culture

ASA Annual Meeting Updates:

On April 30th the meetings department released the online edition of the program, so you will be able to search and find all of your sessions and events. No scheduling information will be released or should be considered official until that date.

The ASA will also release an Annual Meeting App in May or June. This year's app will be available in the iTunes store at the very least; there is no information on the status of an Android App yet.

May 15 is the preregistration deadline for participants in the Annual Meeting.

Inside:

Four Questions For…*Chandra Mukerji*

1) How did you become interested in the study of culture?

As an undergraduate, I majored in sociology, and had a minor in art history, so the sociology of art seemed the perfect area for me to study when I learned that such a thing existed. I started work in the sociology of art in graduate school with Howie Becker when he offered his first seminar on this subject. I remember reading Bourdieu on photography, and finding it a revelation. Then Al Gouldner visited, and told me about the tradition of Marxist sociology of art. That was mostly not part of Howie's program, although we read Adorno, but I kept reading critical theory on my own. Howie emphasized what you could learn by collaborating with artists, and I joined him first, in working groups in Chicago, and later, in SF where he was doing projects with photographers at the Art Institute. He was doing participant observation through collaboration-- the method of study he developed most carefully in his latest book.

I began to think about culture more broadly when I got my first job at Boston University. There were many Marxist sociologists on the faculty, and many comparative sociologists who were thinking about issues of culture and power in interesting ways. I was very much influenced by Mike Miller, Susan Epstein, and Evelyn Glenn. They had a deep sense of the power of culture, and I was stupid about it. They were kind, and taught me what they could.

I learned a lot, too, by teaching social theory, and thinking about what it meant for my work. All the great theorists had something to say about culture, and I was fascinated by the differences in how they approached it. I found myself repeated in arguments with Weber--something I never stopped doing. I was particularly drawn intellectually to Marx and Simmel. I focused on alienation, and the movement of produced goods in producing social domination. I could never believe Marx's theory of history, but I thought his materialism was correct and profound. I loved the theory of numbers and social forms by Simmel. He seemed to create an aesthetic sociology-- a sense of proportions in social life that struck me as deeply wise. I was thrilled by the intellectual freedom Simmel seemed to feel, too, and the places where his freedom would take him. He had been marginalized academically because he was Jewish, and I found myself being marginalized because I was a woman. So, I identified with him and was determined to follow Simmel in taking marginality as freedom. Easier said than done, but there was little help on gender in Marx.

Junior Scholar Spotlight: Maggie Frye

Maggie Frye is a Ph.D. candidate in sociology and demography at the University of California, Berkeley. Her research draws insights from cultural sociology and demography, and past and current projects have focused on education, romantic relationships, and family formation in Southern Africa. All of her research focuses on how shared cultural ideals influence individual life choices, producing patterns of behavior that can be observed in the aggregate.

An article based on Maggie's master's paper, which was published last year in the *American Journal of Sociology*, examines the growing gap between educational aspirations and opportunities in Malawi. This article addresses a persistent puzzle: around the world, disadvantaged youth tend to be highly optimistic about their chances of achieving ambitious educational goals, even when they face scant opportunities for success. While previous literature has approached aspirations primarily from a rational choice perspective, Maggie draws upon pragmatism and cognitive sociology to advance a theoretical alternative: rather than being rational estimations of future life chances, educational aspirations are assertions of a moralized identity as "one who aspires."

Maggie's dissertation examines the moral opposition between sexual relationships and educational pursuits in Malawi, and the prominence of sexual abstinence in local understandings of schooling success. She draws from a variety of data sources, including in-depth interviews, archival records of missionary schools, and a card-sort technique administered as part of a longitudinal survey, in which respondents work with illustrated cards depicting common relationship events to describe the sequences of events they experienced and those they hold as ideal.

In Fall 2013, Maggie will begin a two-year postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard University, as a Junior Fellow in the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research's Successful Societies Program. In Fall 2015, she will join the faculty at Princeton University, as an Assistant Professor of Sociology and an Affiliate of the Office of Population Research.

With BU suffering under a right-wing president who hated sociology, I moved to UCSD where the sociology department was one of the great centers of cultural sociology. Joe Gusfield, Bennett Berger, Jackie Wiseman, Kristin Luker, Randy Collins, Tim McDaniel, Aaron Cicourel, and on and on. These were my colleagues, and their conversations helped me see cultural sociology as an intellectual field (in Bourdieu's sense). I married Bennett Berger, and we talked sociology for hours on end. It seemed the only subject worth discussing besides the kids. Bruno Latour came to SD, too, doing research at the Salk Institute, recruiting me into the young field of the sociology of science, thinking about visualization. And Bourdieu visited, encouraging me to study gardens as sites of knowledge and politics. Finally, I was starting to think about culture, not just art.

2) What kind of work does culture do in your thinking?

Studying the sociology of art, I became interested in the role of objects in social life. Bourdieu and Boltanski's work on photographs argued that they were not just reflections of their culture, but tools for constituting social differences. There seemed to me a lot of power in objects, ways in which materiality mattered outside of relations of production in defining the social contexts in which people lived. So, I wrote my first book, From Graven Images, describing the role of consumer demand for goods in the Industrial Revolution. I argued that technological capacity did not drive the IR because they could have led to over-production. Early consumerism-- as a culture of desire--made mass production profitable. Marx and Simmel were my partners in this analysis, and Weber was my opponent.

I turned to gardens for Territorial Ambitions and the Gardens of Versailles not only because this subject matter allowed me to integrate the sociology of art with the sociology of technology in a much deeper way than I had in Graven Images, but also because I wanted to understand state power. I was naive about power; I was an aging hippie who had been too sure of human goodness and disabused of this optimism. So, I studied the gardens of Versailles, demonstrating my deep commitment to cultural analysis, my Simmelian sense of intellectual freedom and my Marxist belief in the importance of land control to power.

With Impossible Engineering, I started research on an infrastructural project to show how infrastructure shaped territories and state power. I was deeply into science and technology studies at this point, and wanted to write from this perspective. But I kept thinking of territories as sculpture, as memory palaces, and non-human actants in political life. Suddenly, I realized that I had taken Marx's materialism as my materialism, but I had different ideas about how the physical world affected social life, and how states developed as institutions around their capacity to contour landscapes for political effect. I wrote about this as logistical power, a kind of power that was not continuous with social power as it was in Marx, but as a distinct way to shaping the opportunity structures of groups, towns, regions, and states. And I started to theorize about states not as bureaucracies but as institutions that exercise impersonal power through things-- infrastructures and archives. It was the paperwork in bureaucracies, not rationalization, that defined offices as impersonal.

Now, I am thinking more about how people learn from the built environment to explain how landscapes and cityscapes could influence patterns of thought. I am using figured worlds theory to do that, trying to use it to build a social psychology for understanding the cultural power of material regimes.

3) What are some of the benefits and limitations to using culture in this way?

The benefit for me is that I can understand better how deeply human communities are entwined with material cultures, and how this affects things like our relationships to the environment. I see the challenge of climate change differently because I see how deeply and willfully people have changed the environment. So, I feel a kind of calm from knowing what I know. The limits of my approach are not so clear to me, since I continue to do research about the role of objects and the environment in social life. I think the problem I have chosen for myself is too large to be easily addressed even in a lifetime. But it will get boring to people who get the main idea. I may be the only person now who loves the details of the story.

4) How does your approach to culture shape the types of research topics and settings?

I study things, and I look at material relations in social processes. I see life as art, but in a material form. I no longer distinguish between art and social practices. I see social actions are choreography; social contexts as built environments; learning as a form of object manipulation; and the love of art as the expression of our knowledge of our need not only to see patterns in life, but to make patterns in the world.
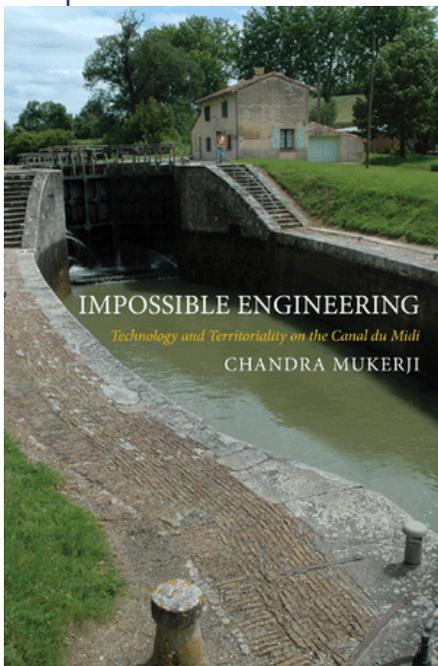
Culture Program Focus
Culture in NYLON
Ruth Braunstein (NYU) and Melissa Aronczyk (Carleton University)

It has been over a decade since Craig Calhoun and Richard Sennett formed the graduate student workshop in culture, politics and social theory that would become known as NYLON (NY for New York and LON for London, a reference to the two cities where parallel workshops would meet regularly for the next ten years). The name has stuck even as the network has expanded to a third city, Berlin, and as its growing network of alumni scatter across the globe. This group has played an important role in the lives of several culturally oriented sociologists, as well as many others outside this discipline.

As of this writing, NYLON is at a crossroads. Craig Calhoun began his new role as Director of the London School of Economics and Political Science this fall. With the arrival of new faculty and students to join and shape the group, we find ourselves with an occasion to reflect on its past, present and future. As former coordinators of this research network, we took this opportunity to speak with Craig, Richard, and NYLON's new helmsman, NYU sociology professor Eric Klinenberg, about the group's history and their visions for the group.

Unlike other loci of cultural sociology that have been profiled in these pages, NYLON is not contained within any single university department, or even within the discipline of sociology. Although for most of its life the New York group was based in NYU's Department of Sociology, and has functioned effectively as its culture workshop, it has always been just one of many outlets for cultural work in the department.

Just as NYLON is not inclusive of all cultural sociology at NYU, neither is it contained within NYU. The workshop has included students from Columbia University, the New School and CUNY's Graduate Center, as well as a number of visiting scholars who have passed through the city. Across the pond, we have also developed ties to students from the LSE, Goldsmiths College, the University of Cambridge, and other area schools. The London group is advised by Richard Sennett along with Fran Tonkiss, Director of the Cities Programme at the LSE; Vic Seidler, Professor of Sociology at Goldsmiths; Shani Orgad, an alumna of the original NYLON group and now a lecturer in the department of Media and Communications at the LSE; and Nick Couldry, Professor of Media and Communications at Goldsmiths. Monika Krause, also an alumna of NYLON and now a lecturer in the sociology department at Goldsmiths, will join the NYLON faculty next year.

The goal of the group is twofold. First, it seeks to develop a network of graduate students and faculty in these two cities to offer graduate students a supportive environment in which to develop ideas and workshop their writing. Craig Calhoun stressed the importance of social conditions for good individual work:

> Natural scientists get benefits from labs that go beyond shared access to equipment. They learn to collaborate. New students learn from more advanced ones. And above all, they see research as it's being made, not just in finished products. This is too often lacking in the social sciences, which ironically are still very individualistic.

Second, the group seeks to bridge differences of approach and institutional orientation and to offer a space in which students gain professional experience as members of an international and multidisciplinary community of cultural scholars. In Richard Sennett's words:

> At the time we started NYLON the US and British ways of doing cultural studies were very different. The British way, shaped by the Birmingham School put a great emphasis on multiculturalism. And the US way of doing cultural sociology… was more institutionally organized. Since I was splitting my time between New York and London, I thought it would be great somehow to get a dialogue between these two very different ways of practicing cultural sociology together. That's one aspect of it.

And the second aspect of it—for both Craig and me—was to empower graduate students, so that rather than performing for professors they had a more professional relationship with one another. And that's why NYLON is self-

organized, and why the actual workshops themselves are structured as they are.

In addition to weekly workshops in each city during the academic year – where graduate students receive feedback on works in progress – both groups gather for an annual conference, typically held alternately in New York or London. This year, we broke tradition by holding our annual conference in Berlin, and by welcoming a group of graduate students from Berlin's Humboldt University (where Craig Calhoun held an Einstein Fellowship), the Technical University, and the Free University, as well as a new faculty advisor, the urban sociologist Talja Blokland. Some New York NYLON members have also gone to London for extended periods and Londoners come to New York as PhD students or postdocs.

Through these activities, the group has forged connections between US cultural sociologists and other thinkers around the world from a number of different disciplines. Eric Klinenberg reflects on how this experience contributes to graduate training: "My view is that you get disciplinary development inside of the sociology department, and that's really the core of where you learn what US professional sociology looks like. And people who go to NYLON are interested in something else— something in addition to that. They want to experiment with multidisciplinary work. They want to try to speak to, perhaps, a more international or multidisciplinary community of scholars."

Participating in this network has allowed us to think expansively about how to translate our specific concerns into terms that will resonate with wider audiences. In many cases, this has required students to develop a new style of writing. As Richard Sennett explains, "Writing for people who are not in the small 'in' group can also sharpen one's thinking. So the writing projects have gotten better in terms of expression; there has been more … clarity and depth of thought. And that is a real gain in converting social scientists into public intellectuals, which is what I think the definition of all social science should be."

This approach has encouraged us to become scholars firmly grounded in our disciplines, but also interested in communicating beyond them. For example, while Claudio Benzecry's book, *The Opera Fanatic: Ethnography of an Obsession* (winner of the Mary Douglas Award for Best Book in the Sociology of Culture) intervenes in debates central to cultural sociology, it has also been of great interest to music critics and opera fans in the US and Argentina. This is a skill that NYLON's advisors have taught by example. Indeed, what Craig Calhoun, Richard Sennett and Eric Klinenberg share – perhaps more than any single approach to cultural sociology – is an orientation toward public engagement.

At the same time, there is a family resemblance to NYLON members' approach to the study of culture. Culture is at the center of NYLON, but always in connection to other themes. As Calhoun puts it,

> I don't think Richard or I ever wanted just to do cultural studies. We weren't interested in a field set apart but rather in how taking culture seriously could inform the rest of social science. We wanted our students to bring cultural analysis to the study of politics and social movements, to political economy and gender, to urban studies and inequality – and at the same time, the students brought each of these other fields into the NYLON discussion and into cultural analysis.

Areas of concentrated interest among students include the culture of cities, science and technology; material culture; and national and transnational political cultures. During the past several years, NYLON members have developed dissertations on the changing nature of urban political authority (Michael McQuarrie); struggles over medical authority in the context of nineteenth century cholera outbreaks in the US (Owen Whooley); the cultural dynamics of donor cultivation in the African-American community (Jane Jones); the politics of urban development (David Madden); the history of post-World War II international journalist training programs (Marion Wrenn); the role of nonprofits in the anti-predatory lending policy field (Mark Treskon); concepts of nature and their relationship to urban processes (Hillary Angelo); the field of humanitarian NGOs and global governance (Monika Krause); the culture of response to the global HIV and AIDS pandemic (Alton Phillips); the medical and illicit use of psycho-pharmaceuticals among college students (Amy LeClair); the causes and consequences of controversy in the field of behavioral genetics (Aaron Panofsky); the implications of nation branding for national identity, political legitimacy, and concepts of value (Melissa Aronczyk); the relationship between organizational processes and security practices in the New York subway (Noah McClain); and the recursive relationship between social institutions and individual identities in the families of gender nonconforming and transgender children (Tey Meadow).

They have conducted ethnographies of religious immigrant rights activists in the New Sanctuary Movement (Grace Yukich); of the Minutemen (Harel Shapira); of the Brooklyn food movement (Kari Hensley); and of death penalty sentencing trials (Sarah Beth Kaufman). They have engaged in comparative projects that examine different avenues for immigrant political incorporation in the US and Europe (Ernesto Castañeda); similarities and differences in how conservative and progressive movements practice active citizenship (Ruth Braunstein); and the relationship between collaborative practices and design tools across different sites (Laura Noren). They have explored the embodied processes of becoming a glassblower (Erin O'Connor), becoming a model (Ashley Mears) and becoming a poet (Ailsa Craig).

During the past few years, a number of NYLON projects have been published as books. From the New York group, these include Owen Whooley's *Knowledge in the Time of Cholera* (University of Chicago Press, 2013), and Harel Shapira's *Waiting for José* (Princeton University Press, 2013), Ashley Mears' *Pricing Beauty* (University of California Press, 2011), and Benzecry's *The Opera Fanatic* (University of Chicago Press, 2011). Several more are on their way, including: Grace Yukich's *One Family Under God* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Melissa Aronczyk's *Branding the Nation* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Monika Krause's *Organised Needs* (University of Chicago Press, under contract); Tey Meadow's *Raising Transgender* (University of California Press, under contract); and Aaron Panofsky's *Misbehaving Sciences* (University of Chicago Press, under contract). Our London counterparts have also been publishing actively, with books like Suzi Hall's *City, Street, and Citizen* (Routledge 2012) and Matthew Gill's *Accountants' Truth* (Oxford University Press, 2009) as prominent examples.

This is only a sampling of the projects that have been developed in NYLON. And a number of pre-dissertation students in New York – including Anna Skarpelis (our current NYLON coordinator), Max Besbris, Daniel Aldana Cohen, Max Holleran, Caitlin Petre, Alix Rule, Gianmarco Savio, and David Wachsmuth – are currently developing research projects. We invite you to visit our website (http://www.nyu.edu/projects/nylon/) for information about all of our members.

The international NYLON network has also produced three books. Edited by Craig Calhoun and Richard Sennett, *Practicing Culture* (Routledge, 2008) offers a series of case studies that focus on culture not as a specialized domain of cultural "objects" but rather on the ways in which culture informs social and political action. Two additional volumes are forthcoming from NYU Press. One offers cultural analyses of how authority is constructed, challenged and defended; the other explores how individuals and groups identify, transgress and navigate "edges," both physical and conceptual.

Meanwhile, the expanding alumni network is made up of professors and professionals ("NYLUMs") working in institutions across the United States, Canada, and Europe. Alumni work addresses diverse and timely questions in the worlds of finance, religion, medicine, art, media, and politics, among others. A special issue of *Poetics* – 40 (1), spring 2012 – brings together some of this work. That this group has chosen to continue identifying with NYLON beyond their PhD years is a testament to the strength and uniqueness of the community we have attempted to create.

As NYLON enters its second decade, its expanding global network will continue its original mission of providing a setting in which culturally oriented graduate students are encouraged to develop interdisciplinary and transnational connections that both enhance their work within their respective disciplines and help them to speak to broader audiences. It is our hope that this process not only facilitates the dissemination of the best aspects of US cultural sociology, but also becomes one of many channels through which we import innovative ways of producing and disseminating knowledge from thinkers outside of our discipline.
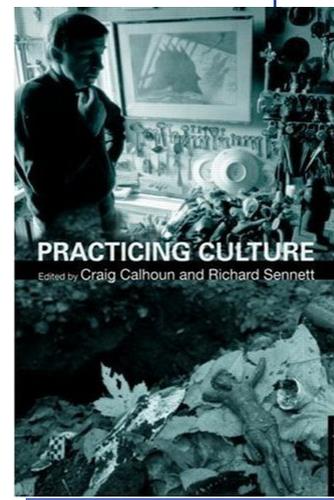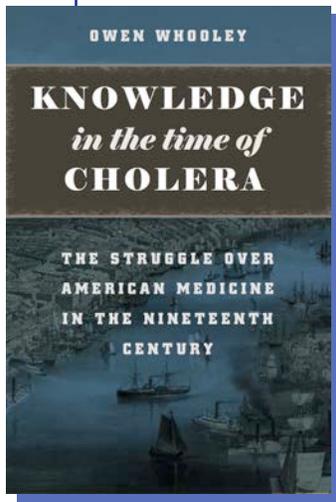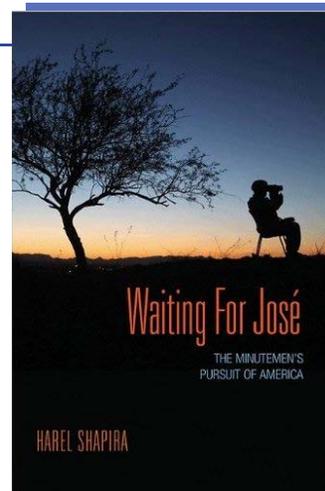
"Culture Meets… Social Psychology"
"Social psychological processes as mechanisms for the explanation of cultural phenomena"[1]

Omar Lizardo, University of Notre Dame

Introduction

As the two fields have developed in the American scene the sociology of culture and (sociological) social psychology have kept themselves at a rather safe-distance from one another. This is in spite of the fact that in the grand classical exemplars that we teach in the required graduate seminars—e.g. Marx on capitalism and alienation, Weber on "The Social Psychology of the World Religions", Durkheim on religion and ritual—cultural phenomena and their generative sources and consequences at level of micro-interaction, affect and cognition are clearly not so easily separable. The main argument in what follows is that the institutional and intellectual separation between the study of cultural phenomena and the set of processes that social psychologists are usually concerned with is not healthy. I also believe that *cultural sociology* and not social psychology has been more greatly affected by this separation.

I do not come into this discussion from a neutral standpoint when it comes to the views on explanation. So it is time to lay (some of) my cards on the table. I subscribe to a view of explanation that is best referred to as "mechanismic" (to borrow a phrase from Mario Bunge (1997) and which attempts to disengage a concern with mechanisms from any allegiance to a *mechanistic* ontology). This simply means that a given phenomenon cannot be explained until the relevant micro and meso processes arranged in a given (sometimes bounded) context into a generative interactive system have been described and accounted for (Bechtel and Abrahamsen 2005; Machamer et al. 2000). A concerted focus on generative mechanisms can help cultural sociologists in two tasks that are crucial to effective explanations of cultural phenomena: *localization* and *decomposition* (Bechtel and Richardson 1993).

First, mechanisms can help us in *localizing* cultural phenomena. This has been a perennial problem (and source of criticism) of cultural theories, which tend to refer to "culture" as if it was in Gary Alan Fine's (1979: 733) memorable words "an amorphous, indescribable mist which swirls around society members." Two decades later, Ann Swidler (1995) echoed the same sentiment, noting that culture continued to be treated as some sort of "mist" that envelops persons and contexts, is both everywhere and nowhere but which also somehow manages to get inside persons and influence their behavior. Most cultural theorists understand the problems that beset this conceptualization of culture, but solutions to it have been harder to come by (Ghaziani 2009).

Second, a focus on mechanisms can help us in *decomposing* cultural phenomena. The notion (and desirability) of decomposition is a bit more controversial and harder to defend, simply because the idea of decomposition is likely to be mistaken for the notion of *reduction*. But decomposition is not reduction; in fact decomposition is fairly compatible with a view of macro-phenomena as emergent and not reducible to the operation of lower level components. Decomposition is a well-established (and pragmatically justifiable) heuristic strategy in many scientific fields concerned with the characterization of complex, multi-level phenomena (Bechtel and Richardson 1993), including (some versions of) cultural analysis. This is important, because unwieldy, ontologically unmoored, macro-abstractions are prone to run rampant in cultural analysis (Sperber 1996).

Precisely because culture tends to be usually mistaken for (or enthusiastically portrayed as) a delocalized, immaterial abstraction, I think that following the heuristic strategies of localization and decomposition with a strong focus on the effective characterization of macro-phenomena can do a lot to strengthen cultural analysis.

In short, cultural sociologists live in a world of richly characterized (macro) "phenomena" but are murky when it comes to generative processes and mechanisms. Social psychologists on the other hand, live in a realm of richly specified mechanisms and processes, but the macro-phenomena that these processes and mechanisms generate tend to be conceptualized in generic ways.

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[1] A previous version of this essay was presented at an invited session on "Social Psychology: Processes Underlying Cultural Dynamics" at the 104th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, San Francisco, CA. Direct Correspondence to Omar Lizardo, Department of Sociology, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN, 46556. Tel: (574) 631-1855. Email: olizardo@nd.edu.

An alliance between cultural sociology and social psychology along these lines thus seems natural. In what follows I specify what cultural sociology can get from this alliance. I do this be delineating a set of cultural phenomena that I think could be better handled if we paid more attention to social psychological mechanisms that generate them.

Culture and Social Psychology

Symbolic boundaries
Where do symbolic boundaries come from? Cultural sociologists (see Lamont and Molnár 2002 for a review) have spent a lot of time describing the contours and consequences of the existence of cultural boundaries among persons, objects, spaces, and intellectual and cultural products. Yet, the question of how these boundaries *originate* and the issue of how they are maintained and reproduced over time has been a bit harder to answer. I submit that a set of simple mechanisms taken from *status-construction theory* (Ridgeway 2000) can be used to shed light on these issues. For the most part, cultural sociologists are interested in those types of boundaries that carry with it some sort of hierarchical import. Status construction theory is concerned with delineating the conditions under which a certain set of *status beliefs* regarding the superiority of members of some (initially neutrally construed) category, (and correlatively, status beliefs regarding the relative *inferiority* of members of other categories) will first develop and then spread in a social system acquiring a measure of taken-for-grantedness and cultural authority (Ridgeway and Balkwell 1997; Ridgeway and Erickson 2000).

Status construction theory suggests that a simple set of *initial conditions* in which members of a group are exposed to some sort of experiential correlation between an initially neutral categorical distinction among persons and the inequitable distribution of some object or resource, can result in the emergence of a status-belief that comes to serve the role of legitimizing and normalizing that state of affairs (Mark et al. 2009). After status beliefs come to be diffused throughout the social system, they come to acquire a self-fulfilling reality of their own, as persons come to treat members of the different group categories in accordance with the initial associative link between category membership and resource distribution that generated the status-belief in the first place. Status beliefs may include presumptions about the superior *general* competence and ability of members of a given group, as they become generalized outside of the initial context in which they developed.

Eurocentrism
While only applied to issues of the generation of beliefs in the superiority (or inferiority) of members of different gender, sexual or ethnic categories, it is clear that this mechanism has general applicability to a whole set of cultural phenomena. Take for instance the issues of "orientalism" in particular and "colonialism" as generalized cultural ideologies (Fanon 1983; Said 1995). While both of these issues have been subject to painstaking analysis by scholars in cultural studies, the humanities and area studies, it is easy to see that they cannot be disconnected from the singular historical event of the take-off of a particularly dynamic system of economic accumulation and expansion of markets in the West (Rosenberg and Birdzell 1986). The key point to keep in mind is that European capitalism could have been aided in its takeoff by factors completely orthogonal to the specificities of Western culture, as has been suggested in recent historical reconsiderations of the "Rise of the West" question (Pomeranz 2000)). However, once the historical correlation between wealth accumulation and Western culture become bundled in a set of consistent and recurrent experiential linkages, the stage is set for the formation and diffusion of self-validating "status-beliefs" that associate Europe and Europeans with greater generalized competence and capacities outside of the specific realm of wealth accumulation.

Cultural hierarchy
In the very same way, boundaries between disciplines, occupations or other cultural domains that are not initially ranked in a hierarchical system can acquire such a cast, simply by the fortuitous association between those cultural domains and some widely recognized resource. This is of course, a commonplace observation in cultural sociology, although the generative processes that account for it have been harder to delineate. For instance, historical research shows that the boundary between "high" and "low" culture in the West does not emerge until very late—by most accounts, not until the last two thirds of the nineteenth century—and only when the wealthy bourgeoisie comes to associate specific cultural pursuits that until that point did not have class-segregated audiences with the specific refinements and trappings of wealth (Levine 1984; DiMaggio 1991). Thus, high culture becomes hierarchically differentiated from "low" culture only after it becomes *experientially linked* to concrete markers of wealth and privilege. *Status beliefs* regarding the superior, generalized abilities of those who become experts in appropriating and monopolizing those cultural experiences then readily develop, as would be predicted by the status construction account.

Dissolution of symbolic boundaries
Attention to social-psychological processes and mechanisms can even help us better understand processes of cultural change. For instance, while cultural studies are good at describing large-scale static patterns of hierarchical boundaries (such as Eurocentrism) they are less effective in helping us understand how and why they change. But if the status-construction account of the generation of consensual status-boundaries is correct, we should expect that these systems should weaken

whenever the experiential conditions for their plausibility erode (Ridgeway and Correll 2006). Thus, one way to explain the emergence of various ideological systems that *question* the tenets of Euro-American superiority (such as the various skepticisms that go by the name of "postmodernism") is to point to the shifting reality of status and wealth in the world-system (Bergesen 2000). As non-Western regions of Global Ecumene are able to find their own path toward developing dynamic centers of wealth-accumulation, the experiential linkage between European descent and generalized status beliefs weakens and the space for alternative (oppositional) construals of the connection between categorical identity in the world system opens up.

Attachment to nested groups
The behavioral and social consequences of personal attachment to large-scale collectivities has been an enduring interest of cultural sociologists. From the origins and consequences of "nationalism" (Anderson 1991) (and the more recent topical interest in in "religious nationalism" (Friedland 2002) to the recent spread of cosmopolitanism as belief system and ideology (Beck and Sznaider 2006). Like many other topics of interest in cultural sociology, the characterization of these phenomena suffers from problems of localization and decomposition (more specifically, lack thereof). In many applications, appeal to their existence once again comes close to the postulation of culture as an ever-present "mist" that suffuses certain social contexts and spreads across the global system but which cannot readily be pinned down.

I suggest that *nested group attachment* theory (Lawler 1992) can help in the explanation and characterization of these phenomena. According to nested group attachment theory, persons are more likely to develop strong affective attachment to wide-ranging, superordinate groups or identities (e.g. the nation, the world) *only* when they have the simultaneous opportunity to develop attachments to smaller micro-collectivities that are embedded (or "nested") in these larger groups. Thus, attachment to large-scale identities requires the support of attachment to more concrete micro-collectivities operative at the level of face-to-face interaction. This elementary social-psychological mechanism illuminates how such "misty" cultural forces as "nationalism" or world-cultural "cosmopolitanism" operate in concrete social settings. Nested group attachment theory also suggests a clear rule of thumb for the cultural sociologist interested in these types of phenomena: *no postulation of "direct" individual attachment to broad identities without intermediary attachments to smaller groups or organizations "nested" within them*.

Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism
Nationalism is unlikely to become a potent social force simply by virtue of individuals "imaginatively" linking to broad communities that transcend face-to-face interaction, even in the presence of print or electronic media that facilitate the "imagined-community" (Anderson 1991) formation process or simply due to the top-down efforts of centralized elites to create nationalist cultural mythologies. Instead, nationalism—whether "religious", or authoritarian—is more likely to grab a hold of a given population when it can "piggy-back" on already operative affective attachments to an existing network of small groups, such as voluntary associations (Riley 2005). "Religious nationalism" operates in a similar way: by making use of already existing networks of religious organizations that already generate group attachment at the micro-level, in order to produce more abstract patterns of attachment to national and transnational imagined communities of faith (Riesebrodt and Reneau 1998). Attention to an elementary social-psychological process thus sheds light on the cultural "dark side" of the traditional Tocquevellian concern with associational and civic life.

In the very same way, cosmopolitan "world culture" is not just an ideological mist slowly spreading itself throughout global society (Meyer et al. 1997; Lechner and Boli 2005) leaving "cosmopolitanism" in its wake. Instead, attachment to "humanity" and the "world" on the part of individuals only becomes behaviorally consequential when it supports itself on existing attachments to networks of international non-governmental organizations (Boli and Thomas 1997). Nested-group attachment theory suggests that INGOs, are not only the *cognitive* carriers of world cultural models, but also the *affective* support of newly emerging sensibilities and patterns of identification with transnational communities and forms of identity.

Concluding remarks
The strategies of localization and decomposition that I have outlined here are certainly not new. It was the deployment of these heuristics that allowed such pioneers in the study of small group dynamics as Bales, Slater and Zelditch to concretize and better characterize the ponderous functionalist abstractions regarding "goal attainment," "integration," "power and prestige" into a set of generative processes that were conceived as *yielding* these macro-phenomena from concrete interaction processes in small groups. In the study of culture consumption localization and decomposition is the strategy that Fine (1977) recommended to better get a grasp of the "behavioral implications" of the reception of the commercial arts in local contexts. As also noted by DiMaggio (1987) the big, ponderous abstractions of "mass culture theory" can be more profitably re-characterized by paying attention to how culture is used in interaction and conversation face-to-face settings.

Where I believe that the current generation of cultural sociologists can do better is in moving to integrate cultural theory with the *specific* processes and mechanisms that are constantly being proposed, refined and updated in social-psychological research. I outlined how two of these research programs, status-construction theory and nested-group attachment theory,

help illuminate the conditions in which large-scale cultural abstractions—large scale systems of symbolic boundaries, cosmopolitanism, nationalism—are best seen as operating and being effective. I could have given many other examples. Cultural analyses of money and the economy for instance, can benefit from mining the vibrant literature on affective consequences of exchange (Lawler 2001), cultural analyses of gender and ethnicity can profit from considering the micro-processes the produce categorical distinctions among persons as interactive and affective realities (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999). The moral is the same: cultural theory becomes better *explanatory* theory when cultural phenomena are localized and decomposed into the likely social-psychological processes that generate them.

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Amuses

Recent articles collected and reviewed by the Newsletter Graduate Student Editors,
Mary Larue Scherer and Trisha Tiamzon

Hedegard, Danielle. 2013. "Blackness and experience in omnivorous cultural consumption: Evidence from the tourism of capoeira in Salvador, Brazil." *Poetics 41*: 1–26.

If you've witnessed a capoeira event or taken a class, you've probably heard that this unique martial art was first practiced in Brazil by African slaves. Capoeira today—which the author describes as "a complex interactional and embodied cultural tradition that incorporates music, gymnastics, and offensive/defensive martial arts movements"--has students across the globe who pilgrimage to the source for training or recreation, creating substantial tourism for Salvador, the Brazilian city where African roots are said to run deepest. Sociologist Danielle Hedegard conducted participant observation at a capoeira studio in Salvador, where 26 white, heterosexual, upper-middle class women in their early twenties, along with two white males, took classes. Most were visiting from Europe or North America, pursuing capoeira recreationally but interacting extensively with local practitioners. Tourists' consumption of capoeira was indicative of their status as cosmopolitan cultural omnivores, but their dominant identity statuses (such as white female) allowed them to both define and consume "authentic" blackness, particularly black male bodies in motion.

Hedegard reports considerable racialized sexual objectification of the Brazilian capoeiristas by the tourists, but complicates this by showing how it extends from a form of cultural valorization. Tourists select from the array of capoeira symbols, consuming those which are exotic yet palatable. Though half of the studio's teachers, including the maestro, were light-skinned Brazilian men, the women were disappointed if class time was not spent with the dark-skinned capoeiristas, whom they called "the guys." They described "the guys'" as poor, despite their living in middle-class neighborhoods. They helped them with their dreadlocks, asked for stories behind tattoos and nicknames, touched their muscles, and copied their necklaces and clothing. Consuming blackness trumped training rigor and skill acquisition for these tourists, suggesting a cultural hierarchy within capoeira itself.

Miles, Steven. 2012. The neoliberal city and the pro-active complicity of the citizen consumer. *Journal of Consumer Culture 12(*2) 216-230.

"A recognition that the neoliberal city is…a two-way street is long overdue" (Miles 2012: 228). So concludes Steven Miles' review of the urban consumption literature, through which he demonstrates a disciplinary neglect of consumers' agency in the context of the neoliberal city. Surveying the urban through the lens of neoliberalism has successfully highlighted the interdependence of postmodern production and consumption, but we've fallen prey to a kind of consumptive determinism, in which consumers' behavior and outcomes are assumed. But consumption studies is most usefully the study of *cultural* consumption (not purely material or economics-based consumption), which is why Miles insists students of the neoliberal city interrogate the everyday, dynamic and highly nuanced ways citizens make choices that either reinforce or contest neoliberal ideology. In fact, Miles suggests that citizenship itself is constituted by particular forms of urban consumption, lending credence to theories that the neoliberal city is a negotiated entity through which personal identity and group belonging is constantly redefined.

Miles is not merely suggesting a more thorough inclusion of consumption studies in urban sociology. Scholars' reluctance to engage empirically with "actually existing neoliberalism" (Brenner & Theodore 2002, as quoted in Miles) means we present free-market ideology as coercive—itself a contradiction in terms—and ignore how consumer complicity is fundamental to the success of the neoliberal project. It's not as simple as consumable forms of urban culture acting as a front for rampant profiteering; after all, cultural consumption is voluntary, selective, and often leisure-based. "As uncomfortable as it might feel, the city of the people and the city of profit are sometimes one and the same thing" (227), Miles explains, and there's a very real intellectual danger in distancing one from the other, as the latter reifies the neoliberal city as a place where consumers are neither to blame nor powerful enough to effect change.

The editorial team for *AJCS* is delighted to introduce the inaugural issue of the journal, now **free to read online** for a limited time.

The Location of Meaning/The Meaning of Location: A Report about the Center for Comparative Research Biennial Conference, January 2013

Shai M. Dromi and Jeffrey J. Guhin, Yale University

Kurt Vonnegut said he was glad not to have studied English before he started writing because, had he read Chaucer while wondering if he should write, he might have given the whole thing up. Graduate students sometimes run into the same fears, except without the possibility of invincible ignorance. Weekly workshops can help ease students into the profession, showing then the developing work of professors from around the world—not to mention the professors themselves. Yet workshops are also supposed to allow students the chance to present their own work, a requirement at our department—Yale University—for all students in their second year. This experience provides a similarly important opportunity for young sociologists to learn what it takes to construct a good paper. Unfortunately, for many of the workshops at Yale, between the second-year papers and invited professors, it's hard for other students to present anything. While we appreciate the free food, the chance to present is pretty important as well.

In response, Yale's Center for Comparative Research (CCR) has developed a biennial conference, whose third meeting was January 26, 2013. The conference is intended exclusively for graduates students—mostly from Yale Sociology— but also from other departments at Yale and from nearby universities like New York University, Brown, Columbia, and Harvard. Faculty members responded to the four panels and everyone got to know each other a bit better during coffee breaks, lunch, and after-conference drinks.

The first session brought together four papers dealing, in very different ways, with the interface of space and society. Alvaro Santana-Acuña (Harvard University) presented a paper about the changing practices of the valuation of nature in early 19th century France, and of the role of the *cadastre* in this change in Napoleonic France. Nikhar Gaikwad (Yale University) showed through his study of the East India Companies that, contrary to the assumptions of current scholarship, long term political economic outcomes for former colonies depend on their *pre*-colonial development. Sara Bastomski (Yale University) showed that high rates of intimate partner violence tend to cluster within specific neighborhoods, and thus challenged the assumption that urban crime is mostly male-on-male street crime. Finally, Elizabeth Roberto (Yale University) presented the findings of her research in racial urban segregation, which uses the spatial location and the race and ethnicity of residents to trace historical patterns and to provide new insight about segregation trends. Comments were given by Julia Adams, co-director of the Center for Comparative Research and chair of the Yale Sociology Department.

The second session dealt with political culture. Ling Zhu (Chinese University of Hong Kong) presented a paper co-authored with Tony Tam, in which she demonstrated that the current literature about Chinese political economy have failed to recognize the rising income returns of membership in the Chinese Communist Party among the low and middle education groups. Michael Rodriguez-Muñiz (Brown University) presented a paper in which he showed the contradicting ways in which Latino communities are encouraged and dissuaded from participated in the national census. Brian Fried (Yale University) talked about his study of the decline of clientelism in Brazil, which highlights the strong influence of the military in the process. The discussant was Matthew Mahler, ACLS New Faculty Fellow, postdoctoral fellow, and lecturer at the Department of Sociology at Yale.

After a much needed lunch break, the conference resumed with a session about Work, Labor, and Values. Alison Gerber (Yale University) presented her ethnographic, archival, and interview-based study of visual artists, in which she sheds light on the ways in which individuals in nontraditional careers account for and promote the value of their activities and their investment in their work. Pianpian Carolyn Xu (Yale University) drew on the China and Japan General Social Surveys to examine gender inequality in labor force participation, and presented several conclusions about the differences between the countries. Finally, Joseph Klett (Yale University) presented a paper co-authored with Jeffrey Guhin, analyzing the moral salience of practices and examining why some actions are understood by educators to be virtuous and others are thought to be the expression of skill per se, based on field research in science and music education. Deborah Davis, professor of sociology at Yale, was the discussant.

The final session was titled "Morality and Religion". Samuel Stabler (Yale University) presented his comparative research of the ways in which relations between religion, politics, and society were waged in colonial America, highlighting the centrality of spatial politics in shaping them. Shai Dromi (Yale University) presented a paper about his research of the emergence of the field of transnational humanitarianism in the mid-19th century, and of the role perceptions of death played in it. Ruth Braunstein (NYU) presented her comparative ethnographic research of progressive faith-based community organizations and the Tea Party Movement, which shows how their difference group cultures are underpinned by different conception of the relation of government and society. Finally, Jared Conrad-Bradshaw presented his critique of the ways in which the notion of "religious markets" has been used by sociologists of religion, and proposed an alternative model based on work on religiosity in China. Nicholas Wilson, British Studies Postdoctoral Associate and Lecture and Senior Fellow at the Center for Comparative Research offered comments and questions.

The conference was organized by Jeffrey Guhin, Wei Luo, Gülay Türkmen-Dervişoğlu, and Shai Dromi, Junior Fellows at CCR and graduate students at the Yale Sociology Department. The Yale Department of Sociology and CCR generously funded the event, and invaluable assistance was provided by Jerri Cummings. For more information about the conference please visit here. We hope that, when the conference was over, the junior scholars who presented felt a bit more comfortable in their sociological identity. We certainly do. We at least hope they liked the food and drinks. After all, even if it's hard to know if we'll be a sociological Chaucer, getting help becoming a Vonnegut isn't so bad.

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(3) narratives that explore the larger climate of political discourse; and (4) narratives about journalism itself. Although most of the articles about *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* are positive, they do not offer a significant challenge to the semiotic distinction between news and entertainment. Furthermore, when there are criticisms of journalism, they consistently limit themselves to the symbolic pollution of television journalism. These findings suggest that the transgressive impact of new media formats is constrained by the durable power of collective meaning structures and cultural hierarchies.

Pomp and power, performers and politicians: The California theatre state Elizabeth Helen Essary and Christian Ferney
The year 2013 marks the 10th year anniversary of the California gubernatorial recall election that replaced Grey Davis with Arnold Schwarzenegger and reinvigorated debates about celebrity politics in the United States. While critics argue that politics has become about entertainment, rather than statecraft, this article challenges the notion that performance can be separated from politics. Instead, symbolic action is a central feature of political processes. Specifically, the cosmology of the state dictates the animating centers of society, within which politicians must perform for the sake of reanimating the myths and reconstituting the people. Using case studies of the initial gubernatorial campaigns of Ronald Reagan, Pete Wilson and Arnold Schwarzenegger, this article highlights the elements of California's sustaining mythology and the various ways in which it defines political behavior. The results highlight two constants across the campaigns: the invocation of crisis and the rendering of candidates as heroes. These components enable the successful – if dramatic – transfer of power.

The Kano Durbar: Political aesthetics in the bowel of the elephant
Wendy Griswold and Muhammed Bhadmus
Political aesthetics deploy theatrical techniques to unite performers and audience into a cultural community, thereby distracting from conflicts. The Kano Durbar in northern Nigeria demonstrates how the aesthetics of power can promote a place-based political culture. Although power in Kano rests on a wobbly three-legged stool of traditional, constitutional and religious authority, the *status quo* celebrated by the Durbar holds back ideological challengers like Boko Haram even as it perpetuates distance from the unified nation-state. The Durbar works as a social drama that helps sustain a Kano-based collective solidarity against the threats of ethnic/religious tensions and Salafist extremism. A cultural-sociological and dramaturgical analysis of the Durbar demonstrates how weak sources of power can support one another when bound together in an aesthetically compelling ritual.

Please visit our website for more information about the journal and about manuscript submissions.

'At the Cutting Edge of Comparative Cultural Sociology'
A Mini-Conference Report from the 2013 Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting
Stefan Beljean and Curtis K. Chan
Harvard University

On the 23rd and 24th of March 2013, a vibrant gathering of scholars convened in Boston for the Mini-Conference on Comparative Cultural Sociology. The event took place as part of the 83rd Annual Meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society and was organized jointly by Harvard faculty members Bart Bonikowski and Michèle Lamont and Harvard graduate students Stefan Beljean and Curtis K. Chan. The goal of the mini-conference was to bring together scholars working at the frontier of comparative cultural sociology, in an effort to learn about ongoing research and to discuss some of the key theoretical and methodological challenges facing the field.

The mini-conference featured 24 papers that had been selected from a pool of over 120 excellent submissions coming from North America and Europe. The papers addressed a wide range of theoretical questions and substantive topics—from the transnational diffusion of Sesame Street to the claims-making of housing advocacy organizations (click here for a full list with abstracts). The organizers grouped the 24 contributions into six sessions, which covered several central themes in contemporary cultural sociology: institutions, boundaries and inequality, identity, repertoires, evaluation, and social processes.

Six prominent scholars acted as discussants for the various sessions: Timothy Dowd (Emory University) on institutions, Mabel Berezin (Cornell University) on boundaries, Myra Marx Ferree (University of Wisconsin at Madison) on identity, Lyn Spillman (University of Notre Dame) on repertoires, Steven Epstein (Northwestern University) on evaluation, and Julian Go (Boston University) on social processes. Each of the discussants provided deeply insightful commentary on the papers presented, drawing connections and highlighting contrasts between them, offering thoughtful evaluations of their strengths and limitations, and relating each of the papers to the overarching themes of the conference. They also spoke to crucial issues in comparative cultural research, such as the importance and challenge of systematic observation of cultural phenomena, the selection of appropriate units for cultural analysis, accounting for historical and institutional context, and understanding the dynamism and temporality of culture.

Taking place over one and a half days, the mini-conference unfolded in a full room and in a climate of general excitement and sustained attention. Participants varied in seniority (including graduate students, tenure-track faculty, and established faulty) and institutional affiliations, including scholars from across Europe and the United States. Yet, all presentations were characterized by remarkably high quality and a consistent focus on cultural comparison, both within and across societies. For their part, the audience was very thoughtful and intellectually engaged, actively participating in animated discussions that continued in the hallways and over libation and dinner at a local lobster restaurant.

It is the organizers' hope that the mini-conference and resulting publications will advance theory building and methodological development in the growing field of comparative cultural sociology, an area that is quickly gaining a strong yet capacious intellectual identity (and already includes many exemplars of cultural research). If the papers presented at our mini-conference in Boston are a good indication of what is ahead, we can expect further significant developments in the field of comparative cultural sociology in the near future.

For a program of the mini-conference and abstracts of the presented papers, visit the website of Harvard's Culture and Social Analysis workshop.