Chair’s Message:
Here, There and Everywhere

Mabel Berezin, Cornell University

Letters from the Chair are a peculiar genre of writing. What might one or should one say in a 1000 to 1500 word allotment? Here, There and Everywhere for some reason popped into my mind as I was contemplating this missive while sitting cramped in the not so friendly skies of United! As Chair of the Culture section, a section that started with many members who were interested in the arts, I report with some chagrin that I actually googled my title because I was not quite sure that I remembered its origin. And yes, it is a Beatles’ song; and yes, I should have known that cultural fact. Moreover, culture is really not akin to love—but maybe, in fact it is—as culture’s ontological status is here, there and everywhere. So my free association at 30,000 feet, my “blink” moment to invoke Malcolm Gladwell, is not so far off the mark.

But alas, I had something slightly more mundane in mind when my title hit me—metaphorically of course. I was thinking that I wanted to cover more than one topic in my initial message from the health of our section to the planning for next year’s ASA to some of the highlights from our New York meeting. I will close with some commentary on the collection of essays from the panel that I organized on politics and culture that appears in this newsletter.

Section Membership is at an all time high of 1208 members again making Culture the largest ASA section. Students represent 37% of our membership. Attendance at our panels at ASA was strong. Some session sessions had overflow crowds. We had nine regular sessions and six section sessions.

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Our section panels were packed. In addition to our panels, our graduate student members are full of energy and enthusiasm assuring us that culture as a subfield in sociology has a vibrant future.

As evidence of that energy, our graduate representative Fiona Rose Greenland organized a workshop on journal publishing with seasoned journal editors and reviewers that included me, Tim Dowd, Genevieve Zubrzycki, Jeff Alexander, and Neil Gross. Graduate student members are planning to launch a working paper series sponsored by Yale University’s Center for Cultural Sociology. As publishing is on everyone’s mind, I am happy to report that the new American Journal of Cultural Sociology located at Yale is entering its second year and is overflowing with manuscript submissions and publishing opportunities. In addition, the European Sociological Association (ESA) has launched the European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology—a new potential publishing venue for our members.

At ASA 2014, our graduate students are planning a workshop modeled on the successful Junior Theorists Conference. Our chair-elect Tim Dowd has organized an invited panel on Big Data and the Study of Culture: Prospects for the Future, as well as general submission panels on cutting edge topics such as networks, cognition and consumption.

Looking ahead, 2017 will mark the 30th anniversary of the founding of the culture section. It is never too early to begin to plan anniversary celebrations. Planning for the 20th anniversary began a few years in advance and stretched over the 2007 and 2008 ASA, the terms of two section Chairs and culminated in a 2008 pre-ASA conference. We are beginning to solicit ideas. Planning will begin in earnest at ASA 2014. One thought was to revive the ASA publishing project of the early 1990s that began with Diana Crane’s 1994 edited volume Sociology of Culture: Emerging Theoretical Perspectives (Blackwell). A 30th anniversary is an opportune time to celebrate how the section has developed in terms of the evolving ideas and areas of member interest, as well as to think about its future.

The invited panels that I organized this year attempted to reflect permutations, continuities and outright breaks in subject matter and method.

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Four Questions For… Karin Knorr Cetina

1) How did you become interested in the study of culture?
I think I was interested in “cultures” naively before I was interested in much else—I wasn’t quite so happy with my own culture, the Austrian Schmäh (humor) and negative outlook on life, the flattering falsehoods, and all the rest, and I wanted to get out and see “other cultures.” This or study a natural science, another way or getting out. I ended up studying anthropology in Vienna—but it was taught in a rather historical way at the time, and so I switched more and more to sociology.

2) What kind of work does culture do in your thinking? Mostly I think it prevents me from taking a narrow focus and approach—I am not going into the field equipped with a specific theoretical framework and seek to apply it and substantiate it. I don’t expect things to be rational, or to be network structured, or some such. I don’t see culture as located only on some superstructural level of symbols or discourse—I like Biernacki’s ideas about signifying micro-practices on the shop-floor for instance, quite apart of what’s going on the discourse level. I do see culture as disruptive. For example, the term epistemic culture, which came to me only after several years of fieldwork in science disrupts any unity-of-science ideas that we may hold in everyday life, in politics, in philosophy, or elsewhere.

The term culture is a pointer, not an end in itself. It forces one to look intensely and concretely at things, in which case there is then usually an expansion of subject matter and the notion culture gets replaced by more specific terms that capture the processes to which the attention has been directed. But it can also be the other way round. One discovers the specifics in all its expansions and then comes up with the notion culture to indicate the ecological huddle of these specifics.

3) What are some of the benefits and limitations to using culture in this way? If “culture” is not a specific approach but more of a concept that does sensitizing work for you, you have to discover the theoretical tools that fit the case, you don’t come equipped with them. That can be a limitation. The benefit can be theoretical adequacy and innovation—induced by theory discovering work.

4) How does your approach to culture shape the types of research topics and settings? Well one thing I believe that in Western economies and societies, lets shortcut the differences for a moment, some of the most interesting cultural processes don’t have much to do anymore if they ever had with nation states, or territorialized groups. They emerge in interesting ways in path dependent expert systems, which can be quite deterritorialized and are global in tendency. Culture in these cases has as much to do with how object relations unfold than with anything else—what I call object here can be a market for instance. Are we enculturating them or they us? On what level does “culture” work in trading for instance, mainly on the level of firms and social institutions or also on a level of regimes of attention and structures of emotions? You get a certain depth of culture in these expert areas—levels of possibly contradictory processes, whether it’s the arts, or science, or technology, or numbers or algorithms.
Sharon Zukin organized a New York City panel (so terrific that the ASA decided to make it a regional spotlight panel!) entitled *Empire State of Mind* that focused on New York as a multi-valent cultural space. Vera Zolberg addressed the changing art scene. Sujatha Teresa Fernandes discussed New York City as an immigrant space. And you will have to read Ashley Mears' new work on clubs to learn what a "whale" is and no—they are not big mammals that live in water—or then again, maybe they are!

Wendy Griswold (1987) was one of the first cultural sociologists to explicitly confront the issue of methodology in a now classic article on the subject. Yet, method has always been implicit in the research design of our empirical projects. The panel *Methods, Materials and Meanings: Designing Cultural Analysis* asked established scholars to address issues of epistemology, evidence, agency and meaning. Panelists Richard Bienacki, Andreas Glaeser, Michele Lamont, Ann Swidler and Lyn Spillman with an assist from John Hall and myself debated with such vigor that David Smilde asked us to put together a theme issue of *Qualitative Sociology* on culture and method. We expect this volume to be ready by next year's ASA and to generate more debate.

Lastly, there was the panel on my own area of specialization, *Political Cultures: Comparison, Contingency and History*. The members of that panel have shared their thoughts on the subject in a series of essays in this newsletter, a kind of *Political Culture Symposium*. Politics and culture as a sub-area has flourished in ways that I would not have imagined in my 1997 *Annual Review* article. All five contributors to this mini-symposium push the boundaries of politics and culture in new directions. They also paired with each other in serendipitous ways.

First, Jeffrey Alexander takes on the issue of power in political sociology. He observes that analysts of power typically turn to Max Weber and domination theory. Alexander argues that Emile Durkheim who points us in the direction of ritualized performance is at least as good, if not better, a starting point for an analysis of power. Alexander underscores the importance of what he terms "cultural pragmatics" that underscores the "precariousness of power" in democratic societies and leaves them always on the verge of a "legitimacy crisis." In contrast to Alexander, Chandra Mukerji and Patrick Joyce locate power in its "material cultures." Mukerji has certainly touched on this conception of power before, from her work on the gardens of Versailles and the Canal du Midi. It is a slightly more novel turn for Joyce, but the emphasis upon materiality provides a compelling contrast to Alexander and forces us to think about the stages of performativity—palaces, office buildings, gardens.

Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman move us away from the historical to the interactional dimensions of contemporary civic life; in their quest for a neo-Tocquevillian theory of association that reflects the myriad organizations that they have studied, (and I am guessing the hundreds of meetings that they have sat through), they draw our attention to the scenes, rather than the style of civic life as in their previous work. They ask what makes some forms of civic engagement succeed and what makes others fizzle—a now classic question since Robert Putnam (1994) first asked it *vis à vis* modern Italy. Eliasoph and Lichterman develop a distinction between a *community of interest* versus a *community of identity.* I have used a variation of this distinction myself with regard to the nation-state, which derives its endurance from the combined power of culture and interest. Small groups and organizations as Eliasoph and Lichterman argue derive their power and endurance when they represent communities of interest—not communities of identity which while enduring are less capable of being politically effective since they by necessity draw on smaller publics.

At first glance, Geneviève Zubrzycki’s essay on the cultural politics of religion pairs oddly with the Eliasoph and Lichterman piece. Zubrzycki places contemporary religious politics in Poland and Quebec in historical perspective. She is, as she explains, a “historical sociologist of the present.” Her focus is comparative. Her empirical materials are texts, performances, sounds, sights—material objects of various stripes. Zubrzycki’s work contrasts nicely to Eliasoph and Lichterman because their distinction between interest and identity is as constitutive of religious politics as it is of local civic mobilization. It is the combination of interest and identity, or culture as I would prefer, that makes religious politics so powerful.

The politics and culture essays provide only one example of the ongoing debates and conversations that section members are having among themselves and with other disciplines. If you have any doubt that we have more fields to plough, boundaries to push, borders to break down, I suggest that you go to the *Annual Review of Sociology*’s web site and read Orlando Patterson’s (forthcoming 2014) “Making Sense of Culture.” And yes, culture really is here, there and everywhere.

References
2013 CULTURE SECTION AWARDS

Mary Douglas Prize for Best Book

As is customary, a committee was charged with selecting this year’s recipient of the Sociology of Culture Section’s Mary Douglas Prize for Best Book. The committee consisted of Claudio Benzecry, Timothy Dowd (Committee Chair), Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, and Isaac Reed.

The committee had the privilege of reading 34 books that were nominated for this prize. In the process, it became clear that cultural sociology continues to be marked by vital and innovative scholarship and by a wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches.

While it is difficult to select but a few of these books to highlight, the committee unanimously agreed on the substantial merits of three of these books – one of which is the recipient of the Mary Douglas Prize and two of which are celebrated as worthy of “honorable mention.”


Consider the following statement: The modern economy works as businesses pursue profit in a self-interested fashion. Given the frequency that statement is offered – and the prominence of those sometimes making it (e.g., classical theorists, contemporary economists) – that statement is widely accepted as fact today. It is that very statement, however, that Spillman takes on in her book, *Solidarity in Strategy*. In doing so, we could see her book as the latest instance of economic sociology demonstrating the cultural foundations of markets and economies. Seen in that light, her book is clearly an important contribution. Yet, it is vital to see her book in another light: Spillman offers not simply another installment of economic sociology but, instead, takes it in new and important directions.

Building on such theoretical foundations as those provided by Weber, Durkheim and neo-institutional theory – while also adding to such foundations – Spillman focuses her attention on a type of actor that either is ignored or that lurks in many studies within and beyond sociology: the non-profit trade associations that work collectively on behalf of for-profit firms operating in various industries and sectors (or more broadly put, in “organizational fields”). These associations include entities like The Association for Women in Aviation Maintenance and the International Society of Hospitality Consultants. These associations also engage in quite a bit of activity – including information sharing, accreditation, lobbying, public relations and research, as well as the sponsoring of meetings and conventions for their particular constituencies. Empirically, Spillman offers two notable advances. On the one hand, she provides a census of nearly 4500 US trade associations. This allows for a much-needed overview of this population of organizational actors. On the other hand, she turns to a sample of trade associations that are mostly typical of their broader population. This allows her to engage in a thick description of what these associations do (their strategies) and say (the discourse that they present in various types of documents) and, in the process, to show how they engage in the making of meaning. Ultimately, she argues that solidarity is as important as strategy for the modern economy.

Spillman integrates her theoretical concerns, empirical focus and overarching argument in four parts. First, she pushes for a new view of trade associations – a view that requires grounding in much historical information, as well as in a comparison of US associations with those in Germany and Japan. In particular, she reveals that trade associations – which are commonplace and have long pursued multiple goals and activities – are helpfully seen as “cultural producers for economic action.” By way of meetings and industry communication, US trade associations build an infrastructure of sorts for the for-profit businesses they represent. Second, she demonstrates that trade associations provide ongoing and everyday ways of thinking (e.g., categories) and acting (e.g., networks) that gel into both stability and solidarity for a given field. Her emphasis here, then, contrasts with and complements the well-known fondness of neo-institutionalists for focusing on change and flux in fields. Third, Spillman shows that trade associations help orient fields to collective interests, thereby moving well beyond an economistic emphasis on the “self-interests” of firms. Moreover, trade associations can do so in “disinterested” fashion, as when touting excellence and / or professionalism. Finally, she hones in on how trade associations address audiences beyond their given fields – as in instances of lobbying or public relations. Conventional wisdom would suggest that their efforts would simply reflect the desires of their for-profit constituencies in lock-step fashion. Yet, in actuality, Spillman shows their efforts
can results from such things as notions of stewardship and / or concerns with civic life.

By interrogating how “interest” is constructed and understood at the field level – such as via the meaning-making provided by trade associations – Spillman admirably moves us beyond the well-known yet analytically hollow statement that opened this summary. Furthermore, while her book clearly demonstrates that the market is not a separate realm removed from other social realms, she does so not by merely positing that culture can penetrate the marketplace, but instead, by impressively documenting the specific and fundamental ways that culture and the economy are intertwined. It is a pleasure to award the Mary Douglas Prize to this stellar work.


At first glance, this book appears like an update of Viviana Zelizer’s famous scholarship on the life insurance industry. Just as Zelizer documented in the US of the 1800s, Chan has documented the confluence of structural conditions that made possible the rise of the life insurance industry in China of the late 1900s, while also noting a cultural element that worked against the logic of the industry’s operation (in the case of China, a taboo against discussing, imagining or planning for an untimely death). However, it would be a serious mistake to only view Marketing Death in that fashion, as there is so much more to this book. Indeed, it represents major steps forward in several ways.

First, Chan uses the case of life insurance market in China to grapple with major themes and debates in cultural sociology – particularly the nature of culture and how it works. Classic works – notably Max Weber’s Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism – have portrayed culture as an overarching coherent system that shapes and steers the practices and beliefs of individuals. Meanwhile, contemporary works – notably Ann Swidler’s “Culture in Action” – have criticized that portrayal – noting, among other things, its inattention to individual agency and to the ability of people to draw upon a “tool-kit” of cultural elements in “grab-bag” fashion. Chan moves adroitly around the debate of whether culture is coherent and overarching or is fragmented and tailored, and instead, she makes case for the interplay that occurs between both types of culture. Whereas widely held cultural taboos in China worked against the early life insurance market (constraints consistent with the approaches of Weber and Zelizer), strategic and locally attentive innovations by various insurance companies and their personnel helped circumvent those constraints (consistent with the tool-kit approach of Swidler and others).

Second, Chan also makes an important contribution to economic sociology. While sociologists in that domain have often approached the construction of markets by emphasizing the production side (e.g., life insurance companies) – if not one level of that production (e.g., the field) – Chan offers a compelling multi-level analysis that deals with the field (in her case, the life insurance market in China), insurance companies and their personnel but that also extends to the consumers themselves. This has at least two analytical benefits. On the one hand, she is able to elaborate upon the heterogeneity on the production side – showing, for example, how companies differ in their approaches to legitimating and promoting life insurance, as well differences in the approaches of their agents engaged in (face-to-face) efforts to sell insurance. On the other hand, she is able to show the ongoing give-and-take between those on the production side who initially proposed insurance as a necessary commodity and idea and those on the reception side whose resistance and hesitance, in turn, has prompted responses and re-calibration from producers. In other words, Chan reveals how the construction of markets is not abstract and orderly, but instead, is concretely rooted in the messy world of everyday interaction – an interaction that includes the evolving dance between companies and their (potential) consumers.

Finally, Chan’s book also contributes nicely to scholarship on economic globalization. Among other things, she is able to compare those transnational companies that moved into China amid policies of economic liberalization to those companies that arose locally to address the emergent market for life insurance. Rather than a story of transnationals easily imposing their might and logic onto a nascent market, Chan shows how both transnational and domestic companies have grappled with consumer resistance to life insurance and how they sometimes did so in different fashion.

The theoretical and analytical ambitions of this book are matched by its empirical richness and clarity of prose. It is much more than an update, then: it is a work that should instruct and inspire sociologists of all types – including cultural sociologists.


Wimmer’s Ethnic Boundary Making is a work of sweeping ambition. The book’s main task is to offer a comparative, analytical, and processual model of ethnic boundary making, based on cases from different parts of the world and of different historical times. This comprehensive volume synthesizes several different theoretical approaches (and empirical case studies) to propose a new multi-level analytic model to study race and ethnicity.

Wimmer defines his approach against what he calls the “Herderian Tradition” in social science and folk reasoning, which he describes as an approach that takes for granted ethnic groups. It is based on three basic assumptions: each ethnic group has (a) a specific culture; (b) dense networks of solidarity; and (c) a shared identity. The first part of the book is organized to demonstrate the failure of each of these assumptions. He also positions himself against what he calls “radical
constructivism,” that “refuses” to recognize that under certain conditions ethnic boundaries can be hard and meaningful. His analytical model, on the other hand, is made of a combination of Weber’s idea of social closure as a relational entity, Bourdieu’s model of society as an ongoing classificatory struggle, and Barth’s concept of boundaries. Thanks to the latter he adds important categorical and behavioral dimensions to what would otherwise be just an interest-based antagonistic social relation.

The book has two main contributions. First, it provides us with a highly nuanced analytical model to distinguish between ethnic and non-ethnic processes, mechanisms and networks. The middle part of the book includes his own case studies, in which Wimmer clearly demonstrates how his model allows us to distinguish when social closure reflects ethnic boundaries and when it does not; when ethnicity is the cause and not the result; when ethnicity is a nested category; when ethnicity is the most significant category and has major implications; and how the model can be translated into a research agenda. The second contribution is methodological, as the book invites us to avoid “Herderian” errors, without discarding ethnicity as a sociological category.

In setting up these claims, Wimmer presents a series of engaged and engaging readings of exemplary sociological, anthropological and historical cases and literatures. Rather than philosophizing, he provides us with qualitative, historical, quantitative and network-centered studies of how ethnic boundary-making works.

Wimmer’s elegant writing mirrors his analysis in its detail and clarity, providing us with graceful, insightful summaries of the central debates, and charting for us accessible new paths through difficult theoretical terrain. The result is a dynamic and at times brilliant book, which will surely become a mandatory reference for scholars interested in the intersection of culture and ethnicity.

### Clifford Geertz Prize for Best Article

The Geertz prize committee this year was Jenn Lena, Anne Lincoln, and myself (Stephen Vaisey). I would like to thank my fellow committee members for making this such an easy and enjoyable process.

The Geertz Prize is awarded to **Lauren A. Rivera for her 2012 article “Hiring as Cultural Matching The Case of Elite Professional Service Firms.”** We considered 31 papers for this award, many of which were excellent, but we could all agree that Rivera’s paper was fully deserving of the award.

Rivera's paper illuminates an extremely important facet of the world we live in: that hiring is not only a process of sorting human capital, or of activating social capital, but of cultural matching between job applicants, employers and firms. In making this claim, she takes aim at some of our sacred cows: disputing the research on the determining value of human capital, but also the dismissal of cultural information as nonproductive in hiring. She also tests a hypothesis of interest to scholars but which had not before been examined: that cultural homophily (or perceptions thereof) impacts hiring. This process was one of the key motivations behind, for example, Michèle Lamont's *Money, Morals, and Manners.*

Of course, Rivera's paper also contributes to research (associated with Bourdieu) on how cultural capital is converted into economic capital. As such, she helps us to better understand the mechanisms that produce admission to the economic elite. She generates these insights from interview and ethnographic evidence and handles the data well, and particularly excels in her ability to write a compelling narrative to support her analysis. I think the next generation of sociologists will benefit from the article in three respects: (1) they will be able to read and understand (because it is well-written, concise, and clear); (2) the findings help us to understand a key mechanism that produces stratification in life chances; and (3) it can be read widely—by students in culture courses, but also in stratification, organizations, and work and occupations courses as well. We expect this paper to have a wide influence in the years to come.

### Richard A. Peterson Prize for Best Student Article

This year, the Peterson Committee received 30 articles, which ranged widely in content and method. Without doubt, the Culture Section is vibrant, extremely diverse and expanding. There were some extremely good papers in the group, and it was a pleasure to talk about them with colleagues Gabriel Rossman (UCLA) and Vaughn Schmutz (UNC Charlotte). Several articles bubbled up to the top in our conversation. We eventually decided on two co-winners and a runner-up. Our decisions were unanimous.

The co-winners are **Phillipa K. Chong (University of Toronto) for "Legitimate Judgment in art, the scientific world reversed?: Critical distance in evaluation" published in Social Studies of Science 43(2): 265-281, and Charles Seguin (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill) for "The Mathematics of Superstars: Two Theories of Cultural Consumption".** The committee also elected to make an honorable mention of Xiaohong Xu’s (Yale University) paper, "Belonging Before Believing: Ethical Activism, Sectarian Ethos and Bloc Recruitment in the Making of Chinese Communism".

Chong's research compares the exercise of critical judgment in artistic and scientific fields, drawing on in-depth interviews with 30 book critics from major American journals and magazines. She describes the strategies critics employ to
manage their subjective responses to authors and their work, and finds that book critics use several strategies to achieve “critical distance” in their efforts to establish the objectivity of their assessments. Offering novel insights into how critics legitimate their own judgments of artistic quality, Chong persuasively demonstrates that the epistemic cultures of aesthetic and scientific evaluation overlap to a greater extent than is often assumed. By highlighting the practical, cultural, and emotional dimensions of evaluation that operate across social domains, Chong responds to Lamont’s (2012) recent call for a more cumulative and comparative sociology of evaluation. The paper should find a receptive audience among those interested in legitimating processes and evaluative practices in any field where expert judgment carries consequences.

Seguin’s paper tackles a fundamental problem in the sociology of culture by asking, what accounts for the massive levels of inequality we see in the popularity of cultural objects? Examining two canonical cases, pop songs and baby names, the paper’s distinctive contribution is to identify the different distributional outcomes of different models of popularity. In a convex returns model, small initial differences in talent or cultural quality yield large differences in popularity (Rosen 1981), while in a model of cumulative advantage, initial success yields additional success (Merton 1968, David 1985). Although the cumulative advantage model has now almost completely replaced the convex returns model in the research literature, Seguin demonstrates that the each model actually applies under different circumstances. While Salganik was right to describe the popularity of pop songs as produced by cumulative advantage, baby names are a better fit with the model of convex returns. The paper makes both a theoretical contribution and a methodological contribution by letting us use popularity distributions as statistical signatures for the micro-mechanisms of popularity without requiring us to engage the empirical challenge of measuring cultural quality, even though the role of quality is exactly what distinguishes the convex returns and cumulative advantage models theoretically.

Xu analyzes the formation of the Communist movement during the May Fourth era in China, 1917-1921. Drawing from reports and meeting minutes of 26 organizations, correspondence among individual activists, diaries and memoirs, he presents a close comparative analysis of organizations. He shows that where a tradition of ethical activism existed, this engendered a sectarian group ethos, which made it more likely that Communists would successfully recruit and mobilize members. These receptive organizations were all societies for “collective self-cultivation” that were open to the connection between individual transformation and social transformation, and also to the group discipline and organizational forms of Bolshevism. Xu’s work is distinctive in tracing the selective nature of spillover between social movements at both the individual and the organizational level, and in tracing the origins of the distinct revolutionary style of the Chinese Communists that was rooted in this spillover, i.e., one that emphasized “self-cultivation, consciousness raising and thought reform”. The work contributes to the analysis of agency and vanguardism in classical accounts of revolution, and also provides a compelling account of the cultural mechanisms through which social movements shape politics.

Junior Scholar Spotlight: Phillipa Chong

Phillipa Chong didn’t get into grad school at first. The admission committee convened, flipped through her transcripts, recommendation letters, and research statement. But they decided Phillipa was not a first round pick.

Around the same time another committee was convening: the selection committee for one of Canada’s most competitive and prestigious graduate fellowships. They met, flipped through Phillipa’s transcripts, recommendation letters, and research statement. But this time the judges decided in her favor.

This prize tipped the balance and Phillipa was admitted to graduate school.

Phillipa studies evaluation: how we assess worth and establish value in various arenas of social life. And she focuses on understanding evaluation from the perspective of evaluators. A PhD candidate in sociology at the University of Toronto, she shares the above story to explain how her research interest is informed by firsthand knowledge of how gatekeepers and the evaluative decisions they make can alter people’s lives in little and big ways.

Most recently, two other selection committees decided in Phillipa’s favor when her manuscript, “Legitimate Judgment in Art, the Scientific World Reversed? Maintaining Critical Distance in Evaluation” earned the Best Student Paper awards in the Sociology of Culture and the Science, Knowledge, and Technology sections of the ASAs this past summer.

In this study, which appeared in the Social Studies of Science earlier this year, Phillipa considers affinities in the rules for legitimate judgment in art and science. At first these two fields appear to be worlds apart: whereas objectivity and dispassionate rationality are prized in scientific evaluation, emotions, personal preference, and subjective taste are fundamental ways of relating to artistic objects. But by focusing on the concrete steps evaluators take to judge quality, Phillipa identifies points of convergence in how the value of fact and fiction are established. The article comes from her thesis examining how book critics evaluate the literary quality of new novels. Her data is drawn from content analysis of hundreds of reviews and in-depth interviews with book critics from The New York Times, The Washington Post, The LA Times and other major national newspapers. And she will defend her thesis in December 2013.

Phillipa’s next project examines how gatekeepers identify creativity in the art and tech industries. She will develop this work over the next two years as a visiting fellow in sociology at Harvard University. Phillipa will be on the job market next year.
Special Feature: Political Cultures: Comparison, Contingency and History

Four essays from a Sociology of Culture Invited Session at the 2013 ASA Meetings

“Legitimation Crisis: Recovering the Performance of Power”
Jeffrey C. Alexander (Yale University)

In this essay, I sketch a brief history of power in its sociological form. My animus will be anti-cultural theories, my premise that progress in power studies depends on taking distance from Weber, not only from his sociology of domination but from his understanding of legitimation. Moving to late-Durkheim and theories of cultural texts can help overcome this legitimation deficit, but they alone are not enough. Only a performative turn to cultural pragmatics will allow a new and better political sociology to arise.

Power as Coercion

Sociologists of power believe they approach the topic empirically, but their work is informed by a theoretical logic that understands action instrumentally and order externally, as an outside force. It is because of such presuppositions that power studies are enmeshed in the semiotic code of power: culture, a hugely misleading binary homologous with such other simplifications as objective:subjective and constraint:freedom. These radical dichotomies articulate the vast distance between contemporary sociologies of power and culture, between political and cultural sociology. Open any recent handbook or textbook in political sociology; you will find almost nothing about the meanings of social life.

There are, to be sure, historical reasons for this conceptual debilitation. As culture became “Axialized” (Alexander 2013a), its transcendental and abstracted character allowed the separation of meaning from earthly structures of political power. Tension emerged between intellectual and religious centers, on the one hand, and political centers, on the other. Intellectual and religious critiques claimed that earthly power had no cultural connection, and thus was morally impugned. As this millennia long process became concentrated in the absolutist states of early modern Europe, raison d’état theories of political power emerged. Hobbes and Machiavelli broke from the classical tradition by theorizing political power as amoral, though hardly as merely instrumental (Vierira 2011). Made cynical by the horrors of industrial capitalism and the violence of European states, elite theorists and Marxists translated raison d’état into a model of political power as conspiracy. Revising and synthesizing both traditions, Weber created political sociology. Defining power as the ability to carry out one’s wishes against the will of others, Weber insisted that the modern state’s success depended primarily upon the monopolization of violence.

Revered as the master theorist of the modern discipline, Weber developed a devastatingly reductionist political sociology that centered on Herrschaft. This sociology of “domination” conceptualized power as dependent on access to material resources — administrative, economic, and military. Structural shifts in the distribution of these resources determine the ability to exercise political domination and violence. Economy and Society details the difficulties of achieving bureaucratic domination, the kind of state control that depends upon the monopolization of violence and allows dependable tax collection for a centralized state. Until the modern west, states were weakened by the dialectic of patrimonialism and feudalization, which could prevent neither tax farming nor violent challenges to imperial states.

Under the aegis of Weber’s domination theory, modern political sociology developed into the hard-headed study of forceful imposition that we know today. Elaborated by Otto Hintze and Robert Michels, crystallized in neo-Marxist form by C. Wright Mills, this political sociology was elaborated by “conflict theory” in the 1960s and 1970s and by the anti-cultural political sociologies of Charles Tilly, Theda Skocpol, and Michael Mann up until to today.

The Movement to Legitimation

Paradoxically, Weber himself recognized the inadequacies of such an approach, placing on top of his Herrschaft theory the idea of “legitimacy.” Referring not to coercion but belief, legitimation demands a conceptual move from power to authority. That legitimacy has been still born in political sociology can be blamed on Weber’s structural bias,
but there is also a problem inside the theory itself. Legitimacy is conceived, not analytically but ideal-typically, not as process but as static structure -- as three forms of authority, the traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal.

Developed for historical and comparative purposes, this heuristic works well for comparing frenzied führer movements with established kingships, the latter with modern bureaucracies, and plebiscitarian populism with constitutional states. But the model tells us little about how power actually works inside collectivities already rational-legal, whether states, organizations, social movements, or campaigns. In none of these settings does power do much justifying, explaining, or illuminating by pointing to legality or rationality. True, procedural rightness is achieved by conformity to impersonal, judge-administered rules. The status of legal rationality, however, is the beginning, not the end, of modern power. The core of power legitimation has to do with meaning-making.

Weber’s approach to power is a straightjacket, a hindrance to realistic thinking about how modern power is made. Weber’s theory of legitimation is a black box from which there protrudes little intelligible light.

From Weber to Durkheim

If we step back from the details of Weber’s power theory, we can see that it relies on his overarching claim about modernity being rationalized -- deracinated, instrumental, industrialized, bureaucratized and secularized. If we believe, to the contrary, that modernity remains filled up with myth, magic, and collective meanings -- with what Durkheim called collective consciousness -- then the inadequacy of Weber’s power theory is easy to see. The emperor and his children have no clothes.

Now an alternative to Weberian reduction begins to take shape. We can overcome Weber’s power theory by turning to the late Durkheim of The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, the master who conceived modernity in a radically different way. Concerned with “the religious man of today,” late-Durkheim made a cultural turn. In Kenneth Thompson's inimitable phrase, Durkheim recognized the dialectic between secularization and sacralization. Symbols continue to reign, fears and passions about the sacred/profane and purity/pollution remain deeply ingrained, collective consciousness and solidarity have not dissipated, rituals continue to create emotional effervescence.

The problem in bringing late-Durkheimian theory to bear on power is that Durkheim himself was scarcely interested in institutional structure and wrote little about political power, in either its traditional or modern forms. So, Durkheim’s religious sociology must be combined with Weber’s political sociology, and also with cultural theory as it was elaborated in linguistic, literary, and anthropological thinking during the 20th century, from Wittgenstein to Austin; from Saussure to Jakobson, Levi-Strauss, and Barthes; from Douglas, Turner, and Geertz to Foucault and Derrida.

A Performative Approach to Power

Yet, while these intellectually massive developments provide the basis for a new theory of legitimation, “culture” by itself is too inert and structural. Power becomes authority when actors exercise their agency vis-a-vis one another. Structural and hegemony approaches to culture cannot deconstruct this open-ended struggle. Legitimate power is subtle and complex, often exquisitely indirect, and highly contingent in its success. The process is not all that different from how dramatic actors project the power of their characters in a play. The script is already established, the footlights on, the stage set, and audiences in their seats. But the most critical theatrical challenge remains: How to make the script walk and talk. What’s at stake is overcoming the “fourth wall” between stage and seats, emotionally and discursively fusing performers with audiences (Alexander 2013b). To the degree there is fusion, to that degree performances achieve verisimilitude, a sense of truthfulness and authenticity.

Thinking about how drama works can be applied to the performance of power (Alexander 2011). Cultural structures are powerful, but they can supply only background representations. In modern, differentiated, and fragmented societies, political actors and citizen-audiences have become vastly separated, and critics -- not in this case theater reviewers but journalists and intellectuals -- incessantly mediate and mess things up in between.

Political actors need be agile. They and their production teams must revise scripts in response to shifting audience reaction and mediating critical interpretation. Of course, performative agility has always been required, even for power in traditional societies. We need look no further than Hillary Mantel’s rendering of Henry VIII and his trusted political consultant Thomas Cromwell in her Booker prize-winning historical novels Wolf Hall and Bring Up the Bodies. Performative fusion is much more difficult to achieve, however, in modern and especially democratic societies. When audiences get legal rights and the franchise, their interpretive power becomes not just cultural but political and legal.

I am suggesting that any theory of modern power must become a theory of the cultural performance of power. How can material and ideal resources be creatively employed to mount and sustain effective symbolic action, such that the yawning gap between political actors and citizen-audiences can be temporally overcome?

In contemporary sociology, we have had some powerful exemplars of such performative approaches to power. Almost thirty years ago, Wagner-Pacific (1986) was already figuring out ways to apply Turner’s liminal theory to the...
drama of political terrorism. Berezin (1997) theorized the theatricality of Mussolini and Italian Fascism, and more broadly the relation between aesthetics, power, and emotion. Ringmar’s first book (1996) demonstrated how narratives of collective identity allowed Sweden’s victory in the thirty years war, and his most recent one (2013) explains French and British devastation of the Emperor’s summer palace in Beijing as the political performance of abjection and sublimity. Steinmetz (2007) interprets Western imperialism as an effort to embrace and displace orientalist ideas about the otherness of the sublime. Smith explains the legitimation of war (2005) and punishment (2008) as grandiose but perpetually faltering efforts to perform the morality of military and administrative power. Mast (2012) reveals how President Clinton managed to script and perform authority despite scandals, Republican power, and impeachment. Separating performance from discursive power, Reed (2013a) offers a deeply revisionist account of charismatic authority (cf., Griswold and Bhadmus 2013; Essary and Ferney 2013; and Reed 2013b).

These new studies decenter Weberian domination theory. They ride the cultural turn, drawing on theories of textuality, narrative, code, and symbol and connecting them with performance studies. In so doing, they move in quite a different direction from another reaction to the weakness of Weberian theory. Rather than trying to make more substantial Weber’s analytical separation of power and meaning, such thinkers as Foucault and Bourdieu moved to eliminate the space between them, claiming theoretically they are almost always empirically intertwined.

What I am suggesting here is that political sociology move in a different direction. Cultural pragmatics recognizes the precariousness of power in modern democratic societies, how it always faces an imminent legitimacy crisis. Theorizing about cultural performance must be brought into the center of political sociology today.

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"Can we still study the civic?"

Paul Lichterman and Nina Eliasoph (University of Southern California)

The modernist ideal of civic association has been that ordinary people, working together, could take part in steering society. By working together to “improve” society—locally, nationally, globally—participants would develop their abilities to act together, to reason about “the big picture,” and to feel solidarity with each other and with the wider public. Like any good modernist ideal, this one nested action, reason, and sentiment together in a happy unity. Tocqueville, Durkheim, Dewey, Addams, and more recent theorists like Jean Cohen, Andrew Arato, and Jeffrey Alexander have crafted versions of this vision of civic life.

Many influential studies have been concerned with the fate of civic life and have tried to measure it and compare it historically or cross-nationally. A common way of doing this is the approach we can call “neo-Tocquevillian.” This approach cleanly separates a civic realm from market or state, conceiving it a “third sector” containing small, local, unfunded, face-to-face groups, and in some accounts, non-profit organizations and NGOs. In the U.S., both the popular imagination and social research often emphasize the small, local association as the prime host of the civic.

The neo-Tocquevillian approach has some problems, however. First, while few would dispute that “civic association” includes volunteer groups, social movement organizations and community service efforts, many studies (by Nicole Marwell, Lyn Spillman, Edward Walker, Caroline Lee, Gianpaoalo Baiocchi, Amy Binder, Debra Minkoff, Louis Friedland and Carmen Sirianni, and scores of anthropologists who study NGO’s) describe organizations that could be considered “civic,” or “volunteer-based,” “community-based,” “grassroots,” or “nonprofit,” but do not resemble the neo-Tocquevillian image. Rather, they are often big, complex non-governmental organizations, sponsored by corporations, wealthy foundations, states, private donors, or combinations of the above, often with big paid staffs and hardly any volunteers. Second, the neo-Tocquevillian image would distort comparisons, at least with Europe (as Evan Schofer, Marion Fourcade, Adelbert Evers and others show), where the state has directly funded civic associations for decades, where some languages do not even make real distinctions between “state” and “society” (as Risto Alapuro points out). Even in the US, which is often considered the exception, the civic sector has rarely if ever been completely clean of government sponsorship (see, for instance, a collection edited by Elisabeth Clemens and Doug Guthrie).

Nor is the internal life of civic groups always like the neo-Tocquevillian image: Ethnographic and historical observations by Ann Mische, Dawne Moon, Jason Kaufman, as well as our own, have noticed that different styles of action—activist, club-style volunteer, neighborhood-based—shape participants’ action, thought, and feeling in very different ways. Civic associations sometimes shrink rather than expand people’s horizons of political concern or willingness to create new social ties. Modernity’s seemingly easy distinctions between market, state and civic have been powerful myths, but not close empirical guides.

So should researchers drop the whole idea of the civic? No. Instead, we can study ordinary citizens consciously self-organizing to improve society, in complex organizations as well as small groups, while scraping off some of the calcification that has encrusted the category of civic especially under neo-Tocquevillian influence.

To do so, we can start with the ideal’s theoretical kernel, along with many recent studies that find civic life in sometimes surprising places, and in widely varied forms with varied outcomes. To get beyond the neo-Tocquevillian image, one would drop the idea of a separate, third sector that that has been theorized a priori as “civic.” One would also peel away the idea that people develop the same kinds of civic skills and virtues in all civic groups. And one would get rid of the idea that civic life happens only in small civic “groups,” rather than possibly arising in “scenes” within organizations that do many other things. Finally, one would look for varied styles of civic action, instead of just treating it as an on/off, yes/no.

To preserve a usable core idea of civic, we propose clearly defining “civicness” as self-organizing, collectively coordinated action that aims to improve some aspect of society. We search for civic action that might take place in organizations that do many things, some civic and some not. This takes up recent suggestions coming from studies of institutional logics, that ask how complex organizations can decompose into multiple “scenes.” We look for civic action in scenes, not necessarily entire “groups” or organizations. We use Goffman as a guide to noticing how people create and splice “strips of action” that constitute scenes.

Since we do not assume that all civic action is qualitatively the same and has the same effects on participants or on society, we investigate the style of civic action we find in different scenes. Building on and refining earlier work on “group style,” as well as other researchers’ insights on patterns of interaction, we investigate different “scene styles” of civic action. Different styles of civic action define membership and “skill” very differently.

To sketch these points empirically: In a coalition that advocated “affordable housing” for residents who could...
afford only low rents, organizers normally tried to rally a broad constituency around this one single issue. Anyone who could agree on this one issue could be in the coalition, even if it meant that members had to join hands with nonprofit housing entrepreneurs, and detach themselves from people with whom they may have felt more affinity, who advocated specifically for homeless people or low-income people of color. At one meeting, several activists wanted the coalition to advocate for the very poorest residents in neighborhoods threatened by gentrification. These activists preferred the more oppositional and local community-based style of their home organizations. A coalition organizer responded in frustration that she knew what game the activists were playing, but did not want it at the leadership meeting where actors were supposed to be united on a more broad-based interest. The coalition organizer was asking that participants enact a style that we call “community of interest,” while the angry advocate was trying to re-coordinate the coalition in terms of a style we call “community of identity,” one that coalition leaders would more happily accommodate at big rallies.

Sometimes a complex collectivity includes multiple scenes that are not necessarily separated spatially, and it can be confusing for actors to know which one is in play at a time. Still, as we found in our second case, actors have implicit methods of cuing each other into which scene is in play at any given moment even when several are running in the same room, so that the actors can act appropriately for that scene. For example, at a Martin Luther King Day event, sponsored by a mix of private, public, and nonprofit sources, about 400 youth volunteers of varied race and class backgrounds and their adult organizers listened to a speech from the African American president of the local Urban League. The speakers like him had to imagine Black students as the audience for his message about “achievement” and his statistics about the alarming drop out rate among Black high-schoolers. He scolded a cluster of Black boys for fidgeting in the back, saying to them, and indirectly, to everyone in the auditorium, “There’s the problem right there,” and underscoring the implicit point that he was talking to kids like them at that moment. Listeners had to take a cue from the speaker’s race, combined with the subject of his speech, and recognize he was not addressing the college-bound, non-disadvantaged youth in the room, who some adults considered hyper-ambitious already: Two scenes were playing simultaneously, for different audiences in the hall. The one for the disadvantaged youth was a civic style that both summons and helps to create a shared identity, and invites members to outstrip the odds that are stacked against them. Here again was the scene style we call “community of identity.”

Different styles of civic action matter because accumulating close-up studies as well as our own research suggest these different styles lead to different political and social outcomes, as we describe in the paper. The research record also shows recurrent evidence of simple cues that actors and researchers who study them can use to distinguish one style in play from another at a given moment. Some styles, for example, emphasize conflict between their group and others, while other suppress it. Some ask participants to share a broader political vision while others only care about a specific issue. Some aspire to long-term bonds between members while others expect shorter-term commitments.

By paying attention to civic scenes and scene-switching practices, researchers can trace the shifting boundaries between civic and non-civic in complex organizations. Ultimately, we can understand how citizenship and subject-hood change under neoliberal reforms, when modernity’s proud dividers separating the realms of market, state and civic have visibly collapsed. We can discover self-organizing citizen action or its absence beyond the cheery but ambiguous use of “civic” by myriad NGO’s and nonprofits. Despite the cooptation, the modernist insight endures: Ordinary people still might sometimes try to steer society. Our panel paper offers a way of finding and understanding how.

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**“Sociomaterial Analysis and Political Theory”**

Chandra Mukerji (UC San Diego) and Patrick Joyce (University of Manchester)

We approach modern politics as a form of impersonal rule— a way of using weapons, canals, archives, office buildings, libraries, post offices and academies as political infrastructures that silently shape forms of everyday life in politically significant ways. Patrick Joyce develops his sociomaterial analysis of power in relation to the Raj, treating the British state in India as a form of distributed governance loosely held together with material tools of power/knowledge.¹ Chandra Mukerji develops her sociomaterial analysis by studying the French state, looking at the role of material forms in the depersonalization and modernization of state power.²

State power in our view is not only or even mainly the power of law, social organizations, political legitimacy, and ideas. It is something more tangible, sociomaterial, that can be analyzed historically: the power of legal documents over people; the infrastructures used to control territory and shape citizens; the cultural infrastructures that shape political identity; the arsenals and soldiers formed to enact legitimate power; and the built environments that define the heritage of a nation—all tools of impersonal rule.

Like Weber,³ we associate political modernity with impersonality. But while Weber focused mainly on the
social means of depersonalization of power, we focus on material cultures of power. And while Weber pointed to the importance of files for rationalizing bureaucratic work, we treat paperwork as mobile and mutable⁴ "little tools of knowledge"¹ that gather people into state relations as they comment on and sign documents that circulate among them.

We are particularly attentive to the material practices that do political work in the absence of discourse -- forms of power that are hard to regulate because they are hard to articulate. This power is the kind that Deleuze⁶ describes--a product of material and performative repetitions that cannot be contained within clear categories. Each iteration does not quite fit the cubbyhole it is meant to represent, and so repetitions overflow discourse and can be politically more powerful than discursive forms precisely because they are silent.

Patrick Joyce

Joyce⁷ tries to make sense of sociomaterial power/knowledge in the British state by focusing on infrastructures used to hold together distributed and unstable relations of state power. He argues against understandings of the state as a unitary actor with sovereignty with a monopoly of violence, or as a bounded entity with a division of labor and institutional center from which power radiates. Instead he treats the state as an active subject, being made up of the active agencies of many (and often conflicting) people and things. Joyce thinks of the state as something like an “assemblage”, which is held together, sometimes very uncertainly, at particular key sites through the actions of key actors, human and nonhuman. He emphasizes that the state is heterogenous and multiplex, and produced to have the characteristics essentialized in Weberian theory.⁸

The key question for Joyce becomes how "the state" is held together in the first place, and how power becomes organized through communication, material control, and education. Joyce treats imperial governance and the India Office archives, for example, as social products of the distributed work by many authors, arranged in many forms and layers of interlinked agency. Much of the business of governing an empire, or any states in fact, he argues, is a very difficult balancing act, that of enrolling actors by permitting initiative and input from below while ensuring that power and direction remain with the upper levels.

So, in the India Office, senior staff had to rely on the initiative of clerks in finding as well as writing documents, providing opportunities for lower-level bureaucrats to express their own opinions and affect the system, but meanwhile, they used hierarchical rituals of address and formulaic ways of reporting information that reasserted the top-down formal relations of power.

The empire, Joyce argues, was not a stable, centralized structure of power, but a system that was fundamentally incoherent, and clearly so in its sociomaterial workings. For example, the increasing volume of paper communication was forever threatening to overwhelm existing arrangements (this was called “the monster of Correspondence” in British India). As new systems were put in place to handle these problems, they invariably ran up against limits and were productive of unforeseen outcomes that generated more complexity and incoherence. The institution was a powerful one, but it gathered power through sociomaterial practices of managing people through things that were always in need of repair.

Chandra Mukerji

Mukerji's work focuses more on how material forms are developed and wielded by states as tools of impersonal rule, embodying the knowledge of subordinates in material regimes that shape the conditions of possibility for local life. She points out the instability of logistical regimes caused by the limitations of human abilities to control natural forces, but she also argues that sociomaterial practices allow states to shape politics outside discourse. Material regimes silently define the political standing of states, teach political logics, and tell people who they are and what kind of world they inhabit.

Mukerji currently studies the political consequences of the cultural equation of France with Rome in French neo-classical art and architecture. She wants to explain how a political heritage that was designed in the 17th century for Louis XIV not only helped to animate the Revolution, but also define Napoleonic ambitions and France's identity as a modern military power. She argues that the image of France as heir to Rome presented a logic for expanding administrative power that was sustained over time in material repetitions of neo-classical forms from the 17th-century Porte St. Denis to the Napoleonic Arc de Triomphe.

The association of France with Rome offered an alternative to the patrimonial system of early modern France with its cultural roots in the Christian moral hierarchy of three estates, making historical sense of the political turn from otherworldliness to worldly activities like infrastructural development and territorial governance. Using Rome as a model for French politics opened up new possibilities that were revolutionary and modernizing. But the idea of France as a New Rome was also kept beyond debate because this construction of heritage was located in extra-discursive forms, stimulating dreams of imperial (& later, republican) possibility without articulating what might be entailed in pursuing them.
Importantly, verbal assertions about Louis XIV as an imperial leader failed to gain credence, but neo-classical art, architecture and performances of power at Versailles and in Paris made the connection both palpable and seductive. Neo-classical architecture created a new "figured world" of French modern politics in the inarticulate *longue durée*, seemingly detached from the world of political events and discourse, but defining the nature of state power.

Conclusions

Patrick Joyce and Chandra Mukerji have demonstrated in quite different ways the importance of material regimes of culture and power to states, defining and holding together states as distributed and socially unstable forms. Sociomaterial regimes make sense of what states are and how they work without ever become articulate, drawing together groups of different ranks into political logics. Sociomaterial forms of power enter the *longue durée* where politics is not supposed to exist. People do not deeply question why streets, post offices, and triumphal arches are built. These forms work outside of discourse and remain unquestioned, so their power is subtle and sustaining.

This theory of sociomaterial power is based on historical research, but it can explain forms of contemporary politics, such as the rapid shift in power in the Arab Spring. Refashioning the political environment physically with parades, placards, sit-ins and demonstrations made inconceivable political changes seem conceivable—whether they were or not. It was not just a matter of appearances. Material reconfigurations of spaces of power altered political logics, embedding new fantasies of self and society in physical where people could treat them as real. The Internet and cellphones so often celebrated as tools of change should be understood not just for their utility in organizing groups, but as significant parts of the new material orders that redefined political agency through objects.

Endnotes

7. Joyce, *State*.
to recognize. It was as if “culture” was a discreet domain merely derivative from structural and institutional transformations taking place in economic and political systems.

Culture, History and Politics are intimately linked, though—ideologically, semiotically and materially—and it is through the prism of that triad that I approach the relationship between nationalism and religion.

**Concept-Building**

Despite sometimes having the sense of sitting astride a fence dividing sub-fields of my discipline, I have found this a congenial perch from which to study the relationship between nationalism and religion. It gave me tools to develop an analytical framework that attends to historical contingencies, the institutional and cultural embeddedness and the socio-political dynamics of the religion-nation nexus. Combining historical and ethnographic methods, I analyze a wide variety of qualitative data to uncover the various ways in which national and religious identities are intertwined; what has shaped various configurations, historically; and how categories of identifications are articulated in actual social practices and political behavior. I give particular attention to symbols and their manipulations during key events, as it is partly through those events and with those symbols that social actors experience and make sense of their world, and that they act upon that world. This framework allows me to show how macro-structural processes such as regime change and state reformation, and micro-sociological phenomena such as national identity construction and religiosity are related.

In *The Crosses of Auschwitz*, for example, I examined the historical constitution of the relationship between Polishness and Catholicism and its reconfiguration after the fall of communism through a multi-layered analysis of the “War of the Crosses” at Auschwitz in the summer and fall of 1998. During this period, ultra-nationalist Polish Catholics erected hundreds of crosses just outside the former death camp. I showed why and how Catholicism and its symbols are used in nationalist discourse and practice, and identified the socio-historical processes behind the relative fusion or fission of religious and national categories in Poland.

Whereas long dominant paradigms in the field maintain that nationalism emerged because of religion’s decline, actually replacing traditional religion or even becoming a modern religion itself through the sacralization of politics, my book turns the standard Durkheimian approach to “civil religion” on its head. Instead of religion yielding to nationalism and nationalism becoming a religion, in the Polish case religion becomes nationalism. Historically,
we observe in Poland the secularization of Catholic symbols through their political use, and then their re-sacralization as national ones. The cross in Poland is therefore a sacred secular symbol. It is sacred not only because of its Christian semantics (or even in spite of them), but because it traditionally represents, since the 19th century, Poland. I show that this national sacrament of religious symbols, however, occurs only in the specific polity-structural context where religion has acted as the carrier of national sentiments in lieu of a legitimate state. Similar yet different processes are currently operating in Quebec, where Catholic symbols such as the cross have been secularized in the 1960s but are now resacralized as patrimonial, “merely cultural” symbols. In this case, however, this move is not made to affirm the link between Catholicism and the nation, but rather to assert the nation’s secularity vis-à-vis religious others: by patrimonializing the cross, the cross becomes a secular symbol that represents a cultural heritage that the Quebecois are proud to have overcome, and left behind (Zubrzycki 2012).

I also showed in the Crosses of Auschwitz how a specific aesthetics of protest that mixes national and religious iconography and rituals was crucial in mobilizing support for the war of the crosses. Strong emotions of affiliation were evoked by the aesthetic activation of specific historical events and myths. In more recent work, I have pushed the analysis of the relationship between the visual, material and affective dimensions of national identity and nationalism further, by developing the twin concepts of national sensorium and aesthetic revolt.

What I call the national sensorium (2011) is the visual depiction and embodiment of historical narratives and national myths in cultural forms, the built environment and the landscape. National narratives are communicated to, and experienced by individuals through a variety of material practices. To take a few examples from the Polish case, by wearing religio-patriotic jewelry; carrying a cross at a political demonstration; brandishing a flag, draping oneself in a Jesus cape, or moving through a landscape dotted by places of martyrdom, social actors sensorially experience national narratives and myths, rendering the abstract idea of the nation concrete. As they become real and close—embodied—these myths often acquire political traction and mobilize groups. Here, I build on the work of Emile Durkheim in the Elementary Forms of Religious Life, and expand from the frameworks of Benedict Anderson and Michael Billig to illuminate the process through which elite projects ultimately generate sentiments of national belonging below. Within a certain sensorium and aesthetics, elite projects can cue paradigmatic stories and sentiments, or their subversion in iconoclastic acts. I argue that it is the relatively shared set of stories, images and material symbols, and the disagreement as much as the consensus evoked in response to them, that generate “a nation”—however thinly coherent its culture may be (Sewell 1999).

In yet another piece (2013), I develop the concept of aesthetic revolt to capture the dual process whereby social actors discursively contest and materially rework iconic symbols, granting those symbols new significations that push forward the articulation of new identities, and provide momentum for institutional reforms. My main case study has been the career of Saint John the Baptist, patron saint of the French Canadians and national icon from the mid-19th century until 1969. That year, his statue was beheaded by a new wave of secular nationalists during the annual parade in his honor in Montreal. Drawing on literatures on visuality, materiality and eventful sociology, I offer a theoretical articulation and an empirical demonstration of how the context, content and the form of specific cultural objects—here, national icons—are intertwined in public performance to not simply express, but actually produce eventful change. I show why and how the semiotic logic, together with the social life of these icons, shape the articulation of new social and political identities that then support novel political agendas.

Conclusion

We know that the cultural is political and that the political is cultural. The challenge is to show the specific ways this is so, and to explain their manifold hybrid articulations. This is what I attempt to do in my back and forth between empirical work on single cases and their juxtaposition, and between empirical work and theory building. Instead of looking only at institutional rearrangements, I show that the relationship between national identity and religion is mediated by, expressed in, and reconfigured through the engagement with material things that impact the senses, and the performance of rituals in concrete sites and during public, and highly publicized, events such as the
In the Department of Sociology at the University of Toronto, cultural sociology takes on diverse forms that reflect the size and varied nature of our faculty. We currently have 52 faculty members contributing to our research and training of our approximately 90 graduate students, with more hiring currently underway. Some of our faculty members are centrally located within cultural sociology, while others employ the tools of cultural sociology to study other subfields with which they are more closely identified, such as gender, political sociology, networks, and criminology. Our diversity coexists with a distinct embrace of academic pluralism, meaning that we highly value many different kinds of cultural sociological research, and that we also have opportunities for cross-pollination between scholars of culture as well as with those working outside cultural sociology. Our internal speaker series has been a productive venue for sharing and improving research, but most important has been the graduate student-organized Culture Workshop, with monthly meetings for presenting work.

Our collective research spans a range of qualitative and quantitative methods, with a broad acknowledgement that different cultural questions require different kinds of data. From ethnography to interviews to content analysis to survey analysis, we carry out cultural sociological research that draws on a wealth of methodological expertise in the department. We also approach the study of cultural phenomena from a range of theoretical traditions, with some work inspired by Weberian, Parsonian, and Durkheimian concepts. To be sure, Bourdieu’s influence is most prevalent across the various research projects our faculty and students have recently or currently are working on.

Within our diverse research profile, there are some topical emphases that emerge as veins of empirical focus, including but not restricted to studies of food, sexuality, media, the arts, consumption, and gender identity. These and other research projects coalesce around five main cultural sociological concerns: inequality, knowledge and cognition, place, production of culture, and field analysis.

**Inequality:** As a core concern of the discipline, the study of cultural dimensions of inequality comes to the fore of many of the research projects within our department. These studies vary in the extent to which they foreground...
particularly cultural modes of analysis, and the degree to which they integrate investigations of culture into investigations of other major subfields. For example, Bonnie Erickson’s pioneering work on the relationships between the characteristics of networks and cultural knowledge, preferences, and practices has been foundational in integrating the study of networks and the study of culture, generating important insights into the ways that culture operates through networks to reproduce inequality. Building on this work, recent graduate Rochelle Côté has focused specifically on the nature of these relationships in the cases of indigenous peoples in Canada, the US, and now Australia. Ann Mullen’s work integrates the study of culture with the sociology of education and stratification as it explicates the mechanisms behind why differences in familial cultural and economic capital put students on different educational paths, which in turn lead to different occupational outcomes. Building on Mullen’s cultural analysis of self-concepts and expectations, as well as the study of cultural capital and habitus, recent graduate Jayne Baker did ethnographic work in private high schools in Toronto to gain further insight into these linkages. Taking a more specifically cultural approach to a more squarely cultural phenomenon, Josée Johnston and Shyon Baumann’s work on gourmet food discourse takes the case of food preferences to illuminate the cultural logic of omnivorousness and the role that cultural consumption can play in reproducing status distinctions. Graduate student Merin Oleschuk is carrying out interviews to explore how foodie discourse is experienced across races to investigate whether this form of cultural consumption may also contribute to racial inequality. Jooyoung Lee is wrapping up manuscript revisions on a long-term ethnography on the careers of aspiring rappers in Los Angeles. The study examines how the creative process transforms the lives of young black men who grow up in the shadow of gangs, poverty, and the entertainment industry. Shyon Baumann and graduate student Kim de Laat employ both quantitative content analysis and interpretive discourse analysis to understand unequal representations of age and gender groups in advertising. As a whole, the work that links culture and inequality in the department offers an array of approaches to studying culture and a long list of convincing reasons why cultural sociology is essential for a full understanding of the contours of inequality.

**Production and Reception of Culture:** Work looking at how culture is produced and received likewise highlights the wide range of approaches we take within cultural sociology, sometimes adapting the tools found throughout the discipline, and sometimes using modes of analysis that are particularly cultural. Relying on qualitative data, recent graduate Sarah Knudson’s study of self-help literature and its reception likewise engaged with the production of culture perspective to understand ideological changes in self-help literature over decades. She also interviewed self-help readers to identify variations in the modes of reading they used to make sense of this literature and to tailor it for their purposes. Kim de Laat’s research on innovation and diversity in music updates the classic work by Peterson and Berger as well as Tim Dowd’s study of this topic. By innovating herself in the creation of new measures of innovation and diversity, she adds to our understanding of how the music industry responded to the uncertainty produced by the digital revolution. Switching both to qualitative data and an analysis of the production process itself, her interviews with songwriters delve more deeply into how cultural producers’ understandings of their self-interest and their professional obligations produce particular patterns of cooperation in the creation of music. Using more specifically interpretive approaches, Michal Bodemann has examined the cultural underpinnings of the successful production of memory in the case of Toronto’s Holocaust Education Week. This work collectively adds to our understanding of the social shaping of cultural objects and the ways that meaning is created from them.

**Knowledge and Cognition:** Several faculty and graduate students in the department do research in the sociology of knowledge and on cognition. Some engage with classical approaches in the sociology of knowledge or the “new sociology of ideas” to examine the development of formal knowledge in a particular context. Others draw on pragmatism and field theory to understand how people deliberate and develop ideas. Still others use research on social cognition to understand decision-making processes and idea-making. In terms of methods, the research that faculty and graduate students do in this area vary from comparative-historical methods, to ethnography and interviews, and experimental methods. Joseph Bryant, for instance, specializes in the sociology of knowledge, with specific focus on philosophy and ethics, as well as in the sociology of religion. His book *Moral Codes and Social Structure in Ancient Greece: A Sociology of Green Ethics from Homer to the Epicureans and Stoics* provides a socio-historical exegesis of the evolving currents of Hellenic moral discourse, as these developed in response to major transformations within the Polis form of social organization. He has also written epistemological pieces about the sociological study of knowledge. Zaheer Baber focuses on the structural contexts of the production and transformation of scientific knowledge and the culture of scientific research. He is currently studying the colonial context of the emergence of botanical science, and the transformation of the culture of scientific research in the context of globalization and the corporatization of universities. Vanina Leschziner does research in the areas of culture and cognition and field analysis, and is writing a book that uses the case study of the culinary fields of New York and San Francisco, where she did ethnographic research, to develop a theoretical framework to explain the social, cultural, organizational and cognitive forces that
shape creativity and innovation in a field of cultural production. Erik Schneiderhan is engaged in a few research projects, some of which use experimental methods, to explain the social dynamics of deliberative processes in groups. He is also writing a book that compares the cases of Jane Addams and Barack Obama to explain how they developed their ideas in light of the particular social and organizational contexts in which they were embedded. Marion Blute, a Professor Emeritus, has done research on cultural evolution, and has published on evolutionary theory and science.

Among the graduate students who do research in this area, Lawrence Williams is interested in studying the long-term effects of playing video games during adolescence on young adults’ socio-economic status, educational attainment, and employment trajectory. He engages with repertoire theory and the literature on cognition to understand video game playing as a line of action among a broader array of strategies of action. Athena Engman is doing research with people who have undergone organ transplant to study how this informs their sense of selves in relationship to their body, in particular engaging with the literature on embodiment and mind-body dualism. Phillipa Chong employs interview data with literary critics to illuminate evaluation as a social process. Her paper demonstrating the techniques that critics employ to legitimate their evaluations was a co-winner of the most recent Richard A. Peterson Prize.

**Field Analysis:** A number of faculty and graduate students are drawing on (but also debating, critiquing, and extending) Bourdieu’s theory to conduct research on fields, looking at a broad range of areas, including sexual life, HIV prevention, music, literature, and cuisine. Adam Green uses field theory to understand the social and organizational properties of sexual subcultures. He develops a “sexual fields framework” that establishes a set of theoretical concerns and conceptual tools around collective sexual life. This framework is developed in his forthcoming edited volume *Sexual Fields: Toward a Sociology of Collective Sexual Life.* He also uses field theory to think through how HIV prevention is organized and how it has developed and changed over time within the contexts of Toronto and Los Angeles public health. With Vanina Leschziner, he has also written about the strengths and limitations of field theory to explain routine action in a field, drawing on the literature on cognition and pragmatism. Clayton Childress is writing a book entitled *Novel Culture: Meaning, Markets, and Social Practice* that examines the world of literature as three interdependent fields of literary creation, literary production and literary reception, relying on a multi-methods approach that includes qualitative research, surveys and network analysis. Among the graduate students working in this area, Diana Miller is writing a dissertation that expands Bourdieu’s field theory to consider gender as an organizing principle of fields of cultural production. She is doing a comparative case study of two grassroots music scenes in Toronto—heavy metal and folk music—through which she outlines multiple ways that gender relations shape field structure, field positions, logics of practice, and the forms of capital that circulate in fields. Holly Campeau is writing a dissertation on “police culture.” With an ethnographic study of the police service in a city in Ontario, she engages with the literature on police studies to address misleading understandings of occupational culture. She investigates how changes in the organizational field of policing impact culture, such as changes in recruiting, mediatization of policing, legislation, community-based initiatives, public expectations, and oversight mechanisms.

**Culture and Place:** A few people in the department look closely into the role of space and place in shaping culture. Some examine the role of places and scenes in cultural production in particular, others focus on how a certain space or notion of place shapes food production and consumption, and still others study how notions of place are materialized and contested in the development of iconic architecture in a city.

Dan Silver looks at the role of places and scenes as key factors in cultural production. He shows that local ongoing activities and practices evoke distinct styles of life with distinct cultural meanings. He developed a “theory of scenes,” using data on local organizations for every US zip code and Canadian FSA to measure scenes. This allows him to examine where and how local cultural differences in scenes correspond to differences in economic growth, the make-up of residential communities, and partisan politics. This is elaborated in his forthcoming book (with Terry Nichols Clark) *Scenes: Culture and Place.* Among the graduate students in this area, Sarah Cappeliez is doing research on cultural and identity aspects of food production and consumption. Her dissertation focuses on how place and origin are used to construct value and authenticity in different products and national contexts. Matt Patterson’s research examines how notions of place become articulated and contested in the development of iconic architecture. His dissertation takes up this question in a study of two museum expansion projects in Toronto, focusing on how competing notions of place led to political friction between the museums and the surrounding community.

Culture is a major part of our research agenda and manifests creatively across empirical topics, drawing on many different theoretical and methodological traditions. The cultural research conducted in the department we briefly summarize here is but a small illustration of what our faculty and graduate students are doing. As one of the biggest Sociology departments in North America, it is no surprise to see the many different approaches to and outcomes of the sociological study of culture at Toronto.
Elihu Katz and Jeff Pooley (2008) maintain that sociology abandoned mass communications research. This may have been true at one point, but in recent years increasing numbers of sociologists are claiming back this territory as they realize how obviously central media are to their research questions. Just months ago, at the initiative of three enterprising young sociologists – Casey Brienza (PhD Cambridge), Andrew Lindner (PhD Penn State), and Matthias Revers (soon to be PhD at SUNY-Albany) – media sociology gathered enough signatures to gain status as an official section-in-formation of the ASA. In August, Brienza, Lindner, and Revers organized a well-attended preconference on media sociology and another is in the works for next August in San Francisco. The drive for institutionalization is moving forward at a rapid pace and scale, exceeding initial expectations.

What is also needed, however, is the intellectual elaboration and explanation of what media sociology can or should be. At the New York media sociology pre-conference, I was privileged to be able to address this question along with my distinguished colleagues Michael Schudson, Andrea Press, Eleanor Townsley, and Dhiraj Murthy. Although there were many points of convergence among us in our visions of a revitalized media sociology, there were also not surprisingly some differences in emphasis. At the kind invitation of the Culture editors, I will happily seize this opportunity to elaborate my remarks and make the case for a particular kind of critical media sociology attentive to social structures and political consequences. I will conclude with some suggestions related to the particular challenges and opportunities for media sociology in relation to interdisciplinary media studies.

In his book The Media and Modernity, John Thompson (1995) perceptively identified three major threads of media and communication research – a critical institutional tradition he primarily associates with the Frankfurt School and Habermas (but would incorporate in principle field theory and various critical political economy approaches), a hermeneutic/cultural tradition, and a media technologies or medium theory approach inspired by Marshall McLuhan. Interest in media as technology has sparked the creation of an official American Sociological Association section in Communication and Information Technologies (CITASA), though this section certainly goes well beyond McLuhan. In the tradition of Raymond Williams (2003 [1974]) and Claude Fischer (1992), CITASA-affiliated sociologists are conducting outstanding research that situates technologies in their social contexts of production and use (see, e.g., Hargittai 2010; Earl and Kimport 2011; Neff 2012; Murthy 2013). The hermeneutic/cultural tradition is well represented in the section on culture, or “cultural sociology” as it is increasingly referred to, while the production of culture focused on the arts and music and often inspired and mentored by Richard Peterson is enjoying a renaissance (Peterson and Anand 2004) in both cultural and economic sociology.

What is left for media sociology? At the outset, it’s important to stress that there is room for more: the pie is growing. This proliferation of sections is yet another sign of strength of our related fields of inquiry. Media sociology would supplement and enhance rather than supplant communication and information technologies, cultural sociology, and economic sociology. I can imagine at least two, non-mutually exclusive, roles for media sociology. One role would be media sociology as the biggest of the big tents: it could be the place where the institutional, hermeneutical, and technological schools come together to engage in debate and mutual critique. In this big tent role, media sociology would also serve as a crucial interlocutor with disciplines outside sociology. I will return to this point, but in most of my limited remaining space I want to advocate a second role that would focus on expanding the critical institutional component of Thompson’s tripartite model, which is arguably currently underserved.

To succinctly express what I mean by such an approach, I will quote the famous money manager John Bogle. Asked to account for why the Vanguard company he founded has substantially lower fees than other mutual fund companies, Bogle pointed to its mutual ownership model that prevents profits being siphoned away to pay investors or shareholders: in other words, he explained, “strategy follows structure.” If contemporary media sociology is in need of a new raison d’être, I cannot think of a better one. There are at least three distinct propositions embedded in Bogle’s claim that “strategy follows structure” worth underlining: First, there is such a thing as structure, it is pervasive, and it has an important social component. Second, both structures and strategies are multiple. And third, perhaps more controversially, some structural arrangements are normatively preferable to others (e.g., an egalitarian or social justice ethos inherent in the effort to keep fees low for non-elite investors). Returning to fundamentals, I will briefly elaborate and illustrate each of these claims.

To speak of the structural is to emphasize the patterned character of human action and to thus create categories that group together various patterns. Structure, however, generally refers to something more than persistent patterns. It also suggests the importance, if not indeed the primacy, of the social. Even if all social reality is discursively constructed, the concept of social structure calls attention to inequalities in the distribution of resources, material as well as symbolic. The cultural turn was a wrong turn, and arguably complicit with neo-liberalism (see, e.g., Sewell 2005), to the extent that it often acted as if social structure no longer existed.

If the mere existence (and persistence) of social structural constraints is thus a first premise of structural media sociology, the second is that these constraints should not be understood in a holistic, all-or-nothing fashion. Fundamental to this sociological approach is the search for and explanation of variation, in marked contrast to the totalizing claims common in much contemporary work influenced by the Frankfurt School or Foucault. For example, in their research on “creative labour,” David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker (2012) successfully identify the variable structural factors that make creative autonomy more or less achievable. Under certain conditions, of course, institutional forces may produce cultural homogenization (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), but there are always countervailing forces of differentiation (see, e.g.,
Homogenization should be understood as a variable not a destiny.

The third normative element perhaps sits less easily with sociological orthodoxy, even though normative concerns obviously underpin some of the most frequently studied aspects of media. Why do we study sensationalism, diversity, inclusion, and critique, or lack thereof, if we did not think that these somehow contribute to or detract from the good society, however defined? Media sociologists ought to set an example to other sociologists — as well as non-sociologists — by always clarifying “what’s at stake.”

Perhaps the most important single thing to do is banish all references to “the media.” The word is plural. There is no single media logic. Media may vary across mediums, across various types of commercial versus non-commercial ownership and funding, across nation-states, and across social class locations: finding out exactly how and when and why is a research program for several lifetimes. For example, as even Herbert Marcuse (1998 [1941]: 58) once acknowledged, in an otherwise sweeping denunciation of bureaucracy, there *can* be a real difference between private and public: “In the democratic countries, the growth of the private bureaucracy can be balanced by the strengthening of the public bureaucracy.... The power of the public bureaucracy can be the weapon which protects the people from the encroachment of special interests upon the general welfare.” Marcuse added one caveat: the public bureaucracy “can be a lever of democratization ... as long as the will of the people can effectively assert itself.” (This passage, though schematic, is a fine example of variable structural sociology. Marcuse affirms that structure consists of institutional forms, that these forms vary, that variations in these forms produce different outcomes, and that these different outcomes are normatively consequential.)

Similarly, as my French-American comparative research on immigration news (Benson 2013) shows, cross-national differences in news formats and content can be linked, at least in part, to distinct institutional histories and mixes of commercial and civic capital in the formation of national media fields. Within and across these national fields, one can also still find substantial discursive and stylistic distinctions between media that occupy different social circuits of production/reception.

In sum, much like George Steinmetz’s (2004) “critical realism,” a variation-oriented structural media sociology acknowledges complexity and contingency while doggedly searching for the patterns that help explain elements of social order. It continues to insist on the stark reality of the social, even if it is discursively constructed. And it engages politically not only in the critique of categories but also in their everyday use in relations of power. At every level, there is an attempt to explore how structures of power enable and constrain strategies of action. I am convinced that this kind of research, done well, will propel media sociology toward ever greater visibility and influence vis-à-vis both scholarly and general publics.

Even so, one should not underestimate the obstacles. There’s little chance that sociology will ever regain its once dominant position, but how could it given that this growing field is now crowded with anthropologists, historians, computer scientists, comparative literature scholars, and inter-disciplinarians of all stripes? These disciplines, both within and across departments, are already fiercely fighting for institutional resources for media research, from grants and fellowships to new faculty positions. Moreover, as Michèle Lamont (2010) convincingly shows, there remain sharp differences in criteria of excellence across the disciplines. Where sociologists are not already present in force, their disciplinary compatriots may have real difficulties gaining entrée. Yet we have no choice but to enter the fray. In the long run, media sociology’s future lies outside as much as inside sociology departments.

On the one hand, media studies will be stronger if sociologists are paying attention to the work produced in other disciplines. Against the ever-renewed fervor about how this or that new technology is going to change the world, the sociological impulse is ever skeptical. With Raymond Williams (2003) blasting away, Marshall McLuhan’s formalist probes about the inherent logics of media technologies are brought crashing back to earth. Media studies often imagines itself on the cutting edge. Sociology is there to help bring it back from the abyss.

On the other hand, media sociologists should be open to other approaches and to critiques of their own models and assumptions. For example, American sociology is still remarkably western-centric, with Western Europe usually marking the outer limits of its international aspirations. As media sociology moves “beyond the western world” (Hallin and Mancini 2012), postcolonial theories (Shome and Hegde 2002) can help comparative researchers be more reflexive about the fit of their ontological categories as well as their broader epistemological and political preconceptions. Likewise, in his own poetic analysis of the unique aesthetic qualities of television itself as a medium rather than as the purveyor of any particular content, even Williams (2003: 76) effectively concedes some ground to McLuhan and gracefully acknowledges the limits of scientific analysis: “When, in the past, I have tried to describe and explain this, I have found it significant that the only people who ever agreed with me were painters.”

Williams, as always, has it just right: argue your case, as forcefully as possible, but retain an open mind. Media sociology’s future will be shaped by how well we adhere to this credo—as well as how well we institutionally anchor it, both inside and outside the mother discipline. The (renewed) battle is only beginning.


References


Ever since Durkheim, iconic symbols have long served as conduits through which to theorize and empirically study the relationship between meanings and materials. Geneviève Zubrzycki’s recent essay makes an important contribution to this intellectual trajectory, and more broadly to the growing interest in materiality among cultural sociologists (e.g. Alexander 2008; Griswold, Mangione, McDonnell 2013; Mukerji 2011).

Drawing heavily on the visual and material turns in the social sciences, Zubrzycki explores the *performativity* of icons, that is, the capacity of icons to actively constitute and configure, rather than merely reflect, social and symbolic relations. And yet, Zubrzycki’s ambitions are not simply to generically assert that materiality matters, or even that it shapes meaning-making, but rather to demonstrate how, and under what historical and social dynamics, “the aesthetic and material form of an icon can…alter its ‘inner’ content, its meaning” (p. 427).

The historical case study at the heart of Zubrzycki’s essay is well suited for her theoretical agenda. Zubrzycki offers an empirically rich and thoroughly researched account of the rapid transformation of French Canadian national identity during the “Quiet Revolution,” a nearly ten-year period of popular upheaval between 1960–1969. At the heart of matters was the biblical figure of St. John the Baptist and his lamb, the hegemonic emblem of the dominant Catholicized French Canadian national imaginary that came under attack from a growing secularist Leftist movement. Zubrzycki interprets this emergent iconoclasm as an example an “aesthetic revolt,” which she defines as a “dual process whereby social actors contest and rework iconic symbols in the public sphere; those symbols acquiring, through those material manipulations, significations that push forward the articulation of new identities and provide momentum for institutional reforms” (p. 428, italics in original).

As Zubrzycki narrates, the aesthetic revolt against the icon of St. John erupted most powerfully in annual parades, which had traditionally served as key sites for the articulation and elaboration of French Canadianness. Opposition leaders charged that the popular depiction of St. John the Baptist as child and the lamb respectively connoted dependence and passivity – and thus were unfit representations for a modernized, self-sufficient Québécois “nation.” Interestingly, attempts by the Catholic Church and parade organizers to modify – in light of criticisms – the material features of the icon only led to further destabilization. Ultimately, Zubrzycki argues that the emergence of a secularized and separatist Québécois identity cannot be fully understood without attending to the aesthetic revolt unleashed during annual parades, which eventually, both figuratively and literally, “decapitated” St. John the Baptist.

Attentive to the complex interaction between material affordances, cultural understandings, historical conjunctures, and political movements, Zubrzycki offers evidence that “the force of symbols resides not only in their content, but also in their form and the stages on which they are displayed and contested” (p. 465). Indeed, the case of the “Quiet Revolution” and its aesthetic revolt over iconic representations of the “nation” uncovers a useful opening for a “cultural sociology of historical change” (p. 424).
Mary Douglas Prize for Best Book

Section members, authors, or publishers may nominate books published in 2013 or 2014. Self-nominations are welcome. Authors must be members of the Culture Section. Send a nominating letter, including a description of the book and its significance, to each of the committee members. Books that do not have an accompanying nomination letter by the deadline will not be considered for the prize. Also, please arrange for the book's publisher to send a copy of the book to each committee member. The deadline for nominations and receipt of books is March 1, 2014.

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Clifford Geertz Prize for Best Article

Section members may nominate articles and original chapters of edited collections published in 2012-2014 (although not pieces that have previously won a Culture Section award). Self-nominations are welcome. Authors must be members of the Culture Section. Send a nominating letter, including a description of the article and its significance, along with an electronic copy of the article to each member of the prize committee. Articles that are not accompanied by a nomination letter will not be considered for the prize. The deadline for receipt of nominations and articles is March 1, 2014.

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Richard A. Peterson Prize for Best Student Paper

Section members may nominate any work (published or unpublished), written by someone who is a student at the time of submission. Self-nominations are welcome. Authors must be members of the Culture Section. This award includes a $300 prize to reimburse part of the cost of attending the 2014 ASA Annual Meeting. Send a nominating letter, including a description of the paper and its significance, along with an electronic copy of the paper to each member of the prize committee. Papers that are not accompanied by a nomination letter will not be considered for the prize. The deadline for receipt of nominations and articles is March 1, 2014.

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One of the highlights of the 2013 ASA meeting was the graduate students’ publishing workshop, sponsored by the Culture Section. Five scholars – comprising journal editors, editorial board members, and experienced reviewers – sat down with 40 graduate students to discuss the publishing process.

We are grateful to Geneviève Zubrzycki, Tim Dowd, Neil Gross, Mabel Berezin, and Jeff Alexander for generously sharing with us their time and insights. We also thank the Murphy Institute at the City University of New York for hosting the event, and Margaret Frye for serving as moderator.

What follows is a condensed version of the discussion. For a full transcript, please contact Fiona via e-mail (frose@umich.edu).

**Selecting a journal**

_How do I know where to send my article? Shouldn’t we all submit to _AJS_ or _ASR_ first, since they’re the top two journals in sociology?_

Jeff Alexander: Until recently, most people didn’t have a journal article [in print] before going on the market. Now, there is a field-wide sensibility that having an _ASR_ or _AJS_ piece guarantees a job. The odds of getting your article accepted in those journals are low, however, and you have to weigh the pros and cons of going through the long review process and risking a rejection as the final outcome.

Tim Dowd: I agree. People may spend three years crafting an article in hopes of a hit at _AJS_ or _ASR_, but that may not pay off and then there’s the lost opportunity to place it in a different, perfectly respectable journal – a journal whose readership may be doing cutting-edge work in your specific area.

Geneviève Zubrzycki: It’s a good idea to read recent issues of journals to get a sense of their editors’ interests and publishing priorities. If your main theoretical frame might fit the scholarly agenda of a top area journal, consider that route. The leading area [specialty] journals are highly respected and publish top-notch work. Don’t consider these journals a backup. The standards are very high.

**Frames and Signals**

_What are the reviewers looking for as they read a manuscript? How can I signal that my paper is making a strong contribution?_

Mabel Berezin: When I review a submission I look for coherence in the manuscript, obvious errors, complete references, and a tight, coherent abstract. It’s the reviewer’s job to make substantive suggestions that will improve the argument, but it’s not his or her job to help the author re-write the paper. The paper needs to be motivated by a puzzle or an overlooked area of analysis. Much of the signaling work is done through the references and notes. It tells me where the paper is situated in the scholarly landscape.

Neil Gross: One of your tasks in the article is to draw a map of the intellectual terrain. It needs to signal to the editor and reviewers that you know the current state of the literature and that the paper is organized according to principles that you understand. This is the basis for your case that you are making a contribution to the literature. At the end of the day, your goal is to move the conversation forward.
Tim Dowd: You also signal your scholarly priorities in the abstract and structure. Abstracts need to be succinct and clear. As for the structure, sociology articles shouldn’t read like mystery novels. Don’t surprise readers with a new observation or piece of data at the end [of the paper]. And as Mabel said, references are signals. Don’t assume that a citation is so obvious that you don’t need it. Show that you know the literature.

Neil Gross: A strong abstract will help us to find reviewers. Abstracts matter because if you write an entire paper but cannot construct an abstract that very clearly explains your argument and your contribution, then you need to do more work on clarifying the paper itself.

Geneviève Zubrzycki: It’s important to write well and to edit your work thoroughly. Re-read your manuscript, or ask a colleague to read it. Clear, solid writing is an important signal of the paper’s seriousness and competence.

**R&R: What’s next?**

*I received an R&R on my submission. What am I supposed to do with all of the reviewers’ comments? Or My paper was rejected. Does it matter what I do with the reviewers’ comments?*

Mabel Berezin: That can be a hard step, reading criticisms of your work or dealing with reviewers’ comments that actually contradict each other. But your job is to get the paper published, not to get upset if you feel misunderstood. Don’t invest your ego in a lengthy debate with the reviewers. Try to do what they say, or explain carefully why you disagree with them if you don’t take their advice. Do it respectfully. Show your appreciation for their insights.

Tim Dowd: I encourage my students to embrace the disagreement that is a staple part of the review process. You may not like what [the reviewers] say. You may feel that they didn’t “get” your paper, particularly if it was rejected. But try to look at the reviewers’ feedback for what it is: impersonal critiques of your work from very smart people, often with experience in your area.

Geneviève Zubrzycki: On a practical level, when you resubmit [an R&R paper] you must include a memo that is a separate letter. This is the place to explain what you’ve done (per the reviewers’ comments) and why you’ve declined to take on some of the other advice. Take that document seriously.

Jeff Alexander: The most effective response to an R&R is to incorporate the reviewers’ feedback to tighten your argument. You should point out in your memo that you have taken on board the comments. I regard the R&R as a contract. I think it’s reasonable for an author to expect that the R&R memo will go back to the original reviewers, not to a new set of them. This could create an endless cycle of revision and critique. At the same time, it’s reasonable for an editor to expect that the resubmitted version will be substantively the same [not a completely new paper with a new case and new theoretical argument] and that the reviewers’ comments will somehow be contended with.

Neil Gross: It’s hard work but if you can respond effectively to the reviewers you’ll improve your paper. The R&R process is at its best when it moves the author from the particularities of his or her study to broader debates and literatures.

And here’s an encouraging send-off from Geneviève Zubrzycki: “Graduate students and PhD students often have the most creative ideas. You’re a source of great intellectual innovation in the field. Have courage to write up your work and submit.”
Special Issue of *Qualitative Sociology*: Reassembling Ethnography: Actor-Network Theory and Sociology

Qualitative Sociology's December issue (V. 36 N. 4) explores the purchase of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) for qualitative and ethnographic sociologies. Founded in the early 1980s by Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law, ANT has become one of the most exciting and innovative intellectual developments in recent memory. Originally developed as an alternative approach in the sociology of science, it has long professed and exhibited usefulness in the analysis of all arenas of social life. Although ANT concepts, theories, and sensibilities have been taken up across the social sciences and humanities, sociology, particularly within the U.S. context, has lagged.

Envisioned as an exercise in translation, this special issue introduces, engages, and expands on many of ANT’s signature features, such as its skepticism towards taken-for-granted divisions, categories, and concepts, its attention to processes of circulation, its interest in the relational interface between humans and nonhumans, and finally its appreciation for uncertainty and multiplicity. After an ANT-inspired introduction that traces the assembling of the special issue written by guest editors Gianpaolo Baiocchi (NYU), Diana Graizbord (Brown University) and Michael Rodríguez-Muñiz (Brown University), the issue features seven empirically rich and theoretically provocative essays on art, materiality and meaning-making; devices of democratic representation; independent film and the formation of “civil society;” urban social movements and the limits of parliamentarian politics; genomics and science of race; the conversion of religious buildings; and reflexivity in sociological account-making. The issue concludes with a thoughtful and thought-provoking essay by ANT founder, John Law, and Vicky Singleton, that explores the origins and afterlives of ANT. Calling for a serious engagement, this special issue is sure to stimulate discussion and debate about ANT’s potential to inspire a deeper, wider, and more robust ethnographic imagination. This issue is now available online at Special Issue: [http://link.springer.com/journal/11133/onlineFirst/page/1](http://link.springer.com/journal/11133/onlineFirst/page/1).

**Actor-Network Theory and the ethnographic imagination: An exercise in translation**
Gianpaolo Baiocchi, Diana Graizbord, Michael Rodríguez-Muñiz

**Objects, Words, and Bodies in Space: Bringing Materiality into Cultural Analysis**
Wendy Griswold, Gemma Mangione, Terence E. McDonnell

**Black Boxes as Capacities for and Constraints on Action: Electoral Politics, Journalism, and Devices of Representation**
C. W. Anderson, Daniel Kreiss

**Re-imagining Civil Society in Contemporary Urban China: Actor-Network-Theory and Chinese Independent Film Consumption**
Seio Nakajima

**Actor-Network Theory, Gabriel Tarde and the Study of an Urban Social Movement: The Case of Can Ricart, Barcelona**
Isaac Marrero-Guillamón

**Translating Racial Genomics: Passages in and Beyond the Lab**
Catherine Bliss

**Unifying and Decomposing Building Types: How to Analyze the Change of Use of Sacred Buildings**
Michael Guggenheim

**Beware of Allies!**
Jan-Hendrik Passoth, Nicholas J. Rowland

**ANT and Politics: Working in and on the World**
John Law, Vicky Singleton