SECTIONCULTURE

ASA Sociology of Culture Section Newsletter Spring 2023, *Vol. 39, Issue 1*

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Letter from the Chair

Vanina Leschziner

Hello to all Culture Section members! I hope you have all had a good start to the new year, and that your new academic term is moving along smoothly. To those living in the Northern Hemisphere, the countdown towards the end of the winter is on and we can look forward to longer and brighter days.

All Culture Section committees have been hard at work, and I will briefly report on what has been happening since our December 2022 Newsletter. Our Newsletter Committee and Editors have put together a fantastic Newsletter, and I hope you will all find items of interest to you in there.

Producing Newsletters is hard work, and our four annual Newsletters would not be possible without the generous work of a whole lot of people. I'm grateful to Hannah Wohl (Communications Committee Chair) for her amazing work leading the Communications Committee, and to Newsletter Committee members Lisa McCormick, Ann Mullen, Jennifer Dudley, Anne Marie Champagne, and Derek Robey. Derek Robey has also become our new webmaster, and will be keeping our Culture Section website up-to-date. The Newsletter has been produced by our fantastic Editors, Man Yao (lead Editor for this issue), Elizabeth Trudeau, and Manning Zhang.

Call for Culture Section Awards

The deadline for submissions to the Culture Section Awards for Best Book, Best Article, and Best Student Paper is upcoming. If you haven't already, please consider submitting your work to the Awards Committees by March 15, 2023!

In case you missed the information for submitting your work to the Awards Committees from the previous Newsletter, here it is again.

The Sociology of Culture Section's Mary Douglas Prize for Best Book

Book authors may nominate a book published in the calendar year 2022. Authors must be section members to be eligible.

Each member of the committee requires: 1) A copy of the book, with hardcopies strongly preferred (see book distribution details below). 2) A two paragraphs-long self-nomination letter written by the author providing a synopsis and outlining the book's contributions to the sociology of culture/cultural sociology. The letter should be submitted through this online form.

The deadline is **March 15, 2023**. To be considered, all the committee members must receive self-nomination and the books must arrive by this deadline. Please direct any inquiries to committee chair Terry McDonnell.

Committee Members

Terry McDonnell (Chair), Waverly Duck, Rebecca Jean Emigh, Amin Ghaziani, Fatma Gocek, Michael Rodríguez-Muñiz

Book Distribution Instructions

Hardcopy: these are strongly preferred! Please submit six hardcopies of your book to the committee members at the following addresses. If a hardcopy is unavailable, please send an e-book version or digital copy.

E-Book/Digital Copy: Please email a link to an e-book version of your book, or send a digital copy as an attachment, to each of the committee members at the e-mail addresses above.

The Sociology of Culture Section's Clifford Geertz Prize for Best Article
Section members may nominate articles and original chapters of edited collections published in calendar years 2021-2022. Self-nominations are preferred. Authors must be members of the Culture Section. Please send the following to all members of the prize committee: 1) a very brief nominating email, including a paragraph-long description of the article and its significance to culture, and 2) an electronic copy of the manuscript. Articles that are not accompanied by a nomination letter will not be considered for the prize. The deadline for receipt of nominations and articles is **March 15, 2023**. Please direct any inquiries to committee chair Iddo Tavory.

Committee Members
Iddo Tavory (Chair), Sharon Quinsaat, Jeff Sheng, Christina Simko, Yongren Shi, Talia Shiff

The Sociology of Culture Section's Richard A. Peterson Award for Best Student Paper
Section members may nominate any work (published or unpublished), written by someone who is a student at the time of submission. Self-nominations are welcome. Authors must be members of the Culture Section. The award recipient will receive a $300 prize to reimburse part of the cost of attending the 2023 ASA Annual Meeting. Any paper that receives an honorable mention will be awarded $100. Email an electronic copy of the paper to each member of the award committee. The deadline for receipt of nominations and articles is **March 15, 2023**. Please direct any inquiries to committee chair Paul Joosse.

Committee Members
Paul Joosse (Chair), Elisabeth Becker, Matteo Bortolini, Larissa Buchholz, Jun Fang, Meltem Odabas

ASA Annual Meeting

Looking forward to the 2023 ASA Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, the Culture Section has already started planning the Reception, which will take place on Sunday, August 20, 2023, the designated Culture Section Day for the 2023 ASA Annual Meeting. Please mark your calendars! This year, we will have a joint reception with the Theory Section, and we are considering off-site venues. Our Reception Committee members Cresa Pugh (Chair) and Alexander Hoppe are looking for good venue options. Please stay tuned for announcements about this later in the year. We will probably be announcing the full set of Culture Section sessions for the 2023 ASA Annual Meeting in our next Newsletter, too.

Membership Committee

The Membership Committee (Marshall A. Taylor (Chair), Thomas Davidson, Asia Friedman, Khoa Phan Howard, Samantha Leonard, and Amy Zhang (council liaison) is following up on their outstanding past work on the Culture Section's Mentorship Program, and they have already started organizing this year's program. Please consider signing up for this very important and valuable Mentorship Program, whether as a mentor or mentee. A few dates to keep in mind:

1. The mentor application is already open and will close on April 3.
2. The mentee application will open on April 17, and will close on May 15.
3. The mentor pods are expected to be formed by the end of May.

More detailed information about the mentorship program, including these dates, has been posted on the Culture Section's ASA Connect. Please see here for more information. If you have any questions, please contact Membership Committee Chair Marshall A. Taylor, mtaylor2@nmsu.edu.

In addition to the Mentorship Program, the Membership Committee will also be working jointly with the Culture Section's D&I to develop the BIPOC Resource Sharing Network.

Culture and Contemporary Life Series

The first Culture and Contemporary Life (CCL) session of the year was on January 27, 2023, with the topic of **"Inequality and Cultural**

Authenticity,**"** and a fantastic lineup of panelists with Sarita Gaytán (University of Utah), Fred Wherry (Princeton University), and Sharon Zukin (Brooklyn College). Each of them offered different perspectives to think about what cultural authenticity means and how it relates to inequality, and shared productive insights into how to study these issues in the Q&A. Annie Hikido (Colby College) smoothly moderated the session and probed the panelists with excellent questions. Thank you to all the panelists and moderator, as well as to CCL Committee Chair Fiona Greenland!

You can read a detailed report on this great panel, written by Jennifer Dudley (Communications Committee) in this newsletter here, and watch the panel here. If you want to check out older CCL sessions, you will find them all here.

On March 1st, our CCL panel convened to discuss "Belligerent Nationalism in Big Power Politics." Fiona Greenland and the CCL Committee (Annie Hikido, Michael O. Johnston, Miray Philips, Ana Velitchokova, and council liaison Juan Pablo Pardo-Guerra) put together another outstanding lineup. You will be able to view a recording of the session on the CCL YouTube page when it is uploaded.

Panelists: Olga Shevchenko (Williams College), Andreas Wimmer (Columbia University), and Xiaohong Xu (University of Michigan).

Topic: "Violence is an ever-present possibility within nationalism. Belligerent nationalism in the case of big powers, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, China's increasing militarization, and the January 6th insurgency in the United States, has raised concern about new practices of violence in the name of the nation. Panelists are invited to examine the causes of this resurgence of belligerent nationalism, to situate them in their contemporary socio-political contexts, and to examine how cultures of nationalism play a role."

Also in this Newsletter

We have several excellent pieces in this issue. Our "Four Questions with…" series has Manning Zhang (Newsletter Editor), interviewing our 2022 Clifford Geertz Best Article Award Winner Talia Shiff, for her article "A Sociology of Discordance: Negotiating Schemas of Deservingness and Codified Law in U.S. Asylum Status Determinations," published in the *American Journal of Sociology*. We have book reviews of the two co-winners of our 2022 Mary Douglas Best Book Award, Fiona Greenland for her book *Ruling Culture: Art Police, Tomb Robbers, and the Rise of Cultural Power in Italy* (University of Chicago Press), and Michael Rodríguez-Muñiz for his book *Figures of the Future: Latino Civil Rights and the Politics of Demographic Change* (Princeton University Press). Thank you to Tania Aparicio Morales and Mari Sanchez for reviewing these excellent books. This is followed by Jennifer Dudley's report on the CCL panel. Jean Beaman (D&I Committee Chair) is sharing a report on the demographic survey of the section the D&I committee conducted last year. Last but not least, we have a fantastic Book Symposium following a 2022 SSHA Author-meets-Critics session on Paul Lichterman's book *How Civic Action Works: Fighting for Housing in Los Angeles* (Princeton University Press). We are fortunate to be able to read the insightful comments from Critics Ann Mische, Guobin Yang, Ming-Cheng M. Lo, Japonica Brown-Saracino, and a reply from Paul Lichterman. We close the newsletter with a set of announcements sourced by Hannah Wohl.

Thank you to the lead Editor for this issue, Man Yao, the Newsletter editorial team, and Newsletter Committee for this great issue. I hope you all enjoy reading it.

2023 Schedule for "Culture in Contemporary Life"

Session 2. Wednesday, March 1 at 5pm EST

Belligerent Nationalism in Big Power Politics – Violence is an ever-present possibility within nationalism. Belligerent nationalism in the case of big powers, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, China's increasing militarization, and the January 6th insurgency in the United States, has raised concern about new practices of violence in the name of the nation. Panelists are invited to examine the causes of this resurgence of belligerent nationalism, to situate them in their contemporary socio-political contexts, and to examine how cultures of nationalism play a role.

Panelists: Olga Shevchenko (Williams College), Andreas Wimmer (Columbia University), and Xiaohong Xu (University of Michigan).

Session 3. Monday, April 17 at 3pm EST

Theodicy and the Meaning of Suffering – What is the meaning of suffering? Sociologists have examined it as an individual experience that is at the heart of meaning- making in collective memory. Paradoxically, however, it is the inability to find meaning that makes suffering unbearable. This panel addresses the problem of meaning, how people reconcile the existence of God with evil, and what it means to find meaning in violence.

Session 4. Date TBA

The Body and Culture in a Post- Embodiment Age – This session will explore how media and medical technologies are changing the construction, conception, and presentation of the body. Panelists will consider whether we've arrived at a post- embodiment age, and what this means for how we understand cultures of the body.

Four Questions with Talia Shiff

Manning Zhang (Brandeis University) interviews Talia Shiff (Tel Aviv University) about her research projects, and how legal studies and cultural sociology intersect in her work and life.

***Manning Zhang*: First I want to congratulate you on receiving the 2022 Culture Section Clifford Geertz Award for your paper "A Sociology of Discordance: Negotiating Schemas of Deservingness and Codified Law in U.S. Asylum Status Determinations"! For today's interview, could you start with talking a little bit about yourself, your research, and your current project?**

Talia Shiff: Sure! I'm currently an assistant professor of Sociology at Tel Aviv University. I graduated from Northwestern University, where I got my JD/ PhD (in sociology). After completing my PhD I was a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard University, where I was both in the Sociology Department and the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs. My research is at the intersection of culture, law, and morality. I'm interested in understanding how social actors in various organizational contexts negotiate "moments of mismatch" between rules and bureaucratic regulations, on the one hand, and "moral schemas (i.e., shared understandings of deservingness that are learned in specific institutional organizational contexts over time), on the other. In order to understand how organizations work, we must examine how actors negotiate codified procedures, rules and law, with internalized learned categories of worth.

Routine decision making depends on there being a certain degree of accordance between codified law and moral schemas. But what about moments where codified regulations and moral schemas do not align? What can these moments teach us about core sociological processes such as evaluation, decision making, etc… These questions are the focus of my AJS paper "A Sociology of Discordance." My interviews with asylum officers reveal how these moments of ordinary discordance shaped how officers evaluated applicants and defined their gatekeeping roles.

In my current research, I examine a different type of discordance, what I term "moral dissonance": situations in which frontline actors' critique not the application of law (as is the case with ordinary discordance) but rather the moral logic underlying it. My analysis is based on interviews that I conducted with asylum officers who worked under the Trump administration. Over the course of four years, the Trump Administration set an unprecedented pace for executive action on asylum policy, enacting a significant number of policy changes that deterred asylum seekers from applying for and receiving protection, with the goal of substantially redefining the meaning and scope of U.S. asylum policy. Among these policies were the Third Country Transit Bar and the Migration Protection Protocols (MPP, also known as the Remain in Mexico policy), both of which introduced new bars for asylum admission based not on the merits of the case but rather on the applicant's nationality and country of origin. In addition, the administration, through revised lesson plans and executive orders, significantly restricted, and in practice eliminated, applicants' ability to receive asylum on the basis of domestic and/or gang violence, overriding past precedent and internationally recognized case law and legal reasoning. Together, these changes constituted what many officers perceived to be a

regime overhaul: they not only eliminated asylum eligibility for entire groups of applicants but also redefined the very logic underlying asylum admissions. Asylum officers subjected to these new policy changes were thus required to act in ways they perceived as directly contradictory to their moral service missions. I draw on these interviews with the goal of furthering our understanding of how frontline public service workers, who are required by their institution to act in ways that undermine their internalized beliefs concerning how they should (morally) act, re-narrate the moral identity of their professional group and legitimize their continued membership within it.

***Zhang*: How do culture and cultural sociology influence your thinking?**

Shiff: I am interested in how people interpret their social surroundings and make sense of various problems and situations. I think cultural sociology gives us amazing tools for identifying and analyzing how people interpret their world and how these interpretations are always influenced and constrained by institutions, dispositions and structure. Processes of meaning-making, evaluation, decision-making and institutionalization are, and have always been, central to my work. Cultural sociology has greatly influenced my own thinking about these issues.

***Zhang*: How do you envision the future of cultural sociology? And what excites you the most?**

Shiff: That's a hard question. I am optimistic about its future. I think more and more people are discovering cultural sociology. More and more sociologists draw on concepts developed within cultural sociology such as schemas, cultural categorizations, boundaries, to name just a few examples, in their analyses of the social world. It is in this respect that cultural sociology has shaped the discipline as a whole. At the same time, as an ardent supporter of interdisciplinary research, I believe that cultural sociologists would gain considerably from engaging empirically and analytically with concepts central to other subfields in sociology, such as law, state power, and governance.

***Zhang*: The combination of cultural sociology and other disciplines is an interesting point, and I am curious about your experience as a JD/PhD as a graduate student in Northwestern University. Could you talk more about it?**

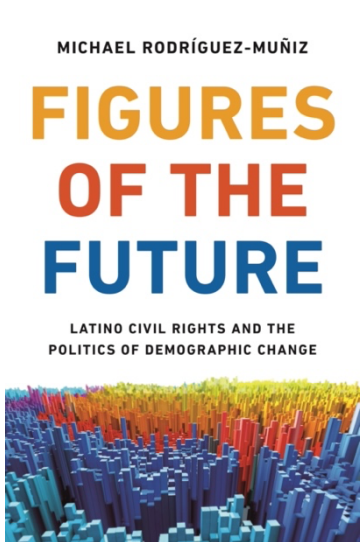
Shiff: For me, the JD/PhD program was an amazing experience. It really informed my thinking and research. The program is structured such that students start in their respective PhD programs but transition to law school after two years. Once done with law school they transition back to sociology to finish writing their thesis. These transitions were hard. Each program - sociology and law - constitutes a different "language," characterized by distinct methods of analysis and research. But at the same time, these transitions were also extremely fruitful. My training in sociology informs how I read, interpret, and analyze the workings of the law and vice-versa. My legal education shapes my understanding of core sociological concepts and processes.

***Zhang*: What tips or advice would you give to graduate students and young scholars?**

Shiff: I would say two things. First, don't be afraid to cross interdisciplinary boundaries, to be creative, and to pursue questions that are of true interest to you. The pressures of graduate school, of writing in formats and about topics that will be more publishable, and of doing "mainstream" sociology too often inhibit our own voice, our passions—the very things that led us to pursue an academic career in the first place. Publishing, finding a job, meeting the established standards of success are all important and naturally shape how we research and what we research about. But, at the same time, we can't let them be the only thing that motivates us. Second, pursue interests outside of academia, invest in friends and family, [and] develop hobbies. I believe that in the end, engaging with the world—whether through reading outside our area of expertise, listening to music, doing sports, and/or hanging out with family and friends—makes us not only happier people but also better sociologists and scholars.

Figures of the Future by Michael Rodríguez-Muñiz

Book Review by Mari Sanchez



By Mari Sanchez
PhD Candidate, Department of Sociology
Harvard University

Amidst Census predictions of an impending minority-majority future, scholars and pundits across the political spectrum have taken demographic trends at face value to debate the implications for American society. *Figures for the Future: Latino Civil Rights and the Politics of Demographic Change* (Princeton University Press 2021), a co-winner of the Mary Douglas Award for Best Book this year, takes an entirely different tack. Author and Berkeley sociologist Michael Rodríguez-Muñiz examines the deeply political struggles over the *meaning* assigned to ethnographic demographic changes, arguing that "projected demographic futures operate as objects of aspiration, sources of frustration, and weapons of struggle" (3). The book works to unsettle the idea of "demographic naturalism," closely linked to racial essentialism, which assumes that demographic knowledge reflects an objective reality unmediated by perception. At the core of the book is the critical insight that population trends have little meaning outside of their politico-cultural contexts; rather, various actors negotiate and contest how to study, interpret, present, and respond to future predictions – the Bourdieusian-style struggles over demographic meaning that Rodríguez-Muñiz calls "population politics."

While various actors provide data or interpretations about demographic change as agents of population politics, Rodríguez-Muñiz focuses his attention on national Latine Civil Rights advocacy groups. He employs interview, content analysis of primary materials, and ethnographic data on organizations such as UnidosUS (formerly National Council of La Raza), league of United Latin American Citizens, and Voto Latino from 2012-2019. Underlying these contemporary population politics are deep historical sediments – past political projects that entrenched particular raced ideologies and scripts that may later be invoked or contested. For example, Rodríguez-Muñiz cites a long history of white supremacist projects that viewed ethnoracial demographic futures as a racial threat. Latines – alternatively described as the largest minority, fastest growing population, and a sleeping giant – have often been at the center of fears about white replacement.

In response to what Rodríguez-Muñiz cleverly

refers to as white "demographobia," Latine advocacy groups have been compelled to mobilize demographic knowledge to depict a positive American future linked to Latine progress. They strived to strike a balance between Latines as a rising demographic force to be reckoned with while minimizing white backlash. For Latine civil rights advocates, producing and wielding demographic data – from growth predictions to voter turnout – offered a means to positively shape public perceptions of Latine growth, create narratives about future power, and effect political change. Rodríguez-Muñiz points to three temporal tactics used "to accelerate the "when" of Latine political power, against a backdrop of public discourses that have framed Latines as a population of the future and perpetually on the rise" (3). These included 1) forecasting that stokes emotive visions of a particular demographic future; 2) foreshadowing that convinces audiences of the imminence of the demographic future they have conjured; and 3) forewarning that reminds other actors of the consequences of ignoring this future.

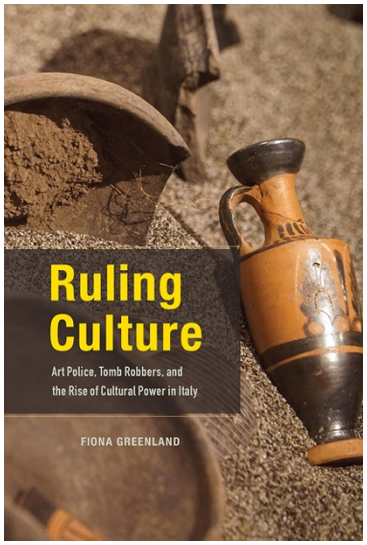
Cultural sociologists will relish Rodríguez-Muñiz's deeply creative theorization of futurity, knowledge production, and meaning-making. His work engages with a burgeoning literature on imagined futures and temporality, while also offering additional insights to constructivist accounts of ethnoracial categories and identities. The book also prompts new pathways of research on the temporality of ethnoracial projects. Coordinating futures is often a basis of collective action – which becomes apparent in Rodríguez-Muñiz's accounts of how Latine civil rights activists attempt to manage (at least temporarily) the overwhelming heterogeneity of Latindad by focusing on a unified story of future potential. How can temporal tactics, in addition to vying for external power, also concretize intra-group solidarity? Would other projects, actors or "groups" besides Latine civil rights advocacy groups find themselves prioritizing future-oriented strategies of recognition and influence? In contrast to waging political battles over imminent projected futures, might they adopt other temporal orientations or landscapes? Indeed, there is more to be explored in the connection between past, present, and future, as Rodríguez-Muñiz notes in his chapter connecting historical sediments to contemporary struggles. How do collective memory or forgetting shape the temporal foundations of imagined demographic futures, particularly in an age rife with battles over school curriculums about history and race?

At the same time, a clear outcome of the book is that increasing numbers do not always translate to increasing power. When do these temporal strategies fail to produce the hoped-for political outcomes? There is a rich classic and modern literature that connects temporality to agency, on which *Figures of the Future* is also poised to stimulate additional thinking. In the conclusion of the book, for example, Rodríguez-Muñiz details how Latine advocacy groups realized that their belief in demographic destiny had not come to bear in the wake of Donald Trump's election, as they found themselves scrambling to respond to a barrage of assaults. This presentism as a form of crisis response contrasts starkly with the previous strategic, methodical emphasis on futurity. How do particular temporal orientations reflect structural opportunities for action and capacity to effect change? When are futures constraining or malleable? Finally, in situations of constrained agency, future aspirations are often less about plausible or viable outcomes, and more often about the moral worthiness of the actors envisioning this future. How can concepts like morality and worth help us better understand why futurity becomes important to certain actors' political strategies?

As the United States is poised to undergo significant demographic change in the upcoming decades, a book like *Figures of the Future* is a timely tool for sociologists to interrogate our intellectual toolkits. The book reminds us to make sense of these changes in ways that do not reify demographic populations but to instead take stock of the population politics at hand – in which we are often complicit.

Ruling Culture by Fiona Greenland

Book Review by Tania Aparicio Morales



By Tania Aparicio Morales, PhD
Full-Time Lecturer, Program in Arts Administration
Teachers College
Columbia University

How did Italy become a global cultural power? In *Ruling Culture,* Fiona Greenland argues that Italian state patrimony became an influential culture powerhouse because of unique dynamics of internal disputes and intimidation among tomb robbers, artifacts, policies, policing, and soil. Her book is the result of many transformations: the natural processes that happen over centuries, on and all-around Etruscan artifacts as they mature into antiquities interred on Italian soil; the political shifts that shape discourses linking cultural patrimony to the sovereignty of the nation state; the ways in which family stories morph from illicit to morally righteous when they are told in the most intimate spheres; and Greenland's academic path as an archeologist turned sociologist who questions how the objects that she excavated are connected to larger systems of state control and to the idiosyncrasies of everyday life. That last aspect strengthens the book's interpretative lens at the crux of theory and data. The book shows how powerful actors, soil, and artifacts connect through complex systems of signification at the macro, meso, and micro levels—which overflow onto each other—and how such a cross-contamination is never stable, but ever changing.

Indeed, archeological soil and artifacts are at the center of Greenland's analysis, as she explains in Chapter 1. There, she presents the concepts she applied and developed to make sense of the practices of tomb robbers, everyday citizens, law enforcement, and cultural professionals, as well as the meanings attached to each of those actors. In particular, she examines two aspects of the ecosystem that have been signified and re-signified for the benefit of Italy's project of cultural domination (i.e. Italian Model): artifacts and tomb robbers or tombaroli. In this chapter, she interprets the ways in which antiquities, extracted from Italian soil, do multiple forms of work to support and represent Italian sovereignty. She calls the multifaceted role of antiquities a form of distributed sovereignty (borrowing from Alfred Gell's (1998) theory of distributed personhood) because archeological artifacts channel Italian authority and can act as a representation of the state wherever they are found, taken, or exhibited. Greenland supports this argument by

interpreting how these objects are perceived in their national context where they are seen as products of Italy's soil or matrix, which—through a patriotic lens and held up by nationalistic discourses—is an equivalent to the motherland's womb. Given that antiquities represent the Italian state, tomb robbers are framed as a threat to the patrimony and state sovereignty.

In the following chapters, Greenland uses archival and ethnographic data to move between the macro and the micro. She introduces key actors who created a market for Italian antiquities, in particular, those who catered to patrons from the Gilded Age and developed international circuits with prices dictated by wealthy American elites. Then, the author guides the reader through a series of policy shifts, from 1909 up to the first decades of the twenty-first century, that sought control of the market to preserve cultural patrimony and keep it on Italian land. One of those initiatives yielded, in 1969, Italy's famous Art Squad, a unit that specializes in the art and antiquities crimes, such as tomb robbing and repatriation campaigns. Using archival data from those periods, Greenland does a close reading of the ways in which politics become entangled with culture, as for instance in the ways in which Mussolini drew from an archeological sense of national identity to portray his power as he "excavated" the ruins in which he found the country and how he used antiquities to leverage political power with Nazi Germany; or how Italy became the UNESCO World Heritage Sites archetype.

In Chapter 4, the author investigates the many faces that tomb robbing has in the experience of 'ordinary' citizens who place tombaroli in a spectrum that goes from expert connoisseurs to reckless thieves. In that sense, Greenland manages to move through all the places in which artifacts' distributed sovereignty is present and to inquire into what are the meanings that such sovereignty has in the intimate existence of Italian citizens. To that end, she enters the daily lives of people who display antiquities that their grandfather took from a tomb in their living room, or who use them as kitchen or garden containers. In that sense, the book demonstrates how distributed sovereignty is shaped by state actors, such as politicians, but also how it is built from the bottom-up by Italian citizens who extract artifacts from the soil to directly connect to their culture. Greenland delves into the complicated relationships that tombaroli have with art, their pasts, their ancestors, and the state; as well as the contentious signification and re-signification processes that state actors subjugated tomb robbers to in the name of cultural dominance. Furthermore, Greenland shows how in their everyday lives, people bring light to the state's moral contradictions that allow foreigners to take Italian artifacts while Italians are persecuted for wanting their own history in their hands.

Greenland's triangulated research methods and interdisciplinary perspective make this book layered and complex. It is, perhaps, only a sociologist with her hands in the dirt who can begin to ask the questions that will yield the data needed to theorize the ways in which land is signified and resignified by the state to assert its cultural dominance through artifacts and tomb robbers. Over a span of four years, she conducted a mix of participant observation in two digging sites, unstructured interviews, and archival methods. In the methodological appendix, she explains how she approached the multiple categories and positions of her research participants, which is not an easy feat. She used a variety of data collection methods, as well as thorough anonymization tactics to protect the participants who, under some or other legal framework, could be accused of illicit excavations or possession of antiquities. Her work provides some guidelines on how to navigate the ethics of ethnography in gray areas and among unsettled legal categories, as well as how to interpret cultural power from the top-down and bottom-up.

This book is a pleasure to read more than once because of the richness of the text. Though there are some parts that I cannot fully grapple with, such as why the discussion of Mussolini as Homo autotelus and Homo faber was a crucial piece of the argument. Nevertheless, Greenland's use of her empirical data to develop a novel way to

understand sovereignty and cultural power is remarkable. It is not a surprise that this book received The Mary Douglas Prize for Best Book in the Sociology of Culture 2022.

I imagine that scholars working on issues of sovereignty and arts repatriation will find Greenland's examination of the Italian model useful. For instance, some of the exciting ways in which I hope to see this book influence our field are: In which ways could the *Ruling Culture* framework help us understand Indigenous People and Native Nations relations to antiquities outside of Europe? How might ethno-racial categories enter the equation of sovereignty from the bottom? How is distributed sovereignty activated through artifacts in contexts in which colonization is unresolved?

Culture in Contemporary Life Series

Inequality and the Politics of Cultural Authenticity

Report by Jennifer Dudley
Host: Fiona Greenland
Moderator: Annie Hikido
Panelists: Sarita Gaytán, Fred Wherry, Sharon Zukin

On January 27, 2023 the Culture Section of the American Sociological Association hosted an online event titled "Inequality and the Politics of Cultural Authenticity" as part of its Culture in Contemporary Life (CCL) series. Dr. **Annie Hikido** (Colby College) moderated the discussion. Dr. **Sarita Gaytán** (University of Utah), Dr. **Fred Wherry** (Princeton University), and Dr. **Sharon Zukin** (Brooklyn College) participated as panelists.

The panel discussed cultural authenticity, its significance, and how it's used in power struggles over spaces and identities. The panel also discussed methods of inquiry and took questions about the future sociological research on authenticity. Below is a summary of the discussion.

Defining Authenticity

Beginning with the question of how to define authenticity, the panel agreed that context matters. **Gaytán** noted that definitions are "contingent on time, place, and people" before adding that the question of authenticity circles around accuracy, conformity, sincerity, integrity, credibility, and consistency. **Wherry** agreed and added that *type* of authenticity adds a useful distinction (Carroll and Wheaton 2009, The Organizational Construction of Authenticity). He also pointed to reactive authenticity is mobilized in response to a threat. For example, creators in a community may not use the word authenticity until "something is being taken away"; once something from the community is extracted in a disrespectful and violent way.

Wherry and **Zukin** also discussed how the concept of authenticity is used in marketing. **Zukin** says that society has broadly applied authenticity to the self and the group, works of creative genius, to the true and good versus false and bad, and as a social construct that's "artfully arranged by decor and verbal or visual presentations."

Power Struggles

The panelists pointed to the role authenticity plays in power struggles over physical spaces. As an urbanist, **Zukin** studies space mediated by authenticity and vice versa. She said these studies often examine "outsiders looking at a space they have not inhabited and defining it as authentic in order to appropriate its uses and benefits." She gave the example of gentrification and her study of online restraurant reviews as a

site where authenticity is contested (Zukin, Linderman, and Hurson 2017, "The Omnivore's Neighborhood? Online restaurant reviews, race, and gentrification").

Wherry agreed that the discussion of cuisine as valued or unvalued helps us recognize that the content is less important. We must "go well beyond the contents of place," he said. **Gaytán** added that people don't have to use the term "authenticity" to implicate authenticity politics. Questions of worthiness, normalcy, and naturalness are wrapped up in authenticity politics. She points to the coordinated attack on trans communities. Those who question what a "real" boy/man or girl/woman is are engaging in a battle that is in part about authenticity. However, while these debates aren't solely related to authenticity, we have reason to understand how authenticity operates in these fights.

Methods

Hikido asked about methods of inquiry. **Zukin** and **Wherry** agree that immersion and thick description helps researchers understand authenticity. Through thick description, one can see how people express deep concerns about the thing they value being mistreated; how they slow down or stop (i.e., get in the way of) that mistreatment. However, **Wherry** warns that ethnographic description needs to be paired with a sense of community. This is how he found cultural policies are strong around the idea of distinctions between what's real and what's not even when the people he spoke with communicated their concerns about authenticity without using those words (Wherry 2006, The Social Sources of Authenticity in Global Handicraft Markets).

Gaytán urged researchers to keep their eyes and ears open, adding that researchers can find information in unexpected places. She has analyzed music lyrics, dance videos, bottle labels, and by just talking to folks on busses. She said that listening is valuable. If something doesn't make into the book or article that one is currently working on, it can still pay off in knowledge earned or future projects.

Directions for Future Research

When asked about directions for future research, **Gaytán** started the discussion by saying sociology needs more critical engagement around authenticity's significance. She asks, "why is it implied as good or neutral" and "how do meanings of authenticity change over time?" **Zukin** says that authenticity continues to shape the way she understands her projects in progress and can see it applied to the digital economy, NFTs, and sites of financial speculation.

Wherry believes that more inquiry is needed in spaces where people are often trying to make a claim on solidarity, ritual, joy, exploration not directed by others. He gives the example of small towns that aren't experiencing a lot of growth. There, authenticity is about preservation as opposed to contestation, so sociology has not focused on it. **Wherry** also suggests more investigation about communities where people find comfort in the loss of something real that was never great. We think about the authentic and tradition as beautiful. However, that doesn't mean it's beautiful for everyone, depending on the body you inhabit or identities that you claim.

Question & Answer Section

The panel concluded by answering questions from the audience. The panel discussed the tension between describing a research population accurately and the community's disagreement about critique or negative portrayals. **Wherry** offered that analysis and criticism should be offered, even when a researcher agrees with or supports the people being studied, especially in ethnography. **Zukin** agreed, saying that is relevant to any study. She says, "describe, explain, and interpret as best you can and of course all research participants will not love everything."

Finally, the panel agreed that more voices are welcome to conversations about authenticity. **Gaytán** said that some of the sociology around

race and ethnicity is exciting (especially the journal *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*). Scholars of color are introducing important work around decolonial projects that talk about questions of authenticity.

Recommendations for further reading includes work by Dwanna McKay, Fiona Greenland, Ann Hikido, Debra Vargas, and *Exterminate All the Brutes* from Raoul Peck.

Culture Section Diversity and Inclusion Committee

Demographic Survey Results by Jean Beaman

In Winter 2022, the Diversity and Inclusion Committee conducted a survey of section membership regarding demographics and diversity-related issues. The 2021-2022 D&I committee consisted of Barbara Combs, Mikki Liu, Daniel Karell, Elisabeth Becker Topkara, Elena Ayala-Hurtado, and myself as committee chair.

We conducted this survey in order to get a "temperature check" on diversity and inclusion issues as they relate to our section. Thanks to all who completed the survey (about 1/4th of section membership)! There was a relatively equal distribution in terms of both years of being a member of the culture section and stage of career represented among survey respondents.

Herein I outline some general findings:

- Demographic breakdown of respondents – 64% white; 15% Asian/Asian-American; 7.8% Black/African-American; 5.7% Hispanic/Latinx/Chicanx; 3.67% Middle Eastern/North African; 0.8% Native American
- About 65 percent of respondents have served on either a committee or subcommittee for the Culture section.
- The main ways respondents participate in the culture section were attending a culture section session at the ASA Annual Meeting (19%); reading the section newsletter (20%), and attending the culture section reception at the ASA Annual Meeting (11%).
- Regarding the extent to which respondents feel welcome in the social and intellectual life of the culture section, 41% reported neither strong nor weak, 31% reported to a strong extent, 12.67% reported to a very strong extent, 11.76% reported to a weak extent, and 3% reported not feeling welcomed at all in the culture section.

Beyond these quantitative responses, there were some common themes in the open-ended questions I wish to also highlight (each of the themes I note below were mentioned by at least 5 respondents):

1. A critique and questioning of what "counts" as sociology of culture and cultural sociology, both in terms of the substantive content and methods of such research as well as identities of scholars themselves (i.e. elevating white cis-heterosexual scholars over scholars with identities marginalized and excluded in academia)
2. Lack of sufficient attention to scholarship on race and culture/cultural sociology, although some respondents also acknowledged some change in this area
3. Lots of praise for the Culture and Contemporary Life webinar series
4. The culture of the section is too elitist, insular, and exclusionary
5. Too much of a "social justice agenda" within the section and ASA more broadly
6. More focus needed on non-U.S. based scholars and non-U.S. based scholarship

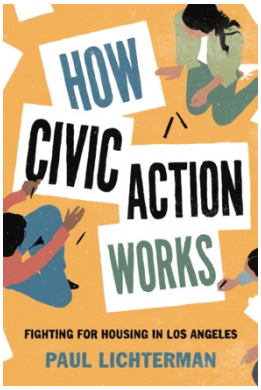
7. More diversity needed re members of award selection committees and section leadership positions

We as a committee take these questions and concerns seriously and welcome your additional thoughts and ideas about how to be more intentional towards creating a welcoming and inclusive section community. Please send any suggestions you have to the 2022-2023 Diversity and Inclusion committee (Jean Beaman, committee chair; Victoria Asbury-Kimmel, Luis Antonio-Vila-Henninger, Mattias Smangs, and Mari Sanchez).

Social Science History Association Book Symposium

How Civic Action Works: Critic Comments and Author Reply

Lichterman, Paul. 2021. *How Civic Action Works: Fighting for Housing in Los Angeles*. Princeton University Press.



Notes for Paul: *How Civic Action Works*

Ann Mische
University of Notre Dame

It's such a joy to have the chance to read and reflect on "How Civic Action Works"! I remember discussing this project with Paul over a decade ago when it was still a twinkle in his eyes, and I've chatted with him at conferences over the years, but it's breathtaking to see the whole rich and expansive project laid out with such detail, care, and insight. Once again, Paul has shown us the power of a particular kind of ethnography, attuned not only to place and context, but to the way action and interaction move across time and place, dynamically creating what he calls "scenes" as rich and mobile sites of relational meaning-making.

In this case, the scenes consist of messy, fractious, multi-layered, partially overlapping setting of advocacy for affordable housing in Los Angeles. Paul takes us deep the committee meetings, street tours, public forums, planning sessions and council hearings of different kinds of housing advocacy, including a close look at one coalition working on a campaign for a city-wide affordable housing ordinance and others working to prevent displacement and homelessness among mostly Latinx and African American communities in South LA.

As a long time fan of Paul's work – and a fellow traveler in some of his approaches to activist ethnography – you'd think there would come a point where I would settle own into a kind of satisfied

approbation – as in, “there he goes again, doing that stuff he does so well.” So what jumped out to me is how fresh and even surprising the insights in this book are. There were so many times that I just stopped in my tracks and said “Wow.” Oddly I was a bit surprised by my own surprise, although I guess I shouldn’t have been!

As my colleagues have noted, Paul argues that prevailing approaches to understanding strategic choices in social movements are misguided in that they place the emphasis on ACTORS rather than ACTIONS. As social movement analysts, we tend to focus on the attributes of “collective actors,” as well as on the way movement “entrepreneurs” summon resources, innovate tactics and craft frames in order to respond to threats and opportunities, while trying to expand the reach and appeal of a movement. Following Fligstein and McAdam’s recent intervention, many of us also examine how movement leaders exercise “skills” in articulating relations across complex fields.
While Paul doesn’t discard the insights of these approaches, he argues that we need to shift the angle of vision. Rather than focusing on the traits, resources, skills, or choices of entrepreneurial actors, he says we should pay attention to the way actors themselves are PRODUCTS of interactions. His “civic action” approach holds that we should “follow the action.” These mobile and shifting “actions” are in turn patterned by “styles” that constitute different social movement “scenes.”

The meaning of any given action or claim is not pre-given or singular, but rather RELATIONAL and MULTIVALENT. Particular advocacy scenes cultivate relationships differently. Some may put the focus on building diverse coalitions around a “least common denominator” set of provisional, short-lived shared interests – he calls this a “**community of interest.”** Others make claims on strong and longstanding forms community that separate the proud but besieged “us” from the threatening “they” – he calls this a **“community of identity.”**

Depending on what style or scene is being enacted, the same practice or discourse can mean different things in different contexts. Paul urges us to deflect attention away from whether actors succeed or fail in their goals, to look rather at how the goals themselves are constructed; the meaning of “success” varies across different scenes, and some claims are understood as more or less legitimate, depending on what scene is being enacted.

Alright – hopefully this condensed and telegraphic introduction to the vocabulary and theoretical architecture (alongside my colleagues’ interventions) will whet your appetite to read the book! I’m going to move now to three points I love about this framework, followed by three questions I wrestled with as I read the book.

WHAT I LOVE – the things that made me go wow

FIRST: I really love the pictorial imagery Paul gives us of the RELATIONAL MAPS of the two core styles – the community of interest and the community of identity. As a heuristic, Paul says that we can describe the community of interest style in terms of a series of concentric circles composed mostly of permeable, dotted lines. At center is the coalition of supporters and endorsers that momentarily converge along a shared “interest” -- these circles of supporters expand outwards toward the ‘zone of aspiration (often composed of city officials or elected council people who could support the proposed policy changes or be “won over” to the interest, with more distant rings of opponents further out – hostile neighborhood councils, for example, or big for-profit developers. These rings are permeable and expanding; the goal is to persuade as many people as possible in the zone of aspiration to consent to the proposed plan (in this case, and affordable housing ordinance), through bargaining and deal making around a narrow, attainable set of claims.

In contrast to this is the pictorial map of the communities of identity --- also a set of circles, but defined by a sharp, thick divide between a unitary "we" at the center – THE COMMUNITY – that needs to be protected from looming, threatening set of "they" – the forces of gentrification, the property developers, and general "elites" and power holders outside the boundary of the community.

While this is just a pictorial heuristic – and Paul would be the first to say that action is more varied and mobile on the ground – these images provide a useful way of understanding why civic actors in these different scenes talk past each other. They express very different foci of relation-building, as well as different conceptions of power. The goal of reaching into the realm of institutional power and getting decision-makers to sign onto policies and resource allocation is quite differently felt and understood goal than that of defending a proud but besieged community against incursions and displacement by powerful elites. This pictorial heuristic of the two kinds of maps helps to bring this home.

SECOND, I really appreciated Paul's challenge to the "good cop, bad cop" idea of how these contrary "styles" in a field of action could just get along. I myself have been tempted by this kind of complementary explanation of field dynamics – I remember back in early 2020 (pre-Covid) thinking naively maybe we need Bernie Sanders AND Elizabeth Warren AND Pete Buttigieg taking up different points of entry and challenge in a combined front against fascism, racism, economic injustice and environmental calamity. Why are all my friends fighting with each other about these different positions in the field? Don't we need "articulation" at all points, including radical outsiders storming the gates as well as policy wonks and institution builders reforming laws and rethinking governance structures?

Now I know that this is not precisely the contrast in style that Paul is talking about. But he makes the point that that it is deeply patronizing and condescending for more institutionally oriented actors to assume the more strident "outsiders" are useful primarily for their passion and pressure, playing bad cop to their own more compromising (but "effective") bargaining tactics. Paul shows us that this is a fundamental misunderstanding of what the more confrontational community-oriented advocates thought they were about. It glosses over their deep commitment to the "long game" of community empowerment in the face of historical marginalization and exclusionary elite power. The temporal arc is different, along with the relational map and sense of purpose and loyalty. In other words, as Paul says, STYLE "is not just a cultural garment one might put on or take off as occasions demand." No wonder the Bernie folks were so irritated by the Pete fans, and why the latter were so bewildered by this animosity.

THIRD, I love Paul's discussion of the dilemmas and tradeoffs that that compose different styles. He argues that we need to avoid thinking of styles either as ideological divides, arrayed on a spectrum of left to right, or as personality clashes, as expressed by more strident or conciliatory people (again, think of Bernie vs. Pete). Rather, Paul argues that each style has a characteristic set of internal tensions, or what he calls DILEMMAS. For the community of interest, this is the tension between the focus on insider or outsider strategies (hence the temptation to think of more community-based activists as useful "outsiders" applying pressure in their "insider" game). For the communities of identity, the dilemma is different – it's whether their action is stemming "from" or "for" the community."

These positions are actively wrangled over and debated within the strategy and planning sessions of the leadership of diverse coalitions. The "scenes" that are informed by these styles can ride back and forth on the different "horns" of these dilemmas. But the dilemmas are not resolvable, and they do not translate easily into each other. I find this to be a powerful way of understanding the dynamic tensions

inherent in different kinds of political action.

On the other hand, Paul tells us that dilemmas are different from TRADEOFFS. Dilemmas are openly wrestled over, while tradeoffs are unspoken or even taboo. For the community of interest, one tradeoff is neglecting redistributive justice toward the most marginalized in order to build a broad-based coalition. Bringing this up in the wrong "scene" was seen as "impolite" or disruptive, a violation of the meaning-making that oriented the style. For the community of identity, the tradeoff was developing an overly exclusionary and essentialized understanding of who constituted "the community" – again, an issue better not examined too closely as it would disrupt solidarity. That is, Paul tells us that the boundaries of a particular style can be discerned in what CANNOT BE SAID within a particular scene, in addition to what is actively debated. This distinction between dilemmas and tradeoffs was one of those "wow" moments for me.

Okay, so I've told you several things that I love in Paul's book. There are MANY MORE – but you can read it yourself! I'll close by trying to tease out a few things that I wrestled with.

First I have to admit that I raised my eyebrows a bit when I saw that Paul had labeled these two styles as communities of "interest" and "identity." This was because a formative set of debates in my own intellectual coming of age – and those of others in my cohort of cultural and political sociologists coming up in the 1990s – was to challenge the divide between interest and identity. We rejected the opposition between the older "resource mobilization" and political process models of social movements (closer to what Paul calls the entrepreneurial perspective, focused on interest) and the "new social movement" approach focusing on identity, culture, and emotion (coming from Melucci, Tourraine and others). Important work by Francesca Polleta, Mary Bernstein, Elizabeth Armstrong, Jim Jaspers and many others (including David Smilde and Lyn Spillman in this room!) challenged this divide, both by showing how interests were culturally constituted AND how identities were mobilized strategically. I myself have tried hard not to put these two terms in opposition.

And of course, more recently this divide has been re-activated by challenges to "identity politics" by those claiming that this ignores economic and class-based forms of power. Paul takes great care to distinguish his approach from identity politics, and I think he is persuasive on this count. But I'm wondering why he felt he needed to use these two juxtaposed terms that hearken back to this debate? Or maybe he would argue that there is something 'real" about this opposition, that it's one of those unresolvable dilemmas with horns we need to ride back and forth on.

As an interesting point of contrast, one of my former students at the Kroc Institute for Peace Studies at Notre Dame --- theologian Kyle Lambelet – just wrote a book on the use of religious ritual as style of nonviolent protest in the School of the Americas Watch at Fort Benning. He makes a similar distinction in discussing the tension between principled and strategic uses of nonviolence. He says that this opposition reflects an underlying dilemma between "faithfulness" and "effectiveness" – perhaps close to what you are calling identity and interest, but without the conceptual baggage. In any case, I'd be interested in hearing what you have to say about why you chose to use those terms.

Ok – on to my second query. Setting aside my uneasiness with the terminology, I'm wondering whether you would understand this tension between communities and interest and identity as "fractal." This is something I've been wrestling with in my own work on futurists, where I also see a number of underlying tensions and dilemmas that keep recurring in different sites and forms and on different scales.

So for example, chapters 3 and 4 you do this beautiful job of laying out the difference between the two styles; we are persuaded by the logic, by the relational maps, and by the underlying dilemmas, But chapters 5, 6 and 7 makes things more complicated; styles shift over time; they disrupt and challenge particular scenes, they are carried between scenes by coalition members involved in multiple campaigns, and the leaders themselves engaged in shifting or hybridized styles as they move between scenes or as those scenes evolve over time. You argue that your strategy of "following the action" rather than the actor, ideology or outcome allows us to see these complex dynamics.

I'm wondering if the imagery of "fractals" could be useful here, perhaps as a way of unpacking the nuances of these field dynamics. That is, is the tension between communities of interest and identity (or whatever we call it) just something that you gleaned inductively from your observations these particular housing advocacy communities? Would we see very different forms of styles in other kinds of activism? OR: is the tension foundational to the civic action field in a kind of meta sense, beyond the constitutive dilemmas within each style that you describe?

As a point of comparison, in my work on Brazilian youth activists, I named four types of "styles," variously oriented toward competition and cooperation, and ideas vs. action. I noted that while different kinds of activist publics (similar to your "scene") had dominant styles, most were also split internally in these tendencies. Leaders within groups were more skilled in some styles than others (and were also adept at switching between them).

Tom Medvetz notes a similar fractal dynamic in his study of think tanks – in which particular think tanks were variously oriented toward politics, business, academics, and the media, and also had people within the organizations who also reflected these different orientations (and the people themselves moved back and forth over time). As Abbott argues in Chaos of Disciplines, it's the recurring attempts to challenge, bridge, hybridize, defend, and revitalize the different poles on these fractal divides that brings both dynamism and stability to academic disciplines, resulting in both theoretical innovation and reproduction of core ideas.

So I'm just wondering to what extent you see these two contending styles as composing core fractal divides in the field – or if this is just not a very useful way to think about it.

Finally, I'd like to hear you say more about what a constructive dialogue between these different stylistic orientations would look like. I guess I want to know if I need to abandon my naïve dream that it's possible for us all to "get along" In a fractious, fractal field with "articulation at all points" -- or as I call it in my Brazil book, in "the dance of democracy." If the good cop/bad cop framing condescending and misguided, what would a more politically generative form of mutual engagement across these different styles even look like? In today's polarizing times – with so much at stake locally and globally -- it can seem so frustrating and dangerous when the so-called "progressive sector" tears itself apart.

You start to talk about this in the closing pages of this book – I'm wondering if you could elaborate more on this for us here. You tell us, for example, "When frustrations emerge, it is good to ask if these come from clashing styles of action instead of assuming they result from ill-willed actors or bad ideologies." But if, as you show, the stakes of styles feel so high in the day-to-day jostle of politics, how can we talk and work through these tensions in a way that does not destroy the space of civic action in the process? Is there a way to engage more constructively with the clash of styles? OR AS MING-CHENG ASKED, WHAT DO WE DO, PAUL?

This hope seems vital, but so elusive – but perhaps your next book will show us how.

Civic Action as Iterative Performances

Guobin Yang
University of Pennsylvania

Thank you to Professor Lyn Spillman for inviting me to join this SSHA book panel on Professor Paul Lichterman's important new book *How Civic Action Works*.

How Civic Action Works is an ethnographic study of housing advocacy in Los Angeles. The book builds on and develops further the author's long-time theoretical and empirical work on civic action and collective problem-solving (Lichterman 2006; Lichterman and Eliasoph 2014). For Lichterman, "civic action happens when citizens work together to steer society, identifying problems and collaborating on solving them" (p. 5). It may or may not be contentious.

Lichterman started his research in 2007. He is a long-time participant-observer of housing advocates' interactions in public settings. In his book, he views these public forms of civic action as scenes: "Civic action unfolds in scenes" (p. 26). He finds that the same advocates may act differently in different settings, or scenes. They switch styles. This leads to the central concept of his book – scene style, which refers to patterns of citizens doing things together in scenes.

Civic action is not narrowly about social movement participation, but about "patterns of collective action", problem-solving action, and "cultural patterns of everyday group action" (p. 10). Social movement scholars have devoted much more attention to radical forms of protest than mundane and everyday forms of civic action. By focusing on the latter, this book is a timely reminder of the importance of everyday civic action.

Another important contribution of this book is its focus on scenes of civic action rather than organizations, as well as its analysis of styled action as opposed the entrepreneurial and strategic model of social action. A focus on scenes of civic action recognizes both agency and contingency. Scenes are dynamic moments of action in concrete settings. Actors respond and adapt to the fluid dynamics in the settings. Even the same people may not act the same way when scenes change. A focus on scene thus avoids reductive and determinist thinking. Scenes are both sites and moments of action and creativity. At the same time, scenes happen in particular contexts. They are neither determined by nor are independent of contexts. The power of such "scene thinking" lies precisely in its capacity to capture the complexities of human action that characterize the social worlds (Woo, Rennie & Poyntz 2015).

In his earlier work on group style and scene style, Lichterman cites Victor Turner's notion of social drama and Kenneth Burke's rhetoric of dramatism to signal the dramaturgical aspects of scenes of civic action as well as the role of the audience. Turner and Burke seem to have faded out of *How Civic Action Works* - neither is cited in it. Instead, Lichterman acknowledges the influence of Goffman's work (p. 26). His use of Goffman and the dramaturgical language of scene, scene style, acting, and enactments suggests that his view of scene and scene style is fundamentally dramaturgical, and yet his analysis is not explicitly driven by dramaturgy, especially its logic of public performance. I wondered whether a more explicitly dramaturgical analysis might not shed some more light on the scene styles in civic action. Lichterman notes that styles "have a fuzzy logic of their own" (p.141). Scene style is "something actors know how to do and match more or less appropriately to a given scene, but not perfectly." (p. 141) "Style is not a firm rule nor a sharply delineated structure, so one cannot follow 'it' absolutely consistently even if one wanted to, because there is not such a unitary 'it'." (p. 141).

Lichterman describes scene style as "styled action" (p. 27), writing at one point: "Whether intentionally orchestrated or generated by habit, scene style is a patterned *chain* [original italics] of actions, dilemmas, and consequences that individual advocates do not parse or rearrange at will." (p. 143).

The word "chain" is key. It is italicized in the original text to highlight its importance. What is a patterned *chain* of actions like? It brings up the image of a cluster of actions that shares similarities with one another, or actions that repeat one another. Styled action is the same action that is enacted and re-acted again and again in social settings. In other words, styled action is repeated action.

It seems to me that this type of repetitive action in public settings, which is necessarily oriented to an audience, is an important part of both the scenes and scene styles of civic action in Professor Lichterman's theoretical program. I certainly hope to see more analysis of the logic of repetitive action, not the least because repetitive action is the dominant feature of mundane and everyday forms of civic action – indeed the fabric of everyday life. Such an analysis might shed additional light on what Professor Lichterman describes as the "fuzzy logic" of scenes and scene styles.

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Bigger Box and Outside the Box: Dialogues with *How Civic Action Works*

Ming-Cheng M. Lo
University of California-Davis

How Civic Action Works is an immensely valuable book for both policy debates and theory-building. Drawing on rich fieldwork in Los Angeles, it illustrates the ways in which civic action may (or may not) help solving the pressing issue of housing affordability in the Golden State. At the same time, it develops a rigorous framework for analyzing civic actions and interactions. Broadening his analytical focus from the ideologies and strategies of "entrepreneurial actors" to what he calls a "bigger box," Lichterman depicts the patterns, strengths, and dilemmas of civic actions through the broad concept of scene style, which includes several key elements, for example, map, or "a sense of who we are in relation to a wider world;" bonds, or "ongoing expectations about what obligates us to each other," and speech norms, namely the unspoken rules of what can be said and how to say it in a given setting (p. 64).

This is a multi-faceted book that can be read from several angles. As a necessarily incomplete (and hopefully on-going) discussion, I situate this book in 3 conversations: a conversation with some of the arguments developed from Jeffrey Alexander's civil sphere theory, a conversation with some of Lichterman's past work, and a conversation with some of the discussions about populism and political polarization in today's America.

If Alexander and his collaborators have documented and theorized the cultural grammar of democracy (Alexander 2006), Lichterman's focus on scene style helps us trace, systematically, how a given democratic value can be mobilized in different settings. Similarly, as Alexander and other CST scholars

focus on how civil society actors can reform non-civil sphere problems, Lichterman's focus on group bonds and group norms help us understand how and why they do so in different ways. Furthermore, as the CST framework valorizes how the civil sphere can be mobilized to democratize the values, practices, or relationships in a noncivil sphere, Lichterman's discussions of "hybrid problem solving" invites us to consider what civic society actors can borrow and, indeed, learn from some of these noncivil spheres.

Allow me to pause and unpack that last argument a little further. In Chapter 9, Lichterman writes: "Assertions in nonprofit HSLA's grant applications did not come from or represent local people to some larger public. There was no smaller "we" trying to convince the public…. Rather, claims in grant applications offered an overview of conditions ostensibly true for all observers, for any combination of 'us.' This is, classically, how governmental administrators communicate" (p. 236). Put simply, "HSLA staff practiced a soft- spoken version of what … James C. Scott (1998) has called "seeing like a state."… [with] abstract expertise more than the local knowledge that scholars like Scott, or communitarian thinkers like Berger and Neuhaus, all celebrate" (p. 246). Lichterman acknowledges that, while this type of hybrid civic action aspires to combine "neighborly virtues of localism with the largesse of tax money and a respect for equal opportunity," in reality, it "leads actors through difficult dilemmas" (p. 247). Even so, the dilemmas confronting HSLA do not appear particularly difficult or morally challenging, as Lichterman even-handedly introduces us to other dilemmas experienced by other civic organizations that *do* embrace a "small we" and celebrate local knowledge. This is an important empirical observation. While for many civil society or social movement scholars, learning to hybridize the logic of civil repair with that of "seeing like a state" may seem like an unusual, even politically suspicious move, Lichterman's findings compel us to challenge the presumed unidirectionality about how civil repair works. In this sense, the book inspires us to further conceptualize the strengths and weaknesses of hybrid civic action, beyond the example of HSLA, in future research.

How Civic Action Works, at least implicitly, dialogues with some of Lichterman's own works. What comes to mind, in particular, is his book *Elusive Togetherness* (Lichterman 2005), another fascinating study of civic actions, volunteering, and social capital. *Elusive Togetherness* illustrates, among other things, the limits of "plug-in volunteering," or the type of civic action that focuses on dividing the safety net into bits of doable tasks for volunteers, in contrast to "partnership building," or efforts at building long-term relationships with and understandings of the community one is trying to serve. One of the malaises characterizing civic action in America, as portrayed in *Elusive Togetherness*, is the symbolic violence perpetuated by well-intentioned volunteers busying themselves with "plug-in" charity work. Yet *Elusive Togetherness* also documents sources of hope. In a rare but notable example, members of Park Cluster, a church-based group featured in *Elusive Togetherness,* became aware of their inadvertent reproduction of cultural inequalities, thereby learning to switch to the style of partnership building as they began to listen more to the community they were serving, have deeper conversations about poverty, eviction, and so forth, and ultimately cultivate stronger social reflexivity.

Following this thread, some of the stories in Lichterman's current book can be read as further steps in the empowerment of marginalized communities. Instead of waiting for a mainstream group to help empowering them through partnership building, ISLA, for example, can be seen as a marginalized community that is seeking to speak in its own voice, make demands on its own terms, and indeed, protect its own identity. I was eager to learn about the political energy and social reflexivity that this newly empowered identity would unleash. Yet instead of engaging in partnership building, ISLA is instead committed to "making the central boundary between us and them less porous as well as harder to move" (p. 172). Lichterman writes that, for ISLA, "The community's definition of the neighborhood,

theoretically, could have been up for debate, but it was not" (p. 174). "The essentialism of community freezes one historically specific, social and cultural profile of a locale as its proper and enduring condition over a long haul" (p. 175).

It doesn't have to be this way. Or does it? Lichterman uses ISLA as an example to illustrates the scene style of "protecting an identity." But does identity-based style inevitably focus on a *rigid* boundary between us versus them? Or can an identity-based scene style focus on the fluidity and inclusivity of its very identity? What would it take for an identity-based organization to enrich its stock of social reflexivity? As institutionally privileged actors, those of us who are full professors and tenured faculty would be presumptuous to tell a group like ISLA that they need to be more inclusive or less essentialist in their scene style. So, what does this research want to give back to a group like ISLA? What, Paul, should we do?

This brings me to the third conversation in which I situate *How Civic Action Works*. I started to draft these comments on the day Americans headed to the polls for the midterm election in 2022 (and I finalized this piece on the day when Kevin McCarthy lost his 12th vote for House Speaker in 2023). Perhaps for these reasons, I am reminded of how, when growing up in Taiwan, my friends and I looked to America as the model of democracy and aspired to one day develop a similar political landscape in our homeland. Now, friends and family in Taiwan keep asking me why we in the US cannot seem to agree upon what separates facts from fiction, or why our politicians can mobilize so many citizens to deny legitimate election outcomes. Obviously, Paul is not obligated to answer these questions, at least not by himself. But I think some of the insights in *How Civic Action Works* can help us understand the allure of populism and political polarization. Going back to my earlier comment about ISLA's hardened boundary between us and them, I find it as a useful example for reflecting upon how populism and polarization can develop "on our side." After years of deprivation of agency and inadequate representation, a community can become, understandably, primarily committed to consolidating its group boundaries. Additionally, if rightwing populists threaten to further erode the voting rights and other protections for marginalized groups, leftwing populist discourses that elevate the poor and other marginalized groups as the authentic embodiment of "the people" will only grow stronger and appear more necessary. How, then, can we ever disrupt the cycle of increasing polarization?
Civic action, in the way it is depicted in Lichterman's book, does provide hope. It is not so much that any of these groups are actively taming populism or polarization. Rather, it is the fact that these groups constitute a diverse landscape of civic actions. By *pluralizing* the styles, identities, goals, and narratives about the housing crisis, these groups dilute the potency of any given frame about how to address the problem. As such, civic action bolsters our democracy not only by empowering grassroots groups to address important social problems but, potentially, also by serving to decenter singularizing narratives, including populism.

However, diversity is only the first line of defense against anti-democratic forces, as many historians of civil society have observed (Lo 2019). The right to express different opinions does not *directly* stop the damage caused by the celebration of essentialism. As much as I value the plurality of scene styles in American civil society, I find myself asking: is there indeed a scene style that can facilitate productive conversations with white supremacists or other "strangers in their own land" who believe in a deep story about the conspiracy between the elites and immigrants (Hochschild 2016)? What would that style look like? How might we get there? As Lichterman has elegantly presented us with an analytical understanding of the strengths, visions, and blind spot of a rich array of scene styles, we may now be ready to take on the normative question regarding which style is best able to circumvent the political polarization of our time. For these timely questions, *How Civic Action Works* not only offers us a bigger-box approach but also inspires an outside-the-box perspective.

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How Civic Action Works **by Paul Lichterman**

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Paul Lichterman's book, *How Civic Action Works: Fighting for Housing in Los Angeles* (2021), relies on ethnography and archival research, principally following two sets of affordable housing activists, to answer the question – to quote from page one – "How do social advocates make the claims and sustain the relationships of collective problem solving?" (1). His answer is that, essentially, the way this question gets answered is context-specific, and is structured by three concepts that he identifies: *style, scene*, and *discursive field.*

I'll elaborate on what Lichterman means by these terms, but to begin I will first gesture to the significance of this frame. In short, *How Civic Action Works* asks us to think about activists in a manner that very much departs from dominant ways of thinking about movements, and of those who people them.

Lichterman does not want to engage questions of what a movement, *is* but, instead, to chart how constellations or clusters of interconnected activists speak and act in relation to the social problems that they grapple with. In *How Civic Action Works*, the problem with which activists grapple is affordable housing, and he interrogates how and why two separate groups of activists approach the problem differently.

I wish to be very clear that Lichterman does not think that the activists approach the problem differently for strategic purposes. This is the second way in which the book distinguishes itself. Lichterman calls us to take a step back from thinking of social movement activists (and potentially, more broadly, of social actors) as strategic. He writes that most studies think of activists as "entrepreneurial actors" "who take initiative proactively, using their skills to launch collective efforts, convince people to join up, and take risks to win their ends. In this view, social advocates are like savvy business entrepreneurs" (Lichterman 2021: 13).

In contrast, Lichterman calls the reader to attend, with him, to "*scenes of civic action*" instead of studying an organization (Lichterman 2021: 26) narrowly and specifically, and instead of thinking of actors as strategic agents who consciously construct the movements in which they are embedded. These scenes of civic action are among the crucial orientating concepts and units of analysis that the book explores.

Scenes of civic action matter for Lichterman, because they shape activists' *style* – which, crucially, is

different than strategy. Lichterman, building off of his earlier scholarship with Eliasoph (Eliasophi & Lichterman 2003), defines "style" as "a collection of implicit social maps and bonds" (Lichterman 2021: 27). Crucially, he instructs that those he studied know how to perform more than one style – but that they *prefer* to use one over the other. Equally crucially, he suggests that their style-preference is not organizationally or personally driven. Rather, their choices are context-driven and largely collective. They pick a style that complements the scene in which they are embedded (and which, at the same time, they help to constitute).

How do scene styles form? Lichterman tells us that they are not "specific to one city, region, or social background" (Lichterman 2021: 28). Each of the dominant styles he finds in his study are widely available, and those who people the activist- scenes that he studied are themselves fairly similar to one another. They've encountered different styles in their lives, and still they and the scene of which they are a part mostly adhere to a specific style that is distinctive from the style that they used in a different context. That is, in each setting activists tend to adopt a single distinctive style – despite their exposure to and the availability of alternate styles. This observation provides the foundation for Lichterman's argument that activists rely on a specific style because of the context in which they and their issue are located, *not* because of who they are or the type of organization to which they belong.

Why does one style end up being favored by a movement over others? Lichterman says, "styles jell in relation to different kinds of pushback from the wider world" (Lichterman 2021: 29).[1] Two key styles he charts are frames for a movement centered around being a community of interest versus a community of identity. Furthermore, amongst those who forge a community of interest are those who present themselves as political insiders versus political outsiders.

This is not a story of activist biographies or even of activist-*action*. Indeed, we learn relatively little about the individuals who populate the settings he observed, and his focus is not on the outcomes that activism produces. Instead, he wishes to spotlight, "the power of contexts that shape action" (Lichterman 2021: 33). He writes, "actors don't use scenes so much as they are embedded in scenes with different styles" (ibid: 33).

A major contribution of *How Civic Action Works* is Lichterman's revelation of the degree to which movements are *not* strategic. As a result, like others before him and as he has himself done before (Lichterman 1996), Lichterman outlines the power of culture to shape movements. He prioritizes, for instance, exploring "why advocates' goals made sense to them" (Lichterman 2021: 9).

By centering the meaning actors assign to what they are doing and how they are talking, Lichterman models a sociology orientated around the substance and process of life, rather than, more narrowly, focused on its outcomes. This is a compelling model for cultural sociologists; once we liberate ourselves from thinking of social actors as narrowly invested in outcomes, we, too, can attend to facets of life that are not rooted in strategy or outcome.

This model, with its dual attention to process and to how actors behave in ways that are not precisely strategic (a.k.a. to style over strategy), has tremendous potential for adoption by a wide range of scholars. Once we stop thinking of actors as strategic, all kinds of novel explanations for how they behave and think and interact become possible. We can even begin to recognize ways of speaking and acting that we might not have seen before; I suspect that too often scholars look away from talk

[1] Lichterman suggests that style emerges from scene, defining style elsewhere as "a patterned accommodation with particular, surrounding structural or institutional realities that impinge regularly on actors' collective efforts" (2021: 31).

and behavior that appears non-strategic. Lichterman powerfully demonstrates the value of not looking away from this, but, instead, of directly interrogating it, by relying on the case of affordable housing activists. In this sense, I think that the book has implications for how we frame and understand social life that extend well beyond movements.

However, I do not wish to over attend to Lichterman's work on style, for context matters at least as much to his argument. In short, *How Civic Action Works* calls us to devote greater attention to "cultural contexts than the entrepreneurial actor model leads us to do" (Lichterman 2021: 10). Later in the book, Lichterman writes that "strategies are embedded in social and cultural contexts" (ibid: 88). In brief, Lichterman develops a theory of how actors are constrained by scene style, as much as they are free to work with it – or even manipulate it. Basically, he offers an account of how activists are embedded in (cultural) structures that shape how they speak and act.

One of my wishes for the book is to have a more robust sense of what precisely produces these different scenes and therefore, in turn, different styles. Are there patterned ways in which the contexts that influence style are themselves shaped and produced? Put differently, I would like to know more about the building blocks of those structures. If we can predict them, how might that shape movement outcomes, or our ability to anticipate and explain the contours of process?

In a book that argues (very successfully in my view) that context matters greatly, it is context that is the one piece of the book that I wish had been further elaborated. For instance, who precisely are the people behind the discourses that Lichterman charts? In other words, who are the people populating and responding to the style and scene? I left the book with a solid understanding of the demographic profile and role of different actors, but I have a hazier sense of them as characters with personality and power and other individual and collective attributes. Nor did I walk away with a robust portrait of the neighborhood settings in which the activists are conducting their work. In short, for a book attentive to context, and built on incredibly extensive and detailed field work, the details of context are not as precisely mapped as some other facets of the book.

Likewise, we don't learn as much about affordable housing or even L.A. as we might hope to (especially readers, like me, who are urbanists). I hesitate to even note this, because the absence of such details is not a mistake. Rather, it is the point. The book does not take up the case of affordable housing, but, instead, of movement style. I think that this is a (worthy) choice Lichterman made to focus on his very novel and compelling argument about how movements take the shape that they do.

As a result, the book actually goes a long way to explain why – from my vantage point – affordable housing activism is somewhat disjointed in the contemporary U.S. In other words, it provides a powerful account (if made somewhat indirectly) about why affordable housing movements are a mishmash of different and sometimes conflicting styles.

Setting aside the specific concerns of an urbanist, this strategy serves Lichterman's argument and reflects how context might *feel* (this is conjecture, of course) to those embedded in it. Who amongst us can really say how any element of social life we find ourselves a part of – from our department to even our family – developed a specific scene and, from that, a specific style? The answers, I suspect, are embedded both in minutiae and in deep structures, both of which are hazy when we are embedded in them. What appears above the surface are *style differences*, and that works to draw our attention to how context is operating in subtly distinct ways across different scenes.

Yet, this is where there is greatest opportunity for scholars to pick up where Lichterman has left off. If

style emerges from scene, and we are convinced (as this reader is) that style is of great consequence, then a more concrete sense of context and of how a context takes on the shape that it holds will be beneficial. In short, making context concrete will permit others to elaborate on the mechanisms that shape scenes.

In the spirit of thinking about how we can utilize this book to advance our understanding of how movements work, I will close with a few questions. My first question pertains to methods. If, in Lichterman's terms, "Style works as a fuzzy, cultural parameter, not a strict program" (183) how do we find it? Must scholars rely on comparative methods, as Lichterman did, to identify scene-style?[2] Is ethnography, and comparative-ethnography in particular, the only way to approach this?

Relatedly, I wonder about the degree to which Lichterman entered the field with the questions that the book ultimately wrestles with. Did the questions emerge from fieldwork, or guide it? I raise this, because I wonder whether one must enter the field in search of scenes, or whether scenes will announce themselves in the data.

Finally, I would welcome a more sustained commentary – perhaps in a follow up article – from Lichterman about what we learn about affordable housing from *How Civic Action Matters*. While affordable housing was not, ultimately, in my view at the center of the book's theoretical contributions, I suspect that, given the depth and breadth of his fieldwork in L.A., Lichterman has much to teach us on that subject, too.

In sum, I highly recommend Lichterman's novel and timely monograph. I believe that it will be of lasting interest to a variety of cultural sociologists, from scholars of movements, to those who study politics, housing, cities, and cultural repertoires.

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Benefits and Trade-offs of Studying *How Civic Action Works*: A Reply

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How great to think with readers whose own virtuoso scholarship illuminates this book's themes. It is a joy to be read closely! Guobin summarizes the book's focus well. "Civic" action is self-organizing, collective problem-solving action, whether contentious or not, on problems that actors think should matter to a broader public. Starting with this bigger conceptual box, *How Civic Action Works* answers practical as well scholarly questions about action in social movements, volunteer projects and nonprofit providers of goods and services. I'm gratified that the four readers are on board with the book's

[2] Comparative ethnography was key for Lichterman's ability to identify these discoveries of different scene-styles. He writes, "I discovered patterns of variation in social advocates' use of the same, symbolic categories for the same campaign but in different scenes" (Lichterman 2021: 180). He goes on to write, "The switches are not random but rather patterned by scene-specific expectations regarding who 'we' all are, socially or institutionally" (ibid: 180).

concepts, its focus on patterns of action, and one of its central arguments--that styles of action matter powerfully for strategies and outcomes. The book is full of actors (it's an ethnography. . .) but a focus on patterns of situated action required a distinct sociological imagination. I'm glad several of you took up the book's idea that style bears the imprint of institutional and social structural relationships; the "style" concept strains the conventional micro-macro divide. The book's value for activists and policymakers became part of this conversation too. In all, you have confirmed my own sense that building a bigger box from pragmatist underpinnings was a worthwhile project. You also highlight the hard decisions and risks of an ethnography that is conceptually driven down a road less travelled as yet. I regret that I won't be able to do full justice to the perceptive read each of you offers, and I have synthesized your critical questions into a succession of themes and trade-offs. I'll discuss each and close with brief thoughts on the potentials of studying how civic action works.

After an astute summary of some key themes, Ann Mische goes on to ask why the book would juxtapose "community of interest" to "community of identity." Haven't years of critique made us wary of dichotomizing interest and identity? I endorse those critiques too, and I think we agree that it is the style differences between the two that are real, not a categorical distinction between interest and identity. The question cues a rhetorical trade-off that many ethnographers confront. How much should we rely on easy language to conceptualize patterns from the field? Bourdieu's old argument comes to mind, that common-sense terms only muddy up our sociological analysis. But can we avoid them completely while hoping to speak to a bit of a broader-than-academic readership? Other terms risk their own ideological slip-slides, or are vague, or else aren't easy on a reader's eyes. Easier rhetoric may call up unintended associations which we must then take precious word-count to fend off, as I did. I'm glad that Ann catches the distinction I wanted to draw between a community of identity and the overused, underspecified "identity politics," which too often becomes a term of derision.

Distinguishing styles of action means identifying different ways that collective actors organize and interpret their relations to each other and the wider world as they are acting. How can we know these patterns when we see them? When we follow the action closely and deal with all the shifts in style between scenes, campaigns and projects, it makes sense to want to find a systematic logic behind the complexity. I infer this concern from Ann's and also Guobin Yang's comments. Choosing between systematic, generative principles and closely described specificity involved more trade-offs.

Ann in effect goes with generative principles, proposing to treat two prominent styles in the book as one set of fractal components in the field of civic action. Ann's own research shows how illuminating the fractal metaphor can be. I discovered style differences in the field, loosely clued but not strongly directed by reading in political culture and cultural history. The book highlighted the two most prominent styles in the Los Angeles housing advocacy world. But the civic action field, if we can conceive that, hosts others that have been widespread, if little present in housing advocacy. These varied styles are not simply inversions of each other on one or another general principle. Identifying styles as fractals could be frustrating, and may work only if we conceive a much smaller field structured by just a couple of principles, which would leave out quite a lot of civic action. Earlier, co-author Nina Eliasoph and I considered the possibility of identifying all potential styles of civic action as one or another combination of characteristics from each of several axes such as "tight cohesion--loose cohesion."[3] The systematicity would make style distinctions easier, but at the cost of some interpretive depth and action-centeredness. In this book I wanted to concentrate on the lived meanings in a fairly fine-grained way because I saw that they really mattered for actors' collective capacities. I think many though not all of the researchers studying styled interaction have proceeded similarly.

[3] See Paul Lichterman and Nina Eliasoph. 2014. "Civic Action." *American Journal of Sociology* 120(3): 798-863.

Keeping with the book's pragmatist bent, I crafted my scholarly problems from actors' own problems. So, while I did not aim to generalize about a civic action field, Chapters 7 and 8 do show how the *discursive* field of housing problems in LA generated through styled interaction. This illuminated puzzles at once scholarly and practical: Why didn't advocates treat homelessness more frequently and forthrightly as a *housing* problem? That all said, I'm more than interested in studies that can generalize convincingly on how styles of action and discursive fields co-evolve.

Guobin suggests a different kind of generative principle. If scenes are central, he asks, then why didn't the book build on the dramatism of Kenneth Burke or Victor Turner? Goffman's dramaturgical perspective deeply informs the study, as Guobin observes. Yet the others would offer more structured symbolic parameters, and that is why I take the suggestion as a different version of Ann's question. Burke's "pentad" of components for classifying different grammars of motive is systematic.[4] Goffman's own writings on frame and transitions in frame, while brilliant, are not.[5] Again, there's a trade-off.

Goffman made more sense for a study that focuses at length on collectively coordinated action, including claims-making action, in messy everyday scenes. Goffman offers an elaborately suggestive guide to understanding the scene switching that actors sometimes do as they reposition themselves with suddenly shifting ends. So far, I have hesitated to treat styles of civic action as a Burkean reading might, though doing that might make good sense depending on the question and material. Researchers have offered heuristics for identifying styles in everyday settings[6] and some simple, binary indicators for two dimensions of style (maps and bonds), but as yet no exhaustive grid. Future research might well develop that from accumulating cases of civic style, or by less ethnographically intensive methods.[7]

Now that we are talking about categorizing styles, it is good to say more about what style is, in cultural terms. Here I blush a bit that Guobin's searching comments arrive at an awkward, mixed metaphor in the book--"fuzzy chains." I implied that a "chain" of styled action follows a "fuzzy" logic. What I wanted to convey is a pattern of action over time--a chain--that is not precisely the same across a city, country, or historical period and therefore "fuzzy," yet recognizable enough to point out across disparate instances. "Family resemblance" would have been another way to put it. Varieties of speech, symbolism and collective mood made fights against gentrification in a strongly Latinx-based organization different from efforts by another group with a plurality Black core membership, yet there were big similarities too. The combination of differences and parallels exceeds the terms of a compact, structural literary analysis. It's relevant to clarify a point from Japonica's comments now. Rather than think of style as emerging *de novo* from a scene of interaction, it is more helpful to say that some variety of styles is part of actors' cultural environment and that they instantiate a style, fuzzily, in a scene.

The fuzzy pattern stands out, as Guobin notes, because we recognize style through a cluster of interactions that recur. Repetition marked interactional routine in activist and volunteer groupings alike. Contrary to popular imagery, a lot about social movement activity is routinely patterned. The book shares that insight with institutional approaches to social activism[8], though on a different level of action.

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[4] Kenneth Burke. 1969. *A Grammar of Motives*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
[5] Erving Goffman. 1986[1974]. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
[6] Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman. 2003. "Culture in Interaction." *American Journal of Sociology* 108(4):735-794.
[7] See the binary indicators for components of style, and suggestions for two other ways of aggregating data on scene style, in Lichterman and Eliasoph, *op. cit*, pp. 839-844.
[8] See for example Elizabeth Armstrong and Mary Bernstein. 2008. "Culture, Power and Institutions: A Multi-Institutional Politics Approach to Social Movements." *Sociological Theory* 26(1): 74-99.

A culture scholar wants to ask what the repetition means to others. The first interpreting audience for style in my coalitions and projects was the collaborating actors themselves; after that, there were allies and potential participants, sometimes city officials and property developer antagonists. Style signals "who we are" to each other and the wider world. Signaling that repetitively helps people keep working together. But I think sometimes it *means* something important beyond what it *does* for people trying to coordinate collectively.[9] I'm pondering that now as I research white people's anti-racism and develop an argument about moral meanings in style, which brings others besides Goffman into the conversation. Guobin's comments encourage me to keep going.

Talk of repetition invites the question of change. Can collective actors accustomed to one style try out something new? They can, occasionally. During a meeting one day, some leaders of an anti-gentrification effort suddenly were musing that the nearby college they had taken as foe might sometimes be a collaborator. I had not predicted that, though the pragmatist view accommodates it: textures and rhythms of action may run the gamut from habitual or repetitive to reflective.[10] Sometimes people really can try collaborating differently; sometimes not. I was also surprised that the Great Recession of 2008-2010 did little to change a citywide affordable housing coalition's collaboration as a community of interest, even though one vocal member insisted it was time now for something more radical. Future research can try to explain when big problems inside or external to an activist campaign generate reflection, and style change, instead of repetition.

A focus on collective actors often comes with strong assumptions about what is "strategic." The book challenges some of these, in a pluralistic spirit. Here, Japonica Brown-Saracino's comments take center stage. They helpfully point out the book's alternative to the "entrepreneurial actor" model that has implicitly informed quite a lot of writing on social movements, far beyond its early appearance in resource mobilization theory. The model induces us to imagine strategic action as instrumental planning, skilled manipulation of opportunities and risk-taking in pursuit of a stable end-goal. I don't at all dispute that activists make plans, get other people to do things, and take risks. The book's questions, rather, are about how activists define goals, decide which kinds of actors should be prized or ignored, determine what timelines organize the plans: in other words, what counts as "strategic." That is where cultural context comes in. Styles (and discursive fields, I hasten to add) are the indispensable contexts that shape strategic action in the book.

Japonica infers that perhaps social movements are not really strategic after all. I think it depends on what we mean by strategic. If "strategic" means concerted effort to bring means and ends together, then most social movement activity is strategic or aims to be. But I think Japonica is picking up on that there's no zero-point, pre-cultural strategy. Any strategy in real action exists through meanings and relationships and is continually pieced together in meaningful contexts. That holds even for lines of action that at a quick glance appear close to what activists and sociologists often call "strategic." The piecing together, whether through intentional planning or habit or exploratory feeling-our-way, happens in a scene of interaction. That's why "scene style" is the term for precise discussion.

That focus on everyday action sounds "micro." I appreciate Japonica's comments for zooming out and asking where scene style comes from. It is, partly, an historical question, which I have pursued a bit in

[9] See an illuminating argument on this point in Daphne Fietz. 2021. "Integrating Meaningful Selfhood into the Sociological Study of Political Languages: Blending Mead's Pragmatism and Taylor's Hermeneutics. *American Sociologist* 52(4): 721-739.

[10] See for example John Dewey. 1922. *Human Nature and Conduct*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books; *ibid*., 1958. *Experience and Nature*. New York: Dover Publications.

the case of one popular style.[11] But the question probably was intended more analytically. The book argues that styles jell into recognizable forms in ongoing relation to institutions and structures that push back on advocates' efforts. The pushback becomes *part* of the style in the form of constitutive dilemmas; different style, different dilemmas. This is worth unpacking further because it departs from our common tendency to explain collective action in terms of its end-goals.

For both of the main styles explored in the book, actors' way of coordinating themselves depends on capacities that would diminish or contravene some other aspect of the style, given the surrounding social context. Hence an aching dilemma. I recognized that a similar dynamic marks other styles too. It is not that advocates' ambitious *end-goals* get pushback which then crystallizes their style. Explaining actors' style in terms of the goals they pursue may sound sensible but doesn't work well empirically or conceptually. Here's an example: Activists in low-income neighborhoods of color in LA fought gentrification as communities of identity. They repeatedly re-visited a dilemma over whether people who were not "from" the community could be full participants by acting "for" the community. The dilemma was built in; it became predictable, central to the pattern of action. That is not because activists' goal was to put brakes on gentrification. Other advocates in a differently styled campaign affirmed the same goal. It is because their action in common privileges socially subordinated participants who identify closely with each other; that runs up against a context (institutionalized racism and class inequality) that typically gives such participants less of the time and facility with dominant culture that it takes to sustain collective action, especially as a leader. Those leaders more likely come from *outside* the community[12], yet the group centers people who come "from" the community, who are considered the most authentic members. So am I saying that ultimately, the group is driven by "a search for authentic identity"? No, that would not help empirically. Rather, identity is a means, not an end-goal. The simple tag in Chapter 4 captures their style in a pragmatic sense: they are solving problems by protecting an identity.

At this point one might ask, as Japonica does, why not describe the actual *people*, groups, and distinct neighborhoods more. The book describes LA housing conditions citywide and in the relevant neighborhoods but does not go into the social geography or feel of neighborhoods in detail. It does not bring advocates' biographies much into the analysis. Next studies, including one of my own, can ask whether particular biographical experiences cultivate affinities for a particular style of action, which may prime the participant for more of that action. But first I wanted to convince readers that styles and discursive fields--collective accomplishments--exist and shape even powerful leaders. The book saved a lot of space for everyday interaction. Beyond that, describing individuals or locales extensively would do relatively little for this ethnography with its agenda of conceptual development and critique. I warmly regard other genres of ethnography. I hope urbanists find it useful to examine patterns of collective action on housing that course through one city. While the book is about relationships, processes, and dilemmas more than about the subject of housing politics *per se*, readers access the conceptual takeaways by moving through scenes of housing advocacy. Readers can get a feel for odd or surprising scenes: Affordable housing activists well on the way to an historic victory embarrass their own leaders and take over a coalition meeting while invited guests look on. A downtown pastor informs earnest, faith-based volunteer recruiters about local activists' innuendo regarding their charitable meal drop-offs on Skid Row: distributing poisoned food would be an easy way to kill off homeless people.

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[11] See Paul Lichterman. 1996. *The Search for Political Community: American Activists Reinventing Commitment*. New York: Cambridge University Press; *ibid*., 2012. "Religion in Public Action: From Actors to Settings." *Sociological Theory* 30(1): 15-36.

[12] See a similar point about self-identified, local, lower-income communities in Robert Sampson. 1999. "What 'Community' Supplies." In *Urban Problems and Community Development*, edited by Ronald Ferguson and William Dickens, 241-292. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Stressed by accusations of playing favorites or being racist, an affordable housing nonprofit distributes low-rent apartments by way of a spin-basket lottery. I pick ping-pong balls out of the basket and call out the numbers written on them, because an ethnographer will look more impartial than the staff, and some applicants want the video.

I agree heartily that the book has things to teach about affordable housing. Watching nonprofit housing developments take shape, from grant-writing which I minorly assisted to leasing up the tenants, I learned that a series of communitarian truisms about the superiority of civic over governmental effort are confused fictions when it comes to affordable housing. Readers interested in the role of nonprofits in housing policy can pick this up from Chapter 9, whether or not they also are drawn to its concept of hybrid civic action.

I also appreciate Japonica's question of how distinct people or groups take on a distinct style. Applying the question to a long trajectory, we can look for the path dependency that Kathleen Blee found in research on grassroots activist groups[13]: Decisions at one point narrow the group's future avenues. The group becomes increasingly accustomed to choosing particular kinds of goals, and probably, ways of accomplishing goals too. This may be true from campaign to campaign; I learned that about the history of two major coalitions in my study but did not develop the point at length. Applying the question to transitions between scenes, I saw how a particular phrase or mention of a hot-button issue might cue a change in style during one meeting. It was as if participants had suddenly become somewhat different people.

Finally, as Ming-Cheng and Ann too want to know, what does all this offer in practical terms? The main affordable housing developer in Chapter 9 constructs a housing-centered bundle of social problems the way a civic actor would. They also follow governmental formats and some market logic too and see a "community" through administrative lenses. That is, they pursue dizzyingly *hybrid* civic action. Yet as Ming-Cheng observes, their dilemmas are not necessarily harder or more morally challenging than traditional civic actors' dilemmas. Defying the popular storyline that "civic" is always good and "government" only wrecks things, Ming-Cheng asks if more unambiguously civic efforts can learn something from this civic-governmental hybrid actor. If we assume current, neoliberal federal and state governance that outsources government-like activities to nonprofits, then my first thoughts are skeptical: From an organization's point of view, relentlessly grant-driven work is an uncertain, constrained, slow way to produce housing. In my observations, it involved little meaningful citizen input. But the question challenges me to consider potential benefits of hybrid civic action some more. One of the book's activist coalitions awkwardly partnered with a big property developer and took up the task of distributing a few affordable units in one of the developer's complexes. While following equal housing opportunity law, the coalition also aimed to give their neighborhood constituency a good place in line. What if activists like these oriented more to a broader public beyond the local community of identity they had cultivated? That is classically what a governmental purview does, and what the affordable developer meant to do with its spin-basket. Activists could go further still. This is not the place for detailed proposals, but affordable housing advocates might turn the government's sometimes unresponsive, anomizing "equal opportunity" into a more socially equitable, resident informed set of strategies, collaborating with similarly oriented advocates and housing providers citywide or regionally. An effort like this might also generate a wide-ranging civic solidarity beyond somewhat essentialized notions of "the community" that a community of identity generates. These perform exclusion as well as inclusion.

And what, Ming-Cheng asks, can this study say back to collective actors who empower a community

[13] Kathleen Blee. 2012. *Democracy in the Making: How Activist Groups Form*. New York: Oxford University Press.

by essentializing it? I agree that it would be presumptuous at best for a privileged researcher like me to tell advocates for lower-income neighborhoods of color to develop a less essentializing strategy. It is up to residents and advocates to decide if there is value in an ethnographic account that starts with problems they themselves articulate, and observes how they solve them. Let me illustrate with an example that retrieves a central concept from the book--discursive field--that the four readers here attended to less than style and scene. ISLA coalition advocates routinely said they wanted more affordable housing, less displacement in their neighborhoods. They also said--in certain places--that they wanted a healthy environment and safe thoroughfares, and pleasant streetscapes too. Yet, I saw that they underplayed these issues, potentially passing up chances to build a bigger coalition. A study that follows styled action *in a discursive field* can point out strategic trade-offs that keep participants from being able to talk consistently about what they actually want. Dynamics inside the discursive field of affordable housing (Chapter 7) gave "quality-of-life" claims the wrong reputation for the activists. These claims would have sounded like property developer or city planner talk. Voicing them would have challenged the oppositional solidarity the activists' style generates. Who does not want and deserve neighborhoods that are affordable *and* sustainable *and* safe? Conditions can't become tractable problems if people do not discuss them readily. These claims were hard to voice together.

I agree with Ann that it is frustrating to watch the so-called progressive sector in the US tear itself apart. I do this kind of research partly because I'm convinced that style differences and the discursive fields that co-animate with them are an under-appreciated part of the challenge of multi-racial, cross-class coalitions. What to do about it? Just for starters, the Conclusion suggests that social advocates could try routinizing talk about how they are collaborating or should collaborate and focus less on persons or ideologies. They might practice putting reflective distance between themselves and any one style of collaborating. How to build relationships that welcome that collective reflexivity and experimentation is a bigger question than comments here can accommodate. Experience tells me that non-academic activists can pick up on style in the scholarly sense of the term just as ably as scholars. Plans are on the horizon for more such experiences.

Ming-Cheng asks what a close look at civic action can offer those of us concerned about anti-democratic populism in the US and elsewhere. In current field work I sometimes hear that, basically, one or another particular style of interaction will enhance conversation between advocates of democratic inclusion and Americans whose image of "the people" is more exclusionary. I would like to be convinced but am not, yet. I don't think there is one, sole style that would fortify the weakly institutionalized, greatly imperiled American aspiration to become a multiracial democracy one day. I like Ann's vision of multiple points of articulation between activists doing things differently. Yet that vision might not entice civic actors who are not "activists," and probably would repel ones who are not progressive activists. What about a broad, cross-party, pro-democracy, community of interest to push back against continuing authoritarian threats? The idea may sound rearguard, not compelling, maybe like the political equivalent of taking your vitamins. I think it's fair to say, though, that something like it orchestrated some collective efforts around the 2022 US elections. Recently, in a progressive zoom room, a discussion leader casually suggested something like this--a bipartisan interest group for democracy. No one took it up. The tentative pitch led, rather, to well-rehearsed criticisms of the Democratic party. The suggestion threatened a pre-existing solidarity--which does have its place--and participants apparently had to signal which side of the map they were on. In contrast, I hope readers of the book might infer that the same civic actors could take on shorter-term campaigns to stop a takeover of election administration by election denialists, *and* engage longer-term struggles for equity and inclusion, at the same time, and talk forthrightly about who they are when engaged in either. Cultural dynamics make this kind of multiplicity challenging. Still it is better to know those dynamics and push on reflectively. And thanks, Ann--I do hope to have more to say on this in the next book.

The four readers attended mainly to the groupings that resemble social movement actors. Those were prominent among the book's three coalitions, four campaigns, and twelve organizations. The book brings some of the same ideas about style, discursive field and civic action to nonprofit work and volunteering. Future research can continue making comparisons enabled by the bigger conceptual box. Contemporary civic life invites those comparisons: The two most prominent coalitions in the book each mixed modes of action we usually associate with either a social movement or a nonprofit association; one sponsored short-term volunteer projects too.

The book focuses on puzzles of claims-making and relationship building. These are two, central tasks that can distinguish civic from other kinds of action. Of course, lots of problem solving groups--whether social movement, volunteer or nonprofit organizations--also must fund themselves, maneuver for advantage in a competitive field, or administer human service effectively. These are important things to do and important to study. Yet by themselves they are not what makes groups civic. The book's focus on civic action advances an old conversation in social theory and research. It also matters because collective actors around the world act civically sometimes, or aspire to, whether they use the term or not. To understand *how* collective action plays out, we need to make qualitative distinctions between and within civic and other kinds of action and contextualize those to reveal dilemmas and trade-offs. The evolving, civic action framework is meeting these scholarly criteria.

Inside the "bigger box" are useful things for researchers who hope to make some difference in the world, too. We get tools for understanding what makes multiracial, multi-class alliances fraught, yet sometimes possible, why homelessness has not been treated more often as a "housing" problem, what it would take for advocates to promote affordability and sustainability at the same time. These are generative, scholarly questions, and a civic actor's questions too. Advancing social science concepts and speaking to real problems need not be a trade-off.

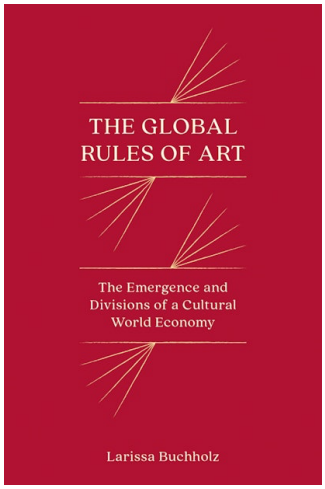
Announcements

New Books

Buchholz, Larissa. 2022. *The Global Rules of Art. The Emergence and Divisions of a Cultural World Economy.* Princeton University Press.

https://press.princeton.edu/books/paperback/9780691245447/the-global-rules-of-art

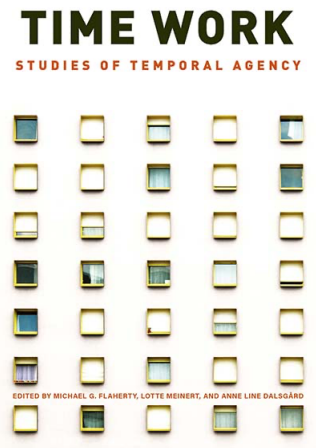
A trailblazing study of the emergence of a global cultural field and the different ways in which artists from formerly colonized or peripheral locations become valued worldwide.



Prior to the 1980s, the postwar canon of so-called "international" contemporary art consisted almost entirely of artists from North America and Western Europe, while cultural agents from other parts of the world often found themselves on the margins. By expanding and revising fields theory to a global level, *The Global Rules of Art* examines how and why this discriminatory situation has evolved and diversified in recent decades. Drawing from abundant source material—including information regarding the arts infrastructures of over a hundred countries; institutional histories and discourses; fieldwork on four continents; and interviews with artists, critics, curators, gallerists, and auction house agents—the book charts the complex historical transformations that led to the rise of a world-spanning field whose logics have become increasingly redefined in global terms. Moreover, blending illuminating case studies with large-scale analyses, the study uncovers how transnational networks, power structures, and larger cultural forces interact in the construction of value and reputations across continents. Theoretically, *The Global Rules of Art* breaks new ground by advancing a multi-scalar and multi-level global fields theory to examine processes of globalization and their effects on valuation, inequalities, and diversities.

Flaherty, Michael G., Lotte Meinert, and Anne Line Dalsgård (eds). 2020. *Time Work: Studies of Temporal Agency*. 1st ed. Berghahn Books.

https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/FlahertyTime

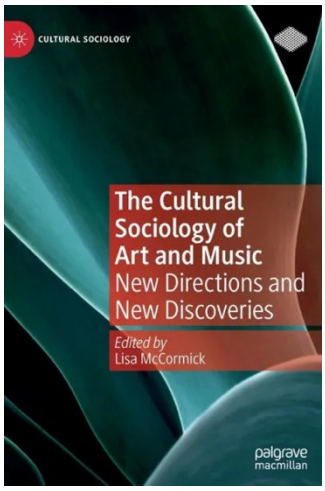


We are very happy to announce that Berghahn Books will release a paperback edition of *Time Work: Studies of Temporal Agency* in March of 2023. Please consider adopting this book for courses that concern culture, globalization, social interaction, and ethnographic methods. Examining how people alter or customize various dimensions of their temporal experience, this volume reveals how we resist external sources of temporal constraint or structure. Is the theory of time work applicable to people across different societies and cultural arrangements? This book is an edited collection of ethnographic studies by anthropologists and sociologists. Their vivid and insightful research is international in scope, including Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Niger, Russia, Uganda, and the United States.

McCormick, Lisa, (ed). 2022. *The Cultural Sociology of Art and Music: New Directions and New Discoveries.* Palgrave Macmillan.

https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-11420-5

This edited collection develops the Strong Program's contribution to the sociological study of the arts and places it in conversation with other cultural perspectives in the field. Presenting some of the newest and most original research by both renowned figures and early career scholars, the volume marks a new stage in the development of the cultural sociology of art and music.

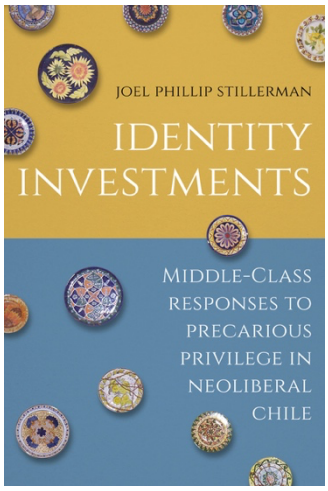


The chapters in Part 1 set new agendas by reflecting on the field's history, presenting theoretical innovations, and suggesting future directions for research. Part 2 explores aesthetic issues and challenges in the creation, experience, and interpretation of art and music. Part 3 focuses on the material environments and social settings where people engage with art and music. In Part 4, the contributors examine controversies about music and contestation over artistic matters, whether in the public sphere, in the American judicial system, or in an emerging academic discipline. The editor's introduction and Ron Eyerman's afterword place the chapters in context and reflect on their collective contribution to meaning-centered sociology.

Stillerman, Joel. 2023. *Identity Investments: Middle-class Responses to Precarious Privilege in Neoliberal Chile.* Stanford University Press.

https://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=32853

After Pinochet's dictatorship ended in Chile in 1990, the country experienced a rapid decline in poverty along with a quickly growing economy. As a result, Chile's middle class expanded dramatically, echoing trends seen across the Global South as neoliberalism took firm hold in the 1990s and the early 2000s. Identity Investments examines the politics and consumption practices of this vast and varied fraction of the Chilean population, seeking to better understand their value systems and the histories that informed them.



Using participant observation, interviews, and photographs, Joel Stillerman develops a unique typology of the middle class, made up of activists, moderate Catholics, pragmatists, and youngsters. This typology allows him to unearth the cultural, political, and religious roots of middle-class market practices in contrast with other studies focused on social mobility and exclusionary practices. The resultant contrast in backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of these four groups animates this book and extends an emerging body of scholarship focused on the connections between middle-class market choices and politics in the Global South, with important implications for Chile's recent explosive political changes.

New Articles

Liang, Yingjian. 2022. “Different Time Frames, Different Futures: How Disadvantaged Youth Project Realistic and Idealistic Futures.” *Social Problems*. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spac053.

Mueller, Jason. 2023. “Universality, Black Lives Matter, and the George Floyd Uprising.” *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory*. DOI: 10.1080/1600910X.2023.2168717.

van Stee, Elena G. 2023. “Privileged Dependence, Precarious Autonomy: Parent/Young Adult Relationships through the Lens of COVID-19.” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 85(1):215–32. doi: 10.1111/jomf.12895.

van Stee, Elena G. 2022. “Parenting Young Adults across Social Class: A Review and Synthesis.” *Sociology Compass* 16(9):1–16. doi: 10.1111/soc4.13021.

Events

Conference in Honor of Annette Lareau

The University of Pennsylvania is hosting a conference in honor of Annette Lareau on the reproduction of inequality. Please find more information here:

https://web.sas.upenn.edu/annettelareau/reproduction-of-inequality/

Symposium on “The Sociology of Contemporary Art”

The journal *Marges* (Presses Universitaires de Vincennes) will organize a symposium on "The Sociology of Contemporary Art" on the 25th of March at the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art (Paris), followed by the publication of our 38th issue on this same subject. Attached is the call for papers, which is also available online: https://calenda.org/1031789. It is written in French but we would be very glad, of course, to meet and discuss with foreign researchers. It would be especially interesting to have the point of a view of American sociologists.

Nicolas Heimendinger

Culture and Contemporary Life Series

You can access the recording to the Culture and Contemporary Life Series panel, “Inequality and Cultural Authenticity,” here: https://youtu.be/A6NRK9AHBWA

Miscellaneous

Culture Section Mentorship Program

The Culture Section of the American Sociological Association is hosting the third annual Mentorship Program as part of the 2023 ASA meetings. The goal of the program is to pair graduate students and early-career scholars with faculty and other academic professionals. Mentoring relationships not only

further the professional development of our members but also create connections and community within the section.

The application to sign up as a mentor will **open on March 1st and close on April 3rd.** The mentee application will then open on **April 17th and close on May 15th.** We will share links to the forms as time gets closer. Mentors and mentees will generally be matched according to their scholarly interests and professional goals. Open to all members, the program considers an array of professional areas in addition to research, teaching, and service--such as non-academic career paths and scholar-activism. Mentoring goals, expectations, and general availability are also taken into account.

The type and frequency of connection is at the discretion of the mentors and mentees, but we do require that mentors connect with the mentees at least three times--for example, three separate Zoom meetings over the course of the calendar year.

Applicants who wish to serve as both mentors and mentees should fill out both applications. Mentors and mentees should be ASA Culture Section members.

If you have any questions, please contact: Marshall A. Taylor, mtaylor2@nmsu.edu

The Work of Barry Schwartz

Barry Schwartz, known internationally for his work on collective memory, died two years ago in a bicycle accident. His family is in possession of his books, papers, notes, and other research material from Barry's forty+ years of research and would very much like to share this material with a sociologist who shares Barry's interest in collective memory and who might find this material useful in their own work. If you would care to, I'd be happy to discuss this further. Please contact me at weberian@uga.edu or through the ASA Connect page.

Jim Dowd