worldwide have lost their jobs in this most recent economic contraction; however, the experience of unemployment is not the same for all.

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(‘Amuses,’ continued from Page 9)

In this article, Pereira examines the ways in which unemployment is shaped by workers’ social positions, relations to the economic field, and their families’ social capital in the industrialized region of northwest Portugal where economic crises and unemployment are common phenomena. He finds three types, or modalities, of experience of unemployment. The first is “uncertain and undefined” in which workers, often female, are too young to retire but too old to be a prime job candidate (often between ages of 40 to 55). They have difficulty searching for jobs and often become dependent on unemployment benefits. Unemployment in this “dangerous age” often results in significant decreases in relational investment thus increasing social isolation and leading to a pessimistic vision of the future. For those less than 40, the experience of unemployment is characterized as “strategic and tactical”. These individuals often stay on unemployment benefits, doing informal jobs on the side, until they run out and thus have to seek stable employment. They often mobilize family networks to find informal, discrete work and maintain “normal” relational investments. Individuals’ visions of the future are characterized as having “strategic optimism”. Finally, for those over 55, their experience of unemployment is prolonged and leads to a transition to retirement in which they heavily depend on unemployment benefits and often become more involved in the church. For those who were “ready” to retire, this can be an optimistic and welcome experience. For those who were not ready or feel that their unemployment reflects personal failures, this can be a period of extreme pessimism and isolation. Pereira provides an excellent examination of the varieties of experiences of unemployment that are relevant in the contemporary era of economic crises.

Cremin, C. (2012). [The Social Logic of Late Capitalism: Guilt Fetishism and the Culture of Crisis Industry](#). *Cultural Sociology* 6(1) 45-60.

Have you ever wondered what to make of Wal-Mart’s global sustainability initiative? Or whether BP’s post-Gulf spill press, featuring wildlife sanctuaries and green meadows, actually earned them the public’s forgiveness? What are the implications of Amnesty International naming their newest fund- and awareness-raising campaign “throw a party for human rights”? The likely hypocrisy of these statements-- or at least the irony—will raise many a cultural sociologist eyebrow, but most won’t stop to unpack this theoretical Pandora’s box.

Colin Cremin has broken the ice. He argues that the capitalist response to material crises (i.e. natural disasters, ozone layer depletion, and abject poverty) is governed by a social—as opposed to a cultural—logic, according to which an “industry” assigns use and exchange values to our feelings of guilt. In other words, the guilt—and pursuant anxiety—that we feel when seeing images of starving children, for example, can be exchanged “in the act of purchasing products, attending events, and performing lifestyles which signify...social conscience” (46).

(Continued on Page 11)

(‘Culture in Italy,’ continued from Page 8)

For reasons not difficult to grasp, cultural work has rarely been translated into empirical research projects, which is one major cause of the still strong theoretical if not abstract nature of cultural sociology in this country. The role once played by Habermas seems to have been replaced by Bauman, an author useful to think with, but surely not to follow as an empirical research model.

However, British and American cultural sociology has been recently becoming more influential, and slowly entering the toolkit of empirical researchers. A major spur in this direction has been the translations (by this writer) in the late nineties of Diana Crane’s and Wendy Griswold’s textbooks, which served as main introductions to the field for a new generation of would-be sociologists who began their careers in the last decade. Then, a major impulse has been offered by the publication in 2007 and 2009 of the first two readers in the field: the former was more attuned to British contributions, the latter was almost exclusively devoted to the American ones. Additional translations of the books or collections of essays by H.S. Becker, P. DiMaggio, J. Alexander, V. Zelizer, A. Zerubavel and a few others have also contributed to a better knowledge of individual intellectual projects. The field is living a strong restructuration along these lines, based on cues such as the contents of locally produced textbooks.

While this move toward American traditions is to be welcomed, the danger of closure in a different provincialism is strong. American cultural sociology provides the necessary resources for a more general rethinking of the field, and certainly for its updating. But it is not enough. The coming of age of Italian cultural sociology will be apparent only when these contributions will merge with indigenous legacies of the Paretian or Gramscian traditions, the latter serving as the foundation for precious qualitative research in the fifties and sixties in the Mezzogiorno (i.e. the Southern part of Italy). In addition, seminal intellectual experiences in this country still have important roots and exemplars, such as microhistory, cultural Marxism, and semiotics, which should continue to play an important role in the development of the field.

(‘Amuses,’ continued from Page 10)

Left-liberals, a group that includes most critical sociologists, are the most likely to feel guilt when consuming non-fair-trade chocolate, for example, because a more ethical product exists that could absolve us instead. Guilt becomes fetishized when it is the fair-trade chocolate that triggers the feeling, rather than the human suffering induced by unfair trade. According to Cremin, left-liberals are producing a hegemonic aesthetic, one that gets repackaged by the culture of crisis industry for the ultimate postmodern consumption act: that which exonerates both producer and consumer as it displaces guilt onto saleable objects for a profit.

Cremin has supplied the terms, connected the theoretical threads and made a compelling case for re-grounding cultural analysis in the materiality of late capitalism.

(‘Conversations With Vera,’ continued from Page 3)

What I think is particularly exciting about her analysis is how she extends her themes that she developed concerning the institutional workings of art museums, and shows how they illuminate the sociological study of collective memory. Her analysis is of the sociological texture of contestation in institutional life.

“Contested Remembrance” is a study of the controversies surrounding an exhibit at the National Air And Space Museum in Washington DC. The primary artifact was the “Enola Gay” B-29 bomber from which the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Vera presents an analysis of the exhibit as key interested parties debated about the dropping of the bomb and how they learned to hate and love it. WWII veterans, professional historians and museum curators, the Japanese government, peace organizations and anti-war activists and crucially official Washington, especially Congress, battled over the exhibit. Zolberg shows how the exhibit provided a public space for a debate about the bomb and American identity. She shows that the exhibit does not present a clearly articulated institutionalized collective memory, but a domain for debate about the connection between past, present and future at the sacred center of American public life. Collective memory is understood as contested public remembering. This is the insight I drew from the work, it’s great accomplishment to my mind beyond the specifics of the case.

It is an important study, which contributed to the renewed interest in collective memory in sociology, and in the social sciences and psychology more generally. Yet, I must admit, I have some concerns about this intellectual movement. I wonder: Why is it that so many of us, including Zolberg and many of you here, have become interested in collective memory? Why is it that the student-sponsored conference on memory, which this special conference honoring Zolberg is an extension of, is probably the single most successful interdisciplinary project in the history of The New School for Social Research? I think there are both positive and critical answers to these questions.

The positive side is obvious. A new domain of interdisciplinary inquiry has been opened, and its exploration helps address difficult and important problems. I myself was working on this topic when Vera and I first met. I published my one and only article in the *American Journal of Sociology*, using collective memory to account for the existence of critical expression in Communist societies. Later the Czech writer, Milan Kundera summarized my argument in his novel, *A Book on Laughter and Forgetting*, more succinctly than I could: “The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.”

Yet, I think there is something troubling about the collective memory renaissance. At one of the earlier meetings of the conference, I expressed my concern, from the audience. As I recall, I wondered out loud whether our interest in the topic was a sign of a major cultural problem: resignation and an absence of imagination - careful study of memory of the past, with little investigation of forward looking projects. The next year I gave a paper, entitled. “Against Memory.” My point was that forgetting was every bit as significant as remembering.

Emphasizing this point, I have recently been playing with the concept of “the wisdom of youth,” thinking about how the ignorance of the young about the past, or at least their sense that it is really passed, is a significant ground for creativity. This explained my own journey to Poland, willing to go to a country from which my

grandparents fled, because the horrors of the first part of the 20th century seemed to me to be over, in a way that wasn't possible for my parents or grandparents. It also explains how the young before their elders took it as being quite possible that a black man could become President of the United States, and now, most significantly, the new "new social movements" from the Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street seem to be manifestations of this special forgetful wisdom. I am struck by the fact that a sociology of generations is necessary to understand the new movement wave and believe that collective forgetting is part of the force behind this generational push.



Irit Dekel (Department of Social Sciences, Humboldt University of Berlin) toasting Vera

I am not questioning the importance of studying memory, least of all am I questioning Vera's work on the subject, rather what I am trying to do is highlight the importance of continuing to study the imagination as it works against memory, as it is unconstrained by established practices. And I see two ways that Zolberg has addressed this in her writings.

First, there is her ongoing concern with

how museums work, particularly relevant is her concern with how museums confront and are pushed by contemporary artists, and second, of course, her continuing interest in "outsider art." The creativity of those who work outside of the collective memory structures of official art institutions, even against them, are a significant part of the liveliness of the art world, which Vera recognizes both in her work and in her life.

Significantly, she and Ary early on studied and collected African Art, stimulated by their work and shared adventures in the Ivory Coast. I suspect those experiences were important in how she studied both the center and the peripheries of the art world, to use the language of Edward Shils. Significantly the hierarchy that Shils maintained was crucial for understanding the relationship between center and periphery, Vera has questioned in much of her work.

Zolberg's most influential work, I imagine, is her 1990 book, *Constructing a Sociology of the Arts*. It has been translated into Italian, Korean, Spanish and Portuguese. It provides a comprehensive overview of the field, which recognized and summarized new research and theory, the various currents and central problems up to the moment of its publication, and, more significantly, the book suggested problems that the field needed to address. It pointed to the kinds of research and debates, the kinds of scholarly conversations, that should be done, which, by now, have been done, strikingly by Vera and her students. For Vera, I think, it is a pivotal work. It summarized where she was then and suggested where she would be going.

I have to admit. She took seriously research that I questioned, perhaps too quickly, with the foolish assertiveness of youth. To my mind, too much of this work took the arts to be like any other social institution, to be examined in the same way, without any special concern with their specific aesthetic and normative value. Our different judgments of the value and limitations of Bourdieu's sociology of the arts can be found here.

During the decade before the writing of her book, roughly dating back to the time Vera and I first met, there was a rapid development in the sociology of the arts. It entered the sociological mainstream. Perhaps the key figure was Howard S. Becker. He published his book, *Art Worlds*, and mentored a significant group of sociologists who were informed by his explorations, including Chandra Mukerji if I am not mistaken. (And by the way, Becker served on my dissertation committee) There was also much work being done on the social organization of art, the production of culture, the socialization of artists, among other themes. Zolberg

seriously and deliberately considered all these inquiries. She highlighted two sociological approaches, ones that systematically studies how artwork comes to be art, and the other which examines what are the effects of these things and performances called art on the greater society. Informed as I was by critical theory, I found much of this problematic. Studies of the production and reception of the arts, with no art, it seemed to me.

A hint at the quality of our conversations about these things is revealed in how she thanked me in her acknowledgements. She wrote: “I have profited as well from contact with my colleague Jeffrey Goldfarb, whose serious commitment to the goals of cultural excellence and democracy have stimulated me to probe more deeply the implication for sociology of the disciplinary cleavages in academic life.”

The fact is that I believed the new sociology of art was turning away from the art, not thinking sufficiently about its critical role in social, political and cultural life, as was explored by Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and Lowenthal, my teachers in this regard. Zolberg, on the other hand, who never turned away from the art, appreciated, more than I did, how the study of the context and reception of art helped shape the quality of art, and its critical potential. I felt sociologists didn’t go far enough. Vera was more patient. She understood and appreciated what I was after, but she also understood how more limited studies could help get us there. This she has done in her subsequent work, on outsider art and on collective memory.

Sometimes patience is a virtue, as Vera’s long and distinguished career reveals. The wisdom of youth, including mine back then, has its limits. And what I especially appreciate was that as she took seriously pretty conventional studies of the art institutions as institutions like others in the social world, she knew that something distinctive was involved.

Vera and I have had many conversations over the years on the topics discussed at this special conference in her honor, indeed, on topics we first started talking about in Cobb Hall many years ago. Perhaps the most interesting ones were mediated by our students and colleagues, who have been informed by our critical and empirical interests, drawing from the sociology of culture that was developing in the first decade after Vera and I met, and who have extended Zolberg’s contributions in scholarly discussion with her and in conversations of their own, as has been revealed in the papers presented in this conference and in the remarkable work of her students. These “conversations with Vera” are a testament to their shared accomplishments, as they have defined the sociology of the arts, the sociology of collective memory and the sociology of culture.

Her students have had long and fruitful conversations with Vera, culminating in their serious contributions to intellectual life: Lisa Aslanian, Catherine Bliss, Anne Bowler, Hui-tun Chuang, Karen Coleman, Irit Dekel, Lindsey Freeman, Yifat Gutman, Nancy Hanrahan, Siobhan Murphy Kattago, Despina Lalaki, Susan Pearce, Donna Marie Peters, Jackie Skiles, Amy Sodaro, Hakan Topal, and Sophia Vackimes. Their work ranges from the historical analysis of the futurists, to a high theoretical critical analysis of the sociology of music, to an ethnography of tap dancing, to a critical analysis of the photography of Robert Mapplethorpe, to studies of collective memorials of the murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, and of the African American burial grounds in lower Manhattan, and of the presence of the Palestinian absence in Israeli collective memory.

These “conversations with Vera,” between Zolberg and her colleagues and students, and on a personal note, I add, between Vera and me, are testaments to her and their shared accomplishments, as they have defined the sociology of the arts, the sociology of collective memory and the sociology of culture.

PS. The papers at the conference were excellent. They affirmed Vera’s patience and addressed my critical concerns. I am hoping we can find a publisher. More about that soon, I hope. These students have had long and fruitful conversations with Vera, culminating in their serious contributions to intellectual life.



Public Culture Moves to NYU Sociology

Eric Klinenberg, New York University

Since its founding, in 1988, *Public Culture* has become a premier outlet for research on cultural globalization, cosmopolitanism, transnational politics, the public sphere, and the circulation of new cultural forms. By 2001 incoming editor Elizabeth Povinelli could write, without exaggeration, that the journal's innovative interpretations of modernity at large had become "the tacit assumptions of most studies of public cultural phenomena. In 2006 Claudio Lomnitz could use his inaugural editorial statement to quite legitimately report that "the journal, in short, gave shape, form, and verve to an entire field." Naturally, the first question for the new editorial group of *Public Culture* is, what next? Or, more specifically, what can a new generation of cultural scholars contribute to the legacy of this publication and to the field it helped establish?

One simple way is to focus our critical attention on cultural problems that have emerged or become more pressing since the late Carol Breckenridge and Arjun Appadurai founded the journal. After all, in 1988 hardly anyone used the Internet or mobile telephones. The Berlin Wall and the twin towers of the World Trade Center were still standing. The Soviet Union and the apartheid regime in South Africa were still intact. Iran and Iraq were at war with each other, and the Soviet army was winding down its campaign in Afghanistan. Not until that summer did NASA scientist James Hansen warn the US Congress that "greenhouse warming" could have a major impact on the earth's climate. There was no way to know how prescient he was.

Today the most urgent cultural question for our species may be whether and how we can change our relationship to the environment — and I call this a cultural question because engineers and policy makers cannot effect this change on their own, nor can they operate without doing their own cultural work.

We also inhabit a world in which militarism has penetrated into the cultural fabric, leading historically open and democratic nations to compromise and even violate their founding principles and turning "security" into a key problem of our time. The US war on terror, which has no clear goal or foreseeable end point, has underwritten repressive and violent activities around the globe while contributing to a debt crisis in the federal government and creating rampant insecurity at home. How will different states or communities "do" security, and what will such projects require citizens to give or give up?

For most of the world's population, the market is not unlike the climate: beyond our control and yet determinative of our individual and collective fate. The economic disasters have generated considerable populist hostility toward banks and other financial institutions, as well as toward lax regulators. Surprisingly, though, the current global economic crisis hasn't produced a wide spread crisis of faith in the market, nor has it inspired much public debate about alternative forms of social organization.

One domain in which new forms of social organization are quickly emerging is the media, and *Public Culture* will continue to feature extensive ethnographic reporting and searching analysis of this dynamic cultural space. We are in the midst of a communications revolution whose outcome is by no means certain. Today information is everywhere, but so too is our attention. There's a global competition for eyeballs, and entertainment reigns. Social media give us new ways to share, connect, and cooperate, but they also give corporations new ways to track our behaviors and interests and give governments new tools for cracking down on dissent. A rising generation of cultural consumers believes that information should circulate freely, but no one knows who will pay for professional journalism or whether the world's great newspapers can evolve to survive the digital age. There are new infrastructures for making cultural objects public and for making all varieties of publics newly visible. Although the battles to shape these infrastructures are often removed from the world of scholarly production, their consequences — for our work and for cultural debate more generally — can be profound.

Today an abundance of smart and serious research on all of these topics is being done by scholars of



culture in a variety of disciplines. Too often, however, this research is published in arcane language that communicates to a narrow set of specialists but not to a broader public, or even to intellectuals in other fields who are exploring similar themes. In recent years, mounting frustration with such highly specialized forms of academic production in the social sciences and humanities has led to calls for more rigorous, publicly engaged scholarship in anthropology, communications, cultural studies, history, literature, political science, and sociology. But we lack a venue that welcomes important contributions on cultural questions from all of these fields, a place where strong writing and clear argumentation are recognized as craft virtues, where the public dissemination of specialized research is an overriding goal. *Public Culture* aims to fill that void.

Full-length articles based on original research will remain the core of *Public Culture*, and short, timely essays will continue to run at the front of each issue, in a section that we call the Forum. But, with this issue, we are also introducing new features: *Public Culture*

Interviews will be in-depth discussions with contemporary thinkers who have influenced and inspired us. Typically, we are familiar only with scholarly labor's final results, published books and articles or occasional lectures. We are all interested in what goes into this final product, which is often the result of many years spent grappling with empirical materials, posing new questions, interpreting existing scholarship, and conversing with colleagues.

This is, of course, not the only form of observation we will promote here. *Public Culture* has always had a strong commitment to images. We've won a national award for our design. And we've published innovative, hard-to-find work by artists from around the globe. Such a strong commitment to visual culture might seem strange — after all, readers today find themselves surrounded by pictures. The naturalistic imagery of journalism and advertising has become inescapable. It's tempting to forgo the visual entirely and to offer the journal as a refuge from the widespread assault on our eyes. Yet we believe that we can present a kind of work that helps readers see beyond these stereotypes.

In the future, as in the past, we will publish *analytic* images — that is, pictures that help us glimpse the cultural patterns, social structures, and transformations of nature underlying contemporary life. They will include photographs by artists, journalists, and scholars but also images of artworks, film stills, and video footage on our website. These images will surprise not only by revealing times and places rarely seen but also by modeling ways of using our eyes to register deep changes in the social and natural landscape. They will, in short, be pictures to think with.

Visual culture will feature prominently on our website, www.publicculture.org. But the signature feature of our online offerings will be [Public Books](#), which extends the reach of *Public Culture* by giving scholars a venue for discussing significant books (fiction and nonfiction) in wide-ranging essays that address issues of broad concern. We care about books because they offer something unique to public discussions: extended argumentation and insight grounded in robust, original research. And we care about book reviews because, at their best, they offer analytic perspective and model exemplary forms of productive critical engagement.

Public Books will be published online because we want to take advantage of the Internet's many technological capacities. First, it allows us to give important new books the critical attention they deserve in a timely way. Second, it allows us to include a range of critical perspectives — beginning with the reviewer, of course, but also expanding to integrate other reviewers and the author. Third, the Internet allows us to add short, stimulating features to our book coverage, such as interviews and conversations with authors; updates from conferences, book festivals, and exhibits; reports from the disciplines on new work that should interest readers from other fields; and brief, summary reviews that we will publish frequently in the Public Books blog. Finally, publishing Public Books online lets us develop it organically, according to how you make use of it. We look forward to seeing you there.

(‘Letter From the Section Chair,’ continued from Page 1)

When I wrote ten years ago about experiments in radical democracy in American social movements, most people in and outside academia thought of radical democracy as a worthy ideal but in practice unworkable. It was meaningful only to committed (and often aging) idealists who were unconcerned with political effectiveness or economic efficiency. Today, bottom-up decision making seems all the rage. Crowdsourcing and open source, flat management in business, horizontalism in protest politics, collaborative governance in policy studies—these are the buzzwords now and they are all about the virtues of nonhierarchical and participatory decision making.

What happened? The Internet was certainly part of it. As numerous writers have pointed out, new digital technologies dramatically lowered the costs of joining, forming, and coordinating groups. They made it possible to combat the problems of scale that have long dogged briefs for participatory democracy; in a sense, they made democracy practical. But even more interestingly, as ethnographer Jeffrey Juris (2009) has shown, the Internet has served as a model for what democracy is and requires. Activists in the anti-corporate globalization movement have sought to create organizations in which autonomous spheres or publics are linked in multiple ways along the lines of a virtual network. The democracy they practice would seem strange to a 1960s participatory democrat: they talk about autonomy more than equality; about self-management more than leaderlessness; about diversity more than unity. They prefigure a different kind of democracy than 1960s activists did.

There are other trends behind the new enthusiasm for bottom-up decision making. Laments about Americans’ combination of political apathy and ignorance have issued in a burgeoning field of public deliberation, in which citizens are invited to discuss and make recommendations about issues ranging from urban sprawl to foreign policy. Hundreds of thousands of Americans have participated, variously, in citizen summits, Deliberative Polls, study circles, National Issues Forums, and countless local deliberative exercises. In international development work, the virtues of grassroots associationalism have become axiomatic (Schofer and Longhofer 2011). In modern business organizations, say Boltanski and Chiapello (1999), the new “spirit of capitalism” takes bureaucracy as its antagonist rather than its exemplar. The buzzwords now are flexibility, networks, an orientation to projects rather than structures, mobility, and a rejection of hierarchy in favor of “transversal flows.”

The result of all this has been democratic enthusiasms in some predictable places, like progressive social movements, and some odd ones, like corporate boardrooms and local real estate development. But is democratic enthusiasm the same thing as democracy? One might well wonder. When in 2002, 4,500 New Yorkers gathered in a giant convention center to deliberate over what to build on the site of the former World Trade Center, many observers hailed this “21st century town meeting” as an exercise in people-powered democracy. Michael Sorkin, a progressive architect who participated in the event, was less enthusiastic. As the day wore on, he said, he increasingly felt like a delegate in a “1950s Soviet Party Congress”: the options for how to develop the site had been determined in advance and they were basically identical. When the mc for the event gave a “brief pep talk on how the meeting was democratic as all get out because ‘in democracy, the people have a chance to speak!’” Sorkin had enough. He stood up and yelled “Buuuuuuullllllshiiiiiiiit! Democracy means the people have the power to choose!” His “tiny act of insurrection went completely unnoticed” he commented ruefully (2003: 58).

Certainly, “democracy” is a concept that is as manipulable as it is meaningful. Ed Walker’s (2009) research on “grassroots lobbying” details a vast industry dedicated to getting ordinary people to send pre-written emails and letters to Congressional representatives in support of corporation-friendly policies. Grassroots, indeed. But I wonder whether the people who are sending those emails think they are participating in a bottom-up democracy. What do people want and expect of democracy? Do they really see spectacles of democracy—complete with hand-held voting keypads and instantaneous results on jumbotron screens—as the substance of democracy? If their expectations are stunted, why is that the case? Is participation without power seen as good, or is it seen as better than nothing? And are there settings or occasions in which people’s expectations of democracy are more expansive, or are questioned or challenged?

Dan Kreiss, as I said earlier, argues that Obama supporters weren’t bothered by their lack of input into a campaign they had supposedly created because winning was more important to them. In her ethnography of the Burning Man Festival, the annual arts festival in the Nevada desert, Katherine Chen (2009) gives another example of democracy seemingly meaning something other than democracy. The group that organizes the festival has striven to stay true to its countercultural roots, even as it has become a for-profit organization responsible for managing a small city. In describing how the organization’s board of directors made decisions about the festival, Chen writes, “Although organizers decide by consensus, the board has a designated leader. As the executive director, Larry Harvey exercises the final say.” Why did that statement not seem a contradiction—not so much to Chen as to Burning Man organizers? Was it because Burning Man’s leader, Laurence Harvey, was so charismatic that simply by listening to people, he made his organization seem collectivist? Was it because members felt not that they were part of the Burning Man LLC but part of the once-a-year-happening, and therefore did not much care who ran things between happenings? Or was it because consensus has come to mean simply input? Have collectivist practices that were

popularized in the 1960s retained their countercultural glamour even as they turned into a management strategy?

In an article on the people who organize and run deliberative forums, Caroline Lee reveals an even more complex set of beliefs about the relations between democratic participation and power. Deliberation practitioners actively promote their services to businesses and local governments, Lee shows, promising that involving people in “hard choices” will make them more accepting of fiscal cuts in the name of fiscal austerity. They actively sell public deliberation as a solution to the problems wrought by neoliberalism and as an alternative to noisy protest. Yet, at the same time, deliberation practitioners are true believers in the civic value of deliberation. They talk about deliberation as an antidote to the ethos of the market that they believe has turned citizens into self-interested and passive consumers. That, then, is the irony: what makes deliberation so marketable is its promise to create the kind of active, responsible citizenry that will, through the power of talk, accommodate itself to the failures of the market.

And yet, I’m not entirely sure that Americans have been sold on the notion of talk as the sum total of what democracy is. When I interviewed people who participated in the forum that Michael Sorkin wrote about, I was struck by their clear-eyed view of what their deliberations would accomplish. They were under no illusion that rebuilding authorities would simply take their marching orders. “You expect the worst and hope for the best,” as one put it. But they emphasized that the organizers of the forum, and participants too, would have to press their case after the forum was over for it to have any impact. Their model of deliberative democracy was one in which persuasion was combined with pressure. As one put it, if the forum organizers weren’t “vigilant” about keeping up the pressure on rebuilding authorities, “. . .if they back off and let them maneuver and manipulate this situation, it will be null and void what we did.” “We’re an alliance,” another said. “We need to protest, shut things down if we have to make sure they commit to really taking our—the stuff we did with the selection process and voting and the whole democracy thing—taking it seriously.”

This suggests to me that participants in deliberative forums may be operating with a very different understanding of what deliberative democracy means and requires than are forum organizers—and indeed, than are many democratic theorists. Far from a civil alternative to political contention, democratic deliberation, in this view, is inevitably part of a contentious process, from beginning to end. In this case, better understanding how ordinary people understand their own participation might well open up possibilities for impact that have been obscured by a tendency to see social movements and politics as wholly different kettles of fish.

I’ve only mentioned a few people working on a cultural sociology of democracy. There are many others: Nina Eliasoph, Paul Lichterman, Margaret Somers, Jeff Alexander, Ann Mische, Andy Perrin, Donatella della Porta, Nicole Doerr, Ron Jacobs and Eleanor Townsley among them. What makes all this work so exciting, to my mind, is that it captures the complexity and nuance of people’s ideas about what counts as democratic while at the same time probing the sources of those ideas—whether in deep civic codes or in everyday rituals, in organization-specific cultures or in cultural norms that diffuse across international organizations. It provides vital tools for understanding both the ideals we hold out as democratic and the practices through which we strive to enact those ideals.

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Sociology of Culture Section Panels for ASA 2012

Sociology of Culture Council/Business Meeting

Session Organizer: [Francesca Polletta](#) (University of California, Irvine)

Sociology of Culture Roundtables

Session Organizer: [Vaughn Schmutz](#) (University of North Carolina, Charlotte)

Media and Aging Audiences/Fans/Users: New Areas of Inquiry

Scheduled Time: Sat, Aug 18 - 12:30pm - 2:10pm

Organizers: [C. Lee Harrington](#) (Miami University) and [Richard A. Settersten, Jr.](#) (Oregon State University)

Presider and Discussant: [C. Lee Harrington](#) (Miami University)

- "Talkin' 'Bout My Generation": The Persistence of Cohort Music Preferences, Andrew J. Ritchey (Pennsylvania State University)
- Aging, the Life Course, and Media, Denise D. Bielby (University of California-Santa Barbara), C. Lee Harrington (Miami University), Anthony R. Bardo (Miami University-Oxford)
- Midlife and Technology Use: The Use of Social Network Sites to Find Old Friends, Kelly Quinn (University of Illinois-Chicago)
- New Names for "Older" Audiences: Language, Agency and the Marketing of Culture, Corinne Endreny Kirchner (Columbia University)
- Newspaper Portrayals of American Nursing Homes: "Disposable" Lives and Their Market Value, Julia Rozanova (Yale University)

Economic Culture in the Public Sphere

Scheduled Time: Fri, Aug 17 - 8:30am - 10:10am

Organizer: [Lyn Spillman](#) (University of Notre Dame), [Frederick Wherry](#) (University of Michigan), and [Walter W. Powell](#) (Stanford University)

Presider: [Frederick Wherry](#) (University of Michigan)

- Economic and Political Culture in the Indian Public Sphere: A study of Gram Sabha Deliberations, Paromita Sanyal (Cornell University), Vijayendra Rao (World Bank)
- Public Discourse and Divisive Populism: The Case of Walmart, Rebekah Peebles Massengill (Swarthmore College)
- Imaginary Economies of Immigration Reform: The Business Association, the "Essential Worker," and the Corporate Imagination, Michael Gould-Wartofsky (New York University)
- Imagination at Work: Postindustrial Restructuring and Earnings Determination at General Electric, Caroline E. Hanley (College of William & Mary)
- Greed or Devotion? Executive Men's Work Commitment in the Financial Sector, Mary Blair-Loy (University of California-San Diego), *Stacy Jeanne Williams (University of California-San Diego)

How Culture Matters in Economic Life

Scheduled Time: Sat, Aug 18 - 12:30pm - 2:10pm

Organizers: [Lyn Spillman](#) (University of Notre Dame) and [Frederick Wherry](#) (University of Michigan), Co-sponsored with the Economic Sociology Section

Presider: [Viviana Zelizer](#) (Princeton University)

Discussant: [Lyn Spillman](#) (University of Notre Dame)

- Capitalism as a System of Contingent Expectations, Jens Beckert (Max Planck Institute)
- Valuing Education: Why Media Rankings Rankle Higher Education, Wendy Nelson Espeland (Northwestern University)
- The Publics of Electronic Markets, Alexandru Preda (University of Edinburgh)
- Is It Worth It?, David Stark (Columbia University)

[Culture/Media](#)

Scheduled Time: Sat, Aug 18 - 8:30am - 10:10am

Organizer, Presider, and Discussant: Eleanor Townsley (Mount Holyoke College)

- The Public Sphere: Theoretical Resources from Media Sociology and Cultural Sociology, Ronald N. Jacobs (State University of New York-Albany)
- Terrified: Fringe Movements, Emotions, and Media Representations of Islam, 2001-2008, Christopher A Bail (University of Michigan-Ann Arbor)
- The Moon over the Eastern Hill: the Chinese Imagination and Cultural Consumption of Tibet, Fen Jennifer Lin (City University of Hong Kong)
- Scopic Media and Synthetic Situations, Karin D. Knorr Cetina (University of Chicago)

[Gender, Culture, Media](#)

Scheduled Time: Fri, Aug 17 - 2:30pm - 4:10pm

Organizers: [Andrea Press](#) (University of Virginia) and [Laura Grindstaff](#) (University of California-Davis), Co-sponsored with the Sex and Gender Section

Presider: [Denise D. Bielby](#) (University of California-Santa Barbara)

- Will the Real 'F' Word Please Stand Up? 'Feminism' and 'Femininity' in Contemporary Media Iconography, Laura Grindstaff (University of California-Davis)
- Feminism LOL: Media Culture and 'Feminism on the Ground' in a Post-Feminist Age, Andrea Press (University of Virginia)
- The 5 Things a Feminist Researcher Should Never Do: Reflecting on a decade of conducting Digital Media Research among Parents, Lynn Schofield Clark (University of Denver)
- Stripped Naked: Divesting the Nation of the 'Mexican' Problem, Lisa Flores (University of Colorado-Boulder)
- The Belly Mommy and the Fetus-Sitter: Gender and the Cultures of Surrogacy, Joshua Gamson (University of California-San Francisco)

[Sociology of Culture 1](#)

Scheduled Time: Sun, Aug 19 - 8:30am - 10:10am

Organizer: [Colin Jerolmack](#), New York University

Presider and Discussant: [Shamus Rahman Khan](#) (Columbia University)

- Back to Nature in New York City? Freegans and the Morality of Urban Life, Alexander Vosick Barnard (University of California-Berkeley)
- Emotions and the Normative Order: Loss, Predicaments, and Cultural Analysis, Joseph E. Davis (University of Virginia)
- Innovation, Terroir and Tradition Among Bordeaux Winemakers, Sarah Daynes (University of North Carolina-Greensboro)
- Too Many Tools? The Effects of a Diverse Cultural Repertoire among Expectant Mothers, Sarah Bracey Garrett (University of California-Berkeley)

[Sociology of Culture 2](#)

Scheduled Time: Sun, Aug 19 - 10:30am - 12:10pm

Organizer: [Colin Jerolmack](#), New York University

Presider and Discussant: [Jennifer C. Lena](#) (Columbia University-Barnard College)

- Docile and Reticent Objects: The Institutional Dynamics of Permanence and Change at the Museum of MoMA, Fernando Dominguez-Rubio (New York University)
- From Splendour to Simplicity: Explaining the Aesthetic and Ideological Diversity of the Arts and Crafts Movement, Claude Rubinson (University of Houston-Downtown)
- Objects, Words, and Bodies in Space: Bringing Materiality into Cultural Analysis, Wendy Griswold (Northwestern University), Gemma M. Mangione (Northwestern University)
- The Relationship between Symbolic and Economic Value in the Global Art Field, Larissa Buchholz (Columbia University)

Books of Note

[Timothy J. Dowd](#), Emory University

As the semesters give way to summer, here are a few books to consider for beachside, poolside, or for wherever you may be.

Rene Almeling. 2011. *Sex Cells: The Medical Market for Eggs and Sperm*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

This wonderful book addresses the commodification of the body. Almeling provides a helpful perspective on this broad issue by focusing on egg agencies and sperm banks (and those who donate to them). Not only does she show the historical contours of this market, she also reveals how it plays out in everyday life (and often in different ways) for women and men.

Joel Best. 2011. *Everyone's a Winner: Life in Our Congratulatory Culture*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Best turns his attention to the proliferation of kudos, prizes, rankings and other things that make up our congratulatory culture. It's an eye-opening book that makes clear that things like status and prestige aren't always as scarce as we might think. Plus, it's a fun read!

Gary Alan Fine. 2012. *Tiny Publics: A Theory of Group Action and Culture*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Bringing together decades of his well-known scholarship—such as that dealing little league baseball teams and restaurant work—Fine offers here a compelling account of how the everyday life of small groups matters for the broader social order (e.g., civic engagement). It's a tour de force that shows how and why culture can be approached as group practice.

Michael G. Flaherty. 2011. *The Textures of Time: Agency and Temporal Experience*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

This fascinating book deals with the “time work” in which people engage—including how they make sense of time's duration (e.g., it seemed to go on forever...) and how they allocate time (e.g., work time vs. personal time). Flaherty casts a compelling light on a fundamental aspect of life that's often taken for granted.

Christine J. Gardner. 2011. *Making Chastity Sexy: The Rhetoric of Evangelical Abstinence Campaigns*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Gardner provides an intriguing examination of how the abstinence campaign has made its case—such as casting the decision to wait until married as one of empowered choice for greater returns down the road. Interviewing both evangelical leaders and teenagers, and considering the campaign and its rhetoric in the U.S. (as well as in sub-Saharan Africa), Gardner gives us much to consider.

Victor Ginsburgh and Shlomo Weber. 2011. *How Many Languages Do We Need? The Economics of Linguistic Diversity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

This provocative book deals with the issue of linguistic diversity, noting both its virtues and costs while grappling with the balance between the two. It is written mostly from the vantage of economics, but the authors also draw on sociology and linguistics. Somewhat technical in parts, it covers a range of topics, including linguistic policies in the European Union.

Doug Guthrie. 2012. *China and Globalization: The Social, Economic and Political Transformation of Chinese Society*. New York: Routledge.

Here's a book that is both expansive and sophisticated while also being reader-friendly. It's a great resource for those interested in the considerable changes occurring in China during the last several decades.

Eva Illouz. 2012. *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

If the title alone is not enough to grab your attention, the book's intent likely will. Illouz builds a framework for thinking of romantic misery not in individual terms but in institutional terms—linking this emotional difficulty to such broader issues as the self, identity and inequality in modern times.

Jennifer C. Lena. 2012. *Banding Together: How Communities Create Genres in Popular Music*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

With much musical nuance, Lena deals with commonalities among a wide range of genres—showing patterns in how they arise and change and highlighting the importance of the context in which they are located. She reveals how grassroots scenes, industries and even governments matter for the ongoing development of musical genres.

Jonathan Markovitz. 2011. *Racial Spectacles: Explorations in Media, Race and Justice*. New York: Routledge.

Markovitz uses “racial spectacles” to interrogate the media's role in discussions of race—such as how mass media can reinforce racial stereotypes and how they can create openings for protest and change. Informed by various bodies of scholarship (e.g., collective memory), Markovitz proceeds by analyzing cases that range across time and place—such as the Scottsboro (Alabama) interracial rape case of the 1930s and the Abu Ghraib (Iraq) photographs of the 2000s.

Chris Mathieu, Editor. 2012. *Careers in Creative Industries*. New York: Routledge.

Show business and the arts aren't easy domains in which to build long and stable careers. This edited volume brings together studies of creative careers that respectively attend to architecture, classical music, fashion, film, television, theatre, and the visual arts. Among other things, the chapters show the difficulties of breaking in to these domains, the importance of collaboration and networks, and the building and impact of reputation.

Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, Editors. 2011. *The Collective Memory Reader*. New York: Oxford University Press.

I can't improve on the authors' summary of this book: “*The Collective Memory Reader* presents key texts...that underwrite and express the long-standing, though surely intensifying interest in memory” (page 5). It's an impressive volume that offers well-selected excerpts. It should be a touchstone for both novices and experts.

Timothy Rowlands. 2012. *Video Game Worlds: Working at Play in the Culture of EverQuest*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

For those interested in online gaming communities and “massively multiplayer online games” (MMOs), this book is likely for you. Focusing on *EverQuest*, Rowlands documents its virtual / social world by drawing upon his long-time involvement, interviews with gamers, and semiotic analysis.

Steven J. Tepper. 2011. *Not Here, Not Now, Not That! Protest over Art and Culture in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tracking hundreds of conflicts occurring in some 70 U.S. cities, and interviewing some of the players involved, Tepper offers a needed corrective to focusing on only high-profile cases (versus the full range of cases), and he also makes clear the types of cities in which such conflicts occur.

Max Weber. 2011. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated and introduced by Stephen Kalberg. New York: Oxford University Press.

This book needs no introduction to sociologists. It’s good news, then, that Kalberg has offered an updated translation of this classic work—one that is very accessible. His introduction and documentation, furthermore, nicely remind us why this book is part of the sociological canon.