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## Chair's Message:

*Cars and Guns: Is There a Meaningful Connection?*

Mabel Berezin, Cornell University



I am writing this message after recently attending Yale's Center for Cultural Sociology 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference. *Advancing Cultural Sociology* was the theme of the conference. The first full feature in our *Newsletter* is an interview with Jeffrey Alexander, the founder of the Yale Center, where he describes his vision and approach to cultural sociology. The spirit of the Yale conference was optimistic; the presentations were wide ranging. I left the event feeling confident that cultural sociology is thriving and multi-faceted. I also left the event brimming with ideas of all kinds—some of which are making their way into my Chair's Message.

The issue of method emerged as a sub-theme in many of the Yale presentations. From its inception, cultural sociology has been methodologically diverse. A multiplicity of methods, from the ethnographic to the newly current forms of computational analysis, is amenable to answering the questions that occupy us as cultural sociologists. The nature of the question coupled with the methodological skills and tastes of the researcher will ultimately determine the method of choice. My own work tends to concentrate on texts but I have employed various methods through the years; and only insist that the method makes sense in terms of the research problem.

The Yale Conference reminded me that method has been on my mind for some time. Last summer at ASA, I organized an invited panel on "Methods, Materials and Meanings: Designing Cultural Analysis."

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# Four Questions For...*Jeffrey Alexander*

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

For me, the study of culture begins from the Strong Program premise about "relative autonomy," the notion that culture cannot be studied merely as a reflection of other, putatively non-cultural social structures but, rather, must be considered also as a structure in its own right. Thus "cultural sociology" rather than the "sociology OF culture," a distinction I introduced in these pages years ago.

I first came to understand this theoretical idea during my days as a young leftist at Harvard in the late 1960s, as I was initiated into "new" as compared with "old" left thinking. The distinction was political of course -- it involved fierce and often militant factional conflict that occasionally spilled over into physical confrontation-- but it was also deeply intellectual, and theoretical. We New Left Marxists were deeply interested in why revolution had not (yet) happened in the developed capitalist countries, where Marx had predicted they would emerge, but only in semi-peripheral ones.

The problem, we decided, was theoretical.

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## Junior Scholar Spotlight: Xiaohong Xu

Xiaohong Xu is Assistant Professor of Sociology at National University of Singapore. He completed his dissertation, *Reordering China: Culture and Power in the Chinese Communist Revolution*, at Yale University in 2013. It explores the cultural and original dynamics of the revolution by focusing on its several critical junctures where intense struggle and debates over organization and strategy were taking place among revolutionaries. Like many cultural sociologists, Xiaohong is interested in the question of "culture in action" and would like to integrate it with analysis of organizational change in transformational historical contexts.

While a graduate student, he wrote a paper on the organizational emergence of the Chinese Communist Movement based on the primary sources he collected for one chapter of his dissertation. The paper, "Belonging Before Believing: Group Ethos and Bloc Recruitment in the Making of Chinese Communism," won honorable mention for the Best Student Paper Prize from this section as well as a couple of other student paper awards and has recently appeared in *American Sociological Review*. Drawing from reports and meeting minutes of 28 organizations, correspondence among individual activists, diaries and memoirs, Xiaohong examines why some existing activist organizations joined the emerging Communist Movement while others did not by looking at their difference in organizational identity and practices and in forging elective affinities with the Bolshevik organizational culture. He also published on cultural analysis of state formation and revolutionary politics of collective memory while in graduate school.

His teaching at National University of Singapore centers on comparative historical sociology and theory. He is working on publishing other parts of his dissertation as journal articles. One paper seeks to bring culture back in to the explanation of China's Cultural Revolution and considers how culture of revolutionary charisma informed student rebellion, despite and to a great degree also because of the Party's path toward routinization. Another work-in-progress explores why, during crucial years of the revolutionary era, the Communist Party was able to expand rapidly while maintaining its organizational coherence. It



argues that a critical factor was its ability to mobilize its members' social networks (guanxi) by re-shaping their understanding of social networks, an ability that its internal norms of ideological struggle helped to facilitate. Beyond these works, Xiaohong is embarking on a new research project that investigates China's dramatic transition from revolution to reform from the late 1970s to the early 1980s. The project will address how ideology informed elite conflict as well as its intersection with a burgeoning movement of socialist dissent and will compare it with reform movements in some other socialist states at the time.

### **(‘Four Questions For... Jeffrey Alexander,’ continued from Page 2)**

Marxism had been too "economistic," wrongly hewing to a theory that radical working class consciousness would somehow grow directly out of practical grievances, from economic experiences such as working in a factory or living through economic depression. New Left Marxism was informed by Lenin's critique of economism and insisted that consciousness could be "raised" only via the outside intervention of (radical) intellectuals. The lesson was that consciousness -- the culture of the working class -- has relative autonomy from the practical experiences of economic life. New Left Marxism traced its historical from Lenin through the deeply revisionist "cultural Marxism" of Lukacs and Gramsci and up through more contemporary Marxist theorists such as Sartre, Althusser, and Marcuse.

Even as I gradually became a non-Marxist in politics, I remained firmly committed to the core philosophical idea that consciousness cannot be derived practical life, but must also be related to background collective representations. To my utter fascination, I found that Max Weber and Emile Durkheim believed the same thing -- at least as I read them. At this point in my sociological education, Robert Bellah's insistence on "symbolic realism", and his broader interests in burgeoning cultural theory outside the discipline of sociology -- in hermeneutics, semiotics, and cultural anthropology -- was a critical mediation. So was my early encounter with Parsons' "The Structure of Social Action."

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

It is obviously central. Humans are meaning-making creatures, and culture provides the patterns through which individual and group meanings are made. Max Weber famously used the mechanical, industrial-age image of switchmen to indicate the independent role of ideas. I'd prefer to make the linguistic turn and talk about the role of "language." Yes, there is individual volition, creativity, and strategic calculation. But these occur within the context of already existing language game. Speech is pragmatic and situational, but language -- at any given historical moment -- is much, much less so. So we must start every investigation of social groups and social structure and social action and social events -- with the hermeneutical reconstruction of the relevant cultural language. We can move on from there to investigate the external environments of action that exert pressures and construct barriers in more non-symbolic ways.

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

The benefit is that we can do justice to the meanings of social life rather than dismissing meaning-making as second order justification or instrumentalizing it as strategy or toolkit. The danger is that we drink the coolaid, that in our search to discover meaning and its influence we become desensitized to the pragmatics of culture in action. It was to avoid this danger that I turned, about 10 years ago, to the theory of social performance I have called cultural pragmatics.

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

I find I'm often interested in counter-intuitive arguments where culture seems not at all to be in play. In my earliest work, for example, I investigated the computer as a tightly structured binary discourse about "the sacred and profane information machine" and the Watergate crisis as a secular ritual. Later, I studied the "Holocaust" not as an event that actually occurred, in real historical time and space, but as a representation that emerged from the cultural work and trauma construction that unfolded in the decades after the actual event. In recent years, I have become particularly interested in seeing how a Strong Program cultural sociology changes the way we look at relatively short-term, highly contingent, and deeply practical political events, hence my monographs on the two Obama campaigns and the January 25 Revolution in Egypt. I have also become deeply fascinating by materiality, and I hope to write a book about the interplay of aesthetics, material form, and discursive meaning -- about the role that "iconicity" plays in social life.

# Are you writing your first book?

If you're coming to ASA this year, please consider joining us for a **First-Time Book Authors Writing Workshop**.

**What:** An interactive workshop led by Eviatar Zerubavel, author of *The Clockwork Muse: A Practical Guide to Writing Theses, Dissertations, and Books*

**Who:** The workshop is open to ABD graduate students, postdocs and assistant professors ( $\geq$  2011 PhDs) who are working on their first book-length projects. The workshop will be capped at 75 people.

**When:** Sunday, August 17, 1:00-3:00pm. [*Please note that the workshop has been scheduled to allow participants sufficient time to return to the conference hotel for the ASA Awards Ceremony & Presidential Address from 4:30-6:10pm.*]

**Where:** JW Marriott San Francisco Union Square, 515 Mason Street, San Francisco, California (a five-minute walk from the conference hotels)

**How:** Please RSVP by **August 1, 2014** by submitting [this online form](#).

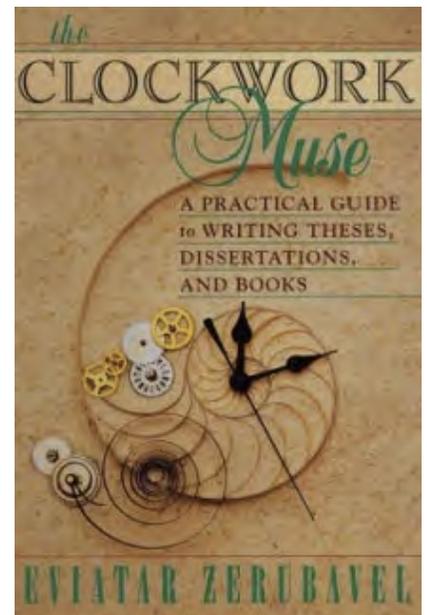
Questions? Contact Fiona Rose-Greenland, Ruth Braunstein, or Claudio Benzecry.

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About *The Clockwork Muse*:

The idea of dashing off a manuscript in a fit of manic inspiration may be romantic, but it is not particularly practical. Instead, Eviatar Zerubavel, a prolific and successful author, describes how to set up a writing schedule and regular work habits that will take most of the anxiety and procrastination out of long-term writing, and even make it enjoyable. The dreaded 'writer's block' often turns out to be simply a need for a better grasp of the temporal organization of work.

*The Clockwork Muse* rethinks the writing process in terms of time and organization. It offers writers a simple yet comprehensive framework that considers such variables as when to write, for how long, and how often, while keeping a sense of momentum throughout the entire project. It shows how to set priorities, balance ideals against constraints, and find the ideal time to write. For all those whose writing has languished, waiting for the "right moment," *The Clockwork Muse* announces that the moment has arrived.



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Check out the new Facebook page for Culture Section grad students [HERE](#).

# Cultural Sociology in the UK

Mike Savage (London School of Economics)

Cultural sociology in the UK has an unusual profile compared to the US. It does not exist as a specialist sub-field, there are no section conferences, and no study group of the British Sociological Association is devoted to it. Yet, cultural sociology infuses the discipline as a whole and has indeed been identified as one of the strengths of British sociology tout court by the first ever international benchmarking of the discipline (carried out by the Economic and Social Research Council in 2010). The British Sociological Association has also published a special journal devoted to the field, edited by David Inglis (Aberdeen, and since 2012 at Exeter) first appearing in 2007, and some of the top Departments in the UK make a point of emphasising their interests in culture. In this short note, I suggest that fluidity about the place of culture in British sociology is indicative of its highly productive role in generating new areas of inquiry and in cross fertilising international debates.

There are some distinguished British based scholars who do conduct sociological analyses of distinctively 'cultural' phenomena such as art and music on the American model. Thus Tia de Nora (perhaps not incidentally, an American, who was worked at the University of Exeter since 1991) and Georgina Born (strictly speaking, an anthropologist who worked for many years in the Department of Sociology at Cambridge before moving to Oxford in 2010) are leading international authorities on music.). Janet Wolff (who not incidentally worked for two decades in the US before returning to Manchester in 2008), Gordon Fyfe (Keele), Nick Prior (Edinburgh), and more recently Laurie Hanquinet (a Belgian who now works at the University of York) have conducted influential studies of the historical development and contemporary significance of art galleries, art audiences and art works. Fyfe has played an important role in the influential journal [\*Museums and Society\*](#). John Thompson (Cambridge) is a leading international authority on the book trade.

On the whole, however, cultural sociology does not exist as a discrete sub-discipline focusing on

the aesthetic or on distinctively cultural phenomenon, but instead intersects with key areas of sociology where it acts as a 'ginger' which disrupts more conventional and mainstream perspectives. This is the reason why it appeals to large numbers of graduate students who wish to work on the 'cutting edge' and the appeal of culture has over the past thirty years acted as a magnet for passionate and committed followers. This can be seen especially in three domains which I will discuss in turn, firstly the significance of the cultural studies tradition, secondly in the distinctive position of cultural theory in British sociology, and finally in the development of cultural approaches to stratification and inequality, sometimes identified as 'cultural class analysis'. I will discuss each of these currents in turn, before making some more general remarks.

## *Cultural Studies*

A point of departure for cultural sociology in Britain lies in the relationship to cultural studies which blazed a remarkable trail in the UK, from its inception in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham in the 1960s. The CCCS led a critique of narrow conceptions of culture which focused on literature and the arts and thus insisted on addressing the cultural practices and routines of everyday life, especially those found in the working or subaltern classes (see notably Willis 1975; Hall and Jefferson 1975; Hebdidge 1979). The key intellectual influences were from the cultural wings of Marxism, and especially Gramsci and the Frankfurt School. Many founding studies of youth culture, music, race, gender and lifestyle were forged from this tradition whose glory years were in the 1970s. On the one hand, this entailed that the development of cultural analysis was led from outside the discipline of sociology which left the discipline somewhat in the shade. On the other hand, there was a huge exodus of the cultural studies generation into senior positions in British sociology, where they played key leadership roles.

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### **(‘Culture in the UK,’ continued from Page 5)**

These included Stuart Hall, who occupied a chair in sociology at the Open University from 1981 to 2002; Paul Willis (previously Professor at Wolverhampton/ Keele Universities, now at Princeton), Tony Bennett (also at the OU) 2002-2010; Celia Lury (Professor of Sociology at Goldsmiths 2002-2011, now at Warwick), Gregor McLennan (University of Bristol since 1997) and Paul Gilroy (Professor of Sociology at LSE 2004-2012, now at Kings College London).

One of the residues bequeathed by this tradition is that way that concerns with music, the media, and audiences, which elsewhere might be taken up within cultural sociology, are more likely to be elaborated in Britain within the cultural and media studies tradition, where they interface closely with humanities disciplines. Figures who exemplify this current include Simon Frith (on music), Tony Bennett (on museums), Paul Gilroy (music and literature). Within the study of the media, key figures might include Roger Silverstone (who founded the LSE’s influential Media and Communications Department), Nick Couldry (who has worked variously at LSE and Goldsmiths) and Angela McRobbie (also Goldsmiths). One result is that the kinds of quantitative methods which are increasingly commonly applied to cultural sociology in the US and parts of Europe (such as the Netherlands) – and which are regularly found in the journal *Poetics* for instance - have not been extensively deployed in the UK, and there is an overwhelmingly ethnographic and qualitative perspective which commands the high ground. Indeed, British survey data sources continue to relatively eschew questions on cultural participation and taste, with the exception of surveys commissioned by the Arts Council and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. There is a big contrast here with the much more elaborated survey sources found in many European nations as well as in the United States, as well as the centrality of quantitative researchers such as Paul DiMaggio and Richard Peterson within the sub-discipline.

It follows from this particular intersection with cultural studies that the study of popular culture was a central theme of cultural sociology. There is a clear lineage here originating in Richard Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy* – which largely originated the cultural studies tradition – through to Raymond Williams’s studies of ‘ordinary culture’, and to Paul Willis’s *Learning to Labour* and then onto more recent

studies of what might be termed mundane cultures of domination and subordination exemplified in Skeggs’s (1997) *Formations of Class and Gender*. The central component of this body of work probes the apparent acquiescence of popular culture in the status quo and represents an imaginative re-working of the ‘dominant ideology thesis’. Rather than seeing the apparent acceptance of the social order as the imposition of hegemonic norms, it is rooted in pragmatic features of daily life and seen as embodying forms of indirect class awareness. This general orientation has proved a major plank of enduring interest in British sociology, as I discuss below.

### *Cultural Theory*

Partly on the coat tails of cultural studies, Britain also saw the distinctive development of interests in cultural theory, which generally proved higher profile within the discipline than sociological theory more narrowly conceived, which is largely seen as dated. This interest in cultural theory can be traced to the introduction of Foucault’s work into the UK, institutionalised by the short lived but influential journal *Ideology and Consciousness* in the later 1970s. From the early 1980s, a key force became the journal *Theory, Culture and Society*, edited by Mike Featherstone (who has worked at the Universities of Teesside, Nottingham Trent, and more recently moved to Goldsmiths), which proved highly significant in making debates about post-modernism, globalisation, and cosmopolitanism central to the discipline. The fact that Michel Foucault’s thinking proved so prominent in British sociology is also revealing, given that Foucault was interested in the political archaeology of the human sciences, and thereby placed cultural theory outside the sociological mainstream. Unlike the US, where the ‘cultural turn’ was predominantly led from outside the social sciences, mainly in humanities departments, in the UK, the result was that cultural theory occupied a central place within sociology. This was marked especially at the leading British Departments of Lancaster, where Scott Lash and John Urry collaborated in the 1980s, and later at Goldsmiths College in London, where Scott Lash moved in the 1990s, and where Celia Lury and Beverley Skeggs also worked from the early 2000s.

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The Department of Sociology at the University of York, which historically emphasised the importance of cultural theory, played a key role in educating several of prominent academics in this field (for instance Inglis, Lury, Prior, and Skeggs).

A further sign of the appeal of strength of cultural theory in British sociology is the fact that the leading exponent of sociological theory, Anthony Giddens (Cambridge and the LSE), increasingly oriented his thinking towards cultural theory's concerns with lifestyle and identity in his later work, notably in *The Consequences of Modernity*, and was also marked in the prominence of Zygmunt Bauman (who retired from the University of Leeds in 1989 but has remained a prolific writer) who did much to elaborate on distinctively sociological perspectives on post-modernism and consumerism. The role of Polity Press, in which Giddens and also John Thompson have played a major role, is also worth noting. This has been responsible for publishing monographs of many of the key cultural theorists, including Bauman as well as the English translations of Bourdieu, Luhmann and such like.

Furthermore, the cultural turn, proved hugely influential in British sociology during the 1980s, becoming a major plank of qualitative sociology. This helped generate a distinction between Departments wedded to cultural analysis – notably Lancaster and Goldsmiths college – and those wedded to what were seen as more traditional and conventional modes of sociology, focused for instance in the study of class and stratification (such as Oxford). In this way, issues of culture fed into fundamental debates about the scope and nature of the sociological discipline itself as well as competition between the leading Departments.

This interest in cultural theory has spawned distinctive, more empirical areas of research in especially two areas. The first of these has been in discussions of post-colonialism, race and ethnicity, which have been unusually strongly informed by Edward Said's work on 'orientalism', the arguments of the 'subaltern studies' collective, and interests in cultural hybridity and mobility, such as exemplified in the work of Avtar Brah (Birkbeck). There have been a number of feted ethnographic studies in this vein, for instance by Les Back (Goldsmiths), and Michael Keith (Oxford). Scholars such as Paul Gilroy enjoy an international reputation. Gurminder

Bhambra (Warwick) have exposed the colonialist assumptions of the sociological tradition.

A second more applied area is the unusually strong British tradition of research on the sociology of consumption. Intellectually, this was rooted in the concerns with lifestyle which emerged in debates about post-modernism and cultural change. Colin Campbell (York) famously revised Weber's protestant ethic thesis to link it to the development of consumerism. Bauman gave the argument that consumer culture had replaced the work ethic as the axial principle of contemporary society particular clarity. This inspired extensive theoretical reflections about the role of consumption, but also, notably in the work of sociologists such as Don Slater (LSE) and Alan Warde (Manchester), applied empirical studies of consumption, in Warde's case based on food, in Slater's on the media. Urry's work influential work on tourism, though less empirical, is another case in point. The University of Manchester has been an especially important base for this work, with sociologists such as Warde and Dale Southerton playing lead roles major funded research centres CRIC ([ESRC Centre for Research on Innovation and Competition](#)) and on [Sustainable Consumption](#).

### *Cultural Class Analysis*

A final example of the way that cultural analysis infused British sociology has been in the development of Bourdieusian perspectives on stratification. In most parts of the world, the sociology of stratification is predominantly quantitative and originally based in the debate between Marx and Weber regarding theorisation of class and status. Stratification research was traditionally strong in British sociology during the 1960s and 1970s, leading to influential studies by Goldthorpe, Halsey and their associates on social mobility. Much of this important tradition of work deployed case studies to explore the association between class structure, class consciousness, and politics, and works such as the *Affluent Worker* thesis commanded major international interest.

During the 1980s and 1990s, this focus on class was subject to serious critique, much of it from proponents of cultural theory discussed above, who saw class as a throwback to the era of industrial capitalism increasingly left behind by de-industrialisation and globalisation.

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It is however, since the late 1990s that a new current has become dominant in British sociology, which sees a hybrid fusion of interests in class and stratification with Pierre Bourdieu's sociology.

Interests in Bourdieu have a long history in Britain, but until the 1980s he was mainly seen as a specialist in the sociology of education. During the 1980s he was taken up by authors writing in *Theory, Culture and Society* who wanted to explore how his arguments about cultural capital could be configured to provide an explanation of cultural change, and especially the significance of post-modernism. Featherstone and Lash and Urry thus rooted the more fluid and unstable cultural hierarchies in the new middle classes whose 'cultural capital' was being reworked. From this initial entry into cultural sociology, Bourdieu's work has come to play an enormous role in British sociology, where, since his death in 2002, he has become probably the single most popular theorist in British sociology. Here British sociology has been an intermediary between his widespread adoption within more quantitative and formal models within American (and some European) sociology, and that deriving from his original French context.

This reception of Bourdieu as a kind of cultural theorist is, of course, very different from the way he is read in France and the US, where he is normally seen as a mainstream sociologist with somewhat sociologically determinist views about the link between cultural consumption and social position. By contrast in the British case, Bourdieu has generally been seen as offering a critique of the more mainstream sociology of stratification through introducing questions of culture into the analysis of social class and gender. The interest of feminists in Bourdieu's work was a striking and rather unusual feature of the British reception (see Adkins and Skeggs 2005).

A foundational work here was Beverley Skeggs' *Formations of Class and Gender* (1997) which sought to explain how young working class women in the English midlands saw their place in the dramatically restructured conditions of the later 1980s and early 1990s. Her influential argument was that these young women dis-identified from class through vesting in 'respectable' and 'feminine' identities. In some respects this was a classically British work from within the cultural studies

tradition, in keeping with Willis's arguments about the way that the subordinate fail to recognise their own disadvantaged position. But it helped to generate interests in identities which came to have considerable appeal. An important application was in the study of ambivalent class identities, for instance in my own studies of class awareness (Savage 2000) which emphasised how the British middle classes are typically reflexive about their class position.

Bourdieu became a key force behind the distinctive British elaboration of what is sometimes called 'cultural class analysis'. This body of work, associated with writers such as Bev Skeggs (Goldsmiths), Fiona Devine and Alan Warde (Manchester), Diane Reay (Cambridge), Andrew Sayer (Lancaster), as well as myself reflects on how cultural analysis poses a highly productive challenge for the understanding of class. This work has led in the last decade into major programmes of research on 'identities' which was funded as a major research programme by the ESRC and has led to several highly significant books and articles

A particularly important institutional base for this body of work was the ESRC Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change (CRESC), based at the University of Manchester and the Open University which had multi-million pound core funding from the Economic and Social Research Council for ten years between 2004 and 2014 (HERE). This brought together many of the currents discussed above, including that of cultural studies (led by Tony Bennett), cultural class analysis (myself), consumption (Alan Warde), as well as leading anthropologists, historians, and experts in management studies. A very important feature of the research programme of CRESC was the 'Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion' project, which involved a major attempt to replicate Bourdieu's own study of *Distinction* using a nationally representative survey, focus groups and qualitative interviews. Bennett et al's *Culture, Class, Distinction* has been an internationally acclaimed study which underscores the continued centrality of social class divisions in generating cultural inequalities, and has also helped to introduce the use of multiple correspondence analysis into Anglophone sociological research for the first time.

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This intervention has also generated more use of formal quantitative methods for cultural sociology, where Alan Warde, Andrew Miles and Tony Bennett have shown an interest in deploying statistical methods for the analysis of cultural phenomenon. One of the more interesting aspects of this work is the more sceptical approaches to the topical idea of the 'cultural omnivore' initially proposed by Richard Peterson. British sociologists have generally argued that hybrid cultural tastes can better be understood as the reworking of cultural capital itself, though the work of Chan and Goldthorpe at Oxford is more oriented towards the American model. The University of Manchester has proven an especially important base for the deployment of quantitative methods, being marked for instance through the recent use of social network analysis by Nick Crossley to examine musical taste, notably the rise of punk music in the 1970s. Andrew Miles has led extensive projects re-thinking the nature of cultural engagement and its relationship to social divisions. A range of innovative studies have extended this Bourdieusian tradition to consider how emergent cultural forms can be associated with the reworking of cultural capital. A good example is Sam Friedman's study of the audiences for comedy, or Laurie Hanquinet's work on changing audiences for the visual arts. This tradition spawned the BBC's Great British Class Survey, which garnered a very large web survey of 325,000 respondents, and which had unusually detailed questions on cultural tastes and participation. The launch of the first paper analysing this research led to 7 million web hits on the BBC's interactive quiz and can claim to be the most popular piece of sociological research ever conducted in the UK.

In 2013 an informal *Stratification and Culture* network was formed to develop and sustain this current of work, led by Sam Friedman (City, and soon to be LSE), Laurie Hanquinet (York), Andrew Miles (Manchester) and myself. In its first year this has held an active programme of seminars bringing together an international audience of experts (see [HERE](#)).

### *Prospects*

Cultural sociology in the UK has a distinctive hybrid identity. I have shown how questions of culture are not easily demarcated into distinctive sub-domains, but have instead informed key areas of sociological debate more generally. This potential of cross fertilisation continues to the present day, a recent example being the growing interests in the cultural dimensions of social research methods. Work begun in CRESC on 'the social life of methods' (e.g. Savage 2010), is an infusion of currents from science and technology studies and Bourdieusian perspectives. These concerns can also be found in the recent elaboration of 'live methods' (Back and Puwar 2013) and in Warwick's Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies, led by Celia Lury ([HERE](#)). New interests in digital sociology, for instance elaborated by Dave Beer (York) and Evelyn Ruppert (Goldsmiths) are associated with this framing.

We can conclude, therefore that cultural sociology in the UK has been a highly successful, if hybrid, formation which has come to play a distinctive position within global sociology as a clearing house for more demarcated traditions which predominate elsewhere.

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This is not a comprehensive bibliography, and lists only a few of the sources mentioned above.

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**(‘Chair’s Message,’ continued from Page 1)**

David Smilde, editor of *Qualitative Sociology*, was present at the session and asked me to edit a theme issue on the subject. Thanks to David’s persistence and my committed panelists who dropped other tasks to meet editorial deadlines, the theme issue is currently available on-line and the paper version will be out in June and available at ASA this August. I encourage you to take a look on-line ([HERE](#)). Ann Swidler and Michele Lamont discuss methodological pluralism. Lyn Spillman makes a case for quantitative methods as description. Andreas Glaeser offers a hermeneutics of institutions. Richard Biernacki discusses the limitations of coding for cultural analysis. John R. Hall skillfully ties all of the articles together in an afterward.

My own contribution to the theme issue is an introduction entitled, “How Do We Know What We Mean? Epistemological Dilemmas in Cultural Sociology.” My article begins with the simple sentence: “Culture complicates.” If you to read the article, you will understand more fully what I mean by complication. My short point is that the ontological status of culture makes it susceptible to a range of methodologies and also makes studying culture difficult from the standpoint of methodology. For instance, sociologists, no matter their methodological orientation, tend to rely on a repertoire of analytic categories that structure research questions and answers. As sociologists, we know that there are a range of social phenomena that prior research tells us interact with each other. When we submit this prior knowledge to process questions, that is when we submit an established social relation to a *why* and a *how* question, we ratchet our analyses up another level. When we ask what our findings or categories *mean*, we open a Pandora’s box of contingencies.

Sociologists of various stripes structure their research around the general question: how do we know that we know it? In contrast, cultural sociologists ask, “how do we know what it means?” Adding the question of culture--and culture and meaning are in many respects interchangeable--to sociological analysis, brings richness but it also brings methodological dilemmas that other sub-fields do not tend to encounter. In my own work, I often argue that cultural sociology is as methodologically rigorous as other forms of sociology. Cultural sociologists achieve rigor by building controls of various kinds into our research designs and acknowledging the strengths and limitations of our data.

But cultural sociology also gains nuance by paying attention to small details and events that open up wider vistas than the relatively isolated instances in which they might occur. And this brings me to the title of this short essay. What possible connection can there be between cars and guns? And if there is a connection, what can it possibly have to do with culture? At this point, I need to narrate one of those relatively isolated ethnographic moments with potentially broader meaning. I happen to drive a really old car—older than the Kerry/Edwards campaign sticker that I cannot seem to get off of the rear fender! Every year I take the car for its New York State safety inspection; and every year, I secretly hope that it will fail inspection so that I will finally buy a new car.

I live in rural upstate New York. With the exception of Cornell faculty and students, many of the cars are not much spiffier than mine—minus the Kerry/Edwards sticker. After learning that my car did pass inspection, I asked the mechanic who was taking my credit card what cars he would recommend—if I were to finally succumb and buy a new car. After the mechanic made a few suggestions, I added that safety was my primary concern because driving on the hilly icy Ithaca roads in the winter is not for the faint of heart. His response to my safety question left me temporarily speechless. He said: “Cars are like guns. There is nothing wrong with guns—it’s just the people who use them that are the problem.”

aken aback, I quickly agreed with him and paid my bill. Why did he mention guns when I asked about car safety? Was it because I was a Cornell employee (I asked for my Cornell discount)? Was it because of my Kerry/Edwards sticker? Why did he automatically assume that I favored gun control (I do)? But more importantly, why in this context, were guns the focus of his analogy, the first thing that came to mind? On one level, it is not particularly surprising that in a rural area where hunting is a favored leisure time activity of men (and probably some women), he would be pro-NRA, if not an actual member. Nor is it particularly surprising, that a university professor might not be a fan of guns and hunting as a leisure activity. Cars can be dangerous. I know of persons who have been victims of cars; but know no one personally who has been a victim of gun violence.

**(Continued on Page 11)**

**(‘Chair’s Message,’ continued from Page 10)**

What is intriguing and worth pursuing are the hierarchies of value and cultural meanings that made the car mechanic turn to guns when I mentioned car safety. This small ethnographic moment is an aperture to another mental world—a world in which cars and guns appear to inhabit the same mental space. As a cultural sociologist, I kept asking myself why this analogy. As a trained social scientist, I ask myself what type of study might I design, what methods might I use that would exploit the insights of this fleeting moment.

Is the connection between cars and guns meaningful? Is it important for social and cultural analysis? I am sure that it is. I just have not done that study yet—and probably will not. But the reason why I remember the statement made in the car shop so vividly, and why I was thinking of it while I was at the Yale conference (where the only big guns present were metaphorical), is that the car mechanic’s remark confirms my conviction that a “thick” sociology of culture begins on the ground and then aggregates upwards. On that journey, methods and meanings are inextricably linked.

## Photo Culture

Jonathan R. Wynn  
University of Massachusetts - Amherst



The Gatling Gun Review (an all-Hong Kongesian band playing American folk music) performing in a plaza at Kowloon’s K11 Art Mall (the ‘world’s first mall for art’).

# Culture @ Virginia

## Jeff Olick, University of Virginia

The history of sociology at the University of Virginia is yet to be written. But surely any such account would include the centrality of culture in the past work of the department as well as the importance of UVA to cultural sociology as a whole.

James Hunter's *Culture Wars*, Sharon Hays' *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, Murray Milner's *Status and Sacredness*: these major, prize-winning contributions were all written in Charlottesville. Other cultural sociologies produced in the department include: Sarah Corse's *Nationalism and Literature*, Allison Pugh's *Longing and Belonging*, Krishan Kumar's *The Making of English National Identity*, Rachel Rinaldo's *Mobilizing Piety*, and my own *The Politics of Regret*, among others with cultural relevance.

We are a small to midsized department that nonetheless tries to cover a variety of areas, including education, inequality, law, religion, family, immigration, development, and economic sociology. But our identity has always included a strong interest in, and contributions to, cultural sociology, and culture has long been a central focus of our departmental plans.

Sociology and anthropology at UVA were separated in the early 1970s, when Ted Caplow led the department, and Ted's follow-ups to the Lynd's *Middletown* studies, among his enormous number of other works, focused on community and culture. In the seventies and eighties, Jeff Hadden's work on religion, and in particular on cults, was of obvious relevance to cultural sociology. For a short number of years, Lewis Feuer's philosophical perspectives shaped the work of a number of graduate students and colleagues. While he is not a cultural sociologist by any strict definition, Gianfranco Poggi's Weberian state theory was also important to the life of the department in the late 80s and early 90s.

Since the early 1990s, culture has been an overriding concern for the department, and various mission statements have made this explicit. For years, all graduate students were required to take either culture or stratification, and while the historical data are not at hand, it is likely more graduate students have taken comprehensive exams in culture and have identified as cultural sociologists than any other subject. And the interest in culture has shaped our hiring over the last two decades as well. Following my own arrival nearly ten years ago, we have been joined by Andrea Press, Allison Pugh, Simone Polillo, Rachel Rinaldo, Sabrina Pendergrass, and (in the Fall) Miranda Waggoner, in addition to Josipa Roksa and Adam Slez beyond culture. Coupled with new financial support from the University in recognition of our growing achievements, cultural sociology at Virginia is on an upward trajectory.

Cultural sociology, of course, like sociology itself, is hardly a unified enterprise. So it is perhaps most accurate to say that members of the department pursue a wide variety of exciting cultural sociologies. Sarah Corse focuses on the sociology of art and literature; Simone Polillo works at the intersection of cultural and economic sociology; Katya Makarova works on cities and culture, as well as on consumption; Allison Pugh investigates the interplay of culture, family, and economic activity; Sabrina Pendergrass works on race, region and symbolic boundaries; Rachel Rinaldo is an ethnographer of women's agency; James Hunter has an extensive research program on character and culture; Stephan Fuchs has worked on science and knowledge as well as on the intersections among cultural, network, and systems theory; Krishan Kumar has recently been working on empire; and my own work has focused not only on collective memory, but more recently on suffering and the origins of meaning.

But we are more than just a collection of individual cultural scholars, we have also been actively cultivating the synergies that make for a vibrant intellectual atmosphere. With the support of the UVA provost, among other places, Allison Pugh has been running an interdisciplinary field methods workshop with colleagues from anthropology, music, and education, which hosted Sherry Ortner this year, and will welcome Annette Lareau next year. In the past two years, Jeff Alexander, Robin Wagner-Pacifici, Abigail Saguy, Jonathan Rieder, Stephen Vaisey and Isaac Reed have also visited as part of our seminar series, and Isaac will be spending part of the coming year visiting the department. With Andrea Press and two anthropologists, Allison is also organizing a year-long series of lectures on intimacy, which will include sociologists like Paula England, and cultural theorists such as Eva Illouz and Rosalind Gill. We have an active work-in-progress seminar featuring work by faculty and

students that meets periodically to exchange ideas, and students meet monthly in an ethnography workshop to present and support interpretive research.

A particularly important resource for the department is the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture run by James Hunter, along with Joe Davis. The Institute is an extraordinarily well-endowed interdisciplinary center exploring “contemporary cultural change and its individual and social consequences,” as its mission statement puts it; IASC not only supports a large number of pre-doctoral, doctoral, and post-doctoral fellows, but also publishes *The Hedgehog Review*, as well as hosting internationally renowned sociologists like Hans Joas, Richard Sennett, and Phil Gorski (all just in the last two years). The department and the Institute work closely together on these and other events, and the department benefits from the Institute’s unusual resources and connections, to say nothing of its gorgeous space.

Another significant institutional structure worth mentioning is the sociology department’s strong collaboration with the Media Studies department. The most direct connection in this regard is Andrea Press, who holds a partial appointment in both units, and who works with a large number of students, in particular on media audiences. Media Studies does not currently have a graduate program of its own, so it has often hired sociology students as teaching assistants, as well as supported their interests in media. In the next couple of years, we may well pursue a joint program in media sociology, which is already represented by a graduate seminar Andrea offers.

Overall, the graduate program in sociology at UVA is doing extremely well, thanks in part to a major revamping a few years ago, in which we stopped admitting unfunded students, and increased our support to the individuals we do admit. Now we fund between six and eight new students a year going forward; our funding package is competitive with—and in many cases superior to—our public competitors. This institutional change has also had important cultural ramifications, as Virginia graduate students have fostered a markedly collaborative atmosphere of solidarity that counters the storied alienation of graduate student life. Put simply, our graduate students support each other.

The major reason we were able to convince UVA’s administration to provide us with increased resources was that our record of student achievement has indeed been extraordinary over the last decade. Our students have published sole-authored papers in journals included *The American Sociological Review*, *Sociological Theory*, *Social Forces*, *Gender and Society*, *Poetics*, and *Sociological Forum*, among many others. They secure funding from national sources for their work, such as the National Science Foundation (twice for cultural projects). In regard to culture, it is important to note that both first place in the Culture Section’s student paper prize last year went to our student (now Ph.D.) Christina Simko, while the honorable mention went to another of our students, Ben Snyder (now also Ph.D.). Both Christina and Ben’s dissertation books have already been accepted for publication with Oxford University Press. Jen Silva, another of our extraordinary graduates, has published her work in ASR and elsewhere, as well as had her book, *Coming Up Short: Working-Class Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty*, published by Oxford. Matthew Hughey, now associate professor of sociology at the University of Connecticut, published his dissertation book, *White Bound: Nationalists, Antiracists, and the Shared Meanings of Race*, with Stanford. And this list just scratches the surface of a very deep pool of extraordinary graduate student achievements.

Part of this record of impressive graduate student achievement reflects our improved support, but, again, part of it is also due to a palpable culture of intellectual cooperation. We have a departmental culture that works in myriad ways to support cultural sociology, including workshops, guest speakers, and a spirit of collegiality among faculty and students. Faculty co-author with graduate students, students collaborate on independent research projects, scholars serve as co-PIs on grants, there is an active flow of papers among scholars commenting on each other’s work – the intellectual life is bubbling here, with much of it centered on cultural sociology in its many forms.

Virginia, in sum, is a terrific place to do cultural sociology, for both faculty and graduate students. Yes, Cultural Sociology, there is a Virginia!\*\*

Please see our redesigned website ([HERE](#)), follow us on Twitter ([HERE](#)), and visit us on Facebook ([HERE](#)). Also please visit our grad student blog ([HERE](#)).

# Amuses

Recent articles collected and reviewed by the Newsletter Graduate Student Editor,  
Michael Rodríguez-Muñiz

**Berman, Elizabeth Popp, and Laura M. Milanes-Reyes. 2012. "The Politicization of Knowledge Claims: The 'Laffer Curve' in the U.S. Congress." *Qualitative Sociology* 36(1): 53–79.**

In its relatively young life, cultural sociology has rebelled against the confinement of 'culture' to specific spheres or sites in social life (i.e. art worlds or museums). In this campaign, one of its signatures has been to demonstrate to the wider sociological field the *meaningful* dimensions of seemingly non-cultural domains. An example of this move is the growing interest in statistics, indicators, and rankings (e.g. Espeland and Sauder 2007; De Santos 2009; Fourcade and Healy 2013). Contributing to this emergent "sociology of quantification" (Espeland and Stevens 2008), a recent article by Elizabeth Popp Berman and Laura M. Milanes-Reyes applies a cultural sociological lens to ostensibly "cold" facts.

In the broadest terms, Berman and Milanes-Reyes are concerned with the politicization of knowledge claims, and in particular, the *process* through which knowledge becomes (and ceases to be) what Latour (2005) calls "matters of concern." To account for this process, they suggest attentiveness to the shifting "cognitive" and "expressive" uses or valences of knowledge and the ways in which knowledge is inserted into broader political narratives. Drawing on diverse conceptual resources, this article provides a fascinating account of the politicization of the "Laffer Curve," a symbolic representation of the relationship between tax rates and government revenue that emerged as a point of U.S. partisan debate and struggle in the late 1970s.

Mining the *Congressional Record* between 1977 and 2010, the authors found that the frequency, and more importantly, the meaning of the "Laffer Curve" varied considerably over time. Their analysis shows how initially both Republican and Democrat officials treated this knowledge seriously, that is, it was debated and engaged on intellectual grounds. In early 1980s, things began to change, as the symbol was given both cognitive and expressive valences, and increasingly so along partisan lines. Subsequently, between the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, Democrats came to exclusively use the "Laffer Curve" as an expressive symbol (and thus no longer as a legitimate piece of knowledge), while Republicans continued to insist on its scientific validity. At this point, Democrats inserted this economic symbol into a narrative critical of the Reagan administration and its economic philosophy.

In addition to presenting a culturally informed approach to the study of knowledge politicization, this essay provokes reflection on the effect of knowledge on deliberation. As interpreted by these authors, the "Laffer Curve" case suggests that the prospects for deliberation are lessened as knowledge claims lose their legitimacy as scientific knowledge. Although further comparative research is needed, Berman and Milanes-Reyes have opened numerous routes for the future exploration of the cultural politics of expert knowledge.

**Reed, Isaac Ariail. 2013. "Charismatic Performance: A Study of Bacon's Rebellion." *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 1(2):254–87.**

Isaac Reed's recent article begins with a simple, but seminal sociological question: "Why do people follow commands?" (p. 254). As is well known, one could broach, if not answer, this question from several angles – some of the most famous being Gramscian, Foucauldian, and Bourdieusian. Instead of these approaches, Reed returns to the Weberian tradition, and specifically Weber's famous insistence that populations can, under specific sociohistorical circumstances and contingencies, come to consent to relations of domination when considered "legitimate." Within Weber's tripartite framework, the author hones in on "charismatic" authority, a characteristically dramatic, ephemeral, and yet powerful force with the potential to overturn other, more stabilized structures, especially in 'unsettled' times. In Reed's assessment, the extant literature does not provide a robust theoretical account of the emergence and entropy (or in his terminology, the "arcs") of charismatic domination. To this end, he proposes a shift from a narrow attention on the charismatic leader to a broader consideration of the "charismatic performance." Bringing Weberian preoccupations into conversation with cultural pragmatics and performance theory, this concept captures

a situation wherein a series of social interactions between a leader and his followers takes on a specific pattern and tone: the leader's startling successes in the world build upon each other to create, in his

followers, a perception of the inevitability of his rise, a deeply affective connection to the leader him or herself, and a tendency for the interpretive frameworks of these followers to center upon the leader's individual person (p. 255).

As Reed illustrates through a historical case study of Bacon's rebellion in English colonial Virginia, the "success" of the performance is not guaranteed in advance nor can it be simply explained by the preexisting status or positionality of the leader. Rather it depends on the extent to which performances 'in and of themselves' generate an increasingly intense "emotional link" between leaders and their "charismatic community." What is particularly distinctive about charismatic performances is how the acts of the leader "becomes a kind of recursive, iterative justification for itself" (p. 266).

The space allotted for a short review prohibits a full exposition of the many insights and arguments condensed in this article. Cultural sociologists of politics, violence, and historical transformations will find a great deal to mull over. For those interested in performativity – and particularly its distinctive elaboration within the Strong Program – this work is a must read, which should be engaged alongside Reed's provocative theoretical reformulation of the concept of power.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Reed, Isaac Ariail. 2013. "Power: Relational, Discursive, and Performative Dimensions." *Sociological Theory* 31(193-218).

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CENTER FOR CULTURAL SOCIOLOGY 10<sup>TH</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE: *ADVANCING*  
*CULTURAL SOCIOLOGY*  
Yale University, April 25-27, 2014

The Center for Cultural Sociology is celebrating its 10th anniversary by hosting a special conference, *Advancing Cultural Sociology*, from Friday, April 25, 1:00 PM to Sunday, April 27, 2:00 PM at Yale. We will host over 80 speakers, covering a wide range of topics in cultural sociology, especially meaning-centered analyses in the social science tradition, with openings to normative themes such as democracy, justice, tolerance, civility, sacrality, and the meaningful dimensions of market exchange. Our seven keynote speakers are Mustafa Emirbayer, Bernhard Giesen, Andreas Glaeser, Michèle Lamont, Paul Lichterman, Lyn Spillman, and Robin Wagner-Pacifici. Four of our outstanding recent Ph.D's, Lisa McCormick, Jason Mast, Matthew Norton and Dominik Bartmanski will present their work in a special session. Co-sponsored by the Whitney Humanities Center.

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# Being There: Phenomenology and Social Structures Annual Sociology Conference at The New School for Social Research

A report by Guillermina Altomonte, Manuella Badilla, Robert Calore, Franziska Koenig-Pastore, Sonia Prelat, Monique Trauger, and Valentina Abufhele (conference organizers)

April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014

This year's sociology conference at The New School for Social Research showcased presentations in seven different panels that explored the lived experience of actors within historically and socially situated environments.

Gabriel Ignatow (University of North Texas) gave the Keynote on the historical development of the social constructionist paradigm in sociology and its benefits and impediments in carrying out social research on "Big Data".

## Space and Place

Janine Muster (University of Alberta) discussed her ethnographic study on how Canadian evangelical groups have transformed abandoned movie theatres into places of worship. Ricarda Hammer (Brown University) presented the findings for her ethnographic study of the daily operations of Cuban Street Vendors in Havana. Mike Deland (University of California, Los Angeles) discussed how he used ethnography to study the social networks that had to be created and maintained to ensure the survival of Ocean View Park basketball court in Santa Monica. Virág Molnár (The New School for Social Research) was the panel discussant.

## Techniques of the Body

Michael Decrosta (Lehigh University) presented his research on the bodily techniques developed in taking mobile pictures and its role in creating a "contemporary nostalgia". Through a historical analysis, his research suggests that through the daily practices of photography the phone-camera has become an extension of our bodies that alters the relations to our past and future. Allison Bloom (Rutgers University) presented her research on the embodied forms of survival by women exposed to recurrent domestic violence. She investigated how techniques such as hyper vigilance are learned through fear and trauma, and takes on a creative and strategic bodily

awareness to ensure survival. Victoria Pitts-Taylor (City University of New York) presided as the panel discussant.

## Sacred and Profane

Christopher Carroll (Northwestern University) presented his research on second generation Mexican American Catholics in Chicago and how religion is socially embedded instead of rationally articulated within these communities. Aga Pasieka (Polish Academy of Sciences) presented her research of lived religion in the life of multi-religious communities in Poland. She illustrated how religion works as the background for many social actions that create boundaries among neighbors but also allows for them to be traversed within these pluralist communities. John Cuda (University of Pittsburgh) presented his research on New Age and neo-pagan identities. He suggested how New Age individuals build their identities through a composite of beliefs and practices creating an alternative spirituality culture. Daniel Winchester (University of Connecticut) offered comments as discussant.

## Patterns of Perception

Lilia Raileanu (Rutgers University) examined written narratives regarding experiences of imprisonment, a loved one going to war, waiting for a visa grant, and the pause on life produced by the chance of a heart transplant. In all of these, Raileanu contends that a socio-temporal disruption is produced by not allowing actors to enact their usual temporal maps and take part in the socio-temporal order. Asia M. Friedman (University of Delaware) presented on sensory perception and the visual construction of sex and race. Friedman argued that a multisensory framework offers new insights about the meaninglessness of "biological race", since it underlines the fact that categories such as race and sex are only thought to be "real" because we "see them".

**(Continued on Page 15)**

## **(‘New School Conference report,’ continued from Page 16)**

Stephanie Alves (Rutgers University) presented on the social logic of blind trust. Alves contended that attentional norms and traditions must be foregrounded to understand trust in relation to social order. Lisa M. Champion (Rutgers University) discussed her work on the construction of cancer survivor identity. She focused on the lived experience of cancer survivors and how they incorporate their illness in the production of their identity: managing their appearance, settings, and discourses. Claudio Benzecry (University of Connecticut) provided insights as the panel discussant.

### Migration and Displacement

The papers presented in this panel came from Patrick Ciaschi (The New School for Social Research) and Virgine Mesana (University of Ottawa.) Ciaschi’s paper discussed how we can understand, and approximate theoretically “being in movement”. His paper put forward a research agenda that explored ways to approach migratory trajectories, border crossings, and experiences of movement. Mesana presented her findings in interviewing female Indian filmmakers in Canada. She explored the personal effects as well as the cultural display and interpretation of what it means to inhabit diaspora space. Robin Wagner-Pacifici (The New School for Social Research) provided commentary as the discussant.

### Race and Subjectivity

Karida L. Brown (Brown University) presented her research on the impact of school desegregation in an Appalachian community and how the African-American community was affected by these profound changes. Her analysis of oral histories suggests that the lived experience of social integration caused African-Americans to encounter feelings of material dislocation and identity reformation. T. Aradhana Hinds (New School for Social Research) presented a paper that investigates the phenomenon of racial passing in everyday life to highlight how social actors commit and construct a self. She drew on examples from Nella Larsen’s novel *Passing*, to show that racial passing can be investigated as a case of performance and formation of self rather than as an instance of pretense. Keahnan Washington (Yale University) drew on participant observations and oral histories at an ex-offender

reentry program to explore the experience of racial formation within the context of the prison environment. Jacqueline N. Brown (City University of New York) gave her feedback as the discussant.

### Knowing and Becoming

Michael Shultz (UC Berkeley) presented a formal model to develop a theory on the effects of network structure on individual experiences of local communities. His results revealed that though structural knowledge can lead to an increased sense of community, excessive structural knowledge actually diminishes such community. Lynette Shaw (University of Washington) advocated for the use of “Agent-Based Modeling” in sociological research. After illustrating how mental schemas can lead to a spontaneous emergence of systems of shared meaning at the individual and dyadic level, Shaw then went on to show how this model can be mapped back onto macro-level processes. Sharon Cornelissen (Princeton University) presented her ethnographic work on the phenomenological development of becoming a dumpster divers in New York City. Cornelissen used her study to make a theoretical intervention in the Bourdousian claim of the unity of the habitus, arguing instead that these dumpster divers demonstrated a situated and context-specific disposition that is disjointed from their middle-class notions of trash. Gabriel Ignatow (University of North Texas) contributed as the panel discussant.

The conference concluded with a presentation by Eviatar Zerubavel (Rutgers University) on the social construction of irrelevance. Using the Gestalt figure-background model of perception, Zerubavel highlighted the socialized processes (e.g. traditions and norms) of what actors attend to in the world. Janet Vertesi (Princeton University) and Claudio Benzecry (University of Connecticut) provided some empirical support from their own work. Vertesi illustrated how the perception of a two-toned Martian surface was brought about by certain socio-material practices. Benzecry discussed opera aficionados and their emotional investment and social dynamics shape the salience of certain features of the performance (singing) while backgrounding others (the musical accompaniment).

# AUTHORS MEET CRITICS

A session at the 2013 Annual ASA Meetings on  
*AMERICAN MEMORIES: ATROCITIES AND THE LAW*

by Joachim Savelsberg (University of Minnesota) and Ryan D. King (The Ohio State University)

With critiques by

Francesca Polletta (University of California at Irvine), Barry Schwartz (University of Georgia),  
and Ron Levi (University of Toronto) and a reply by the authors

## **Francesca Polletta: Critique of *American Memories: Atrocities and the Law***

I thought about this book while I was reading about the confirmation hearing last week of Samantha Power for US ambassador to the UN. Power, recall, was the Pulitzer prize winning author of a book about the U.S. record on atrocities. By the time of the hearing, though, she had learned to “bite her tongue,” as the story put it. When she was asked repeatedly by Senator Marco Rubio to list the US crimes that she believed called for an apology, she kept her poker face. “Again, sir,” she said, “I think this is the greatest country on Earth. We have nothing to apologize for.”

That she said that was both completely unsurprising (and her confirmation went off without a hitch) and stunning. That the U.S. has nothing to apologize for? In a way Savelsberg and King’s book asks the question, is it worth it to try to get Americans to see things differently?

Does knowing the past make us less likely to repeat it? Do efforts to recognize and commemorate past atrocities—specifically, by way of legal trials—serve in any way to prevent future violence? The question is deceptively straightforward and enormously important. The authors divide the question into two parts. How and when are atrocities entered into the collective memory? How, meaning which atrocities are subjected to legal action (the Holocaust, but not Germany’s extermination of the Herero in Namibia; the internment of Japanese Americans but not the enslavement of African Americans; and so on). How do trials construct atrocities and how do they do so differently than diplomatic discourse and media discourse? Which constructions stick—is the legal narrative more or less powerful than the journalistic one? And then the second question: what effect does remembering have on efforts to prevent future violence? Are groups or places or people who remember past atrocities more energetic in combating future ones?

To answer these questions, the authors draw on a wealth of scholarship along with ingenious studies: they trace the representation of My Lai through journalistic expose and trial to contemporary school textbooks. They content analyze posts to a website supporting one of the US marines implicated in the Haditha killings. They compare the representation of Serbadan Milosovic in diplomatic renderings and in the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. They analyze the pattern of hate crime enforcement to see if cities that commemorate past atrocities are more likely to prosecute hate crimes.

Their answers are provocative and depressing—which is a little bit at odds with the optimism they profess in the book. Americans—and the book focuses on American memories—Americans are much better at remembering atrocities on foreign soil than on their own. Trials tend to find guilty low level personnel—the Lynndie Englands and LT. Calley’s—rather than the high level military personnel. In the United States, commemorating the Holocaust seems to be associated with higher rates of hate crime prosecution, but commemorating the oppression and liberation of African Americans is not.

I found most intriguing their discussion of the institutional logics shaping the construction of collective memories. For example, the logic of diplomacy—with its premium on negotiation, and keeping players engaged in negotiation—cast Slobodan Milosovic differently than the logic of the court, with its allegiance to formal rules, and binary of guilty or not guilty. In the diplomatic rendering, at least early on, Milosovic was a cooperative political leader fighting for peace—against antagonists within his own party. The legal narrative was much quicker to cast Milosovic as a power hungry nationalist responsible for his regime’s atrocities.

The court told My Lai as a story of a low ranking soldier violating orders, resulting in a limited number of unjustified deaths. The media—in particular, in Seymour Hersh’s searing expose—told a story about wanton acts

of rape and murders—hundreds more than the court trial—and about a military that first endorsed such acts and then covered them up.

So institutions construct memories differently, in line with institutional goals, standards of credibility, and conceptions of culpability. But some institutions are more influential than others in putting their narrative stamp on history. They shape memory in ways that spill out of this institution, that become part of a broader, popular memory. So for example, the court's story of Milosovic proved was more influential in media accounts and indeed, eventually influenced the diplomatic story. Likewise, and more surprising, the court's representation of Lieutenant Calley as acting individually and as signaling not the wantonness of the military but public opprobrium for war, won out over media accounts; textbooks now treat the episode tersely and in line with the trial narrative.

So the authors do a superb job in demonstrating the stickiness of legal narrative as compared to other kinds of narratives (at least in the United States). I wished they had devoted more attention to why that is the case. What gives legal narratives staying power that neither journalistic nor diplomatic narratives have? Is it because we tend to see a verdict as more conclusive than a newspaper report or a diplomatic missive? (even though verdicts are appealed) Is it our view of law as not only authoritative but unchanging? (even though precedent is interpreted in a variety of ways). Is this distinctive to the United States?

The second part of the authors' argument is harder, and their arguments are looser and sometimes problematic. Causality is really really difficult here, and I want to argue that it's even more complicated than the authors suggest. The question, again: do trials prevent subsequent violence? They say that yes, they do. But their evidence seems to point in the opposite direction.

Except for a 3 year house arrest for a low ranking soldier, My Lai didn't change much. It didn't lead to changed public views of the military. It didn't lead to changed views within the military of the merits of torture. Although the episode was invoked in newspaper accounts of Haditha, the 2005 episode in which US marines were accused of murdering 24 Iraqi civilians, it didn't seem to have any effect whatsoever on the outcome of the trial or on public response to that outcome.

The authors assert that memories of the Holocaust motivated the passage of hate crime legislation—but it's hard to take some legislators' references to the Holocaust as being the same thing as motivation. They show that cities with Holocaust memorials are more likely to prosecute hate crimes but cities that memorialized the civil rights movement did not have higher rates of hate crime prosecution. And the civil rights movement did have criminal trials. They say that America's failure to take legal action for atrocities committed in its history—notably the extermination of Native Americans and the slave trade—accounts for the remarkably celebratory character of its commemorative style. But even if that statement is true, it's not the same as saying that the celebratory character of America's commemorative style somehow encourages violence.

So I'm left a little confused by the authors' optimism. And this matters, I think, because I'm left also confused about what the practical implications of their argument are. The book is about American memories of atrocities but Americans are pretty resolutely unwilling to remember American atrocities. Is the problem America? Is it law? Or is it criminal law? If the problem is America and America's triumphalism, then maybe you just have to say, like Samantha Power, America is the greatest country on earth. Pretend the atrocities didn't happen even as you try to prevent future ones. If the problem is our legal system, maybe we should try to enter atrocities into the collective memory in ways other than law. If the problem is criminal law, then maybe the best strategy is to use civil law instruments to bring the state to account.—and I think groups have done that to combat police brutality.

So the authors' empirical evidence seems to point toward pessimism about the prospects for acknowledging atrocities in a way that prevents future violence—despite the authors' professed optimism. But maybe their optimism isn't quixotic.

And the key, I want to suggest, is that the authors may be drawing causal arrows too narrowly, especially with respect to how trials have an impact on collective memory. We know from the study of social movements that groups challenging the status quo get media coverage when they are connected or can connect themselves to institutionalized political processes: to the passage of legislation, to electoral campaigns, to big trials. In other words, if you're an organization fighting for civil liberties, you get coverage when you comment on the ongoing Congressional investigation into allegations of wiretapping—not when you come up with a five point plan for how to increase civil liberties in the age of the Internet. So even if only low-level military personnel are put on trial, that may provide the opportunity for media and public attention to the larger crimes, the larger derelictions of duty. Yes, only low level personnel were convicted for Abu Graib, and the commanding officer was only demoted.

But the trials—and the commanding officer’s defense that she had been instructed to allow the mistreatment of prisoners-- allowed newspaper reporters to draw connections between Abu Graib and John Yoo’s Torture Memos, and waterboarding, and the administration’s sanctioning of torture. I think that that is what is entered into the collective memory. That sum total of accounts of Abu Graib—journalistic in conjunction with judicial—make me more sanguine that another Abu Graib won’t happen again.

Same thing with Vietnam. Small wonder, as the authors point out, that state-certified textbooks downplay the My Lai incident. But collective memory is also made up of movies and tv shows and novels and songs—casual references to the past made in a movie about something else. Vietnam is remembered as a debacle--in spite of school textbooks but because of movies, and television shows, and novels.

I was reading about the commemoration of white rioting against African Americans in Tulsa in 1921, rioting that left tens of thousands homeless and hundreds dead. The episode was largely forgotten until, with its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary approaching, a state representative called for public commemoration. The episode then became the object of state study commission, a legislative campaign for reparations for survivors, organized protests, several monuments, and newspaper articles, books, journal articles, movies, and television shows. So there were a variety of vehicles for the creation of a collective memory.

So I’m left with three questions. One, what is it about legal decisions that make them so important in forging collective memory, particularly in the United States?

Two, if the problem with using trials to prevent future violence is that Americans tend to be unwilling to find culpable for atrocities anyone or anything other than low level personnel and individuals (bad apples)—is the source of the problem American culture, American law, or American criminal law?

And three, what are the practical ramifications of the authors’ argument? Should we lobby the Justice Department to prosecute Dick Cheney? Should we accept that until we have a regime change, trials are not going to do any more than convict the Lt. Calley’s of the world, and try to combat government sponsored violence in other ways?

That this book provokes such urgent practical questions as well such important theoretical ones is a sign of its significance.

### **Barry Schwartz: Critique of *American Memories: Atrocities and the Law***

I regret that I could not write this book, for in few realms is the moral drama of life as memorable as it is in the courtroom and in the enforcement of law. At the same time, I disagree with many of the authors’ statements and arguments. This irony resolves itself in the very quality of the book, which provokes as much as it informs, which readers can sink their teeth into because the lucidity of its perspective challenges and clarifies their own.

The thesis of *American Memories* is that high profile atrocity trials are both workhorses which assess evidence and dispense justice and showhorses which dramatize the sanctity of violated human rights and inhibit future cruelty. But Savelsberg and King must be aware of their argument’s vulnerability. Take, for instance, the Nuremburg and other postwar trials in Germany. Who can doubt that these trials were *preceded*, not *followed*, by peace and diminished violence (induced by military defeat). Despite the present significance of these trials for German memory, the dominant sentiment during almost thirty years following surrender was neither regret, obligation, guilt, nor shame but rather a sense of victimhood. “In the name of Germany,” war was imposed on the people by monsters that had betrayed their nation’s legacy of high morality and achievement. Not until the late 1960s, when German youngsters began to question their parents’ generation, did a sense of wrongdoing permeate the population at large. Not until then did National Socialism become part of German history. Indeed, one may argue that the 1978 television series, *Holocaust*, not the Nuremburg trials, motivated German young people to become conscious of their forebears’ wrongdoing. These qualifications underscore key questions about the Nuremberg Trials’ reception: how many knew about the trials, how did they think and feel about them, and how did they appraise what they knew.

The authors’ claims in the “Avoidance of Evil in American Collective Memory” are true as stated. No commander has been brought to account for the murder of Native Americans, civilians at My Lai and Haditha, or humiliating prisoners in Abu Ghraib, but I respectfully disagree with the way their statement is formulated. The deeper issue is how atrocity is qualitatively and quantitatively defined. The American legal system processes few atrocity cases of any kind, and I submit this is because American atrocities, *compared* to those of their German, Russian, Chinese, and Japanese counterparts, are few and mild.

It is also true that Americans are less likely than Europeans to remember Slobodan Milosevic's crimes, but one can only make sense of this statement within a comparative perspective. Are Europeans more or less likely than Americans to remember the details of American slavery, slaughtering of Indians, wartime treatment of Japanese citizens?

Evidence tells us that Americans need no trials to remind them of their history's moral shortcomings. I will name my own work with Horst-Alfred Henrich on German and American students' beliefs about the most hideous events in their respective countries' history. In the United States, the event most frequently mentioned by our subjects was slavery, followed by maltreatment of the American Indians, internment of the Japanese, and racial segregation. These survey findings on negative memory cannot be inferred from the author's primary source of data, history texts, where oppressors appear in the purity of their impenitence; victims, solely in the innocence of the suffering.

Americans, far more than most other peoples, deny *personal* responsibility for their ancestors' wrongdoing. Their individualist ethos makes this so, but that same ethos requires redeeming future actions. Some of these actions are excessive. At the institutional level, "multi-cultural" courses that permeate even the most conservative of American universities are, in fact, rituals of regret rather than examination of the sources, characteristics, and consequences of minority group conduct. These courses do not invite students to analyze minorities but to "appreciate" them. Some fail to appreciate them enough. The author quotes a well-respected sociologist's observation that Congress honored Martin Luther King Jr. for his civil rights achievements but was silent on his opposition to the Vietnam War. Whether King's civil rights legacy is more or less relevant than his beliefs about the Vietnam War, however, is a matter of moral priority—unless the Vietnam War is to be considered an atrocity in itself. If so, which nation is responsible for it?

Furthermore, commemorative markers maintained by the Interior Department express, in their aggregate, a veritable rush to repentance, as does the *U.S. Gazetteer's* listing of schools, hospitals, streets, highways, and other physical sites named after victims of American injustice. This is also true for recent history texts. As I looked for Abraham Lincoln in American texts written prior to the civil rights (1920-1960) movement, I found few black contributions to American society, but after 1960 the role of African Americans is not only disproportionately represented but also overestimated, as is the case for all favored minorities. In America and Europe alike, history and commemoration are now vehicles for what Pierre Nora calls, "the vengeance of the underdog." A strange "vengeance," indeed, where the oppressor himself revises and stands traditional history and commemoration on their heads.

In Savelsberg and King's brief reference to American slavery we confront directly the question of atrocity's meaning. According to Nobel Prize Laureate Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman's *Time on the Cross*, free Southern whites within any age group had significantly higher rates of morbidity and mortality than did slaves. The cruelty of American slavery, which includes rape, arbitrary punishments and humiliation, the denial of education and family life, and physical punishment, is undeniable. But common sense compels us to ask how frequent these cruelties could have been. The *Slave Narratives* and other sources tell us that psychopath slave owners were far from the norm. With respect to physical abuse in particular, why would a planter spend the present equivalent of many thousands of dollars for a slave to plant and harvest crops, then beat him so senseless that he could not perform the labor for which this owner paid?

To recognize the relative well-being of the slave is not to reduce the meaning of slavery to its health benefits, but to insist that the so-called bridge metaphors ("coupling" or "pairing," as Alfred Schutz would have called it) connecting slavery (even Serbian aggression) to the Holocaust is neither right nor wrong; rather it reduces two qualitatively different events to their few comparable dimensions. The function of such metaphors is to arouse the emotions, not the intellect.

On a related topic, our authors claim that Americans are less inclined than Europeans to enforce laws prohibiting hate crimes. This is true, but three issues about hate crime laws bother Americans more than Europeans, and the book ignores them. The first, legal, issue arises from the Fourteenth Amendment guarantee of equal protection. Is the security of some classes of victims, namely minorities, more worthy of protection than the security of others? The answer, under hate crime legislation, is yes. Secondly, America's reluctance to define a given offence as a hate crime is surpassed only by their reluctance to prosecute "love crimes," namely, willingness to give sanctuary to those able to elbow their way to the front of the immigration line by their skill at climbing border fences at night. Thirdly, Justice Department and Census Bureau records acknowledge the subjective definition of hate crimes, which are almost eight times more likely to be committed by whites against blacks than blacks against whites, suggesting a surprisingly low level of black resentment. Whites are not only

disproportionately judged to victimize blacks out of hatred; they are also treated with disproportionate harshness. Duke University is still paying for violating the civil rights of its (2006) largely white Lacrosse team by expelling them for alleged hate crimes against an African American female dancer and escort. The city of Durham's district attorney was disbarred for concocting evidence in favor of the black girl supposedly raped by three of the Blue Devils. This scandal tells us that high-profile trials can backfire on the innocent. Of hate crimes committed for religious reasons, 70 percent of the victims are Jews, who comprise less than two percent of the population. That a third of African Americans and Hispanic Americans, twice the rate of the general population, hold anti-Semitic beliefs is generally ignored in the academy and the media, where minorities have pride of place.

(Whether African Americans and Hispanics disproportionately perpetrate anti-Semitic crime is a separate matter.)

In this regard it is difficult to overlook the authors' selective commendations of the International Courts and Tribunals, including the Court of Justice. The latter, it is true, affirmed Milosevic's malevolence, but this same Court is notorious for its anti-American and pro-Arab bias. After Palestinian terrorists caused the death of 1,000 Jews, the Israeli government built a security barrier (most of which is electronic and wired) which for all intents and purposes eliminated further terrorism. In 2004, the General Assembly, petitioned by the Palestinian Authority, instructed the Court of Justice to rule on the legality of Israel's actions. Even the European Union recognized that the Court had no jurisdiction in this matter, but the Court of Justice harshly condemned the Israeli government, ruled its security barrier illegal, ordered its removal, and proposed sanctions. A judge from the Peoples Republic of China announced the decision. If taken as seriously as the Nuremberg decisions, this verdict would have certainly created memories: it would have expressly encouraged rather than ended the murder of Jewish civilians.

Set beside the authors' naïve faith in World Courts as champions of human rights, I am intrigued by the assertion that American civil society compels citizens to remember past wrongdoings, while the state is the source of self-congratulation and whitewashing. This sounds very much like Alexis de Tocqueville, who declared civil society to be the *intermediate unit* that protects the individual from state tyranny. I have always thought Tocqueville to have had it inside out: the American state is and always has been the protector of civil rights; the localities (municipalities, counties, and state governments), the sites of moral mischief, including invidious discrimination and atrocity.

What about state-sponsored military atrocity? One gets the impression from this book that National Socialist atrocities (and Japanese atrocities in Asia) are of the same genre as My Lai and Haditha. Only the magnitude differs, and both are equally deterred by high profile court cases. The deterrence of such cases, however, is not a linear function of penalties imposed; deterrent effects are most evident when enforcement ceases altogether, as during natural disasters.

The problem runs deeper. Courts and tribunals cannot always affect the types of conduct they are called upon to regulate. S.L.M. Marshall, the World War II historian, tells us that in conventional land warfare, a substantial number of soldiers are so paralyzed by fear that they cannot fire their weapons. Many fire with vengeful deliberation; many, spontaneously and uncontrollably. Sometimes an attack combines all three elements, without regard for command directives. High-profile tribunals cannot change this. In all wars, crimes are committed by each side against the other, but the death rate of innocent noncombatants, i.e., atrocities, is greater in cases where the enemy and the civilian are impossible to distinguish. Yet, collateral damage is not necessarily an atrocity. Without understanding the asymmetrical lineaments of recent wars, which includes suicide attacks, use of civilians as shields (often with the latter's approval), and fighters mixing in with the general population, scholars condemn atrocities more often than they analyze them rationally.

High-profile legal contention is a symbolic activity, an articulation of ultimate values and major turns in American and European history. As courts and tribunals perform only the weakest deterrent function, the high-profile trial is a constituent, not a source, of future memory and commemorative practice. Can we fully grasp the African American struggle for justice, for example, if we ignore the Amistad trial, the Celia Case, Dred Scott, John Brown, Plessy-Ferguson, the Scottsboro Boys, the so-called Emmet Till murder trial, Brown vs. the Board of Education, Affirmative Action, Rodney King, O.J. Simpson, the repeal of federal supervision of voting practices? Some of these trials entail atrocity, most do not. But these and related trials comprise a framework for organizing African American memory. To my mind, this point exemplifies Savelsberg and King's unintended but nonetheless compelling achievement. Trials—civil, not criminal or military, and properly conducted—secure human rights.

The authors' comparison of American and European sensitivity to historical sins is less impressive. Are the sixty million dead of Europe and Asia's two World Wars seriously to be compared to the internment of

Japanese Americans, prompted by Pearl Harbor and the existing Japanese intelligence network, or to American slaves cared for and fed as well as work animals, or to the victims of angry young men at Haditha, frightened boys at My Lai, adolescent captors at Abu Graib? When did an American military unit, comparable to the *Einsatzgruppen* or their Russian and Japanese equivalents, systematically murder enemy combatants and civilians? When did they tie together enemy soldiers like cattle and machine-gun them to death? Where in Guantanamo or Abu Graib is the Dachau ditch the SS prepared to receive the blood of Russian prisoners of war? Where is America's gulag? When did its Cultural Revolution start? What fair-minded person would contemplate these actions, deliberately planned, against scores, indeed, hundreds—even thousands—of innocents and compare them with American injustice? *American Memories*, for all its merits, is a comparative study that deemphasizes the gravity of the events compared.

This review of *American Memories* cannot end on a note that draws attention to its shortcomings. Joachim Savelsberg and Ryan King's colleagues are indebted to them for the thought they put into this book, a work that raises more issues than an *Author Meets Critic* session can cover. Their book belongs to that category of writing in which not only valid findings but even incomplete and problematic ones provoke fresh ideas—in this case, ideas about the place of atrocities in American conscience and memory.

### **Ron Levi: Critique of *American Memories: Atrocities and the Law*<sup>1</sup>**

"Does the world know what happened to us?," survivors of Buchenwald are recalled asking repeatedly, on the day US troops entered the camp in April 1945 (Fox 2013). How all the more unspeakable, then, that among the dead of Buchenwald was Maurice Halbwachs, the French sociologist whose signal contribution was giving life to the concept of collective memory, and the social process of witnessing, remembering, and commemorating the past (Halbwachs 1950). Halbwachs survived for eight months in the Buchenwald concentration camp. He died of dysentery in Block 56 of its *kleines lager*, or "Little Camp," in 1945 (Semprun 1994). Separated by barbed wire from the remainder of Buchenwald, the most extreme conditions of starvation, disease, forced labor, torture and medical experimentation were visited upon inmates. Throughout this time the crematorium was visibly located above inmates of the *kleines lager*.

In his biographical analysis of 'The Murder of Maurice Halbwachs,' Pierre Bourdieu (1987) insists that rather than solely memorializing Halbwachs's insights, we must also take up the work that engaged him and remember the violence that ended it. In so doing Bourdieu (1987:169) brings to light Halbwachs's teaching during the interwar period, and his insight that German sociologists of the day were caught in metaphysical debates and overly hostile to empirically-driven research that sought to demystify social life. For Bourdieu, it is imperative to remember Halbwachs in these terms: and to understand his death within the trajectory of a destructive rationalism of thought, and the need to confront the madness of the extermination camp (1987:170).

Mere months after Buchenwald's liberation, legal attempts to confront the madness of the camp were taken up at the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg. Evidence from Buchenwald of a shrunken head and the tattooed flayed skin of a Polish prisoner would represent, as Douglas (1998) trenchantly demonstrates, the depths of Nazi atrocities that could underwrite an emerging concept of crimes against humanity. The Nuremberg court would thus rely on this evidence to witness -- and indeed to generate an experience of witnessing -- atrocity, and to seek to confront it through an invocation of civilization and international law as a contrast to barbarism.

This approach built on the core authority of law generally, and its capacity to witness events through practices of inscription and spatialization (Ewick and Silbey 1998:99). Indeed despite its legal emphasis on the launching of an aggressive war, much of the legacy of the Nuremberg court lies in the development of evidence of the *Shoah*, and its documentation of Nazi atrocities (Marrus 1998). It is here -- law's promise to witness, to inscribe, and through them to confront -- where *American Memories: Atrocities and the Law* enters the fray.

In *American Memories*, Savelsberg and King adopt a resolutely empirical approach that characterizes Halbwachs's work, to examine the role that legal institutions can play in forging collective memories of atrocities. They argue that collective memory is strengthened in those cases when legal institutions gain traction, and weakened in those cases when legal institutions are circumvented or discounted. Building on work in political science, they suggest that through collective memory, legal institutions such as trials may help prevent future atrocities.

*American Memories* thus develops a bold agenda that places significant stock in the power of formal legal institutions to shape the content, tone, and depth of collective memory. In the process Savelsberg and King adopt the position of several legal scholars on atrocities, and provide empirical hooks for the argument that trials can

generate an influential record of horrific events. Yet *American Memories* goes further than this, demonstrating that this official and state-sanctioned memory tends to spill over beyond the legal field, tracking how legal interpretations influence a broad repository of how atrocities are remembered across nearby fields such as journalism, education, and diplomacy. Building on case studies from My Lai, Haditha, the prosecution of Slobodan Milosevic at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, and a comparative analysis of hate crime legislation in the US and Germany, Savelsberg and King provide evidence that when legal strategies are pursued most vigorously – with the prosecution of senior officials – we gain deeper and longer-standing collective memories of atrocity.

Across these cases, we learn how legal narratives carry long term weight – but that these require high-level prosecutions to successfully shape collective memory. *American Memories* relies on grade school textbooks to demonstrate that the legal narrative persists in the case of My Lai, but with narrow impact, a pattern seen even more starkly with the case low-level prosecutions for Haditha in Iraq. In contrast, the prosecution of Slobodan Milosevic demonstrates that in the context of prosecuting a head of state, a legal narrative was successful in shifting the narrative of diplomats: here Savelsberg and King are at their most compelling, elegantly demonstrating not only the “staying power” of the legal frame, but its capacity to shift the debate. *American Memories* suggests how this can in turn lead to greater legal effect, by signaling how institutionalized memories can lead to increased legal intervention against hate crimes.

By developing in two directions at once – by considering the role of law as a system of thought, and by developing methodological strategies to measure the relationship between law and collective memory – Savelsberg and King successfully extend the boundaries of Halbwachs’ own work on point. Their system-based approach to law, which appears to implicitly draw on a Luhmannian approach that emphasizes a specific logic to how law thinks and communicates, takes a different reference point than Halbwachs’ relational view of the role of “legal space,” and particularly the role of private law relations, in constructing collective memory. Their methodological emphasis – including analyses of newspaper accounts (for the Milosevic prosecution), legislation and commemorative practices (in the US/Germany comparison), or educational textbooks (for the My Lai case) – advances the project by identifying the relative strength and effect of legally informed memory. This orientation toward what Halbwachs refers to as “touts concrets,” (Marcel 1999) or concrete findings, is one that Halbwachs himself sought to emphasize, beginning with his early research on the Parisian working class (Halbwachs 1912), here extended through a resolutely empirical approach to collective memory.

*American Memories* delivers innovative empirics while also stressing an ethical commitment to our collective need and capacity to remember. Perhaps in the process, *American Memories* risks echoing the claims made by those most invested in the legalization of this field – that legal mechanisms, and indeed criminal trials, are the go to approach for responding to atrocities because of their power to document, adjudicate, and potentially deter future violations.

Within the legal field, *American Memories* tends to downplay the role of lawyers as strategic actors focusing on instrumental goals – this is the terrain for them of politics and diplomats, with the legal field regarded as the terrain of norms, rules, and ideals (see e.g. p104). A tendency to carve out professional politics over-privileges legal ideals, but also tends to reproduce competitions within the legal field. For instance, the current zeitgeist within the human rights community has moved to an emphasis on prosecutions for massive human rights violations. With it, the emphasis of *American Memories* similarly concentrates on the logic of criminal prosecutions and trials for atrocities, rather than approaches such as amnesties, peace agreements, or truth commissions – which are regarded by Savelsberg and King as outside the toolkit of legal institutions. Yet these too are shot through with law and legal regulation, such as the *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act* in South Africa, the legal bases that underwrite peace agreements and amnesties, or the form of legality that pervades newspaper reporting in journalistic accounts of atrocities such as that of My Lai. Civil suits demanding compensation for atrocities are proliferating. How this legal variation informs collective memory is kept outside of *American Memories*: but work on truth commissions, for example, suggests that they enjoy some capacity to generate and solidify new narratives and social imaginaries.

Politics within the field of state power are also potentially underplayed within *American Memories*. While Savelsberg and King themselves indicate that regime change is important in identifying when a criminal trial for atrocity will occur, the real action is seen as happening through the trial itself. But the relative importance between trials and the preceding regime change is not always evident: after all, on 21 November 1945, the opening of the Nuremberg trials was indeed reported on the front page of the *New York Times*, but in a thin column largely outflanked by other stories (McLaughlin 1945). The current entrée and the struggles of the International

Criminal Court to engage in ongoing conflicts demonstrate the close link between regime change and the capacity for prosecution. The effects also turn on the need for an underlying legitimacy: as the largely ignored trial of Saddam Hussein demonstrates, despite prosecution at the top of the chain of command, prosecutions – even with regime change – may not in and of themselves lead to a deep well of collective memory of atrocity.

Similarly, the questions of state legitimacy and state power are themselves deeply embedded in the decision to invest in the visibility of law and legal institutions to respond to atrocities – so that what may be doing the work is less the power of the legal institution itself, than the factors that lead states to invest in legalization. Savelsberg and King’s comparison of Germany and the US is particularly telling: these are states with markedly different political and administrative histories, and with different ways of organizing the state and pursuing statecraft. Yet Germany in the post-*Shoah* context also had a highly constrained set of opportunities through which to act and gain legitimacy, and the decision to invest heavily in structures of commemoration that include legal trials held within Germany was a reflection of the German state’s struggle to engage its past, as well as to reorient a domestic public and an international community during a time of reconstruction. The sheer scale of atrocity appears here as a central issue, combined with a need – past and present – to deploy law to symbolic ends in that process.

Where do we come to in *American Memories*? Savelsberg and King provide an innovative and impressive approach to the method of collective memory, to test the effect of trials across an array of sites and case studies. They link a sociology of law with a sociology of culture that examines how practices of inscription allow legal institutions to bear witness, to solidify memories, and to confront atrocities. Following Bourdieu’s invocation, *American Memories* does not merely remember Halbwachs’s work. While it at times overstates law’s role and prominence, it provides an array of theoretical and empirical tools for how law can help remember: and perhaps most importantly, it reinvigorates Halbwachs to insist on the *scholarly sensibility of asking how we collectively witness*, that we will need to pursue that question.

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## **RESPONDING TO OUR CRITICS: AMERICAN MEMORIES REVISITED by Joachim Savelsberg, University of Minnesota and Ryan D. King, The Ohio State University**

When authors invest thousands of hours in a manuscript they hope, if nothing else, that the book is read carefully by scholars they respect and admire. We are so fortunate, and we thank Ron Levi, Francesca Polletta and Barry Schwartz for their careful reading, insightful commentary, critique and questions raised. The comments were tough, as they should be. Some of the critiques are very much on point and made us wish we had known of them when we wrote the book – but such is the temporal ordering of things. Other comments are easy to disagree with. In a couple of cases we do so vehemently.

We begin by responding to three significant criticisms that appear in more than one review. They gave us pause when we first heard them last August at the Authors-Meet-Critics session in New York. If we could write

the book again these issues would surely receive more ink.

First, *does the gravity of the atrocity affect memories more than we assume?* This question is particularly relevant to the first part of our book on how atrocities are entered into our collective memory in the first place. We want to be clear that suffering and body counts matter and not all calamities are equal. Yet consider three examples that call into question the salience of sheer lethality. First is Nuremberg. Would the Holocaust be forgotten but for these trials? No. But the trials resulted in train cars filled with documents for the historical record which, at a minimum, influence the written record and perhaps allowed for far more coherence in the collective memory than otherwise would have transpired. (The famous books by Christopher Browning, Daniel Goldhagen, Devin Pendas, and Hannah Arendt, for example, are at least partly based on court records and/or on the observation of court proceedings).

Further consider the Armenian genocide and the failed Constantinople war crimes trials. Surely our critics would agree that a million deaths make for a gross atrocity. But how well is this event remembered in the West, let alone the mid-East? If the body count determined memory then the phrase ‘Armenian genocide’ would presumably be easier for American politicians (or the French Constitutional Council) to say without looking over their shoulders. Now imagine the Constantinople trials had succeeded in the same way as Nuremberg? We think Gary Bass is correct when writing that “the forgetting of the Constantinople trials has been closely linked with the forgetting of the Armenian genocide.” We could add the millions of victims of Stalinist purges or of Mao’s Great Leap Forward or the almost forgotten German genocide against the Hereros – all events that were not followed by trials (see our “Conclusions” chapter, especially Table 10.2). We cannot estimate the counterfactual to prove that the absence of trials is the decisive factor. But the above cases show, at a minimum, that the gravity of atrocity does not automatically dictate its place in collective memory.

The issue of *causality* also cuts across each of the critics’ comments, and three finer points require attention: mono-causality, the role of confounders, and counterfactuals. We hope there are many merits of our book, yet we concede that “proving” causality is unlikely among them. And yet, the causal arrows might not be as flimsy as the critics suggest. Professor Polletta mentions findings from the social movement literature in which groups find traction on issues in the absence of trials, or through media in the aftermath of trials. We agree, and we think our chapter on Milosevic illustrates this. We are not mono-causal; the argument is that trials can alter collective memory, but trials are *a* factor; not *the only* factor. Those who seek recipes for greater potency of trial narratives (or for their replacement by alternate stories) will have to take Francesca Polletta’s suggestions seriously: Media, film, scholarship and social movements can work with the material provided by (or simply used by) trials to amplify or challenge judicial narratives. They may introduce evidence not admitted in trial and seek to make a different point.

Another issue relates to confounders. Ron Levi astutely points out that state legitimacy and power is embedded in the decision to invest in the legal process following atrocity. Indeed, other characteristics may be associated with the state that matter more than the trial itself. Our strategy of focusing on distinct cases precluded the kind of ‘large N’ analysis that might help disentangle some of this. Research in the mold of political scientist Kathryn Sikkink’s work could help sort out such questions. Her work certainly points at other lawyerly projects such as truth commissions that often complement trials, as Ron Levy rightly points out. And, indeed, Sikkink’s research (in collaboration with Hunjoon Kim) shows that the association between transitional justice proceedings and improving human rights outcomes is stronger when trials are supplemented by truth commissions. Yet we make this suggestion with due caution. When dealing with the aftermath of atrocity we cannot create a suitable counterfactual – that is, what would have happened but for the trial (or perhaps if there were a trial)? Our chapters on Milosevic and My Lai give us some traction in that we point to multiple narratives and assess which one ultimately had staying power, but questions about causality certainly remain.

On to the third issue, the *stickiness of trials*. We do observe, for My Lai, that the trial narrative, more than its competitors, is reflected in later textbook and media narratives. Also in the Milosevic case, the judicial narrative seems to stick in memory more than its diplomatic competitor. We cannot determine the causal mechanism at work, but we can offer theoretical candidates, and some of them we do address in the book. There is the ritual power of trials, a Durkheimian argument. Niklas Luhmann might instead propose that the procedural features of trials provide them with particular legitimacy. Mark Osiel proposed a Habermasian argument when he wrote about the discursive solidarity that arises from a trial situation in which all sides are being heard and have to listen to each other. We might add that many institutions and the populace have an interest in the judicial narrative because of the “decoupling” function of trials that Bernhard Giesen has alerted us to. By finding select individuals guilty, the organizations in which they were embedded, and the governments and peoples on whose

behalf they acted, are formally (legally) freed from guilt. These four candidates for explaining the “stickiness” of trails are not mutually exclusive. Admittedly, we cannot determine the relative weight of each.

We now turn to smaller points and those that we find less convincing or ardently disagree with, many of which came from Professor Schwartz’s fervid commentary. His paragraphs entail tremendous insights, but they are often camouflaged by exaggerations, tangents, and inaccuracies. Consider a few inexactitudes. Professor Schwartz accuses us of having a “naïve faith in World Courts as champions of human rights.” In fact, the book includes no claim of faith in such “world courts.” Our arguments are explanatory, not normative, and hence our support for policies or institutions is limited and pointed. (We do acknowledge Ron Levi’s related and analytic point though that the advancement of legal proceedings, and not just international ones, is not just a question of norms but of political and professional strategizing. Max Weber would have strongly agreed.) Elsewhere, Barry Schwartz states that we “claim Americans are less inclined than Europeans to enforce laws prohibiting hate crimes” and that we “ignore” legal differences between nations. We could challenge Professor Schwartz by referring to many pages in the book such as page 137: “a simple legalistic answer... might point to nation-specific differences in constitutional protections.” We go on to explain why such argument is insufficient. And for that matter we never write that Europeans are better at enforcing hate crime law, and we certainly don’t endorse one set of laws over another. We simply conduct basic social science research. That is, we identify differences between countries, and we provide an empirically backed explanation for those differences.

The above points may be trivial, but Professor Schwartz also takes issue with arguments that are central to our book. For instance, he questions our claim that Americans have a rather sanitized view of their history, and his argument is twofold. Schwartz first claims that atrocities in American history have simply been “few and mild” compared to other countries. He secondly argues that American society is rife with apologies and introspection. Taken together he seems to imply that Americans have little to apologize for but nonetheless engage in all sorts of apologizing. On the issue of Americans engaging in all sorts of rituals of regret, we respond with a simple question: Why would Samantha Power, as Francesca Polletta notes in her comments, sit before the U.S. Senate and state that we’re the greatest nation on earth *and* “we have nothing to apologize for”? Or consider commemorations of the places where people were enslaved, beaten, or killed. Americans indeed commemorate slave plantations, but look at the pamphlets and web pages. They feature color photos with smiles and tour guides dressed in slave attire. As reported in the *Washington Post* a few weeks before this writing, a Virginia plantation will have a “holiday tour” in 2013, part of which focuses not on the abuse of slaves, but on the slaves’ violence against the plantation owner. We provide manifold additional examples in our book. In short, our argument is not that Americans have forgotten their sins, but that they maintain a fairly sanitized view of the darker periods in their national history, so much so that in the halls of Congress it is taboo to even mention something that we might apologize for. We think this more than balances out the ‘rituals of regret’ mentioned by Professor Schwartz.

We can anticipate Professor Schwartz’s reply to the previous paragraph, which relates to what we see as his most important critique. He claims that we treat all atrocities alike. My Lai, Haditha, Holocaust, Cultural Revolution... all the same. In response we would first like to direct his, and the readers’, attention to those pages on which we explicitly draw distinctions (e.g., p. 110 on the ontological uniqueness of the Holocaust; or text on p.137: “Some countries have more horrid and atrocious pasts than others.”) Admittedly, the book’s title refers to “atrocities” – a term under which we subsume a great variety of phenomena, despite their ontological differences. We also did not object to the jacket design that features “Arbeit Macht Frei,” the slogan above the gates to concentration and extermination camps, over images of American soldiers in Vietnam and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. We do not need to debate the obvious differences between these types of events. But we agree with Schwartz that constructivists have to consider if (or to what degree) differences in magnitudes of atrocities affect social constructions, representations and memories. Surely though, magnitude is not the sole determinant, a point we addressed above.

Professor Polletta also raises additional important issues. She rightly states that we argue trials can prevent subsequent violence, but she adds that our evidence points in the opposite direction. Professor Polletta may be right, but the example she provides – that the My Lai trial didn’t change much – would seem to *support* our argument. We argue that trials are less likely effective when low-level officials (Lt. Calley in this case) are the targets of prosecution. So the point is well taken, and our causal story is hardly airtight. But we disagree with Polletta on this specific case; My Lai seems to support our argument.

Professors Polletta and Schwartz both mention our “optimism” about post-atrocity trials in relation to subsequent violence. But, alas, we are not Pollyanna. This book is not a simple “if-then” argument such that *if* we have a trial *then* nothing bad will happen in the future. Indeed, we sought to move beyond this simple

argument and draw attention to several subtleties and intervening factors – namely the role of collective memory – in this process. And further, when criticizing the importance of trials we must ask, “compared to what?” Dealing with the aftermath of atrocity is a matter of finding the “least worst” option. Doing nothing forsakes justice and much else. Prosecutions will result in missed indictments or perhaps acquittals. Truth commissions will make some victims feel like perpetrators escaped punishment. If there is a normative implication to be taken from our book it is that trials, and perhaps truth commissions, are the most viable options in the wake of atrocity, at least under certain circumstances (see conclusions chapter). They are not a cure-all, but they may reduce the chance of collective forgetting, denial of atrocity, and retaliation, especially when compared to the alternatives.

Again, we are most grateful to our critics. We are moved and humbled by the way in which Ron Levi sees Maurice Halbwachs’ spirit inscribed in our work. His, as well as Barry Schwartz’s and Francesca Polletta’s reactions confirm that *American Memories* is here to provoke controversy and to raise questions, in addition to providing insights. They make clear that the arguments and questions pertain to an array of sociology’s specialty areas: the sociology of culture, especially collective memory; law and crime; media; and social movements; as well as to political sociology. Where we did not convince you, the reader, with our response to the critics, we invite you to pick up the book and decide for yourself.