

Letter from Section Chief Operating Officer, Laura Stark (Vanderbilt University)

Report from Denver:

There were many reasons to celebrate the Culture Section at the annual meeting in Denver. Our membership remains strong; our finances healthy; our scholarship topnotch *and* bountiful; and our members generous in their service to the section.

The Sociology of Culture section remains the largest in the ASA. We have more than one thousand members (1098), including 44 sociologists who joined the section this past year. Our strong membership shows that one out of every eleven ASA members considers culture central enough to their work that they joined the section or renewed their membership this past year. In light of budget crunches, the section is especially lucky to have 41 low-income members, also the largest number among sections.

Thanks to our strong membership, we currently have \$11,461 in net assets. Our major expenses typically orbit around the annual meeting: funding the culture reception and honoring our prize-winners. Fortunately, our 2011-12 President, Francesca Polletta, made several prudent choices in planning the reception for ASA, and so our expenses for the event held steady relative to previous years (around \$2,000) despite inflation. At our business meeting in Denver, members brainstormed ways the section can hold on to the budget surplus next year. Hosting a reception in Manhattan will be unusually expensive because the conference will be especially well-attended and because Manhattan will be

pricey. Our 2012-13 president, Denise Bielby, is looking into options for an off-site reception—with caution. As members also pointed out, there may be downsides in hosting an off-site reception: for example an event far-afield may discourage new people from coming, particularly graduate students, who might otherwise get a feel for the section over drinks and conversation. In the year ahead, we will also be considering the possibility of using our funds instead to sponsor a mini-conference. In addition to being intellectually productive, a workshop event may help us to draw graduate students and recruit them into the section's scholarly community. Another special project proposed at the Council meeting was a study aimed at providing publishers with empirical

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evidence that culture has an audience and a buying market. This effort, too, would cost money but be worthwhile, particularly because it would be helpful for graduate students facing a tight market.

Looking ahead to the upcoming year, our new section president, Denise Bielby, will be guiding the way. Denise has taken the place of Francesca Polletta, who generously served as president over the past year. Denise is Professor of Sociology at University of California - Santa Barbara, where she also has an affiliation with the Department of Film and Media Studies. Her research focuses on film and TV viewers and producers, and she has written innumerable articles and books that integrate culture, work, and women's studies. Most recently, she published *Global TV: Exporting Television and Culture in the World Market* (2008, NYU Press) and this book is emblematic of her research agenda. It takes up the fascinating puzzle of how TV programs created for a specific market find appeal among very different viewers in distant locations. The book, in essence, makes sense of the seeming mismatch between programs' intended markets and their fan bases by explaining how audiences innovate and give new meaning to pre-packaged cultural content. Denise is not only an influential scholar; she is also a generous mentor and colleague. She has won commendations for teaching and advising undergraduates, on top of her graduate duties. She has also served the profession as member of editorial boards and funding panels for NSF, NIH, and more.

Several members have joined Denise as new section officers. Mabel Berezin is our chair-elect and as such she is also chair of the 2013 program committee. Rhys Williams and Deborah Gould are new Council members, taking the place of Laura Grindstaff and Philip Smith, who generously served three-year terms as Council members. We are delighted to add a new Student Representative to the section: Fiona Rose-Greenland will be joining Alison Gruber for a two-year term. Finally, we owe a special debt of gratitude to the section officers who are continuing to serve, especially the section's newsletter editors and web gurus Jon Wynn, Andrew Deener, and Claudio Benzecry. Thanks to all our officers, and to each member, for an excellent year and many reasons to celebrate in Denver.

If you have any thoughts on this report, please send me an email: laura.stark@vanderbilt.edu

2012 Clifford Geertz Prize for Best Article

Committee: Melissa Wilde (Committee Chair, University of Pennsylvania), Genevieve Zubrzycki (University of Michigan), and Terry McDonnell (Notre Dame University).

I'm delighted to report that the article award committee has reached a unanimous decision. We have decided to award the Clifford Geertz Prize for the Best Article in the Sociology of Culture to: Marion Fourcade, UC Berkeley, for her article: "[Cents and Sensibility: Economic Valuation and the Nature of 'Nature'](#)" (*American Journal of Sociology* 2011). The committee was impressed by the creativity, internationally comparative nature and ambition represented by this project, and felt that it provides a great example of how thinking about culture can strengthen other areas of sociology, such as economic sociology.

We have also decided to award an Honorable Mention to: Amin Ghaziani and Delia Baldassarri for their article: "[Cultural Anchors and the Organization of Differences: A Multi-Method Analysis of LGBT Marches on Washington](#)," *American Sociological Review* (March 2011). We found the concept of "cultural anchors" to be an interesting and useful tool that we suspect will become widely used in the years to come.



Marion Fourcade
University of California,
Berkeley

2012 Mary Douglas Best Book Award

Committee: David Garland (Committee Chair, New York University), Teresa Gowan (University of Minnesota), Allison Pugh (University of Virginia), and Guobin Yang (University of Pennsylvania)

Mary Douglas award winner for 2012: Claudio E. Benzecry, *The Opera Fanatic: Ethnography of an Obsession* (Chicago 2011)

The Opera Fanatic is a beautiful book. A work of art as well as intellect, it conveys to its readers not just the fans' passionate love for their opera but also the author's love of his subject and his passion for understanding. The ethnography of a specific social world – the world of plebian opera devotees, waiting in line for discounted tickets, traveling together to far-flung theatres, gathered in the upper galleries of the legendary Colon Opera House in Buenos Aires – Benzecry's account nevertheless provides glimpses of aspects of the



Claudio Benzecry
University of Connecticut,
Storrs

human condition that we too often overlook: our capacity for love, for commitment, and for self-overcoming through devotion to an ideal. In the process, he develops a powerful set of arguments about the appropriation of culture and the relations between culture and class – arguments that challenge our dominant theories while opening up new lines of research on the formation of taste and its social uses.

Benzecry follows the daily routines, the social rituals, and the private ecstasies of his informants with deep sensitivity and understanding, providing us with an ethnography that is full of surprises, illuminations and a satisfying sense of insight into the lives of others. In the process, he gently but effectively pushes back against Bourdieu's account of taste as a mode of distinction, showing us instead some unexpected relations between high art and low socio-economic status, and revealing how sophisticated tastes come to be acquired not as means of domination and hierarchy but as forms of self-transcendence and belonging.

A study of self-fashioning through devotion, discipline, and sacrifice – repaid in enthrallment and epiphany – and a study of great music as a variety of religious experience, this is also a profoundly sociological study, showing the role of music in relations between people, in their relation to their nation and its history, and above all in the relations of devotees to themselves and to their conditions of life. It is an account of how people work to make their lives meaningful and social. An account that shows how passions can be cultivated, embodied in practices, and made central to one's life and identity.

Sociologists often study the passions of society, and yet in the studying, they sometimes squeeze all the passion out of it. *The Opera Fanatic* addresses central theoretical issues in the sociology of culture but its treatment is transcendent because Benzecry never loses sight of his informants' intense feeling for opera and its performance. *The Opera Fanatic* works powerfully as research and as narrative, not just because Benzecry manages to consider cultural content, cultural meaning, and culture-as-action all at once, but because he does so with a lyricism that inspires, and which exudes what Andrew Abbott called 'humane sympathy.' *The Opera Fanatic* is more than an in-depth ethnography of working class people who love opera in Argentina: it is sociology with heart.

Mary Douglas Prize 2012, Honorable Mention: Isaac Ariail Reed, *Interpretation and Social Knowledge: On the Use of Theory in the Human Sciences* (Chicago 2011)

Despite its brevity and accessibility, *Interpretation and Social Knowledge* is a work of sweeping ambition. It aims to change the self-understanding of the human sciences by offering a new account of the epistemological grounds on which social inquiry proceeds.

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("Mary Douglas Prize" Continued from page 3)

Though the book is written for a wide audience, sociologists of culture will find it of particular interest since Reed places "meaning-centered inquiry" at the very heart of the project of social explanation and causal analysis. As far as Reed is concerned, "cultural analysis" is less a sociological specialty than an indispensable component of social research.

Writing in an era when most sociologists find it easier to say which epistemologies they reject than to affirm the positions they embrace, Reed sets out a positive account of the terms upon which social inquiry can effectively proceed. In doing so, he deconstructs the usual antinomies between interpretation and explanation, culture and cause, meaning and power, and insists that, in the social world, meaning operates as a cause of acts and events – albeit a "forming" or framing cause rather than a "forcing" one – and will necessarily be an element of any adequate social explanation.

Reed identifies the character and logic of three different epistemic modes – the Realist, the Normative and the Interpretive – and shows us how each has a different way of employing theoretical abstractions to re-analyze and ultimately re-signify what we know about the world. Moving beyond these positions, he presents a new synthesis: a post-positivist epistemology for the human sciences that refuses to abandon realist causal claims and explanatory ambitions or to give up normative critique of the social world being studied.

In the process, he argues for a theoretical pluralism. Given that our social landscape is multi-dimensional and rendered meaningful in multiple ways, we should accept that it can be validly interpreted from more than one perspective. But he rejects the skepticism and relativism that often accompanies such pluralism, insisting that we can distinguish between better and worse interpretations, and between more and less valid causal accounts, and ought to do so on the basis of evidence and reasoning. Reed thereby extricates interpretivism from the defeatism of relativism while simultaneously showing why the critical realism underlining much historical-comparative work should not be confused with anti-theoretical or "positivist" empiricism.

In setting out these claims, Reed presents a series of engaged and engaging readings of exemplary sociological, anthropological and historical texts. Rather than philosophize about the terms on which social understanding might be attained, he examines the texts of leading interpreters of our social world – Geertz, Foucault, Marx, Habermas, Skocpol, among others – and traces how these writers shape the dialectic of evidence and theory, factual claims and interpretive claims, social description and social explanation. He roams across this terrain with extraordinary command, moving through a concise but resonant analysis of landmark works within each of the standard epistemic modes. The conclusions he draws, and the synthesis he presents, will be of interest to all sociologists, but especially to those of us who work in the sociology of culture.

Click on the books to order!



Reed's elegant writing mirrors his analysis in its clarity and precision, providing us with neat, insightful summaries of long-standing debates and accessible new paths through some difficult epistemological terrain. The result is a lively, sometimes brilliant, book that can be read with profit by anyone interested in the possibility – and the practice – of developing causal explanations of a meaningful social world.

Four Questions For...*Paul Lichterman*

- 1) **How did you become interested in the study of culture?** When I started graduate school, sociologists were used to dividing up the world into “big” forces called “social structure” and little social worlds of meaning and self. The studies I gravitated toward in my areas of interest, politics and social change, were asking about how images, communication, everyday customs influenced labor movements and revolutions. After about a year of fascination, I decided that Bourdieu was not going to be my grand guide to society (I figured it was better not to have a single guide), but I stayed interested in what sociologists now meant by “culture”; Berkeley was an excellent place to do that. Later, I was struck at how the organizational problems I saw and heard in grassroots environmental movements were like the problems I’d read about in earlier social movements. No one was pointing to this pink elephant in the room, and it seemed like an aspect of “culture,” but different from the symbol systems or discourses that sociologists tended to focus on when they studied culture then.
- 2) **What kind of work does culture do in your thinking?** Culture does more than one thing in my work. Partly, it’s a way of talking about patterns in how people coordinate action together in everyday settings. I’ve referred to these sometimes deeply held, habitual ways of coordinating group action as group styles. Culture also includes the vocabularies that both orient people and give them reasons for doing things, individually and collectively. Group styles orient people too, sometimes very powerfully. The same reasons or discourses or traditions mean different things, within limits, depending on what those people assume they are doing together. At a “higher” level, culture helps shape institutions over time as it also is shaped by them.
- 3) **What are some of the benefits and limitations to using culture in this way?** So far I probably sound like someone who grew up academically with cultural sociology’s terms of art. It’s true that I’m less bothered than some by the proliferation of terms for culture. I think it actually would be better to talk somewhat less about “culture” and more specifically about what *kind* of culture we are studying. Put differently, I drank the joy-juice, joined the culture section while a grad student, and think the intellectual agendas people pursue in it are exciting and still developing. But I do think we should be very concerned about excessive terminological baggage. When I teach a graduate seminar in cultural sociology, we spend a lot of time talking about the different assumptions behind different culture concepts, how and why (if at all) to use one culture concept rather than another for different kinds of questions. Fine distinctions in the realm of culture can be as useful empirically and theoretically as fine distinctions we’ve long valued in other parts of the sociological enterprise: Culture needn’t be “one thing.”
- 4) **How does your approach to culture shape the types of research topics and settings?** I’ve usually chosen everyday settings of political or civic action—activist coalitions, religious volunteer groups, affordable housing non-profits, for instance. I want to find meaningful patterns that organize how people do citizenship, how they make things political, or not-political. I’m interested in how different political practices travel or get sequestered in the public arena so my research topics lately include large networks of organizations as well as single group sites. Cultural analysts of everyday life still have lots to do.



Feature Article:

“In this election season: A plea for a cultural sociology that matters”

Michèle Lamont, Harvard University

In recent years, a number of cultural sociologists have turned their attention to the symbolic aspects of politics (most recently, Alexander 2010) and we have seen the multiplication of a rich cultural sociology of politics and democracy, as described by Francesca Polletta in a [recent issue of the *Culture Newsletter*](#) (2012). In many ways, the present moment could be viewed as the coming of age of a successful marriage between cultural sociology and politics. Yet, in this election season, it may be useful to ask ourselves if we have done enough. I don't think we have.

Many of us felt mortified when on a July trip to Israel, Mitt Romney explained from the terrace of the King David Hotel that the economic under-development of the West Bank is due to “the culture” of Palestinians. And some of us were relieved when Angela Merkel urged her co-citizens to be more emphatic toward Greek people who live in a “different reality.” The political uses of cultural arguments deployed by the likes of Romney and Merkel have a very real social impact and are meant to sway the opinion in incessant battles around boundary work about “who is worthy?” This is where the rubber hits the road: concepts of what culture means and how it works permeate the media.

Nothing new here, yet members of our tribe too often forget that what we and other scholars do matters politically. Too often, we are seduced into producing increasingly sophisticated essays and books and impressing one another with our wit, theoretical acumen and incisive analytic interventions. This dynamic was probably functional when cultural sociology was in the process of becoming the powerhouse that it is now, one of the largest and most vibrant sections of the ASA.

But over the last few years I've become convinced that to avoid self-congratulatory sterility, and eventually, obsolescence, we need to reach beyond our tribe. We need to intervene regularly in public debates, so as to help our co-citizens learn to think about culture better – in less essentialist ways. We need to be more militant when it comes to influencing how opinion and policy makers think about the role of culture (both big and small “c”) in shaping social problems. This is what gives social meaning to our work, beyond the pleasures that we can derive from it. It is particularly crucial to reflect on this very topic at the eve of a national presidential election where the significance of every fact is up for grabs, as are the facts themselves (I am writing the day after Paul Ryan gave a speech at the Republican National Convention peppered with lies about Obama's record, as if “what happened” did not matter a bit....)

Pursuing this path can create difficulties, however. When I wrote a few pieces with Mario Small and David Harding meant for demographers, economists, epidemiologists and others non-expert in culture (Lamont and Small 2008; Harding, Lamont and Small 2011), I was taking the risk that fellow cultural sociologists would not understand why we wrote in such a rudimentary fashion about key concepts in our subfield (e.g., the concepts of frames, repertoires, institutions, boundaries and identity). We were also taking the risk of being associated with conservative forces, since radical students of poverty had declared any reference to culture as guilty “by association” for blaming the victim (the main criticism address to the Moynihan report which concerned the cycle of poverty of low-income black families). Yet, it is out of the conviction that we needed to export beyond our subfield the conceptual gains of the last thirty years, that we proceeded with these publications, guided in part by the faith that conceptual frameworks had developed so much since the Moynihan report that there was no risk that our analysis would be misinterpreted. To diffuse our work, David Harding organized in Washington, D. C., a Congressional hearing targeting congressional aides, including those who do much of the background work for elected officials who legislate on matters of inequality and poverty. The [New York Times front-page coverage](#) for this event did not do justice to our agenda to lead policy-makers and the general public toward thinking about culture and causality in less simplistic ways. Yet it did get the ball rolling in some direction.

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Junior Scholar Spotlight: Christina Simko

Christina Simko is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Virginia and a dissertation fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture. Her dissertation, "Mourning and Memory: September 11 Rhetoric as American Theodicy," examines political and commemorative rhetoric articulated in response to the events of September 11, 2001.

Taking up Weber's argument that human suffering creates the demand for theodicies—cultural vocabularies, religious or secular, that explain perceived injustices—Christina interprets 9/11 rhetoric through this lens. She builds on a growing body of literature that conceptualizes meaning as an end of politics in and of itself, arguing that contemporary politicians face the imperative to address the problem of theodicy—to provide explanation and consolation for collective suffering. Such efforts, she finds, generally turn in a retrospective direction. In the case of September 11, speakers draw upon symbolic frameworks from the Declaration of Independence, the Gettysburg Address, Pearl Harbor, and other pivotal moments in U.S. history in order to interpret the present. Thus, Christina's dissertation identifies and explains the theodicies deployed in 9/11 rhetoric, historicizes these theodicies, and, more broadly, works to develop an approach to cultural analysis that is both meaning-centered and historical.

Christina's article, "Rhetorics of Suffering: September 11 Commemorations as Theodicy," identifies divergent theodicies that have emerged in 9/11 commemorations over the past decade and develops a framework for explaining this divergence. It will appear in the *American Sociological Review* in December 2012.

Currently, she is working on an article that examines how speakers at 9/11 commemorations appropriate symbolic frameworks from Lincoln's Gettysburg Address in order to interpret the present and figure the future. She is also collaborating with Jeffrey Olick on work on that extends and elaborates the argument for more rigorous attention to the Weberian concept of theodicy in contemporary sociology.



2012 Suzanne Langer Prize for Best Student Paper

Committee: Shaul Kelner (Committee Chair, Vanderbilt University), Avi Astor (Pompeu Fabra University), Isaac Reed (University of Colorado at Boulder)

We are pleased to present the 2012 Suzanne Langer Prize for Best Student Paper to Christina Simko (University of Virginia), for her paper, "[Rhetorics of Suffering: September 11 Commemorations as Theodicy](#)." Comparing memorial practices at Manhattan's Ground Zero, the Pentagon, and Shanksville, Pennsylvania, Simko's work deepens our understanding of how social and institutional contexts have shaped cultural interpretations of 9/11, one of the most powerful events in recent history. The paper draws deep into the wells of the discipline's theoretical tradition, recovering the Weberian concept of theodicy, tracing the concept's history through nearly a century of sociological thought, and rethinking the concept to bring a fresh and theoretically sophisticated perspective to the study of memorialization and commemoration. Simko's theorization of theodicy enables her to present an innovative twist on Griswold's "cultural diamond" that succeeds in explaining cross-site variation in 9/11 commemoration based on an interplay between the event, carrier groups, audiences, and genre memory. The model is generalizable, and holds promise for future research on collective memory and commemoration.

HONORABLE MENTIONS: We are pleased to name Margaret Frye's "[Bright Futures in Malawi's New Dawn: Educational Aspirations as Assertions of Identity](#)" as an honorable mention for the 2012 Suzanne Langer Prize for Best Student Paper. Frye's article, which was published in the May 2012 issue of the *American Journal of Sociology*, resolves a conundrum. Contemporary research on youth aspirations has tended to be framed by rational choice models. Yet this body of work has struggled to explain why research has repeatedly shown young people to be more optimistic about their future than their objective opportunities would suggest. In crisp prose, and with an interesting case study of female students in Malawi whose social conditions would seem to foster pessimism or even cynicism, Frye shows that expectations of bright futures are less statements about the future per se than they are assertions of identity in the present. Drawing creatively on pragmatist theory and cognitive sociology, Frye's analysis is a fine use of cultural sociology to reveal the meaning in behaviors that many have dismissed as irrational.

We are pleased to name Benjamin Snyder's "The Culture of Vigilance: Rethinking Clock Time and the Self" as an honorable mention for the 2012 Suzanne Langer Prize for Best Student Paper. Snyder's work takes up the classic sociological question of the relationship between instrumental rationality and modernity, examining the emergence of clock time in the culture of religious vigilance originally developed by Benedictine monks. The paper's empirical scope and theoretical sophistication account for its strong contributions to current theorizations of time, culture, and action, even as the paper exemplifies the impact that cultural sociology can and should have on historical sociology and social theory.

Culture Program Focus

Culture Warriors: Cultural Sociology at Notre Dame University

[Omar Lizardo](#) and [Terence McDonnell](#)

The department of sociology at the University of Notre Dame has traditionally been recognized for its continuing strengths in the Sociology of Religion, the Sociology of Education, and the study of Social Movements and Political Sociology. In recent years, Notre Dame has managed to firmly establish itself as a hub for excellence in Cultural Sociology, to the point where it is safe to consider Notre Dame one of the few places that can call themselves “culture departments” without danger of stretching the meaning of that term. The establishment of a regular “culture workshop” in the fall of 2011 under Terence McDonnell’s leadership has provided an institutional home for the cadre of faculty and graduate students interested in culture at Notre Dame, providing a formal stamp to what was already a vibrant intellectual strand within the department.

If there is one distinctive feature of cultural sociology at Notre Dame is its methodological and substantive breadth. At Notre Dame, rather than engaging in a self-containment strategy, the study of culture necessarily spills over to a wide variety of cognate subject areas in sociology, without much respect for the standard methodological boundaries. This is most clearly exemplified in the propensity of both faculty and graduate students to attempt to connect the sociological study of culture with questions and research problems at the intersection of various subfields within sociology. These include the study of culture in economic life, culture and materiality studies, the study of political culture from a comparative/historical perspective, the role of culture in stratification processes, the study of culture and cognition, the role of culture in social movements, culture at the level of micro-interaction processes and culture and social networks (among others).

The diverse interests and approaches of the three core culture faculty—Lyn Spillman, Terence McDonnell and Omar Lizardo—are emblematic of this distinctive character of cultural sociology at Notre Dame.

Lyn Spillman’s research is concerned with how meaning-making processes interact with macro-historical patterns of social and cultural change, with a special attention to political and economic culture. Her research on economic culture has dealt with the cultural dimensions of comparative economic governance, industries, organizations, professions and nonprofits, and her interest in political culture has generated work on interest groups, nationalism, national identity, and collective memory. These two strands are exemplified in her two major books; *Nation and Commemoration* (1997), a comparative study of national identity formation and collective memory in Australia and the United States, and more recently in *Solidarity in Strategy: Making Business Meaningful in American Trade Associations* (2012) a ground-breaking new study of how the relations among trade associations at the heart of the American economy are structured as much by concerns for sociability and collective identity formation as they are by “self-interest.” In addition to these substantive contributions, Spillman has also done some fundamental theoretical work on the relationship between cultural meanings and social structure and the cultural foundations of markets. She has also made contributions to some central methodological issues on the logic of casual reasoning and explanation in the cultural and historical sociology.

Terry McDonnell studies the everyday life of cultural objects, explaining how objects come to gain and lose cultural power. His current research examines HIV/AIDS media campaigns in Ghana. With his concept of cultural entropy, McDonnell describes how the intended meanings and uses for cultural objects—like AIDS prevention billboards—fracture into a chaos of alternative meanings, new practices, failed interactions, and blatant disregard. As his 2010 publication in *The American Journal of Sociology* implies, materiality is at the center of this process of entropy. McDonnell has plans to extend his interests in entropy to understand the failure and unexpected success of other instrumental uses of culture like advertisements, political campaigns, and social movement protests. Beyond his research on entropy and materiality, McDonnell has ongoing research on the power of cultural forms like irony in ACT UP’s protest art and street theatre, the waxing and waning of powerful symbols like the red ribbon, and how cultural institutions like art museums use metaphor when responding to moments of crisis.

Omar Lizardo’s work deals with both theoretical and substantive issues in the study of culture and stratification, culture and social networks and culture and cognition. His work combines quantitative

methodological strategies with detailed attention to generative mechanisms in the study of the relationship between cultural tastes, lifestyle practices and social networks. This has taken the form of conceptual contributions to work on the relationship of culture consumption and status rank in the contemporary context (*Sociologica* 2008) and the problem (with Sara Skiles) of the origins and dynamics of the “omnivorousness” phenomenon (*Sociological Theory*, forthcoming). A related line of work brings together concerns with the role of cultural tastes and lifestyle practices in stratification processes with the links between culture and social networks. This has resulted in work demonstrating a link between variety of culture consumption practices and network size and range, network use and local structure. Lizardo’s more theoretical work on the culture and cognition linkage seeks to specify a practice theoretical approach to the theory of action using insights from cognitive science and neuroscience. One empirical outcome of this efforts is a paper (*Social Forces* 2010) with Stephen Vaisey that links cultural worldviews with dynamic changes in the composition of personal networks among adolescents.

In Christian Smith and Eugene Halton Notre Dame can be said to have its own proponents of a “strong program” in cultural studies. Culture takes center stage in Christian Smith’s work on religion, morality, and personhood. This is clear in his call for a “thickly culturalist” approach to understanding the role of culture in human motivation in *Moral, Believing Animals* (2003) and more recently in *What is a Person?* (2010). Eugene Halton’s critical work on material culture and consumption in *The Meaning of Things* (1986) and *The Great Brain Suck* (2008) as well as his theoretical work in *Meaning and Modernity* (1986) and subsequent series of articles arguing for a neo-pragmatist semiotics also make a plea to returning to a strong conceptualization of culture, one that recovers the “cultic” roots of culture in lived experience and that takes seriously the idea that culture entails some measure of “cultivation” at an embodied level.

Other Faculty at Notre Dame place culture at the center of their approach to the study of a broad array of subject matter. Robert Fishman’s recent work on civic and political culture in post-revolution Portugal (see “Democratic practice after the revolution: the case of Portugal and beyond” *Politics and Society*, 2011) draws on recent calls to consider culture as not only embodied in explicit symbols, but also carried by the “implicit culture” evident in routine practices of civic participation and commemoration. In an ongoing collaborative project, Fishman and Lizardo bring together their respective interests to examine the consequences of Portugal and Spain’s divergent democratization pathways on generation-specific divergences in patterns of cultural taste among cohorts born after democracy. They show, using a mixed methods methodological strategy how the distinct politico-cultural fate of each Iberian neighbor left an imprint on the logic of educational institutions and how that has resulted in the creation of distinct culture consuming publics across the two cases.

Erika Summer-Effler, in *Laughing Saints and Righteous Heroes* (2010) has made important contributions on small group cultures and emotions in social movements, with particular attention to how groups stay motivated in the face of repeated failures and internal conflict. Mary Ellen Konieczny, in *The Spirit’s Tether: Religion, the Family, and Moral Polarization among American Catholics* (forthcoming from Oxford University Press) combines an appreciation for the power of the religious symbolism inherent in the material culture of parishes with careful attention to the construction of opposing moral and political cultures around distinct conceptualizations of family life. She brings the same attention to the power of space and materiality in her current work on commemoration and symbolic politics of the Cadet Chapel in the Air Force Academy. Erin McDonnell’s work in on the economic sector of the Ghanaian state realizes the origins of bureaucracy in subcultures, suggesting that state development begins in deviant pockets of excellence with a shared *esprit de corps*. In addition, in a forthcoming paper in *American Journal of Sociology*, she advances theoretical work on Weber’s concept of the “budgetary unit” proposing a new way of understanding household consumption by focusing on the social organization of purchasing decisions, going beyond the notion of consumption as having a purely symbolic character.

We are fortunate to have a group of bright, dedicated, and collegial graduate students engaged in innovative work in culture. Melissa Pirkey is bringing theories of organizational culture to bear on exchange theory through an ethnographic account of a volunteer-based, nonprofit farm. Justin Farrell, who has done award-winning work on how moral worldviews impact collective participation in environmental movements, examines how the moral claims-making in environmental conflicts over Yellowstone stem from the embodied practices of “Old West” ranchers, farmers, hunters versus the “New West” environmentalists and recreation-oriented hikers, photographers and the like. Ana Velitchkova’s uses a four-case cross-national comparison of the adaptation and institutionalization of Esperanto as a way to understand how political structures in Eastern Europe affected citizens’ capacity to create a shared cosmopolitan culture. Sara Skiles NSF-funded dissertation work is a creative attempt to use vignettes survey experiments to shed empirical light on of the most often noted but least empirical explored aspects of Bourdieu’s argument in *Distinction*: that personal expressions of tastes are affected by relational information regarding the taste expressions of others located in different positions in social space.

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Amuses

Recent articles collected and reviewed by the Newsletter Graduate Student Editors,
Allan Hyde, Tricia Tiamzon, & Mary Larue Scherer

Berman, Elizabeth Popp. 2012. "[Explaining the move toward the market in US academic science: how institutional logics can change without institutional entrepreneurs.](#)" *Theory & Society* 41: 261-299.

The "corporatization of the university" is a phrase we all should be familiar with—it has been bandied about in the popular press and is the subject of a number of books and studies. While we might have an understanding of what this shift toward market logic looks like, how it came about is probably more vague. Berman fills in this picture through comparative case studies of the institutionalization of faculty entrepreneurship, university patenting, and university-industry research centers. These three practices mark the shift to market logic in academic science—the beginning of equating the value of science with economic value. Challenging the focus on institutional entrepreneurs as the force behind change, she argues for a practice selection model of change that considers the landscape of practices that individuals can use to solve local problems, as well as the external conditions that supplement institutionalization.

Although academic science has always drawn from multiple logics, it was not until the late 1970s that market logic gained prominence. Before then there had been a number of market-based "experiments," including research parks and the formalization of university-industry relationships. These were not widely adopted, and most were unsustainable due to resource limitations and regulation that prevented the patenting of federally-funded research. However, as political discourse increasingly centered on innovation as the panacea for the economic downturn, the possibilities to extract economic value from the sciences expanded. The passage of the Bayh-Dole Act in 1980 reversed patent restrictions, and along with a number of other policies that enhanced intellectual property rights, created external conditions that favored the shift toward market logic. Today, the contraction of tenure-track positions and sunseting of programs and departments that lack clear economic value reflect the growing influence of market logics in academia. Berman helps us think through the causes, both internal and external, of this institutional change.

Harkness, Geoff. 2012. "[True School: Situational Authenticity in Chicago's Hip-Hop Underground.](#)" *Cultural Sociology* 6(3): 283-298.

American hip-hop artist Eminem is probably best known as the first white rapper to become internationally prominent. The semiautobiographical film *8 Mile* portrays the ridicule and hostility Eminem faces in Detroit's all-black hip-hop community. Insightfully, authenticity is at the heart of these struggles, the lyrics hurled in the "battles" revealing how hip-hop is tightly policed along the lines of race and class. Eminem argued—ultimately persuasively—that growing up in abject poverty with a dysfunctional family qualified him as authentic and worthy of acceptance by the traditionally black, urban hip-hop community. Policing hip-hop's borders for transgressors of authenticity is a complex cultural practice, one which Eminem's story only skims. In Chicago's Humboldt Park, hip-hop outsiders are not simply whites: female and suburban rappers-- deemed inauthentic by black, urban male insiders-- also navigate the cultural boundaries and vie for the authenticity stamp-of-approval. Geoff Harkness' extensive qualitative data shows that the boundaries of authentic hip-hop are porous in some situations, allowing outsiders more identity fluidity. Outsiders negotiate their acceptance using the more interpretive aspects of authenticity (eg. a suburbanite rapping about poverty and concrete wastelands outside the city limits), thereby "reordering the normative cluster of conditions to suit their own habitus" (288). Being highly skilled or committed to underground (noncommercial) hip-hop are other examples of interpretive elements of authenticity, deployed to counteract the more fixed markers of race and gender. One white male Chicago rapper emphasized his loyal "representing" of hip-hop culture and "trueness to himself", gaining him admittance to what he termed hip-hop's "true school." In general, recent authenticity literature has been concerned with cultural appropriation, mass-marketing tactics, morality, and rejected claims to authenticity. Reconceptualizing authenticity as situational—in which sincere bids for authenticity are granted when the situation is successfully navigated-- has implications for culture far beyond hip-hop.

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Miles, Steven. 2012. "[The neoliberal city and the proactive complicity of the citizen consumer.](#)" *Journal of Consumer Culture* 12(2): 216-230.

Consumers: dupes of the neoliberal city or agents engaging in an alternative form of citizenship? Miles offers a critical review of the literature on consumption and cities, pushing for fuller recognition that "the neoliberal city is ideologically...a two-way street" (p. 228). Previous work focused on the neoliberal city as an expression of the coercive state, which obscured control with the apparent freedom to consume. Others have acknowledged its complexities as a site of political contestation. Paralleling the practice turn in cultural sociology, Miles interrogates the roles of meaning and pleasure, restoring some degree of agency to the consumer. Further, he argues that consumption can be construed as a form of citizenship as individuals mediate their public life through the market more so than the state. Indeed, as a consumer myself, I cling to the hope that choices I make do have some sort of real meaning and are not simply manifestations of neoliberal logic. Studies of consumer culture should attend more to the lived realities of consumption, even as they are constrained.

Dominguez Rubio, Fernando. 2012. "[The Material Production of the Spiral Jetty: A Study of Culture in the Making.](#)" *Cultural Sociology* 6:143-61.

Since many of us are consumers and not producers of art, we tend to see the end product and take for granted the process of the material production of art. Even in the realm of sociology, Dominguez Rubio (2012) argues that studies tend to focus on the social factors affecting artistic production, such as Bourdieu's studies of the field of cultural production; however, actual artistic production is often overlooked. Dominguez Rubio attempts to open the "black box" of artistic production by highlighting the material practices and the morphogenetic processes used in the creation of the Spiral Jetty by Robert Smithson. As part of the "earthwork movement", the Spiral Jetty was created to blend art and nature together as one. Dominguez Rubio shows that Smithson not only had to negotiate with "nature" as a material, but also the mechanical equipment and workers, in this process. While other forms of art may not require as many additional workers or as much material manipulation as the Spiral Jetty, this article shows that art is a negotiation and that the plan and the final product do not always match up perfectly in the process of artistic production. And for those of us who are not artists, this article can also build appreciation for artists and the art process.

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"Culture Meets... Politics"
Joshua Pacewicz, Brown University

Even though summer is at its end, let's daydream about a vacation in a neighboring discipline: anthropology. Of course, there are many reasons why a look at how anthropologists think about political culture could be interesting for us, and – much to our own chagrin – we should therefore bring our own work along. Figures like Geertz, Levi-Straus, and Saussure were seminal within sociology's cultural turn and partially laid the foundations for debates that cultural and political sociologists would later have. But my intention here is not to look into anthropology as a crystal ball, but as a mirror wherein changes in how sociologists approach political culture come into sharper relief.

In particular, it is useful to contrast two books: Marshall Sahlin's 1974 classic *Culture and Practical Reason* and William Mazzarella's *Shoveling Smoke: Advertising and Globalization in Contemporary India*, published nearly three decades later in 2003. Both books take consumer goods and advertising as their subject and focus on the relationship between forms of subjectivity and enduring economic and political relationships (i.e. the kinds of "structures" sometimes contrasted to culture).

Sahlin's exposition is motivated by an effort to exorcise the Marxist ghost and establish that culture is irreducible to political economies or other "material relations." He takes the reader through a series of thought exercises: why do we eat cows but not horses? Why is silk more feminine than wool? Ultimately, such examples reveal the existence of an autonomous cultural "grid," which evolves according to its own logic, but also functions as an organizing principle for other spheres of human activity. This leads Sahlin to formulate the classic analogy of culture as sculptor: material relationships, Sahlin argues, are merely stone, which is transformed into statue only by the "genius of the sculptor" (i.e. culture).

Sahlin's formulation is undoubtedly prescient. It places culture and material structures on a plane of ontological parity and establishes their relationship as co-constitutive: without sculptor or stone, clearly, we would not have sculpture. Indeed, it is difficult to find a sociologist today who would seriously dispute that social phenomenon are partially defined by the subjectivity of social actors. At the same time, the formulation is telling in its subtext: Sahlin leaves little mystery about which of these two characters – sculptor or stone – the reader is meant to find more compelling. The stone is static and uninteresting, the sculptor it's dynamic, not-so-subtly anthropomorphized cousin. As a creative spirit, the sculptor is also motivated by an other-worldly, even god-like, impulse – one never completely amenable to social scientific analysis.

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One can analyze the sculptor, but one is also tempted to just sit in awe of the creative capacity itself. Consider Sahlin’s characterization of the advertiser: a transcendental figure that refashions the cultural grid and gives it material form.

Contrast this model of culture to Mazzarella’s ethnographic account of advertising agencies in Bombay. As the author makes clear, Indian advertisers are an endangered professional class, trapped between two bureaucratic behemoths: the Indian state, which initially has the power to hamstring them with regulations, and “the hub,” or Western multinational corporations who pay for their services. Much of the book covers missteps along the way as advertising professionals negotiate this role; during the developmentalist 1970s, for example, they present themselves as agents of consumer education and autarchy. By the time we meet them, advertisers present -- or perhaps market -- themselves as guardians of an Indian citizen-consumer: a uniquely Indian actor, whose uniqueness lies not in the austere ideologies of India’s struggles for political independence, but in post-ideological – but culturally specific -- sensual pleasures. The Indian citizen-consumer craves Tandoori Pizza, KamaSutra condoms, and other consumer goods that advertisers are happy to market.

Relative to Sahlin’s, one is struck by the fact that Mazzarella is decidedly less enamored with culture. In fact, the word “culture” rarely appears in the book at all. Rather, the genius of the book lies in an ethnographic analysis of how the cultural category of Indian consumer allows advertisers to negotiate their tenuous political and economic position. What is interesting here is not the sculptor, but the stone. To the state, advertisers become defenders of Indian identity against Western-led globalization. To the hub, they become owners of a proprietary commodity: Indian uniqueness. Where it does appear, culture is not a transcendent cultural grid that spans and infuses Indian society, but rather something of a con-job.

Consider a youth-directed campaign that advertisers launch on behalf of a Western soft-drink. They begin with market research and ask Indian youth what they do for fun. Responses range as follows: “loud music, wild dance, costume, make-up, on the phone for too long...break valuable glass, tear books, play with fire, ride bike...at 80mph, put hand into electrical plugs” (2003, 232). Indian teens, it seems, like to keep it real. But consider the crisis for the advertisers: real Indian fun, or at least a satirical version thereof, is unusable in the family-friendly campaign intended by the hub. They scour reports and discover that Indian teens are marginally more likely to mention family time as fun. From this, the narrative becomes that Indian teens do not rebel against family, and – eventually – that “there is no Indian generation X.” A genre of wholesome advertising follows, which is creepily reminiscent of American beach-movies from the 1950s.

What is noteworthy about Mazzarella’s account is not that it begins from a fundamentally different model of economy, politics, and culture than Sahlin’s. Advertisers do interpret and reinterpret a cultural grind, and even give it material expression. Crucially, however, Mazzarella shows that advertisers do not connect culture to political economy writ large, but rather operate within particular sites wherein material constraints interact in complicated, often counter-intuitive ways. The book is not macroscopic, but rather focuses upon the site where the rubber hits the road. Here, the advertiser appears not an authoritative agent of cultural production, but rather a bumbler confronted by a set of economic and political relations that ordinarily hover just outside of human comprehension, but become consequential in the act of cultural production itself. The stone starts to look more interesting, because the process of cultural production appears as a dialectic that is both culturally and materially constituted.

A similar development is evident within sociological studies of political culture. Here, one could hardly pick a more compelling baseline than the Skocpol-Sewell debate about the role of ideology within the French Revolution (1985). The debate arose over Skocpol’s *States and Social Revolutions*, wherein she famously argues that researchers should “rise above” the “viewpoints of the participants” (1979, 18). Although Skocpol partially backs away from this “structural determinism,” she nevertheless expresses reservations about the causal role of culture: “Dangerous pitfalls lurk when students of complex, changing, highly stratified sociopolitical orders rely upon anthropological ideas about cultural systems,” she writes, “[researchers] are not well served by supposing that sets of ideas – whether intellectual productions or cultural frameworks of a more informal sort -- are ‘constitutive of social order.’” (1985, 90-1).

Sewell’s argument proceeds along the lines of Sahlin’s, in that he establishes the “autonomous role of ideology” in the French Revolution (1985, 58). Much as with Sahlin’s, however, the interesting aspects of the argument revolve around everything that this cultural turn connotes. The medium of Sewell’s argument is largely its message: a stunning historical ethnography of the lead-up to the French revolution. One appreciates the frustration that the monarch must have felt when the nobility, the highest orders of feudal society, suddenly begin to attend salons and parrot Enlightenment ideals. One is shocked by sudden efforts to re-order the world – units of measurement, the names of days and months, even time itself – to accord with Enlightenment principles. Sewell’s cultural approach effectively re-casts the French revolution as a contested and contingent process. Accordingly, one sees the roots of many ideas that now captivate sociologists: Sewell’s analysis is narrative-driven, it is full of turning points, institutional constraints and contradictions, and offers a processual account as an explanatory framework. Such insights, however, get smuggled in with a notion of culture as prime mover that is nothing if not reminiscent of Sahlin’s sculptor and which is sometimes embodied in people. Consider Sewell’s claim that Robespierre “[became] an embodiment of revolutionary ideology. Revolutionary ideology itself, not Robespierre, was the significant historical actor.” (1985, 73).

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Contrast this formulation to two recent studies of political culture: Mara Loveman’s account of Brazil’s little-known (in the U.S.) war of the wasps (2005) and George Steinmetz’s account of German colonial policy (2008). Loveman argues that the war of the wasps represented a missed opportunity to consolidate the Brazilian state via civil registration. The Brazilian monarch imagined that he was governing a European-like state and attempted to enact civic registration through functionaries rather than clergy, an effort that one contemporary observer described as “a lovely ideal, with no base in reality” (2005, 1674). The populace, which had no exposure to state-like institutions, interpreted the registration effort as forced conscription or even a precursor to enslavement, and the effort failed. Similarly, Steinmetz argues that German colonial policy arose out of different cultural models of the colonized. These models, however, were embedded in complex relationships between the German civil service and colonial administrators. The civil service was profoundly confused by the colonies, and the administrators, although equally confused, nevertheless established their legitimacy by claiming to understand the colonized. Steinmetz shows how such administrator–civil service interactions produced different understandings of the colonial subject, and hence radically different colonial policies.

Such studies may illustrate Sewell’s insistence upon the causal role of culture, but they also analyze this causal role as enmeshed within a political and economic dialectic. Like Mazzarella, they revel in an exploration of structural factors that are more stone-like than sculptor-like. Loveman’s analysis illustrates a failed cultural transposition: the Brazilian monarch’s idea of statehood was consonant with models employed by European monarchs, but grafted onto the realities of Brazilian life in a manner that produced chaos. Similarly, Steinmetz shows how political machinations within the German state validated different models of the colonized. Note also the decidedly dour conception of the social actor. Gone is any semblance of an authoritative agent who, like Sewell’s Robespierre, becomes an embodiment of this or that revolutionary ideology. Rather, actors in recent studies often appear confused by a world that defies comprehension and wherein efforts at cultural production yield surprising outcomes. Consider, for example, the introduction to Tom Medvetz’s (2012) recent book on right-wing think tanks: an interview with Charles Murray, a right-wing ideologue who failed as an academic, bounced around policy institutes for years, and found recognition through think-tanks only later in life. Murray recalls watching an interview with Bill Clinton, who suddenly began to discuss Murray’s ideas on welfare, concluding that Murray has convinced him to change his own position. “You sort of imagine us drinking beer in the college dorm together or something,” Murray recalled, “[but] we had never met. ‘We’ve had a lot of disagreements over the years, but I think he’s done the country a real service.’ I was watching the TV and I said, ‘Holy shit.’”

One sees similar efforts to ground political culture within a material dialectic in other areas of political sociology. Consider, for example, renewed interest in political parties, veto points, taxation systems and other political structures. At first blush, this appears as a turn away from culture, but sociologists use such tools to show how political institutions normalize models of economic and racial equality (Skrentny 2006; Chen 2007; Martin 2010). One sees a similar move within studies that show how institutional accounting techniques reorder the values assigned to institutional practices (Espeland and Sauder 2007). In urban politics too, I have shown that efforts to repackage the city to appeal to bond market investors transform local understandings of political legitimacy (forthcoming). Similar developments have occurred in civil society studies, which were long influenced by Putnam’s identification of civic culture with a democratic panacea. In contrast to Putnam’s upbeat culturalism, recent studies file in dejected, sometimes scowling like teenagers. Eliasoph (2011), for example, argues that efforts at inclusive democracy are often structured in ways that alienate civic participants in practice. A new edited volume on civic participation asks if “participation is the new tyranny?” and proposes four new areas of inquiry: participation in economic development programs, state-mandated participation, elite efforts to mobilize the public for instrumental ends, and professionally mediated public deliberation (Walker, McQuarrie and Lee, forthcoming).

Finally, one sees passing references to a “post-cultural turn” (Lizardo 2011), and efforts to redefine material interests as culturally constituted (Swedberg 2005; Spillman 2012) and political culture as materially constituted. Zubrzycki (2010, 24), for example, argues that Polish nationalism is predicated upon contradictory cultural models, which are only made whole when “embedded in visual images...material artifacts...sounds, textures, smells, and even tastes.” As in anthropology, heroic images of political culture as a prime mover have faded in sociology, but political culture remains at the front and center of the agenda. The starry-eyed romance may be ending, but that is merely the next phase in a maturing relationship.



Michael G. Flaherty’s book, *The Textures of Time: Agency and Temporal Experience* (Temple University Press, 2011), won the 2012 Charles Horton Cooley Award from the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction

(“In this election season” Continued from Page 6)

This work built on material that Mario Small and I wrote for the 2011 annual UNESCO report on cultural diversity – certainly one official document where cultural sociology had to be present (Lamont and Small 2007; 2010). These various projects were explicitly, for me at least, experiments in cultural intervention. While they shared elements with Michael Burawoy’s widely publicized call for a public sociology, it also engaged mainstream institutions with gusto.

A second endeavor was to accept an invitation to co-lead a group of social scientists in using the tools of institutional and cultural analysis to reflect on the dimensions by which one may define a successful society (including dimensions such as social inclusion, recognition, diversity, low intergroup conflict etc., where meaning-making plays a central role). While some of the scholars involved are members of our tribe (Ann Swidler and Bill Sewell in particular), others are human development experts, epidemiologists, political scientists, criminologists and geographers. For more details, see [here](#).

At the onset of this project in 2003, most of us looked at the notion of “societal success” with suspicion, but we came to think of it as a useful way to consider normative issues that remain unavoidable for social scientists: what kind of society are we pushing for anyway? Some of these are explored in our forthcoming book *Social Resilience in the Neo-Liberal Age* (Hall and Lamont forthcoming A), which builds on our 2008 book *Successful Societies* (Hall and Lamont 2009). Both books aim to broaden the interdisciplinary dialogue about inequality and its consequences – for instance by engaging epidemiologists (working on “the wear and tear of everyday life” produced by inequality on health) with the notion of identity and collective imaginaries, and open-minded political scientists with new developments in our subfield (Hall and Lamont forthcoming B).

There again, the purpose was to rattle the cage and to generate new conversations, which lead to a third experiment: after a presentation of the first *Successful Societies* book to the World Bank, I was asked to develop a conceptual framework for understanding the impact of the crisis on youth in the Global South with a group of development economists and human development experts. The result is probably the only World Bank document where the words “recognition” and “cultural repertoire” appears (Wuermli et al 2012). Getting these concepts into the report was worth the risk --especially as an essential complement to the far more predominant language of human capital and Heckman-inspired references to non-cognitive abilities. This is not much, but this particular experiment may have contributed in small ways to tilting predominant analytical frames toward a direction that we, cultural sociologists, would find more satisfying.

These interdisciplinary projects do require sacrificing some conceptual nuances for the sake of communication (one has to give and take for such collaborations to work). But in my view the attempt to influence public conversations is worth sacrificing a bit of conceptual purity. Yet, this does not preclude one from continuing to write for experts in other venues, as I did most recently in a more challenging piece on valuation and evaluative cultures written for *Annual Review of Sociology* (Lamont 2012). The degree of abstraction of the argument deployed there would be entirely inappropriate in the context of an interdisciplinary exchange, or an exchange with policy-makers. But as Charles Tilly once explained to me, it is possible to work on several desks at once. What is written at one table can coexist with what is written at another – they do not have to be in a zero-sum relationship with one another.

A fourth experience with reaching beyond our tribe came from my involvement in the 2008 multidisciplinary report on the evaluation of qualitative research at the National Science Foundation (Lamont and White 2008). Here again, the purpose was largely political. When NSF administrators asked me to take the lead in organizing this multidisciplinary report, I was told that such a document would be used to make the case for more funding for qualitative research at a time when there was an explosion in the number of qualitative and mixed methods dissertation improvement grant proposals coming to the NSF sociology program – while much confusion remained concerning appropriate criteria of evaluation. This sure was another worthy cause. While this collaboration involved scholars from four fields (anthropology, political science, law and society and sociology), including fields where the words “variable” and “hypothesis” are not viewed as poison ivy (a.k.a. political science), I agreed to proceed despite the obvious risk of being criticized for coveting with “the enemy.” I charged ahead because fixing my eyes on the end objective – gaining more funding for our students and for qualitative research in general -- justified engaging in interdisciplinary exchange about common standards.

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This project was of particular interest to me as I found the question of the definition of shared standard fascinating, due to my previous scholarship on peer review. Although I remain fully convinced that NSF should provide instructions to quantitative researchers concerning the evaluation of qualitative proposals, I still feel that producing this report was the right thing to do, even if it generated some criticisms from a few tribe members. I abstained from a public debate around these criticisms to avoid feeding the (in my view) counterproductive trend of qualitative sociologists castigating one another publically, which was then reaching its apex.

In all these examples, the ultimate end is to improve the universe we live in, so that we can maintain a sense of personal and intellectual integrity as we continue to produce research we can be truly committed to. I am certain that many cultural sociologists share my conviction about the importance of such an agenda, and I want to invite them to reach out, even if it means at times losing control of the diffusion process (viz. the *New York Times* article mentioned above) or being in tension with certain members of our tribe. Doing so may help insure the continued health and social and intellectual relevance from our field. For cultural sociologists, the future challenge is to maintain a proper balance between creative production for peers, and reaching out to create social and political change with the distinctive tools that our expertise puts at our disposal. Eschewing this dual challenge could lead us down the triple dangerous paths of insular obsolescence, congratulatory mutual admiration, and narcissistic self-satisfaction. This is no way to insure the continued impact of cultural sociology on our discipline (and there is plenty of work to be done there...). But beyond sociology, the stakes are real as individualistic modes of analysis keep gaining more influence in setting the agenda for the social sciences. There is a tug of war for conceptual framing of social problems raging, and I urge my tribal members to broaden our collective horizons and step up to the plate.

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(“Amuses” Continued from page 11)

Hinterberger, Amy. 2012. “[Investing in Life, Investing in Difference: Nations, Populations, and Genomes.](#)” *Theory Culture and Society* 29:72-93.

Over the last several decades, genetics has experienced an explosion of new scientific discovery culminating in the Human Genome Project. Beyond the new knowledge that we have gained about the human genome, there has also been a significant expansion of “the categories of human difference” (or in other words, categories of racial and ethnic division) resulting from this research. Hinterberger (2012) examines the national and local sources of the creation of these new categories in the Quebec province of Canada. In particular, she finds that the scientific discoveries of the laboratory are refracted through Canada’s history of being part of the British Empire, national census practices, and contemporary cultural practices to produce “varied variation”, or a variety of different conceptions of human difference. While we live in an age when breakthroughs in genetics have led to some resurgence in the obsession over “natural” ethnic and racial differences, Hinterberger shows that these perceived differences have been filtered and morphed through a variety of cultural lenses. She argues that understanding the sources of these differences is important as health and medicine have a greater influence on genetics and genomic research.

Christin, Angèle. 2012. “[Gender and Highbrow Cultural Participation in the Unites States.](#)” *Poetics* 40: 423-443.

The relative absence of gender analysis in cultural studies is not due to a shortage of empirical phenomena. Women’s greater participation in high-status cultural activities (attending classical concerts, live theatre and dance performances; reading fiction; touring art museums) has been previously documented but unexamined. Using data from a 2008 Public Participation in the Arts survey, Christin updates the record to show that the gender gap in highbrow culture participation persists today, net of socioeconomic differences of the respondents. Christin tests several hypotheses, including more spare time due to lower labor force participation and spousal influence, but finds that early childhood socialization in the arts explains 25% of the difference in men and women’s participation in highbrow culture. The greater likelihood that girls have art lessons or take art classes translates into a lifelong interest and participation in the arts. Christin effectively reconciles her key finding with the literature on cultural consumption which, while accounting thoroughly for class, does not attend to gender differences within or across class. Looking at cultural consumption patterns by gender challenges a basic sociological tenet: in terms of income, career, and, until recently, education, women have less access to high social status than men. While women’s greater participation in highbrow culture is somewhat paradoxical and noteworthy, Christin’s analysis could have been enriched by greater attention to the gender socialization literature that deals with early childhood constructions of masculinity and femininity. For example, if highbrow art connotes delicateness, fluidity and passivity—some classic tropes of femininity—then what looks like women’s greater interest may actually be men’s perceived limited ability and/or willingness to participate in highbrow art without compromising their masculinity.

(“Culture Program Focus on Notre Dame” Continued from page 9)

Mike Strand, who has already done some award-winning work on the genesis and dynamics of classification systems in American Psychiatry (*Theory and Society* 2010), is engaged in an in-depth case-study of the emergence of the first recognizably modern discourses of welfare provision in the turn-of-the-19th-century British political field.

The Culture Workshop at Notre Dame, provides graduate students and faculty a venue for presenting works in progress. Alongside the core group of sociologists, the workshop serves as a center of gravity for scholars of culture across a variety of departments on campus: American Studies, Anthropology, English, History, and Film, Television, and Theatre. A few times a year we host scholars visiting from beyond South Bend, providing a supportive, informal setting for cultural sociologists to share and refine new ideas.

In addition to the Culture Workshop, a number of centers at Notre Dame create opportunities for bridging cultural sociology with other fields. Scholars associated with the Interdisciplinary Center for Network Science & Applications (iCeNSA) are at the cutting edge of networks and culture. Many of our culture-oriented faculty are affiliated with the Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies, making Notre Dame one of the best places to study culture outside the U.S. context. In addition, our department has close ties to the Center for the Study of Religion and Society and the Center for the Study of Social Movements. We can’t think of anywhere better to research religious cultures or cultural approaches to movements.

Culture at Notre Dame is thriving. When encouraging your students to pursue a specialty in cultural sociology, point them in our direction. If you are a young graduate student trying to choose a place to study culture Notre Dame should not only be at the top of your list, it is the place where you should be. We are ready to welcome [the best and brightest young minds in culture] you with open arms.