SECTIONCULTURE

Contents

Editors:

Manning Zhang
Brandeis University

Bo Yun Park
Harvard University

Bambang Trihadmojo
Northwestern University

The header image by ktbuffy, Creative Commons.

Letter from the Chair

On the obstinacy of a transformative moment

Photo: Ann Mische, University of Notre Dame

Greetings to all Culture Section members as we near the end of yet another challenging semester. We may be back in the classrooms (for the most part), but the pandemic is not over yet, and we are far from being "back to normal." While it feels wonderful to be "in the room" with real human beings after an isolating year, other challenges seem to have multiplied. We are dealing with pent-up institutional and research pressures, as well as continuing emotional distress and uncertainty among students, colleagues, and family members. We are also grappling with deep challenges to exclusionary histories and tendencies in our own discipline, alongside intensifying political polarization reverberating through academic institutions. Solidarity to all – this is real, exhausting, and important work.

I want to begin by expressing my appreciation to Terry McDonnell, our past chair, for his thoughtful and engaged stewardship of the Culture Section during Year Two of the pandemic. Terry built on the important work of former Chair Allison Pugh, who was quick to respond to the crisis in spring 2020 by instituting Covid relief research grants to students, supporting the ASA Minority Fellowship Fund, proposing a Diversity and Inclusion Initiative for the

section, and leading us successfully through the first canceled ASA conference in summer 2020.

During 2020-2021, Terry launched the highly successful "Culture and Contemporary Life" (CCL) series, with five excellent panels showcasing the commentary of cultural sociologists on urgent public issues. This series (chaired by Hannah Wohl) was an important source of intellectual community for the section during our second year of canceled in-person gatherings. Terry oversaw the expansion of the section's Mentoring program (under the leadership of Blake Silver), with the establishment of "mentoring pods," with 14 mentors "podded up" with 37 mentees. Terry also launched our Diversity and Inclusion Committee (co-chaired by Nino Bariola and Anya Degenshein), which has produced an important set of proposals for making our section a more inclusive and welcoming space for BIPOC scholars. These initiatives will be framing our work for 2021-2022.

I encourage you to keep your eyes on this space as we get our work underway this year. This year's CCL committee (chaired by Yan Long) has a list of exciting topics and is in the process of recruiting speakers. We plan to launch our first session in January 2022. The Diversity and Inclusion Committee (chaired by Jean Beaman) recently met to consider ways to move forward with the proposals of last year's committee in a focused and impactful way. All of our committees have been charged with taking racial, ethnic and other forms of diversity into account in all section work (including nominations, awards, and programming). The Membership Committee (chaired by Marshall Taylor) will be initiating a new round of "pod-formation" as part of our mentorship program for younger scholars in early 2022. The programming committee (led by Chair-elect Vanina Leschziner) has put together an exciting program of section panels for ASA 2022. So we have lots going on to continue the good work initiated by Allison and Terry.

The difficulties of transformation amidst crisis
I would like to use this first Chair's letter to invite your thoughts on what I call "the obstinacy of a transformative moment." In other words, why is change so difficult? Perhaps that is not an especially puzzling question for any cultural sociologist worth our stripes. We all know the constraining and inertial power of cultural categories, valuations, practices in contributing to the reproduction of systems of power and inequality (call it Cultural Sociology 101). And yet, one commonplace of popular discourse is that moments of crisis are also moments of possibility and transformation. Can the experience of being smacked in the face with so many intersecting crises at once

break us out of cultural and structural inertia and set new possibilities in motion? And if so, would those be good changes, or bad ones?

I'm currently in the midst of a book project that engages with professional futurists of different stripes, that is, those who make a living from their expertise in guiding people through the uncertainties of the emerging and long-term future. As the (first) year of Covid unfolded, many of these futurists seemed downright giddy with excitement, even as the rest of us were engulfed by fear, distress, and uncertainty. As I described in a blog post last year, they saw the pandemic as transforming us all into "futurists." The deep dive into uncertainty and the disruption of our daily routines made the plasticity, multiplicity, and contingency of the present – and thus the transformative possibilities of the future – seem much more tangible than usual.

This excitement was echoed in public discourse. Our news sources and social media feeds were flooded with assessments of how Covid was transforming our workplaces, family dynamics, gender roles, education and health care systems, electoral dynamics...the list goes on. The summer of protests in response to the killing of George Floyd heightened the possibility that perhaps this time would be different. Perhaps more radical imaginaries would take hold, and we would finally address deeply rooted racialized inequalities and the pervasive structural violence that in "ordinary times" seem naturalized and immovable.

The pandemic and the uprisings heightened the visibility of long-standing problems and amplified the insistency of public demands for change. Many of us joined protests, and some of our institutions-initiated measures to take a stab at addressing systemic exclusions and inequalities. Meanwhile, we returned to a brutal, exhausting year of teaching and classes amidst isolation, anxiety, and political turmoil. We held our second online ASA conference, which under the leadership of Aldon Morris probed deeply into the epistemological and institutional factors underpinning racialized exclusion within sociology, while foregrounding critical and emancipatory scholarship and a rising cohort of young BIPOC scholars.

As we work through Year Two of Covid, times have "settled," perhaps dangerously so. As routines reappear, the sense of open and transformative possibility has started to coagulate and stiffen. It is so easy to let such a moment pass us by. And yet, we have so much work to do. This is clear from continuing, difficult conversations in my own department and university

regarding diversity and inclusion. We have tried to make some changes, but these have revealed, even more painfully, how entrenched the problems are and how much further we need to go. The same is true of the Culture Section. We need to keep asking ourselves the hard questions – and I hope you will help to keep those coming.

In future newsletter posts, I would like to reflect on three components of the "obstinacy" of the present moment. These include: (1) the invisibility of structural violence; (2) the moving line of visibility amidst change; and (3) the fractal nature of divisions, inclusions, and valuations. I would also like to invite your own contributions to this discussion. Why are change processes so difficult and stubborn even amidst what feels like the heightened transformative potential of disrupted and unsettled times? What does your own work in cultural sociology have to say about this? We would like to hear about it in this newsletter.

ASA Culture Section 2021

Summary of ASA Panels

A. **Report on Panel** *New Perspectives in Sociology of Art and Music: BIPOC Artists and Creative Agency*
Organized by **Fiona Greenland** (University of Virginia) and **Patricia Banks** (Mount Holyoke College)

Race has historically been a neglected topic in sociology of art. Studies of how art is produced, evaluated, collected, and displayed have typically had little to say on the contributions of racialized subjects. Recent scholarship is addressing the gaps created by that omission, and our panel showcased four examples of cutting-edge work.

Rebecca Emigh and Johanna Hernandez-Perez asked how "genius" is recognized in the field of music composition. Sociologists of culture have generated robust discussions about how genius is constructed through social norms and structures. But Emigh and Hernandez-Perez brought a new approach: dialectical realism, which they develop in a close study of five early 20th century American composers, varying by race and gender. Composers' social location, they show, as well as the type of institutional resources they can access, decisively shape the take-up and configuration of their music. Building on the theme of institutional resources, Daniel Cornfield and co-authors examined the role played by local arts agencies (LAAs) in supporting cultural equity in American communities. Drawing on a dataset of more than 500 LAAs, they identify two main types of organizational portfolio – growth and inclusion – and find that whether agencies effectively engage with local stakeholders has important effects on cultural diversity and placemaking. LAAs are active throughout the US but we know little about how they function and with what effects. Cornfield and colleagues make a powerful case for the need to improve sociological knowledge about this area.

Another key theme of the panel was invisible labor. In "Be Weary: Racialized emotional labor in creative careers," Kim de Laat and Alanna Stuart conducted in-depth interviews with Black, Indigenous, and people of color artists and creative workers. Focusing on the emotional labor expected from their subjects in majority-white creative industries, the authors identified three coping strategies: alleviation, confrontation, and the benefit of the doubt. Racialized emotional labor takes a "psychic toll" that manifests in weariness, inequality, and, sometimes, burnout. In a similar vein, Tania Aparicio's comparative study of the Cineteca Nacional in Mexico City and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City examined the hidden processes of diversity in film curatorship. Beginning with the point that film curatorship practices create inequality and exclusion, Aparicio highlighted the gaps between institutions' best intentions (the macro) and individuals' actions (the micro). Taken together, the two papers brought into the open the subjectivities of race and racism that permeate art worlds but go unnoticed in majority-white spaces.

As the four papers showed, there is fruitful work to be done on race in sociology of art and we look forward to continuing the discussion.

B. **Report on Panel** *Between Collapse and Utopia: Foresight, Imagination and Social Change*
Organized by **Ann Mische** (University of Notre Dame)

With futures uncertain, how do people imagine possibilities for change? Between the two poles of dystopian collapse narratives and utopian visions of a world transformed, there is a lot of unexplored cultural space. Arguably this "in between" space of foresight and action is critical for determining personal and institutional pathways. This is the space of "emergent strategy" (to borrow a phrase from writer and activist Adrienne Maree Brown), linking actions in the present to longer term temporal horizons. In this panel, five exciting papers explored different ways in which narratives of foresight, future-making, and transformation are caught up in personal, social, and political change efforts amidst the intersecting crises of our times.

The papers explored a range of different sites for the future-oriented imagination. These included how people imagined the future after same-sex marriage (Peter Hart-Brinson), how clinicians and scientific experts envision the impact of climate change on public health (Mallory Fallin), how Black millennials reflect on the frustrating pace of change in response to the Black Lives Matter movement (Simone Nicole Durham), how young Syrian refugees in Lebanon adjust their dreams amidst shrinking opportunities (Samuel Dinger), and how young US millennials creatively re-weave hopes for the future in the face of uncertainty (Shira Zilberstein, Michèle Lamont, and Mari Sanchez).

The dialogue between these five papers was lively and impressive. Prior to the session, I asked each panelist to reserve their final 2-3 minutes to share points of connection with at least one other (pre-circulated) paper on the panel. This proved extremely generative, as the papers spoke to each other in deep and interesting ways. I posed three questions for the panelists:

1. *In what ways does crisis (i.e., heightened uncertainty) make thinking about the future easier, and in what ways does it make it harder*? The papers had different responses to this question. Hart-Brinson suggested that crisis *enables* futures thinking, while the papers by Fallin, Durham, and Dinger suggested that crisis can make futures thinking harder. Zilbertstein and colleagues noted both tendencies in play, as young people navigate between constraint and possibility.
2. *How do people move between different "ontological" relations to the future (i.e., as inevitable, impossible, luminally possible, plausible, or attainable?* The papers wrestled with variations in ontological orientation (Hart-Brinson), as well as with the ways people "toggle" between pessimism and optimism (Fallin), wrestle with the perceived inevitability or impossibility of change (Falllin, Durham), or recalibrate which futures are deemed plausible or attainable (Dinger, Zilberstein et al).
3. *Does thinking about the long term paralyze us or enable us? When is long-term thinking useful, and when is it problematic?* Some papers stressed the enabling, even liberating quality of long-term thinking in the face of present barriers (Hart-Brinson, Durham). Others noted that long term imaginaries can paralyze action, especially when disconnected from the present (Fallin) or when perceived unattainability leads people to "shrink" futures to their immediate locus of control (Dinger, Zilberstein et al).

Overall, this panel demonstrated the richness of contemporary research on futures. While drawing on diverse strands of this burgeoning literature, these five papers highlighted the urgency and the difficulty of imagining futures in a period of uncertainty, crisis, and social change.

C. **Report on Panel** *Cultures of Computation in Theory and Practice*
Organized by **Anna K. M. Skarpelis** (Harvard University) and **Marshall Taylor** (New Mexico State University)
Report by **Anna Skarpelis**

Marshall and I sought to bring together papers by theorists and critical empirical sociologists with those by software designers and other practitioners. We received several dozen submissions; in fact, the quality of submissions impressed us so much that we wished we had had the opportunity to showcase all of them over several panels. In the end, we chose four papers that reflected the breadth of the field as well as its different methodologies: Alina Arseniev-Koehler's theoretical piece on meaning and word embeddings; Angele Christin's ethnographic piece on algorithmic fields and vegan influencers; Maria Akchurin and Gabriel Chouhy's ethnographic work on fairness in school choice and black boxed algorithms; and Stewart, Miner, Halley, Nelson and Linos' (SMHNL) methodological investigation into human versus unsupervised approaches to identifying meaningful labels in text analysis. Matt Rafalow, a social scientist at Google while affiliated with Stanford, generously agreed to serve as the panel's high-spirited and expert discussant. I'd like to highlight several issues that

cut across the papers in ways relevant to the cultural sociology of computation and for computational approaches to culture: questions of transposition, historical legacies, and representation.

Substantively, all papers in some way tackle questions on movement across fields. Christin studies extreme online content from the perspective of the "bad actors" that produce it, and finds that algorithmic fields compared to others are more likely to be polarized on account of an oligopolistic structure. Put differently, were the very same people producing content in other fields, their discourse would likely be less extreme and tending towards the dramatic. Akchurin and Chouhy look at what happens when an algorithm developed for a specific, middle class and professional context – residency assignments for medical students – gets applied to Louisiana students' school choice. While neither authors, nor their informants, have access to the black boxed algorithms, this transposition raises obvious questions of fairness and efficiency. What is interesting is that nobody can quite agree what "fairness" should look like, similar to the minefield that is "authenticity," where transgressions disproportionately lead to the punishment of women and people of color, as Christin shows when vegan influencers are uncovered as "frauds" when found out to consume animal products. Both works showcase the value of looking at how similar processes unfold in different contexts, and their theoretical strength lies in carving out processes that undergird variation across fields. Although they are both on the face single case studies, they have significant comparative implications.

SMHNL ask what happens when we unleash qualitative human eyes versus unsupervised topic modeling on the same set of texts: do we capture "the same" meaning? Where they find that unsupervised learning is a decent enough cheap alternative for a first pass compared to more labor-intensive and expertise-necessitating qualitative work, they also show how although both machine and human efforts mostly lead to the deployment of similar labels, these frequently point to different documents. Intercoder reliability (see also Victoria Reyes and team's article on the Living Codebook in Sociological Methods and Research) is one thing, but if we truly want to use unsupervised models as a first pass to enable meaningful analysis in a second step, the labels better point to documents in meaningful ways. Where SMHNL unleash different approaches on the same corpus, Arseniev-Koehler asks more foundational questions. By revealing the transdisciplinary evolution of word embeddings as methodology, the paper asks: What are structuralism's legacies for sociology, and should we really just

adopt computer science methods because they are "there"? What happens when a technology developed for one context and one set of purposes is made to do something else entirely – for example, the search for "meaning" in sociology? Neural embeddings, Arseniev-Koehler suggests, could provide a way out of the structuralist hangover, especially where we'd like to capture meaning over time.

Although none of the papers are explicitly historical, they all raise questions of path dependencies – in methodology, in the importance (or lack thereof) of early communities for the later structuring of a field, but also in historical harms that disproportionately accrue to minority populations. They also do not shy away from asking tough methodological questions about what is a good proxy for the thing we want to study, and complicate what moral concepts like "authenticity" and "fairness" mean not only to their respondent directly, but also how the people they study desperately try to derive these concepts from the often black boxed systems that they are exposed to, and on whose inner workings much of their economic value and life chances hinge. Individually, each paper posed provocative questions on meaning, morals and methodology, but more importantly, the talks spoke to one another in ways that were generative beyond the individual case. We hope the authors will continue to puzzle through these provocations as they move towards publication.

D.   Report on Panel *Culture and Morality in Times of Crisis*
Organized by **Aliza Luft** (University of California, Los Angeles)
Report by **Manning Zhang** (Brandeis University)

Jacqueline Ho and Reid Ralston (Cornell University)
Coping with Corrupted Systems: Moral Negotiations in the Hinterlands of Evaluation

The starting point of this research is when college campuses shut in March of last year and there was a lot of debate and student activism around the issue of how students should be graded for the Semester. Ho and her colleagues argue that the crisis made it more visible that evaluation systems can be moral accomplishments. They try to use the controversy generated by this moment to understand how actors are problematized and the evaluation system in moral terms during the crisis, and then how the struggles are meant to be resolved.

Ho and Ralston have conducted a natural/breaching experiment in one North American university within a time span of three weeks. They find that, on the one hand, to use narrative to

illustrate unequal opportunity, and to speculate about the moral meaning of pandemic grades, are the two ways that actors (students and faculty) use to problematize the system in moral terms. On the other hand, the college's final grading policy retains the letter grade option but changes the meaning of a "pass" while having the meaning of a letter to stay intact.

Ho concludes that, in times of crisis, actors articulate what is usually taken for granted about the evaluation system. In doing so, they affirm the system as moral, fair under "normal" circumstances. Narratives allow actors strategically to problematize the system, and the evaluation systems also produce moralizing subjects.

Till Hilmar (University of Bremen)
Moral Economy and the Social Semiotics of the Covid-19 Crisis

Hilmar uses the framework of moral economy and the meaning of shifting social associations to analyze small businesses and the self-employed in crisis and compares Covid-19 state relief in the US and Germany. Hilmar analyzed a corpus of 3936073 US-related tweets and 121260 Germany-related tweets that were authored between March 1st, 2020, and February 15, 2021, while the keywords are the official names of the payments.

In the German materials, Hilmar identifies blurred boundaries among benefit recipients while in the United States materials, he identifies racial inequality in the distribution of loans.

Ryann Manning (University of Toronto)
Proximity and moral action: diaspora communities helping from afar during the West African Ebola outbreak

Based on the context of mobilization by members of Sierra Leone's global diaspora community to respond to the 2014-2015 Ebola crisis in West Africa, Manning asks how people trying to help from afar overcome their lack of physical proximity to a place in crisis. She uses qualitative, abductive analysis to analyze both the real-time data and the retrospective data and finds out that members of the diaspora valued physical proximity and saw physical distance as hampering their response to Ebola but faced barriers in their efforts to create physical proximity. To tackle this problem, they create two forms of proximity: narrative and moral proximity.

Then, Manning raises a further question: How did narrative and moral proximity shape the action in response to Ebola? She argues that it helped generate a sense of personal and collective efficacy and prompted members of the diaspora to follow scripts from past activism.

Taylor Paige Winfield and Janet Xu (Princeton University)
Risky behaviors and moral judgements in a politicized pandemic

Considering the literature in sociology and psychology of morality, Winfield and Xu ask two questions: How are U.S. Americans across the political spectrum defining and moralizing risky health behaviors in the COVID-19 pandemic? What do they think about morality in relation to risk? They use a pilot survey experiment to measure people's evaluations of risk, moral judgments, and the rationales they provide for their assessments.

Unsurprisingly, Winfield and Xu identify that people perceive riskier behaviors as more immoral. But surprisingly, they find that the negative relationship between risk and morality is similar for Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. They identify similar patterns in how people across the political spectrum moralize "risk." In contrast to Moral Foundation Theory, Winfield argues that their study shows that Democrats and Republicans moralize risky social behaviors during COVID-19 similarly. As for next steps, Winfield and Xu decide to run on a representative national sample and test if the association between "newly" risky behaviors and morality holds for more established personal and public health risks.

E. Report on Panel *Studying Culture in Times of Crisis: Methods and Approaches*
Organized by **Nino Bariola** (University of Texas at Austin) and **Samantha Leonard** (Brandeis University)

The Culture section's student representatives organize a graduate professionalization panel during ASA annual meeting. In 2021, considering the multiple ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic upended academic research, we invited scholars from whom we could learn how to approach cultural processes and dynamics during periods of crisis (broadly defined) and how to practically navigate circumstances in which exogenous forces limit our ability to gather data and do research. The scholarly work of some of the participants directly examines critical junctures like wars and uprisings, whereas others creatively figured how to study the effects of crises like the pandemic on the social practices or populations they were studying before the onset of COVID-19. Here we summarize some of the theoretical, methodological, and practical lessons the scholars shared during the panel.

Aliza Luft (UCLA) studies episodes of extreme violence like the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide to shed light on how people evaluate and make sense of state-sponsored brutality— when and why do they support it or resist it, and how and why they shift their stance about it. Albeit categorically different, the pandemic also entailed disarray of multiple social norms. Building off her previous work, Luft underscored the relevance of investigating that disarray not only to grasp its impacts at the macro-level, but also how organizations and groups of organizations (i.e. the meso-level) respond to unexpected events like the pandemic, how people make decisions, valuations, and calculations under such circumstances, and how they establish (or abjure) new relationships (i.e. the micro-level).

Jelani Ince—then PhD candidate at Indiana University and now assistant professor at the University of Washington— investigates the interplay of race and religion to understand how rigid social norms and heavily regulated social spaces relate to organizational diversity. In previous work, he examined the tactics and legacies of #BlackLivesMatter. Ince was wrapping up ethnographic fieldwork for his dissertation as the pandemic unfolded. Observing how the Protestant organizations he was studying reacted provided rich data about how participants create meanings and relationships, and how they draw social boundaries amidst chaotic circumstances. He was particularly struck by how the pandemic has deepened already existing inequalities.

Angela García's (University of Chicago) book examines the impacts of local immigration laws on the lives of undocumented Mexican immigrants from their own perspectives. García was leading two qualitative research teams when the pandemic started—one focused on the temporal dimensions of immigrants' experiences and another one examining a social inclusion initiative that provided municipal IDs to undocumented immigrants in Chicago. On top of logistical complications, COVID-19 and the lockdowns added extra layers of complexity that warranted scholarly attention on their own right to García's projects. With this experience, García confronted the practical ethics and realities of doing collaborative qualitative research, including how to support and protect the safety of student research assistants and co-investigators.

Caitlyn Collins's (Washington University St. Louis) research delves into another sort of emergency—the lack of *work-family justice* in the U.S. Considering that crises in the past provided space for policy change, Collins asked would the pandemic undo decades of gender progress at the workplace or could it shine a new light on and un-stall the recent stasis of the gender revolution? To grapple with these questions, Collins said, collaborating with other scholars proved essential. On the one hand, she co-authored a comparative analysis of policies to redress the pandemic's effects on gender and labor inequalities in multiple countries. On the other, she collaborated with scholars with skills different than hers to examine if and how the pandemic was deepening multiple facets of gender inequality in the U.S.

Finally, **Craig Rawlings** (Duke University), whose research focuses on meaning-making processes and social networks, shared how a previous crisis affected his career trajectory and how he navigated such circumstances. Rawlings finished graduate school during the Great Recession and worked in a number of temporary positions for almost a decade before landing a tenure-track job. Academic research and careers, he noted, are indeed vulnerable to crises of all kinds. Rawlings mentioned that learning to deal with constant rejection was key to manage the uncertainty and ups and downs of his atypical trajectory, and to keep doing the work that the was able to do.

<div style="background-color:#d4694f; padding:8px;">Summary of ASA Roundtables</div>

A. Summaries of ASA Roundtables
1. Table 13: Cognition—**Michael Rotolo** (University of Notre Dame)
   This year's Cognition Roundtable brought together sociologists using a range of methods and topics to illuminate cognition's role in shaping cultural understandings. Devin Cornell's (Duke University) coauthored project used a novel version of "the telephone game" with word embeddings to explore the relation of public representations and nondeclarative cultural schemas, identify the role of "cultural attractors" and their influence on public representations of social problems. Michael Rotolo's (University of Notre Dame) project analyzed the development of "Extremely Liberal" political views using longitudinal interviews, field notes, and surveys from the 10-year NSYR and developed a tripartite model of political orientation, showing how different

combinations of social position, knowledge, and affect shape divergent perceptions of society and consequent political orientations. Hyunku Kwon's (University of Chicago) project analyzed the relationship between political polarization and social trust and explained the importance of how citizens position their own political opinions in relation to subjectively perceived in/out groups. Ji Hye Kim's (University of Pennsylvania) project used CCA to identify systems of implicit values and showed how they vary both within and between countries. And Gordon Brett's (University of Toronto) project explained shortcomings of the automatic/deliberate cognition bifurcated model, showing how the liminal situations of improvisation theater demand actors' use of automatic and deliberation cognition simultaneously and discussing its implications for scholarship on culture and action. It's difficult to describe such ambitious and exciting projects in brief. However, the presentations were outstanding, and I eagerly look forward to seeing the final products in print.

2. Table 14: Organizations—**Audra Dugandzic** (University of Notre Dame)
The roundtable on organizations had four presentations. Andrea Cavacchini presented a paper on behalf of himself and his coauthors arguing that organizations with a culture of performance pressure are more likely to engage in misconduct, and that the organization's level of centralization moderates this relationship. Sara Beth Kaufman presented research on her institution, Trinity University, using qualitative network analysis to show how the founding members were implicated in slaveholding and white supremacy. Qianyi Shi's presentation explored how knowledge-sharing networks in the tech communities on meetup.com have evolved over time. Finally, Kunyuan Qiao examined the role of regional geography in corporate culture, especially in mergers and acquisitions.

3. Table 3: Embodiment, Gender and Sexuality— **Melissa Cambero Scott** (Florida International University)
The Embodiment Gender and Sexuality roundtable involved two compelling presentations as well as other scholars who submitted their papers but were unable to join due to scheduling issues. The first

presenter was Sylvia Esther Gyan who discussed the puberty rites of passage performed by girls in traditional African societies and the ways in which these traditions are becoming less common due to the introduction of Christianity and modernity into these cultures. Esther Gyan argues that the fading of these traditions is removing spaces from young African girls to discuss and learn about sex and sexuality. Next, Aunrika Tucker-Shabazz discuss the ways in which the study of incest, specifically incest between white adults and black children, has been considered taboo in academia. Tucker-Shabazz explains this silencing of discussion of taboo has further silenced survivors of incest as well as created new hurdles for black and brown women scholars. After these presentations, we further delved into the work of these two scholars. Specifically, we talked about the ways in which the authors discuss women's, especially black women's agency. In uplifting the stories, experiences and knowledge of black women, academia and future generations will have a better understanding of sex and sexuality.

4. Table 2: Intersectionality—**Alexander Hoppe** (University of Pennsylvania)
Louise Ly of UC-Berkeley analyzed Whites' attraction to their South Asian spouses and highlighted the significance of affiliative ethnic identity in their desire. Using an intersectional approach, they underscored the importance of gendered constructions in attraction. Cory Haines of Virginia Tech offered an analysis of video game characters, finding that women and minorities are underrepresented in screen time and narratives.

5. Table 15: Visual Methods—**Rachel Keynton** (University of Notre Dame)
At the culture section roundtable on visual methods, we held a lively and intimate discussion of how emergent and less-frequently used methods using visual media opens particular advantages and new possibilities for sociological research. Our small table allowed us to have a really engaging conversation and deep dive into each of the presenters' research. The first paper, *Using Video-Ethnographic Data to Study Parenting Interactions*, by Joanne Golann and Richard Hall, uses video data collected in families' homes to study everyday interactions among parents and young children. The video data, collected as part

of the New Jersey Families Study, captured two weeks of interactions throughout the homes of 21 families. Their presentation focused on the challenges of, and approaches to, reduction and management of such large amounts of video data, as well as the wide range of theoretical insights that can be gained from such data. The second paper, *Insert Your [Suburban] Logo Here: Using Logos to Brand Municipalities in the Chicago Region*, by Brian Miller looked at how suburban communities distinguish and brand themselves through the visual medium of logos. This presentation identified how visual data reveals patterns across the logos of 160 suburbs in the greater Chicago area which are tied to differences in community identity and recruitment aims. Some logo features map onto communities that appeal to traditional suburban values and are whiter and wealthier, while other features are related to changing suburban populations.

B. Report on Roundtable 8: Meritocracy
Report by **Luca Carbone** (KU Leuven, Belgium)

Meritocracy is a thorny issue. Conceived by Michael Young as an ironic device to portray a dystopian society, where intelligence and merit are central tenets of a good society, its contemporary supporters seem to have misunderstood the irony. Meritocracy assumes equality of opportunities and ascribes to individuals the responsibility of their destinies. It praises successes as the outcomes of hard work and personal commitment, blaming setbacks on indolence and lack of initiative. Disregarding the unequal distribution of opportunities and the everlasting presence of systemic forms of discrimination, meritocracy has become a moral lynchpin to justify and perpetuate inequalities. How did we arrive here? How to evaluate the presence and extent of meritocratic ideals in everyday cultural products? Once realizing the perverse reach of meritocracy, what shall we do? Where shall we go?

The roundtable on Meritocracy, as part of the Sociology of Culture Session, has been a unique opportunity to reflect on these – and many other – questions. Bringing a comparative and historical perspective to the table, Victor Kogan reflected on the role of educational systems and family privileges in creating fertile soil for the future development of meritocratic ideals. His speech showed the weight of the past in guiding contemporary systems of inequalities. Luca Carbone and Alexander Kindel followed this historical account, proposing conceptual and methodological tools to measure concepts such as meritocracy,

prestige, and deservingness in popular media products, such as music lyrics and TV game shows. With these presentations, past bearings were unveiled and present realizations were analyzed, but future directions were still missing. Michael Bell, Abigail Letak, and Hannah Kass proposed a framework to further develop discussions and initiatives to move out of the "madness of inequality" that is fed by meritocracy. Starting from the consideration that humans are NOT socially cruel by construction, they advanced the concept of "Sh!tocracy" to highlight the detrimental consequences of meritocracy, such as productivity anxiety, conspicuous productivity, stress, burnout, and the incessant comparison with others: never satisfied, never enough. Realizing the origins and reach of this madness is a first step to dismantle belief systems that justify and perpetuate inequalities, among which meritocracy reigns supreme.

Neoliberal madness looms large in the world: this roundtable felt as a beacon of resistance, one among many others that we will keep building and supporting.

C. Table 12: Memory and Futures

Organized by **Daniel Jaster** (Eureka College and Texas Tech University)

How does the sociological study of culture help us understand the relationship between memories and futures? Four scholars provided compelling points at the ASA Sociology of Culture roundtables. Elena Ayala-Hurtado's talk, titled "When will my life begin? The purgatory of insecure college graduates in the United States and Spain", focused on how unemployed college graduates in Spain and the US view their futures in light of the deviation from the predicted trajectories of their pasts. She framed one common theme as a sense of being stranded in purgatory: a recognition of struggle but a general faith that college grads can eventually resume their path towards prosperity if they continue to work hard. Derek Robey's talk, titled "What's in a name: Public naming disputes and the contested construction of racial history in the United States and Canada", focused on different understandings of America and Canada's pasts and how that influenced both opinions about renaming public spaces and objects, and also understandings of what these debates mean for the future of the nation. He found that respondents tended to hold one of two perspectives: nostalgic colorblindness or projective anti-racism, with each group having a different understanding of their nation's past prejudices and thus having differing ideas for constructing future collective memories. Finally, Emma Brandt and Wendy Griswold's talk, "Staging Inter/Nationalism: Cultural politics at

the International Belgrade Book Fair", focused on the complex (inter)national narratives present in an area with complex, fraught histories, thus displaying complex, sometimes conflicting, identities towards the future. They framed their findings as the fair projecting a sense of cosmopolitanism without cosmopolitanists: proclaimed international multiculturalism while groups largely expressed their own national identities.

The Q&A after the presentations also highlighted just how complex and interesting the relationship between memories and futures are. More comparisons between cultural norms or different types of employment outcomes might highlight the dynamic interplay between individual experiences and broader cultural patterns which influence how empowered or threatened one is by a deviation from a plan that one repeatedly was told would lead to future prosperity. When discussing collective memory and monuments, questions arose about symbolic gestures versus real attempts at change and whether these groups see themselves as distinct; yes, they do, and both claim to speak on behalf of white communities. The final presentation elicited discussion about what the purpose of the international book fair is, given the mixed messaging. The presenters posited

that it may be because there are many different people attending: messaging isn't cynically manipulated nor haphazard but rather a product of discussions happening at different radio frequencies due to the Serbia's complex histories and what internationalism might mean in such a context.

Ultimately, these talks were interesting and posed difficult questions about the dynamic relationship between who we think we were, are, and will be. I was struck by the nuanced answers by the presenters, which admittedly had to be flattened and simplified for this essay format. The audience posed questions which helped push the presenters into more complex territories, whose compelling responses perhaps generated more research questions for themselves. These talks showed a bright future for this theme in the sociology of culture. As a scholar of memories and futures myself, I was struck by the common cores of tensions between individual and collective pasts; which identities should be retained, amended, discarded, or built; and how to culturally express the tensions between different memories and futures, especially considering individual and collective desires. These scholars offer some promising pathways towards answer questions of the past and prompting questions for the future.

Book Review

Scripting the Moves

Golann, J. W. 2021. *Scripting the Moves: Culture and Control in a" No-Excuses" Charter School*. Princeton University Press
Reviewed by **Peter Francis Harvey** (University of Pennsylvania)

During Monty Python's classic comedy movie, The Life of Brian, the titular character wakes one morning to find an enormous, adoring crowd camped outside his window. Believing him to be the messiah, they call in unison for instructions. Anguished, Brian pleads with the crowd to think for themselves. "You're all individuals," he insists. "YES, WE'RE ALL INDIVIDUALS," chant back the crowd.

Reflecting on *Scripting the Moves*, I was struck by how well Golann captures the similar tragic irony of "no-excuses" charter schools. Employing a vast array of rules and regulations for the most minor behavioral deviations – with students officially sanctioned on average once every three days and teachers themselves reprimanded for giving out too few sanctions –

these schools still insist that students should this of themselves as leaders, while only ever being allowed to follow.

Of course, the popularity of no-excuses schools is no accident. As Golann relates, money from businesses and philanthropists has poured in, attracted by the schools' apparent improvements to test scores and the highly problematic assumption that what disadvantaged students of color *really* need is more discipline. But, as Golann clearly lays out, no-excuses charter schools deliver attractive short-term test gains, but do not produce the social mobility they desire. That is, they have been found to improve high school test scores and rates of college enrollment but have no visible impact on rates of college completion. Furthermore, clouds hang over their short-term gains given the

repressive disciplinary methods employed and the possibility that their results have more to do with selection effects than educational efficacy. Thus, Golann compellingly situates the study within the current American educational landscape.

The book is built on 18 months of keen observations at the appropriately named "Dream Academy," where students are instructed to envision bright futures, while their focus is continually dragged back to the constantly surveilled present. Golann mostly observed one 5th and one 8th grade class, following them to different lessons, though she also observed teacher meetings and trainings, parents' engagement with school activities, and students from Dream Academy's high school preparing for higher education by taking classes at the local community college. These observations are well rendered, giving the reader a feeling of "being there." In addition, Golann conducted 132 interviews with students, teachers, and parents. Dream Academy is a middle school catering to approximately 250 5th-8th grade students. Over 80% of these students received free or reduced-price school lunches and two-thirds of the students were Black while the remaining one-third were Latinx. In contrast, the teachers were mostly young, middle-class, and White, with limited teaching experience.

The key argument of the book is that no-excuses charter schools take a misguided approach to creating social mobility. They explicitly teach students cultural "scripts" that mimic certain aspects of middle-class dispositions and cultural capital. These scripts are strictly enforced. But, using an array of existing literature on middle-class and elite educational and socialization experiences, Golann contrasts these rigid scripts with the flexible range of cultural "tools" with which class-privileged students are equipped. Thus, scripts and tools become metaphors for how no-excuses students and middle-class students, respectively, learn to engage with the world.
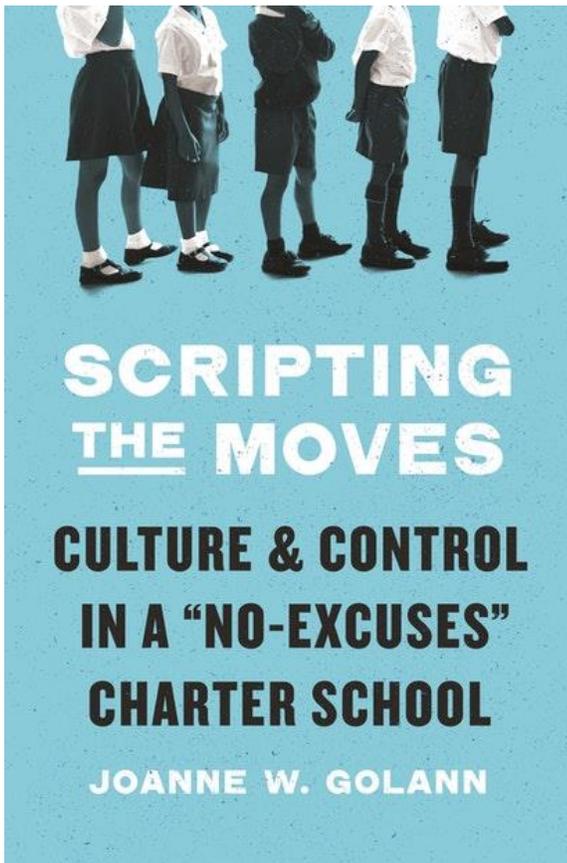
After setting up the book in chapter one, Golann vividly walks us through different aspects of the school experience and system. Chapter 2 details the rigid scripts demanded of Dream Academy students, all under the belief that doing so will help instill middle-class cultural attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behaviors. The scripts apply not only to academic and behavioral features, but also to particular forms of embodiment and appearance. Eye-rolling and teeth sucking are specifically sanctioned along with many other physical enactments, both precise and vague, while students are obliged to "sit up straight with your hands folded in front of you." Students also have to "earn" their classroom seat and their blue school shirt, with those deemed unworthy publicly marked by having to sit on the

floor and remain in white. Sanctioned or "benched" students must wear yellow all day and are isolated. In a parallel to the unpredictability endured by workers on zero-hours contracts, students given detention must also serve it that day after school. Given that Golann highlights how many of these students have family responsibilities like caring for younger siblings, such punishments undoubtedly made life more difficult for students. Collateral impacts such as this could, perhaps, have received slightly more discussion, but Golann admirably conveys the sheer extent and inflexibility of the no-excuses approach. Alarmingly, this approach is explicitly informed by deficit-minded academic work, including that by psychologist Angela Duckworth and educator Ruby Payne. In a memorable passage, Golann relates how the teachers were taught, using Payne's book, A Framework for Understanding Poverty, that the "driving forces" of those in poverty are survival, relationships, and entertainment, while those of the middle-class are work and achievement.

Chapters 3 and 4 show these rigid scripts in action, with students describing the frustrating limitations on their right to voice their opinions, query instructions, work in groups, or generally be heard. For the school authorities, student freedoms are seen as just too risky. But for the students, such oppressive containment and lack of trust understandably leads them to resent and distrust the school and its teachers. This was magnified by the typical race and class differences between students and teachers. The self-doubt, rule-following, and antagonism towards teachers learned at Dream Academy is effectively contrasted with the ease and entitlement cultivated in middle-class environments, which reaps particular dividends in college.

Chapter 5 explores the organizational origins of no-excuses charter schools. Motivated by market logics and interests, Golann describes how charter schools have increasingly shifted from a primary focus on flexibility to a pursuit of "what works." Coupled with the growth of large networks of branded charter schools and institutional isomorphism, more have adopted the no-excuses approach. While some of these networks and individual schools have belatedly recognized the problems with their rigidity – demonstrated in part by college graduation rates no higher than traditional public schools – they are struggling to modify their unyielding approach.

Chapter 6, the last substantive chapter, focuses on teachers detailing how they, too, were obliged to follow a rigid system. Golann details four types of teachers, ranging from those suited to, and happy with, the no-excuses approach, through to those

Scripting the Moves: Culture and Control in a "No-Excuses" Charter School book cover
Source: Princeton University Press

attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behaviors utilized by the middle-classes as "cultural capital." This cultural capital is cast as a "tool" for flexibly engaging the world. In footnotes, Golann acknowledges that some readers might dispute her broad use of cultural capital, but that using the one term and allying it with Swidler's toolkit metaphor aids clarity. She is not wrong, as the book is impressively clear. But for me, the distinction between habitus and cultural capital is pertinent to the book for two reasons.

First, as cognitive sociologists like Omar Lizardo have argued, we tend to learn features of the habitus (e.g., skills, dispositions, associations) through implicit lessons and experiences, and we typically learn features of cultural capital (e.g., values, attitudes, ideologies) through explicit methods. No-excuses schools try to teach aspects of both habitus and cultural capital through especially explicit methods, hammering messages home. So there is a mismatch between methods and aims. As we see in the book, referring to students by college year (e.g., "class of 2024"), did little to transmit to students a dispositional sense of ease about college attendance. Dispositions cannot be so hurriedly and explicitly force-fed.

Second, though Swidler's toolkit approach to culture is well-known and intuitive, I worry that casting all middle-class cultural behavior as employing tools can make it seem too deliberate. Much of how we engage the world is largely automatic, built on dispositions, not active, discursive thought. So framing the middle-classes as deploying tools as opposed to scripts may inadvertently give them too much credit, as if they made "good choices" rather than followed socialized routines built from structural disparities. Taking on these debates might have strengthened the book's theoretical contribution.

But these thoughts should not detract from the many strengths of the book. *Scripting the Moves* is an extremely well-written, readable, accessible, yet powerful monograph, suitable for use in undergraduate and graduate level classes. It captures the harshness of the no-excuses model and its broader contribution to social reproduction and inequality. I highly recommend it.

who rejected the demand to "sweat the small stuff." Again, the market logic of these charter schools shines through, with Dream Academy's focus on rules an attempt to make the system "teacher-proof." Unsurprisingly, many teachers did not enjoy this robotic approach, with only 44% of the teachers continuing from the previous year. Indeed, the deliberate recruitment of young, undertrained, and naively ideological teachers from outside communities speaks to the overall no-excuses ethos as being more popular with investors and "thought leaders" in distant boardrooms, than with teachers, parents, and students.

If I have a criticism of *Scripting the Moves*, it is the sidestep of theoretical debates about the differences between habitus and cultural capital. Golann refers collectively to the array of

How Green Became Good

Angelo, H. 2021. *How Green Became Good: Urbanized Nature and the Making of Cities and Citizens*. University of Chicago Press
Reviewed by **Andrew McCumber** (Boston University)

For most people, the very concept of the city affirms these urban locations as the polar opposite of nature. The extent to

which a place is "urban" as opposed to "rural," "pastoral," or some similar counterpart is the extent to which human society has bent the physical landscape to its will, replacing a portion

of the natural world with asphalt, rebar, concrete, and glass. This commonsense dualism is key to the equally ubiquitous narrative of urban nature. The rapid growth of cities, the story goes, introduced people to new, uniquely urban social ills like noisiness, pollution, and disease. Thus, urban nature, in the form of tree-lined streets, pastoral oases like New York's Central Park, and more, were efforts to address these problems of city life and to bring the lost benefits of nature into the urban center. In short, these "greening" efforts are interpreted as making urban locales more hospitable by using nature to make them less urban.

In her new book, *How Green Became Good,* Hillary Angelo challenges us to rethink this narrative and, in the process, rethink the relationship between cities and nature altogether. Angelo offers a historical analysis of greening practices in Germany's industrial Ruhr region, a case study which presents a challenge to the typical narrative of urban nature as a reaction to the social problems endemic to industrial cities. For one, the Ruhr is a sprawling region that never lacked for open space. Nonetheless, urban greening proceeded there in the absence of the high population density that produces the social problems it is typically assumed to alleviate. For Angelo, this anomaly demands that we posit new explanations for the ubiquity of greening practices and their relationship to urbanization. She theorizes greening as a core aspect of urbanization itself, an "aspirational" practice that proceeds as part of a "social imaginary," or a "cultural understanding of the moral order of a social world." This term, which builds on the work of Cornelius Castoriadis and Benedict Anderson among others, emphasizes that greening is not just an expression of existing values or aesthetic preferences, but rather a concerted attempt to generate new social realities. In short, greening does not make urban areas less urban; it is fundamental to making them identifiably urban in the first place.

Angelo divides the book into three parts, each two chapters apiece, which cover more than a century of the Ruhr's history more or less chronologically. The first part, *Green Becomes Good,* details the rhetorical and material uses of nature by nineteenth century industrial barons and other elites in the region as the Ruhr first began to urbanize. Chapters One and Two focus on the problem of housing workers in the industrializing Ruhr of the late 1800s, the solutions to which represent a transition between different roles of nature in the social imaginary. Initially, the predominant mode of housing were village-style dwellings referred to as "colonies," which appealed to pastoral or agrarian visions of natural abundance. Whereas the colonies offered nature as a direct, subsistence

good available to residents, they gave way to a new planning model referred to as the "garden city," which was conceived in dense urban areas elsewhere as a means of alleviating city dwellers' want for clean air and open space. Although these issues did not plague the Ruhr, with its low population density and ample space, Angelo writes that the garden city served a different, equally important role in the Ruhr: it made it "spatially and socially legible as a city."

In Part 2, *Contested Social Ideals,* Angelo examines how greening can be a mechanism harnessed for competing social visions. This pair of chapters uses primary source materials and social science literature to contrast two efforts to actualize the political worldviews of planners and social theorists. First, the attempt to create a "functionally divided" city in the Ruhr
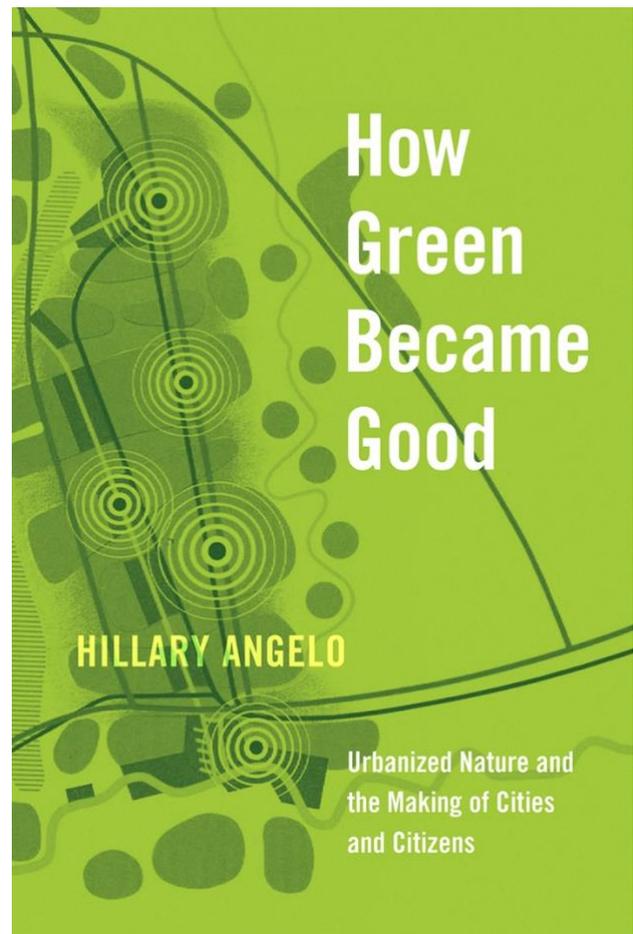
How Green Became Good: Urbanized Nature and the Making of Cities and Citizens book cover
Source: The University of Chicago Press

included a series of recreation parks called *Revierparks,* which were intended to create, spatially, Jurgen Habermas's notion of the bourgeois public sphere. Meanwhile, a movement lead by two of Habermas's students, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge,

sought to rehabilitate the colonies of old to create a New Left, proletarian vision of nature. In contrast to the *Revierparks'* "functional division," the rediscovery of the colonies promised conviviality and social interaction in so-called "green rooms." While their political motivations differed, both projects turned to greening as a mechanism for instantiating an imaginative vision of a possible world.

Finally, Part 3, *The Social Life of Urbanized Nature,* turns to the experience of greening itself. First, Chapter Five focuses on this experience from "greening protagonists," or the directors of greening projects who curate the interaction with nature as a "universally beneficial" resource. Angelo notes the contradictory manner in which these planners meticulously manage peoples' engagement with urbanized nature but in a way that elides that effort to create an "unmediated" nature experience. Chapter Six shifts to the target audiences of these "producers" of nature. Drawing on interview research, Angelo demonstrates how residents critique the projects' shortcomings, yet retain a reverence for the core notion of a universally beneficial nature; they may reject a housing development, for instance, yet embrace the artificial lake it was built around.

A major impact of the book promises to be its practical implications for city planning and the phenomenon of greening itself moving forward. In the conclusion, Angelo lists two lessons we might take away from her study. First, she implores us to "green better," by which she means to recognize urbanized nature as a resource whose distribution, like any other resource,

is characterized by social, cultural, and physical inequalities and to work to alleviate those gaps. Relatedly, she suggests we "green less," or resist turning to urban greening as a kneejerk fix for every social and ecological problem. After all, recognizing greening as a cultural endeavor, a project of a social imaginary, as the book presents it, may help us let go of tantalizing but dangerous ideas such as the notion that planting a tree is a universal act of environmental good, relevant climatic conditions be damned.

In all, *How Green Became Good* is a remarkable empirical feat. Angelo identifies an important and useful case study in the Ruhr that implores us to rethink persistent narratives about urbanization, cities, and nature. The book seamlessly combines a wide variety of historical materials with interviews and fieldwork to advance its theoretical argument. Moreover, this empirical elegance is matched by its effective engagement with a broad range of academic disciplines and topical areas of research, spanning sociology, cultural geography, history, urban planning, and more. For sociology in particular, the book promises to deepen the crucial connections between environmental sociology and cultural sociology. Environmental sociologists can see in *How Green Became Good* a prime example of how cultural meaning is an important analytical lens through which to view the biophysical landscape's role in the social world. Likewise, the book affirms the environment as a core area of concern for those of us interested in culture. Future authors working at this intersection will look to Angelo's book as an exemplar for this kind of scholarly work.

<div style="background:#8B0000;color:white;text-align:center;">

Four Questions for Angèle Christin

</div>

Bo Yun Park (University of California, Berkeley) interviews **Angèle Christin** (Stanford University) about her book, **Metrics at Work**

Tell us a little about yourself, your research, and any info on your future career plans you'd like to share.

These days I usually define myself as an ethnographer of work and technology, mostly because I spend a lot of time with computer scientists and engineers in Silicon Valley, so the methodological angle is easier to read across disciplinary lenses. But of course, my training in cultural sociology informs everything I do.

I study how algorithms and analytics are changing work practices and professional identities. I look at how people use and make sense of the platforms, metrics, and computational systems in their daily work. And I try to figure out what is changing – and what's not changing – when these systems become increasingly prevalent in our societies.

I've examined these questions in several ethnographic sites, including web journalism (my book *Metrics at Work: Journalism and the Contested Meaning of Algorithms*, was

published in 2020 by Princeton University Press), criminal justice, and now the brave new world of social media creators. Over the past two years I've been conducting virtual ethnographic fieldwork with influencers and marketers. I'm in the middle of writing a book based on this material, which is making me really happy (PhD students: there is a life after the dissertation and first book, and in my experience it's more fun!).

I just came back to the Bay Area after a year of (pandemic) sabbatical, first at the Paris Institute for Advanced Study/Sorbonne Université, and then as a Visiting Researcher with the Social Media Collective at Microsoft Research New England. I'm excited to be back at Stanford (where I'm an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication) and hang out with colleagues across campus. This year I'm affiliated with the Center for Work, Technology, and Organization in Management Science & Engineering at Stanford – a great place to observe how Silicon Valley is evolving.

How does cultural sociology influence your thinking and research?

This is such a hard question – in part because culture is everywhere! During my training, I always gravitated towards sociology of culture: first in Paris, at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, where I pretty much circled around the holy trinity of Bourdieu, Boltanski, and Latour, and then at Princeton, where I absorbed everything Paul DiMaggio, Viviana Zelizer, and Kim Scheppele would teach.

But if I think a bit more analytically about the role of culture in my current research, I would say that it comes in two main flavors.

First, I am interested in how computational technologies and the metrics they provide become intertwined with cultural dynamics of valuation and evaluation. Sociotechnical systems cement some of these dynamics, but there is always some room for negotiation. These uses and interpretations in turn are shaped by a range of structural factors – field structures, organizational and professional norms, habitus and dispositions, and so on. In my work, I examine when and where these different forces come into play and shape the effects of algorithmic technologies on the ground. For instance, in *Metrics at Work*, I show how French and US journalists project different meanings onto clicks, traffic metrics, and what I call their "algorithmic publics." I argue that these differences are

shaped by the trajectories of the journalistic field in the US and France, as well as by the organizational cultures of the newsrooms I studied. Pushing back against determinist accounts of technological convergence in the digital age, I show how journalists can reproduce cultural difference when they interact with algorithms and analytics.

Second, I like to think that my attention to culture comes through in my love for comparisons. A while back, there was a great ASA panel on "Audacious Comparisons." This expression resonated with me… in part because I enjoy comparing things. Over the past ten years, and with the help of talented co-authors, I've compared newsrooms in the US and France; algorithms in journalism and criminal justice; predictive technologies in criminal courts and police departments; and personal branding among freelance journalists and jobseekers. Across these sites, I'm always focusing on the interplay between field-level structures, professional and organizational cultures, and sociotechnical systems. Comparisons are good to think with: they help me conceptualize similarities and differences, as well as tease out the culture/structure nexus across institutional sites.

How do you envision the future of cultural sociology?

Digital technologies are everywhere. Especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, everybody has been spending staggering amounts of time in front of screens, on a wide range of devices, websites, applications, and platforms. These technologies are mediating and reconfiguring a rapidly expanding number of domains – communication and information exchange through search engines and social media, obviously, but also transportation, shopping, care work, food, workplaces, politics, public administration, the arts, and so on. In fact, it's hard to find a domain that's not affected.

This process of digitization in turn is far from neutral. It comes with specific ideologies (including the so-called "Californian" one), business models (often described as the "platform" one), and data-hungry infrastructures that nudge users in specific directions (often leading to the reproduction and reinforcement of inequality). These changes also affect what people do and how they socialize offline: did you ever stop to watch influencers do choreographies for TikTok videos or Instagram shoots in a street or campus hallway? If you haven't, check out the mesmerizing Instagram account "Influencers in the Wild."

To date, most of these changes have been explored outside of sociology – in computer science, communication, information

science, media studies, and so on. With important exceptions, sociologists are often missing from these discussions. Yet they have so much to offer! For instance, one pet peeve of mine is the generalized amnesia that permeates most studies of digital technologies. Mirroring industry dynamics, there is a scholarly race for covering each "new thing," be it a new platform, cryptocurrency, or artificial intelligence. That's fine if it helps people to get funding, but a lot of the structural changes we are discovering have been under way for more than two centuries, and it doesn't hurt to return to Marx, Weber, or Simmel to get a sense of déjà-vu. I would love to see more cultural sociologists apply rigorous methods, carefully crafted theoretical frameworks, and long-term historical approaches to the study of digital technologies, because engineers and computer scientists really need to hear these perspectives. Right now, philosophers and economists are flocking to the study of "AI ethics," "fake news," and other digital evils. That's fine, but I wish there were more cultural sociologists at the table as well!

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

It's a big world – one where research interests often transcend subfields and disciplinary affiliations. Graduate students should always feel that they can explore what interdisciplinarity has to offer. Often, interdisciplinarity provides a nice contrast to what you're used to do. For instance, if you're used to working alone, perhaps you can join a lab for a while and see what it feels like.

Or, if you're used to working only for academic publications, you can try public outreach and see if you like it. That's one of the things that I like about academia in the US: compared to France, students have more time and space to engage in some amount of intellectual exploration outside of the specific area they'll end up specializing in. I'm not minimizing disciplinary pressures and the need to pay dues when preparing for the job market, but I would still say that travelling across topics, methods, and disciplines is a good way to figuring out what you like – and what you don't like – in research.

For instance, from where I stand, there are many centers, labs, and non-profits dedicated to the study of digital technologies and artificial intelligence. Most of these places bring together people from academia, industry, activism, policy, and the media. They tend to work collaboratively; they have internships and RA positions for graduate students. As a graduate student, you can build your expertise and networks by doing this. The research you'll do in these places probably won't end up in ASR or AJS, but these are not the only markers of success. In fact, in many interdisciplinary departments, white papers, conference proceedings, and public-facing articles are also relevant signals of expertise and productivity. I'm not saying this kind of collaborative, lab-based, or non-profit model of work is perfect – far from it. But graduate school does not need to be a solitary tunnel where only single-authored publications in top journals count. Doing interesting research is bigger than this, and that's probably a good thing.

Research Highlights

Licheng Qian (University of Macau)
The study of "difficult past" in Western/democratic societies has contributed insightful theories to our understanding of memory, politics, and culture. Yet is "difficult past" remembered and used differently in an authoritarian context? How can one consume a difficult past unacknowledged by the authoritarian state? By analyzing the consumption of Chairman Mao symbols in contemporary China, this article explores the memory of a difficult past under censorship with ambiguous rules, that is, imposed discursive ambiguity, and puts forward a theory of mnemonic displacement centering on two generational mechanisms: denial and diversion. The "attendant generation" has experienced the past, reads the discursive ambiguity conservatively and consumes the Mao symbol as

denial of the difficult past. The "posterior generation" has no autobiographical memory of the past, reads the discursive ambiguity more openly and consumes the Mao symbol as diversion of mnemonic themes. As a result, the difficult past is displaced and forgotten. This article contributes to memory studies by theorizing a type of difficult past under discursive ambiguity, which is different from the Western/democratic context, and by developing a displacement theory of remembering and forgetting.

Licheng Qian received his PhD from the University of Virginia and is currently an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Macau. His research interests include cultural sociology, political sociology, comparative historical

sociology, and memory studies. His articles have appeared in both social science and China studies journals such as *Cultural Sociology, Memory Studies, Sociological Studies* (in Chinese), and *Journal of Contemporary China.*

(Qian, Licheng. 2021.*"Consuming a Difficult Past Unapproved: Chairman Mao as Commodity."* Memory Studies 14(2):363-379)

Scott Westenberger (Stanford University)
Scott Westenberger grew up in Wisconsin and received a BA in history from the University of Minnesota. Prior to Stanford, he worked as a military analyst where he received specialized training in social network analysis and counter-insurgency operations. In the military, one of the main goals of this work was to understand how seemingly random, micro-level terrorist acts can trigger macro-level disruption with strategic-level effects. At Stanford, his research has continued to focus on uncovering the mechanisms by which micro-level social activity yield macro-level social change. Today, his work focuses on the wildly unpredictable world of fads and fashions. He studies popularity dynamics in pop culture domains like music and movies, and his research agenda takes up questions such as: Why do we like the songs and movies that we like? Why do our tastes change over time, and why are we unable to predict these changes in advance?

His dissertation, entitled "Fashion Changes: The Role of the Audience in the Fashion Cycle," consists of three thematically connected empirical research papers designed to uncover information concerning the demand-side mechanisms and processes relevant to understanding macro-level popularity fluctuations and consumption trends. His work involves agent-based models, the analysis of longitudinal survey data, the creation and fielding of survey experiments, and further includes topics on social networks, social influence, and the structure and evolution of taste. The work was recently published at *The Journal of Mathematical Sociology*.

Poem: "*Our Skin*"

Poem by **Moses A. Uyang** (Project 60, Abuja, Nigeria)

Our Skin

Your skin, my skin, our skin
I am black, you are white
You're black, I am white   And so what?
Our skin doesn't talk,
It does not hate
We talk, we hate.
When we live in a world of white, brown or black
Hispanic or Asian
Africans or Americans
Europeans or Oceanians
Then, for sure, the world has long left us behind.
We become relics of our dishonourable past.
From the North to the South
Across the oceans
Down to the arid lands
We carry a badge of shame on our existence
An insignia of prejudice and ridicule
If our hearts have no regards
For human dignity, then
Till we leave the dungeons of our ignorance
We may not have a living spirit within
But just a statue, taking a tour around the surface of the earth

With hate, without dignity
What a sad existence!
What a sad world we create
Choose to love!
It's priceless

Announcements

New Book Summary

Claude Rosental. 2021. *The Demonstration Society*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press

YouTube demos of makeup products by famous influencers, demonstrations of strength during street protests, demonstrations of military might in North Korea: public demonstrations are omnipresent in social life. Yet they are often perceived as isolated events, unworthy of systematic examination. In The Demonstration Society, Claude Rosental explores the underlying dynamics of what he calls a "demonstration society." He shows how, both in today's world and historically, public demonstrations constitute not only tools to prove, persuade, and promote, but fundamental forms of interaction and exchange, and, in some cases, attempts to lead the world.

Rosental compares demos with other forms of public demonstrations, drawing out both their peculiarities and common features. He analyzes the processes through which demonstrations are conceived and carried out, as well as the skills of their producers. He also compares contemporary demos with historical demonstrations including theaters of machines in the Renaissance, public demonstrations of natural philosophy in the seventeenth century, and demonstrations of the magic lantern in the nineteenth century. Above and beyond the entertainment they sometimes provide, demonstrations are experienced as intense moments that broadly involve alliances, material and symbolic goods, and, more generally, the future of individuals and collectives. Rosental elucidates the many ways in which we live today, as in the past, in a society of demonstration.

Turkmen, G. (2021). *Under the banner of Islam. Turks, Kurds, and the limits of religious unity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Sunni Islam has played an ambivalent role in Turkey's Kurdish conflict—both as a conflict resolution tool and as a tool of resistance. *Under the Banner of Islam* uses Turkey as a case study to understand how religious, ethnic, and national identities converge in ethnic conflicts between co-religionists. Gülay Türkmen asks a question that informs the way we understand religiously homogeneous ethnic conflicts today: Is it possible for religion to act as a resolution tool in these often-violent conflicts?

In search for answers to this question, in *Under the Banner of Islam*, Türkmen journeys into the inner circles of religious elites from different backgrounds: non-state-appointed local Kurdish *meles*, state-appointed Kurdish and Turkish *imams*, heads of religious NGOs, and members of religious orders. Blending interview data with a detailed historical analysis that goes back as far as the nineteenth century, she argues that the strength of Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms, the symbiotic relationship between Turkey's religious and political fields, the religious elites' varying conceptualizations of religious and ethnic identities, and the recent political developments in the region (particularly in Syria) all contribute to the complex role religion plays in the Kurdish conflict in Turkey.

Under the Banner of Islam is a specific story of religion, ethnicity, and nationalism in Turkey's Kurdish conflict, but it also tracks a broader narrative of how ethnic and religious identities are negotiated when resolving conflicts.

New Articles

Fridman, Daniel. 2021. "This Is a Handcraft: Valuation, Morality, and the Social Meanings of Payments for Psychoanalysis." *Theory and Society*. doi: 10.1007/s11186-021-09450-4.

Guo, Weirong, and Bin Xu. 2021. "Dignity in Red Envelopes: Disreputable Exchange and Cultural Reproduction of Inequality in Informal Medical Payment." *Social Psychology Quarterly*.

Jean-Pierre, J. 2021. How African Nova Scotians envision culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy as civic repair. *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* 42(8), 1153-1171. doi: 10.1080/01425692.2021.1981247.

Rivera-Cuadrado, Wayne. 2021. Crafting Charismatic Cops: Community Policing and the Faulty Reputations Paradigm, *Social Problems*. https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spab054.

Qi, Xiaoying. 2021 "Trust Upset: Redefining the Terms of Trust in Maintaining Exchange Relations." *Sociological Review*. doi: 10.1177/00380261211049035.

Levi, Ron, Holly Campeau and Todd Foglesong. 2020. "Recognition gaps and economies of worth in police encounters." *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41290-020-00109-8.

New Books

Büyükokutan, Baris. 2021. *Bound Together: The Secularization of Turkey's Literary Fields and the Western Promise of Freedom*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Kalberg, Stephen. 2021. *Max Weber's Sociology of Civilizations: A Reconstruction*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge.

Türkmen, Gülay. 2021. *Under the Banner of Islam: Turks, Kurds, and the Limits of Religious Unity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.