

SECTION CULTURE



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Letter from the Chair

Vanina Leschziner



It has been a real honor and privilege to serve as Chair of the Sociology of Culture Section. One of the greatest pleasures has been seeing the commitment and generosity with which so many people dedicated their time and efforts to serve on our multiple committees. We all have many pressures on our time, and it would be all too easy to prioritize many of those pressures over the (generally invisible) committee work that happens in the Culture Section throughout the year. But I saw the opposite, so many people putting in hard work and making it look like it wasn't. We will be reporting on and celebrating all the important and exciting work our committees have done at our Business Meeting in Philadelphia. Please come and join us!

The 2023 ASA Annual Meeting is less than a month away. We have a full Section conference program, with a slate of exciting Section sessions thanks to incoming Chair Monika Krause and Programming Committee members Fabien Accominotti, Guillermina Altomonte, Omar Lizardo, Jaimie Morse, and Derron Wallace. We also have a new installment of our successful Early Career Professionalization Panel. And of course the Culture Section Roundtables. Our Business Meeting will be on Sunday, August 20, 9-9:30am. We will be celebrating all the Section

award winners, as well as all the work our committees have accomplished this year. We hope to see many of you at our Section events.

Last but not least, our Culture Section Reception! Our off-site joint Culture-Theory Reception will be on Sunday, August 20, 6-8pm, at Ladder 15 (1528 Sansom Street), a short walk from the Pennsylvania Convention Center. There will be an open bar and free food, and interesting people to talk with. Please come join us! We all owe a big thank you to our Reception Committee members Cresa Pugh (Chair) and Alexander Hoppe for finding the site and making all the arrangements.

ASA Annual Meeting Sociology of Culture Section Sessions

Information about our Section sessions and activities is below. For full conference program information, please visit the online program on the ASA website. We hope to see many of you at our Section events!

Early Career Professionalization Panel: From Dissertation to Book (Invited Session), Sunday, August 20, 8-9am, Marriott Philadelphia Downtown, Level 4, Franklin Hall 4

Organizer: X. Amy Zhang, George Madison University

Section on Sociology of Culture Business Meeting, Sunday, August 20, 9-9:30am, Marriott Philadelphia Downtown, Level 4, Franklin Hall 4

Comparative and International Perspectives on Race and Culture (Invited Session, co-sponsored by Sociology of Culture and Race, Gender, Class), Sunday, August 20, 10-11:30am, Marriott Philadelphia Downtown, Level 4, Franklin Hall 8
Organizer: Derron Wallace, Brandeis University

Cultures of Expertise: Mediating Global Challenges, Sunday, August 20, 2-3:30pm, Marriott Philadelphia Downtown, Level 4, Franklin Hall 7

Organizer: Monika Christine Krause, London School of Economics

Section on Sociology of Culture Roundtables, Sunday, August 20, 4-5:30pm, Marriott Philadelphia Downtown, Level 5, Grand Ballroom Salon E

Organizer: Guillermina Altomonte, New York University

Sociology of Culture-Theory Joint Reception, Sunday, August 20, 6-8pm, Ladder 15 (1528 Sansom Street)

Modeling Cultures (co-sponsored by Sociology of Culture and Mathematical Sociology), Monday, August 21, 8-9:30am, Pennsylvania Convention Center, 100 Level, 103C

Organizers: Juan Pablo Pardo-Guerra, University of California-San Diego and Ronald L. Breiger, University of Arizona

Culture and the State, Monday, August 21, 10-11:30am, Marriott Philadelphia Downtown, Level 4, Franklin Hall 13

Organizer: Fiona Greenland, University of Virginia

The Sociology of Art and Art Institutions, Monday, August 21, 12-1:30pm, Marriott Philadelphia Downtown, Level 4, Franklin Hall 13

Organizer: Patricia A. Banks, Mount Holyoke College

Our previous Newsletter was less than two months ago, but there is always new Section work to report on. Our Membership Committee (Marshall A. Taylor (Chair), Thomas Davidson, Asia Friedman, Khoa Phan Howard, Samantha Leonard, and Amy Zhang (council liaison)) has finalized forming this year's mentoring pods for our Mentorship Program. Marshall Taylor has

written a thorough and interesting report on it for this Newsletter.

Our Dissertation Improvement (Mohr) Grant Committee (Tania Aparicio (Chair), Joshua Doyle, Jelani Ince, Mehr Latif, Chanel Prince, and Craig Rawlings) has received many applications for the grant (more than last year!) and will be selecting two award winners before the ASAs. We will share the announcement and celebrate the winners at our Business Meeting. Thank you Tania for all your work on shepherding this committee!

Our always hard-working Newsletter Editors and Newsletter Committee have put together another fantastic issue. Our "Four Questions with..." Series has Jennifer Dudley (Newsletter Committee) interviewing Mario Small about qualitative research and public-facing sociology. Joselyne Quiroz reviews Alka Menon's *Refashioning Race: How Global Cosmetic Surgery Crafts New Beauty Standards* (University of California Press). We have a report on our latest Culture and Contemporary Life (CCL) Series panel, "Theodicy and the Problem of Meaning," by Manning Zhang (to watch this panel, or any previous CCL session, click [here](#)). Nathalie Heinich has written a piece for the Newsletter on "Taxing and the Boundaries of Art." The report on the Mentoring Program by Marshall A. Taylor (Membership Committee Chair), and a set of announcements sourced by Hannah Wohl (Communications Committee Chair) close the issue. Thank you to the lead Editor for this issue, Manning Zhang, the Newsletter editorial team, our webmaster Derek Robey, and the Newsletter Committee for preparing a great issue.

Putting together four newsletters in a year is a whole lot of work. I want to thank our fantastic and hard-working Newsletter editorial team, Elizabeth Trudeau, Man Yao, Manning Zhang, and webmaster Derek Robey for making it happen. The Newsletter Committee was newly created this year, and it has proved to be a great addition to support the work of the editorial team. Thank you, Hannah Wohl (Chair), Lisa McCormick, Ann Mullen, Jennifer Dudley, Anne

Marie Champagne, and Derek Robey for all your work!

I would also like to thank departing council members Karida Brown, Japonica Brown-Saracino, and Amy Zhang for their service to the section. A big thank-you is owed to our departing COO, the incomparable Clayton Childress. Unfailingly helpful and detailed, and the most supportive and cheerful team member one could

ask for. Last but not least, I want to welcome incoming Chair Monika Krause and Chair-Elect Clayton Childress, COO Ming-Cheng M. Lo, and council members Michaela DeSoucey, Laura K. Nelson, Natasha Warikoo, and Yesenia Vargas.

Serving as the Sociology of Culture section Chair has been a tremendous honor. Thank you for giving me this opportunity.

Four Questions with Mario Small

Interview by Jennifer Dudley

Jennifer Dudley (University of Notre Dame) interviews Mario Small (Columbia University) about qualitative research, public-facing sociology, and where there's more potential for cultural sociologists to make an impact.



Jennifer Dudley: Your recent work on qualitative research (particularly with [your book, *Qualitative Literacy*](#) and [your recent comment published in *Nature*](#)) highlights some challenges and benefits to qualitative research as well as how to evaluate qualitative research. Do you see cultural sociology as a place with unique challenges or benefits in terms of producing qualitative research?

Mario Small: I tend to see the challenges and benefits of qualitative research as consistent across fields. In [the paper you mentioned](#) on the role of qualitative methods in "big data" research, we provide examples from across the social

sciences. Having said that, the sociology of culture may have some advantages, because historical, ethnographic, and interview methods have long been part of the tradition. Contrary to other subfields in sociology, researchers and readers regularly understand the value of this kind of work, and thus can incorporate innovation in more natural ways. For example, it is not surprising that recent advances in text analysis have been adopted in this subfield in more sophisticated, less mechanistic ways than others. People are already used to thinking from multiple methodological perspectives.

Dudley: You have a strong vein of public writing in your career, which is so important at a time when sociologists are trying to have a more direct impact on society. How does cultural sociology influence your public-facing scholarship?

Small: That's an interesting question, because I would not necessarily have described myself as a public sociologist. If anything, I'm more of a private sociologist; I am an introvert, I vastly favor my desk over a lecture hall, and I get more joy out of studying things I find interesting than issues others deem important. The public writing I do is less out of natural inclination than a sense of

responsibility. I believe that if we have discoveries, findings, or realizations that could improve how the world understands something important, we should share them. I admittedly do less than I could because it does not come naturally.

Cultural sociology has a major role to play. Many of the most important issues we have faced in the past few years – the rise in populism, the decline in trust in science, the explosion of interest in racial inequality, etc. – are cultural in nature. I wish I saw more high-quality cultural sociology contributing to those conversations. For example, on race, the public discourse is much more influenced by sociological research on inequality than sociological research on culture, and I don't quite understand why.

Dudley: How do you envision the future of cultural sociology or what do you hope to see more of?

Small: Until recently, the historical weakness of cultural sociology was its Eurocentrism. The field was born with its eyes firmly turned on French and

German theorists, and it did not shake their influence as quickly as other subfields dropped their focus on the Germans. I am delighted that this orientation has started to change, as evidenced for example by recent book awards in the subfield. I think continuing this expansiveness would help. I would love to see more work on the Middle East, on sub-Saharan Africa, on the ethnic diversity of Latin America; on issues other than

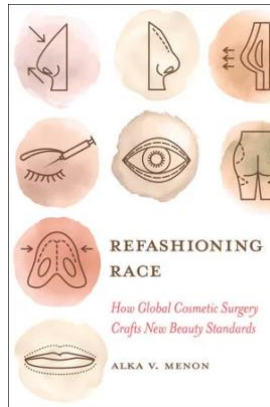
"high culture," taste, and cultural capital; and on the relationship between culture and politics, inequality, organizational action, network behavior, and decision-making. For example, I recently wrote [a long paper](#) on how people mobilize their networks when they need something. The topic was begging for cultural sociology – network behavior is necessarily cultural – and I could only find a few relevant researchers. Our huge [new volume](#) on social networks with 50 contributors has less on culture than I would have wanted.

Dudley: What is one piece of advice you have for graduate students or early-career sociologists?

Small: This is a difficult one, not only because there are many things one could say but also because different people have different life goals, and the optimal things to do depend a bit on one's path. But I would certainly encourage everyone to spend most of their time studying not what's supposedly hot in the field but what they find interesting, important, or puzzling. The field rewards quality and originality, and both of those are easier to attain when you're being true to yourself: you ask questions others wouldn't have asked and you work harder at getting an answer. I would also encourage everyone to cultivate a network of like-minded scholars, not only people who are studying similar issues or using similar methods but also, and maybe more importantly, people who share your orientation toward scholarship, academia, and life. We get much farther with others.

Refashioning Race by Alka Menon

Book Review by Joselyne Quiroz



Book Review by Joselyn Quiroz
PhD Candidate, Department of Sociology
University of California – Los Angeles

In Alka Menon's new book, *Refashioning Race: How Global Cosmetic Surgery Crafts New Beauty Standards*, she identifies the ways in which cosmetic surgeons generate and apply knowledge, theory, and technique using racial categories, thereby reshaping and refashioning racial categories on an individual, interactional, and broader cultural scale. Menon examines the case of cosmetic surgery as a racial project, both in national and transnational contexts, arguing that "beauty is a key site where race is made material and embodied" (5). The book works to delineate popular discourses in global cosmetic surgery, using the U.S. and Malaysia as field sites, given that they both have racially diverse populations, a robust middle class, and stated commitments to multiculturalism. Menon identifies themes in global expert discourse among cosmetic surgeons, including standardization of techniques, crafting a "natural look", and racialized customization. At its core, *Refashioning Race* creatively draws attention to the ways in which cultural meaning is fashioned and refashioned within biomedicine and popular culture by cosmetic surgeons, illuminating the discipline on how these professionals participate in race-making and reshaping through their work.

Using interviews, content analysis, and participant observational data, Menon examines how cosmetic surgeons generate and apply knowledge based on racial categories, arguing that the clinical knowledge and tools used in cosmetic surgery produce "conventionally beautiful, racially legible bodies" (8). She identifies cosmetic surgeons' use and development of racial types, which span across global expert discourses. Menon notes these racial types—race-specific standards for cosmetic surgical procedures—are a form of what Steven Epstein calls "niche standardization" (see Epstein's 2007 *Inclusion: The Politics of Difference in Medical Research* for more), or knowledge generated for intermediate sized groups, like race, as opposed to knowledge applied universally for all humans or individuals. Menon finds that racial types serve as guidelines for surgeons to ensure the "ethnic preservation" of their patient's physical appearance and not standardize or whiten their features.

Menon illustrates how beauty fits in the architecture of racial meaning and inequality by using beauty culture as a site for understanding the semiotics of race. In doing so, she builds on extant research

on racial disparities in health, crime, housing, the law, and other social domains. According to Menon, cosmetic surgery is, in fact, a racial project that makes racial identities “material, identifiable, and coherent” (4). Given the intertwined nature of race and beauty, Menon notes that cosmetic surgeons recognize the role race plays in human aesthetics and seek to ensure surgical interventions are natural and appropriately contextualized to racialized bodies. In her chapter on race and customization in the cosmetic surgery market, Menon uses the case of buttock augmentation procedures to illustrate the ways in which surgical alternatives to white ideals, like the Brazilian butt lift, can be celebrations of Black beauty. However, while the procedure challenged white and thin norms of beauty, it did not dissolve hierarchies of beauty, race, and class within niche specializations like Black patients.

As medical practitioners with an aesthetic orientation, cosmetic surgeons hold responsibilities to their patients beyond a medical context, given their role in shaping, challenging, and rewriting narratives of racial meaning. First, they must ensure they “do no harm,” adhering to the Hippocratic oath and adequately weighing potential risks of bodily and psychological harm against patient requests for surgical intervention. Then, they generate a race-specific approach to create the patient’s desired changes and establish standards of what is appropriate cosmetic surgical intervention for a given racial category, shifting from a once “one-size-fits-all” approach toward more racial-specific standards of beauty. Finally, the surgeon must wrangle with the tension between science and art that permeates throughout their work, with their completed procedure being a negotiated outcome of such tension. Upon completing the procedure, producing the desired appearance sought out by their patient, and ensuring physical ethnic preservation, the cosmetic surgeon reshapes and refashions race on the micro level of the patient and on the macro level of the culture.

While comparing U.S. and Malaysian surgeons’ scales of racial meaning and the boundaries that define them, Menon argues that cosmetic surgeons serve as cultural intermediaries—sitting at the intersection of beauty and medical industries at both a national and global scale and are tasked with mediating and maintaining relations between them. As cultural intermediaries, cosmetic surgeons “take narratives of racial meaning and elevate or reject them” (128), holding the power to both manifest and reinforce structural racism in cosmetic surgery, as well as broaden or reconfigure notions of racial pride for either surgeon or patient. How do cosmetic surgeons map physical features onto social identities, like race, and what consequences do they bring for those identities? Menon elegantly unravels this empirical puzzle by delineating the ways in which surgeons’ professional judgments about race link symbolic racial and cultural meanings into context-dependent beauty ideals at the micro, meso, and macro levels.

Beauty, like race, class, and gender, can affect life course outcomes—career aspirations may be affected by a person’s particular look, or body capital, thereby reinforcing racialized hierarchies of beauty. While racial anthropology and skull measuring have been discredited for centuries, historical legacies of such schools of thought linger in racial categorization schemes. Menon’s inquiry into aesthetic racial categorization, race-specific surgical pedagogy, and global expert knowledge exchange enhances our understanding of racial projects that transcend international borders and look beyond sociological levels of analysis. Sociologists of all specialties would benefit from engaging with a book like *Refashioning Race*, as it encourages us to revisit the case of beauty as a racial project and recognize that outdated racial typologies have staying power in biomedicine, popular culture, and beyond.



Manning Zhang
PhD Candidate
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On April 17, 2023, the Culture Section of the American Sociological Association held a live discussion themed “Theodicy and the Problem of Meaning,” as the third event of this year’s Culture and Contemporary Life Series. Miray Philips (University of Minnesota) moderated the discussion. Zeina Al Azmeh (Selwyn College and University of Cambridge), Christina Simko (Williams College), and Biko Mandela Gray (Syracuse University) participated as panelists.

You can watch the recording of this event on [YouTube](#). Here are highlighted remarks from the discussion.

This panel conversation tackled the intricacy of assigning significance to acts of violence and the experience of suffering. While certain individuals find meaning in suffering, others dismiss it, claiming that suffering lacks purpose and sacredness. The first question concerned how sociology, particularly cultural sociology, talks about theodicy and meaning. **Christina Simko** argued that theodicy is where sociology touches on theology and philosophy. Just as philosopher Susan Neiman contended, the obscure theological or philosophical questions may target at the confusion that 17-year-olds share towards the world. Sociology and allied social sciences share “lay” responses to these big questions.

Following that, **Miray Philips** raised a question concerning **Zeina Al Azmeh's** contention about the division between those who have the right to attribute meaning and those whose lives are considered devoid of meaning. Philips invited Al Azmeh to elaborate on this dichotomy and share thoughts on the decolonization of the study of meaning. Al Azmeh responded to the first question from the perspective of people’s right to meaning. Her interviews with 30 exiled Syrian intellectuals, artists, and writers in the revolution suggested that the meaning of suffering is in four distinct but interconnected ways: linguistic, existential, significance, and meaning as essence. Al Azmeh observed the shift from a state where the revolutionary movement was the quest for its essential and political meaning and the reclaiming of the political meaning, gradually to a question of meaning and the loss of meaning, specifically when revolution turned to war. For her research participants, even when they took great risks to enact their political agency to fight for a better, fairer, more meaningful life, Syrians are still commonly reduced to their life – the meaning of their movements are stripped. Regarding Philips’ second question, Al Azmeh mentioned Jeffrey Alexander’s central paradox of cultural trauma theory, which regarded the failure of raising awareness of the non-Western regions’ traumas in the wider population. Al Azmeh argues that there’s no failure in delivering the message

of suffering, but such messages are not always received and interpreted properly, which highlights the specificity and the misunderstanding of non-Western trauma. Al Azmeh aimed to open a research front for a decolonial cultural trauma theory, which shows examining the traumas beyond the US and Europe might qualify some theoretical assumptions about how cultural trauma processes and how meanings are made and contested, and how collective identities are changed after the tragedy.

Miray Philips then asked **Biko Mandela Gray** if suffering is meaningless, and how the theodicy is leveraged to justify violence. “No, it’s not,” Gray answered, “but the question for me actually is what kind of meaning gets attributed to what kinds of suffering. Gray introduced that in the philosophical tradition, there are two kinds of evil in relation to theodicy: natural evil and moral evil. He argued that the question of meaning usually has little to do with the value of the sufferer’s life, but with the act of suffering itself. Theodicy is used to play a logic game with the inconvenience of the idea of the Good God, suffering, and evil in the world. Gray argues that theodicy is secularized in the modern period, where it is not God but the society that needs to be justified in front of human suffering.

After the one-on-one conversations, **Philips** invited all the panelists to discuss how meaning and theodicy are discussed in their empirical research contexts, and their opinions on what is at stake. **Al Azmeh** contended that the question of theodicy emerged in its secular form, and confirmed the idea that we need to give meaning to suffering, such as religion and conversations about God. Her research suggests that the theodician question of meaning is central to the Syrian intellectuals’ work in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War. **Gray** made two quotes to suggest the relationship between anti-blackness and theodicy. The first one is “Not all cops are bad,” which he believes is a theodician statement to justify the goodness of the State in the face of what Black people understand as unjust violence and suffering. The second quote was made by Nancy Pelosi in the wake of George Floyd’s murder in 2020, “He sacrificed his life for justice.” Gray considered it as a socio-political theodicy, which justified George Floyd’s death retrospectively as a good thing in order for the country to gain justice and progress. He also mentioned Afro-pessimists’ thoughts about the immateriality of the question of meaning for Black life, insofar as their personal meaning-making of suffering cannot register in the larger socio-political consciousness. **Simko** argued that what is at stake is ultimately life and death, in response to different forms of violence. Drawing from her own research, she cites Tom Brokaw and NBC’s statement shortly after the 9/11 tragedy, labeling it as an act of war. This example serves to propose a significant juncture in the theodicy of 9/11’s history, rather than approaching it as a heinous crime that should have been addressed through international law. She insisted that there are suffering that we should and must ameliorate, and there should be spaces in social science to further discuss it.

Philips’ next question was about the role of academics in front of inequality, suffering, and violence. **Gray** made a critical comment that “wokeness” is a euphemism for a racial slur. He pointed to the academics’ responsibility to clearly define the conditions of violence and adopt the morality of care in teaching and research. **Simko** echoed the emphasis on the modality of care in classrooms. She also urged for more open space to discuss how to better explain and ameliorate the violence and suffering, and what kinds of suffering we have to hold on to as a remainder. **Al Azmeh** argued that constraints towards academics may vary, and a universalist view on academics’ role may be misleading or even dangerous. For instance, intellectuals working under the dictatorship may cause incredibly high costs to exercise the role that academics can take on in a neoliberalized academia. But across different contexts, she believed it is important for academics to keep asking “why suffering and violence exist,” instead of accepting it as a reality or distancing themselves psychologically from it.

The last question pertained to the essential questions concerning suffering and theodicy that should be further investigated in the future. **Al Azmeh** contended that we still have a long way to overcome our internalized biases in the sociology of meaning, which creates selective solidarities that reinforces the “global color line.” Within the realm of cultural sociology, it is urgent to unsettle the hegemonic theories by engaging with the thoughts and analyses of the Global South. **Gray** quoted Toni Morrison’s book *Sula* to ask a question: How can we move away from theodician reasoning and instead begin to think about how to deal with those who have been deemed as evil?

During the Q&A session, the audience raised a couple of thought-provoking questions, delving into topics like the connection between Western modernity, the privileges of thoughts, and the weaponized meaning. The panelists provided insightful responses to these inquiries.

Bios of Participants



Dr. Zeina Al Azmeh is the Centenary Research Fellow at Selwyn College, Cambridge, and a guest lecturer at the Department of Sociology. She is also a research associate at the Centre for Governance and Human Rights, University of Cambridge. With a multidisciplinary approach that bridges cultural and political sociology, Zeina's research centers on the experiences of academics and intellectuals in exile.

Dr. Biko Mandela Gray is an Assistant Professor of Religion at Syracuse University’s College of Arts & Sciences. His work operates at the nexus and interplay between continental philosophy of religion and theories and methods in African American religion. His research is primarily on the connection between race, subjectivity, religion, and embodiment, exploring how these four categories play on one another in the concrete space of human experience.



Miray Philips is currently a PhD Candidate in Sociology at the University of Minnesota. In the fall of 2023, she will join the University of Toronto as an Assistant Professor in the Sociology Department. Her research explores the transnational politics, meaning, and memory of violence and suffering. She is especially interested in how religion and rights shape interpretations of violence and chart trajectories for mobilization.

Dr. Christina Simko is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Williams College and the author of *The Politics of Consolation: Memory and the Meaning of September 11* (Oxford University Press, 2015). Her article “The Problem of Suffering in the Age of Prozac” was published in [To Fix or to Heal: Patient Care, Public Health, and the Limits of Biomedicine](#), edited by Institute Research Director [Joseph E. Davis](#) and Ana Marta Gonzáles (New York University Press, 2016).



Taxing and the Boundaries of Art

The “Beta Tank” Experiment on Valuation



By Nathalie Heinich
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Creators are sometimes the best social scientists' friends. It is the case when they provide live experiments regarding the boundaries of art, as Marcel Duchamp and Constantin Brancusi did with the famous trial against the American administration after it had applied industrial taxing rules to an imported sculpture fault of having considered it an artwork.¹

Boundary objects such as design or contemporary art pieces are perfect tools for socio-artistic experiments, since they belong to categories of activities which play with ontological boundaries between art and ordinary life: a play defining what is usually called “contemporary art”, thus sometimes transforming it into a kind of sociology in action.² Some eighty years after the *Brancusi vs USA case*, taxing became once more the nexus of a boundary test, but in a more radical way since the works themselves have been designed in advance in order to implement the test.

The “Beta Tank” experiment

Beta Tank is the name of a Berlin collective of young creators. During the 2000s they decided to experiment in practice with the lability of the fragile boundary between art works and functional objects through two parallel kinds of displacements: topographical displacements and categorial displacements between art and industry, the latter being provoked by the former. They entitled this experiment “Taxing Art.”

A first example was that of a table/sculpture, as described by its conceptor: “I used full steel profiles to make 119 squares, which were perforated to house axels and magnets to stop the pyramids from spinning freely. The table now has two states: one in which the tops of the pyramids are pointed down and resembles a complete functioning table and one in which the pyramids are up and the table is a sculpture. I wanted to transport it across the border to the exhibition in Basel with all the pyramids pointed up in order to classify the object as a sculpture.”³ The conclusion of the test was the following: “In Barcelona it was labeled a wooden table; in Istanbul it had been transformed into parts of a wooden

¹ Cf. N. Heinich, « C’est un oiseau ! Brancusi vs États-Unis, ou quand la loi définit l’art », *Droit et société*, n° 34, 1996 (re-published in *Faire voir. L’Art à l’épreuve de ses médiations*, Bruxelles, Les Impressions nouvelles, 2007).

² Cf. N. Heinich, *Le Triple jeu de l’art contemporain. Sociologie des arts plastiques*, Paris, Minuit, 1998 ; *Le Paradigme de l’art contemporain. Structures d’une révolution artistique*, Paris, Gallimard, 2014.

³ Beta Tank, *Taxing Art. When Objects Travel*, Berlin, Gestalten, 2011, p. 55.

dining table; and in Doha the exact same table had become personal effects. Only in Berlin did it finally become a sculpture.⁴ Consequently, the taxing basis of this sociologically experimental table changed from one country to another.”

The second example is that of a strange chair, or rather a series of objects which, depending on a subtle scale of deformations of the angle between the seat and the backrest, gradually pass from the status of a chair to that of an abstract geometric form, non-functional since it is no longer possible to sit on it. It therefore becomes assimilable to sculpture rather than to design.

The whole Taxing Art experiment was intended to test chapter 97 of the "Combined Nomenclature" (CN) developed by the European Union for the taxation of goods. Regarding visual arts, its definitions still clearly identify classical and modern paradigms (paintings, sculptures, drawings, pastels...). As the installation-exhibition crossed Europe from country to country and from fairs to biennials – from Berlin to Barcelona, from Basel to Istanbul – it crossed and recrossed the tiny border between design and art and, at the same time, it tested the resistance of institutions to innovation through tax regulations.

Proof was thus made that, contrary to the liberal doxa, the works of living artists cannot travel freely; and above all that it takes very little to go from art to design, and vice versa. In certain cases, especially with things conceived as boundary objects, the financial valuation, even when framed by fixed conventions, can dramatically vary according to contexts.

From value to valuation

This experiment fully illustrates the pragmatic theory of value that I proposed in my works on contemporary art and on values: value is not the cause of valuation but its consequence. In other words: value is the result of the whole set of operations through which a quality is assigned by a subject to an object (be it a thing, a person, an action, or an abstract entity) in a certain context – and the Taxing Art experiment demonstrates the importance of the context.

This assignment can take three forms: measure, attachment and judgement. In the case of Taxing Art the object is a thing, submitted to pricing in the taxing process, parallel with other contexts in which it might be submitted to attachment (e.g., being fond of it) or judgement (e.g., commenting it as “a real art work,” or as “an original piece of design.” etc.). The price – or in this case the taxing amount – results from the conjunction of these factors, which combine the two meanings of “qualification”: categorization and evaluation. Taxing Art also demonstrates the priority of categorization over evaluation.

In the valuation process evaluators implement valuation principles, which are also called “values”: for example, in the case of Taxing Art, value of comfort, or of utility, or of beauty, or of originality, or of playfulness, or of rarity, or of perennity... Framed as belonging to modern art it would probably require the value of authenticity. Framed as belonging to contemporary art the value of meaning would be expected. Applying those value principles require the implementation of more precise qualities or criteria, which themselves rely on concrete “affordances,” according to the vocabulary of the

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 153.

psychology and the sociology of perception: that is, objective characteristics of the object orienting its perception (e.g., aspect, form, size, etc.).

This is why value is neither subjective nor objective nor arbitrary: it is motivated by the affordances of the valuated object (e.g., the wooden pyramids in Taxing Art), by the collective representations shared by actors (e.g., that of the categories of art or design), and by the possibilities offered by the contexts (e.g., with Taxing Art: various countries, biennales, contemporary art fairs) in which these representations are implemented onto an object. Thus, value results from actions of valuation supported by a conjunction of personal preferences, of objective properties and of contextual opportunities.

So, what should be the right tax in the case of Taxing Art? There is no unique answer to this question since it depends on various and varying factors.

Conclusion

The term “value” is frequently invoked though little or ill defined. Rather than dismissing the issue, as sociologists often do, I propose to take it seriously, using the tools provided by pragmatic sociology through a descriptive, comprehensive and neutral approach. In that perspective, values appear as neither metaphysical realities, nor as mere illusions, but as collective, coherent and active mental representations.

Contrary to moral philosophy, which pretends to say what "true" values are in themselves, the "axiological sociology" I propose addresses what values are for the actors, by describing how various categories of actors actually produce valuations; how they attribute "value," in the first sense of “worth” or “importance,” through prices, judgments, or attachments; how the various objects thus valuated become "values" in the second sense of goods; and how these valuations are based on "values" in the third sense of valuation principles (such as truth, goodness, beauty, etc.). These principles, conceived as collective mental representations, are widely shared but differently implemented according to the subjects who evaluate, to the objects that are evaluated, and to the valuation contexts, be they cultural or micro-sociological.

The pragmatic analysis of actual judgments, controversies, or endless disputes – such as debates on bullfighting – allows the highlighting of the culture of values shared by members of the same society. We thus discover that, contrary to common sense belief, opinion is not reducible to public opinion; that value is reducible neither to price, nor to moral values; that values are neither rightist nor leftist; and that they are neither metaphysical entities existing "in themselves," nor arbitrary constructions or concealments of hidden interests. They are but mental representations connected to physical affordances and to cultural criteria.

The materialist perspective has long prevented sociology from focusing on values as a legitimate object, while the idealist and metaphysical perspective has long prevented scholars from focusing on the actual actions and situations of valuation, which are the very core of axiology. This is the lesson of the Taxing Art experiment at the light of a pragmatic sociological analysis.

Report on the Culture Section Mentoring Program

Marshall A. Taylor, New Mexico State University

We are well under way with the fourth annual ASA Culture Section Mentor Program. The best way I can think of to summarize the program so far is this: *consistent, but a little down*.

Before I elaborate on that summary, though, I'll quickly recap the structure of the program.

The program is following the same structure as it has in previous years, with multiple mentees assigned to individual mentors (creating “mentor pods”) and the mentorship happening over the course of the year—starting at or just before the 2023 ASA annual meeting and ending before the 2024 meeting. The mentorship specifics and schedules are at the collective discretion of each mentor pod, and the meetings are (mostly) remote with each pod deciding whether or not they would like to meet up at the ASA meeting. We retained the well-received anonymous mentor ranking system that we implemented last year—see [pages 10 and 11 of volume 8, issue 2 of the section newsletter](#) for more details on this—and used the mentees’ preferences to help us form pods that maximized the extent to which mentee needs aligned with mentor experiences.

The mentor application opened on February 28th and closed on April 4th; the mentee application opened on April 17th and closed on May 8th. Pods were then emailed at the end of May and are now in progress.

The Membership Committee—consisting of Asia Friedman, Thomas Davidson, Samantha Leonard, Amy Zhang, and myself—put together 17 pods, each with one mentor and three to five mentees. A breakdown of the mentors and mentees by position and type of institution is provided in Table 1.

Now, back to what I mean by that summary.

Table 1. Summary Statistics of Program Participants, 2023 Program

	Position									Type of Institution						
	Pre-Uni	Pre-ABD	ABD	NTT AcP ¹	Asst Prof	Assoc Prof	Full Prof	App ²	Ind	R1/R2 ³	Liberal Arts	Public/State	CC	Prim / Sec ⁴	Res Inst ⁵	Alt-AC
Mentor	0	0	2	1	5	3	5	1	0	12	1	1	1	0	1	1
Mentee	1	17	37	6	4	0	0	0	0	61	2	1	0	1	0	0

¹This position includes postdocs, visiting professors, lecturers, and other non-tenured academic positions.

²This position includes applied sociologists, professionals, or other members outside of the academy.

³This category includes international equivalents.

⁴This category is primary/secondary schools (pre-higher education).

⁵This category is research institutes with academic affiliations (unlike alt-ac research institutes/centers).

The 17 pods from this year is down from 21 pods last year. A four-pod difference may not sound like a lot, but that is the difference between pods with three mentees, on the one hand, and four or even five mentees, on the other. We don't want to let this become a downward trend, since (1) large pods strain the committee's ability to form groups with consistent mentorship needs, and (2) we risk developing a reputation where mentors in this program are overburdened—thus compounding the issue. So, in short, we need to get more mentors signing up.

The number of mentees was also down a bit from 2022, from 70 to 65. This isn't too bad, but that combined with the smaller number of mentors led to a general decrease in representation across position and institution type for both mentors and mentees. Table 2 shows the percent change from the 2022 numbers to the 2023 numbers. As the table shows, we had lower turnout across most categories. The exceptions here are full professor mentors—who went from 3 to 5 for a 67% increase—and applied sociologist mentors, mentors from state schools, and mentees from liberal arts colleges, all of whom saw an increase from zero last year. We also had mentors and mentees from new types of institutions—namely, high schools, community colleges, and academically-affiliated research institutes. These are great new additions that I hope we continue to see in future iterations of the program.

Table 2. Percent Change from 2022 Program to 2023 Program

	Position									Type of Institution						
	Pre-Uni	PreABD	ABD	NTT AcP	Asst Prof	Assoc Prof	Full Prof	App	Ind	R1/R2	Liberal Arts	Public/State	CC	Prim / Sec	Res Inst	Alt-AC
Mentor	-	0	↑	-100	-29	-67	67	↑	0	-33	-67	↑	-	-	-	↑
Mentee	-	-5	-3	100	-56	0	0	-100	-100	-9	↑	-50	-	-	-	-100

Note: Cell entries are percentages. Dashes are in cells where the category does not exist in both program years. Upward-facing arrows (↑) are in cells where the cell count for the 2022 program is 0 *but* there was at least one count for that same cell in 2023.

It is also worth pointing out that the two groups who we ostensibly expect to see in the largest quantities as mentees—pre-ABD and ABD students—had essentially the same turnouts from 2022 to 2023 (from 18 in 2022 to 17 in 2023 for pre-ABDs; 38 to 37 for ABDs). That's a good sign.

All in all, then, the 2023 numbers look similar to the numbers from the 2022 program—though admittedly a bit low. The natural follow-up question is: *Why* are the numbers a little low? There could be (and probably are) several explanatory factors, but my hunch is that ASA Connect's alternative to the listserv method of section communications played a significant role. We'll get a better sense of this possibility with next year's mentor program when ASA Connect is phased out.

Lastly, the BIPOC Resource Sharing Network is now going to be a joint venture between the Membership Committee and the D&I Committee. This collaboration is still in development, but I look forward to sharing news and details as they arise.

Thanks for reading, and I look forward to seeing everyone in Philadelphia!

Announcements

Job Postings



The University of Oregon, Department of Sociology, seeks to hire an assistant professor of sociology with expertise in culture, digital media and/or technology, broadly defined. The ideal candidate will have a record of methodologically rigorous scholarship, a commitment to institutional diversity, equity, and inclusion, and a dedication to inclusive teaching. Find more information about the position here: <https://careers.uoregon.edu/en-us/job/531916/assistant-professor-of-sociology>



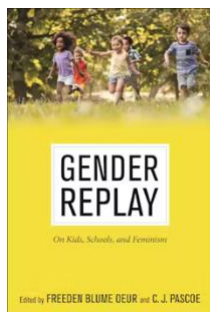
The Department of Sociology at University of Amsterdam is seeking a postdoctoral researcher for the project “The Return of the Medici? The Global Rise of Private Museums for Contemporary Art,” which is funded by the Dutch Science Foundation (NWO) and led by Professor Olav Velthuis. The researcher will be part of program group Cultural Sociology of the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR), and will as such be able to participate in activities of this research institute (e.g. research presentations, conferences, trainings/workshops). Find more information about the position here: <https://www.academictransfer.com/en/329571/postdoctoral-researcher-in-sociology/>



The Department of Sociology and Social Research of the University of Trento, Italy, is looking for a highly motivated scholar with expertise in the collection and analysis of narrative data, such as those deriving from interviews, focus groups, visual or textual documents. The selection is for a position of RTD-B, an equivalent of a tenure-track assistant professorship. We are interested in applications from candidates with an excellent teaching and research record. Details of the offer and application forms are available at: <https://lavoraconnoi.unitn.it/en/bando-dr-valcomp/377-2023-dsrs>
Deadline: September 29th, 2023.

New Books

Blume Oeur, Freeden, and C.J. Pascoe. 2023. *Gender Replay: On Kids, Schools, and Feminism*. New York University Press. [Link to Gender Replay](#) [Get 30% off at the NYU Press website using the code NYUAU30.]



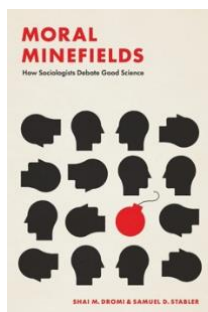
Barrie Thorne's *Gender Play* was a landmark study of the social worlds of primary school children that sparked a paradigm shift in our understanding of how kids and the adults around them contest and reinforce gender boundaries. Thirty years later, *Gender Replay* celebrates and reflects on this classic, extending Thorne's scholarship into a new and different generation. Freeden Blume Oeur and C. J. Pascoe's new volume brings together many of the foremost scholars on youth from an array of disciplines, including sociology, childhood studies, education, gender studies, and communication studies. Together, these scholars reflect on many contemporary issues that were not covered in Thorne's original text, exploring new dimensions of schooling, the sociology of gender, social media, and feminist theory. Over fourteen essays, the authors touch on topics such as youth resistance in the Trump era; girls and technology; the use of play to challenge oppressive racial regimes; youth activism against climate change; the importance of taking kids seriously as social actors; and mentoring as a form of feminist praxis. *Gender Replay* picks up where Thorne's text left off, doing the vital work of applying her teachings to a transformed world and to new configurations of childhood.

Champagne, Anne Marie and Asia Friedman (eds). 2023. *Interpreting the Body: Between Meaning and Matter*. Bristol University Press. [Link to Interpreting the Body](#)



Written by leading social scientists working in and across a variety of analytic traditions, this ambitious, insightful volume explores interpretation as a focal metaphor for understanding the body's influence, meaning, and matter in society. Interpreting body and embodiment in social movements, health and medicine, race, sex and gender, globalization, colonialism, education, and other contexts, the book's chapters call into question taken-for-granted ideas of where the self, the social world, and the body begin and end. Encouraging reflection and opening new perspectives on theories of the body that cut through the classic mind/body divide, this is an important contribution to the literature on the body.

Dromi, Shai and Samuel D. Stabler. 2023. *Moral Minefields: How Sociologists Debate Good Science*. The University of Chicago Press. [Link to Moral Minefields](#)

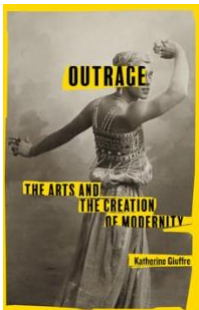


Sociologists routinely turn on their peers with fierce criticisms not only of their empirical rigor and theoretical clarity but of their character as well. Yet despite the controversy, scholars manage to engage in thorny debates without being censured. How? In *Moral Minefields*, Shai M. Dromi and Samuel D. Stabler consider five recent controversial topics in sociology—race and genetics, secularization theory, methodological nationalism, the culture of poverty, and parenting practices—to reveal how moral debates affect the field. Sociologists, they show, tend to respond to moral criticism of scholarly work in one of three ways. While some accept and endorse the criticism, others work out new ways to address these topics that can transcend the

criticism, while still others build on the debates to form new, more morally acceptable research.

Moral Minefields addresses one of the most prominent questions in contemporary sociological theory: how can sociology contribute to the development of a virtuous society? Rather than suggesting that sociologists adopt a clear paradigm that can guide their research toward neatly defined moral aims, Dromi and Stabler argue that sociologists already largely possess and employ the repertoires to address questions of moral virtue in their research. The conversation thus is moved away from attempts to theorize the moral goods sociologists should support and toward questions about how sociologists manage the plurality of moral positions that present themselves in their studies. Moral diversity within sociology, they show, fosters disciplinary progress.

Guiffre, Kathy. 2023. *Outrage: The Arts and the Creation of Modernity*. Stanford University Press. [Link to Outrage](#)



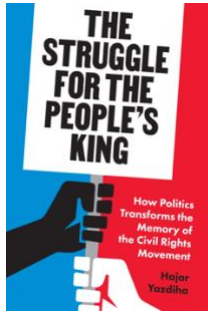
A cultural revolution in England, France, and the United States beginning during the time of the industrial and political revolutions helped usher in modernity. This cultural revolution worked alongside the better documented political and economic revolutions to usher in the modern era of continuous revolution. Focusing on the period between 1847 and 1937, the book examines in depth six of the cultural "battles" that were key parts of this revolution: the novels of the Brontë sisters, the paintings of the Impressionists, the poetry of Emily Dickinson, the Ballets Russes production of *Le Sacre du printemps*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Using contemporaneous reviews in the press as well as other historical material, we can see that these now-canonical works provoked outrage at the time of their release because they addressed critical points of social upheaval and transformation in ways that engaged broad audiences with subversive messages. This framework allows us to understand and navigate the cultural debates that play such an important role in 21st century politics.

Knottnerus, David. 2023. *Polar Expeditions: Discovering Rituals of Success within Hazardous Ventures*. Routledge. [Link to Polar Expeditions](#)



Polar Expeditions: Discovering Rituals of Success within Hazardous Ventures employs structural ritualization theory to show how rituals enriched the lives of crewmembers on 19 polar expeditions over a 100-year period. David Knottnerus identifies and compares failed, successful, and extremely successful missions in terms of participation in ritual practices and the social psychological health of crews, finding that that social and personal rituals, such as work practices, games and sporting activities, religious practices, birthday parties, special dinners, or taking walks are extremely important in increasing crewmembers' ability to cope with the challenges they face including extreme dangers, isolation, restricted environment, stress, lengthy journeys, and quite importantly the disruption of those practices that define our everyday lives. Besides contributing to our knowledge about polar expeditions, this research yields implications for our understanding of ritual dynamics in other situations such as disasters, refugee camps, nursing homes, traumatic experiences, and a new type of hazardous venture, space exploration.

Yazdiha, Hajar. 2023. *The Struggle for the People's King: How Politics Transforms the Memory of the Civil Rights Movement*. Princeton University Press. [Link to *The Struggle for the People's King*](#) [Use the promo code P321 for 30% off at Princeton University Press]



In the post–civil rights era, wide-ranging groups have made civil rights claims that echo those made by Black civil rights activists of the 1960s, from people with disabilities to women's rights activists and LGBTQ coalitions. Increasingly since the 1980s, white, right-wing social movements, from family values coalitions to the alt-right, now claim the collective memory of civil rights to portray themselves as the newly oppressed minorities. *The Struggle for the People's King* reveals how, as these powerful groups remake collective memory toward competing political ends, they generate offshoots of remembrance that distort history and threaten the very foundations of multicultural democracy. In the revisionist memories of white conservatives, gun rights activists are the new Rosa Parks, antiabortion activists are freedom riders, and antigay groups are the defenders of Martin Luther King's Christian vision. Drawing on a wealth of evidence ranging from newspaper articles and organizational documents to television transcripts, press releases, and focus groups, Hajar Yazdiha documents the consequential reimagining of the civil rights movement in American political culture from 1980 to today. She shows how the public memory of King and civil rights has transformed into a vacated, sanitized collective memory that evades social reality and perpetuates racial inequality. Powerful and persuasive, *The Struggle for the People's King* demonstrates that these oppositional uses of memory fracture our collective understanding of who we are, how we got here, and where we go next.

New Articles

- Foster, Jordan, Pettinicchio, David, Maroto, Michelle, Holmes, Andy, & Lukk, Martin. 2023. "Trading Blame: Drawing Boundaries around the Righteous, Deserving and Vulnerable in Times of Crisis," *Sociology*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385221137181>
- Issar, Shiv. 2023. "The Social Construction of Algorithms in Everyday Life: Examining TikTok Users' Understanding of the Platform's Algorithm," *International Journal of Human–Computer Interaction*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10447318.2023.2233138>