SECTIONCULTURE

ASA Sociology of Culture Section Newsletter Spring 2024, *Vol. 40, Issue 2*

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Letter from the Chair

Monika Krause

Dear colleagues in the culture section,

Summer is approaching. I hope it will bring you some periods of working that are less scheduled and structured as well as some times that are genuinely off.

At the end of, or the middle of that summer, I am looking forward to seeing many of you at the Annual Meeting in Montréal. The section session - on the Monday and the Tuesday- are already listed online and showcase a fantastic range of topics, approaches and styles. Alongside sessions on Culture in Interactions, Culture in People, Culture in Organizations and Markets and Culture in Objects, please also note the session co-organized with the section on Race, Gender and Class (Culture and Solidarity across Difference) and the session co-organized with Mathematical Sociology (Formal Models of Duality in Culture and Society, on Sunday), an Early Career Professionalization Panel on Grant Proposals and our roundtables.

The award committees are busy discussing the submissions (thanks to everyone!), so we can celebrate the winners at our business meeting on Tuesday morning.

Please save the Sunday evening for our section reception, which will be held off-site at a bar close to the conference venue. We are hosting this reception jointly with the Theory section and the Consumption section. I am quietly confident that this will be both the place to be that day and a space that is really welcoming even if you don't know anyone already. Many thanks to our organisers, Daphne Demetry, Alexander Hoppe, and Carly Knight.

In the meantime, please:

1. Vote in the ASA elections if you have not. The ballot closes 5 pm EST on May 20.

2. Join our mentorship programme. The first deadline is for mentors and I would really like to encourage everyone who can to sign up before May 20th. There is a strong uptake of this programme by mentees and we aren't logistically able to reach out to all the amazing potential mentors individually. If you are unsure if you should mentor or mentee (can I will that to be a verb?), why not sign-up to do both? The deadline for mentees is to follow. Many thanks to Marshall Taylor and the committee.

3. Check out the last session in this year's Culture and Contemporary Life series, an amazing opportunity to meet the editors of 6 major journals (American Journal of Cultural Sociology! Cultural Sociology! Ethnic and Racial Studies! European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology! Poetics! Signs!) in our field. and put your questions to them. I thank Giovanni Zampieri for organizing and all the editors who are giving up their time to join us for this on top of the time they are devoting to the infrastructure of our work week in and week out.

4. Enjoy our newsletter. Huge thanks to our fantastic team of newsletter editors, led in this edition by Clara Cirdan, with support from Nick Dempsey, Hannah Wohl, Manning Zhang, Derek Robey and Man Yao.

Best wishes
Monika

Working with and after Howie Becker: An Interview with Chandra Mukerji

By Claudio Benzecry

Howard Becker with Chandra Mukerji, San Francisco, 197X. Picture by Jack Kadis

On January 25, **Chandra Mukerji (UCSD)** and **Jon Wynn (U Mass-Amherst)** came as guests to the Northwestern Culture & Society Workshop, to discuss the direct and indirect influence of Howard S. Becker in the US sociology of the arts and culture.

On April 5, **Claudio Benzecry (Northwestern University)** interviewed Professor Mukerji to better capture some of her thoughts. She was one of Becker's students at Northwestern Sociology, participating in his famed Sociology of the Arts seminar. What follows is a condensed and edited version of the conversation.

Claudio E. Benzecry (CEB)
We are going to reminisce about what it meant to work with Howard Becker.

Chandra Mukerji (CM)
Howie was a wonderfully warm and funny mentor. He was, I think, the only faculty member in sociology who was really joyful, playful and self-deprecating, which was a wonderful thing for graduate students. His not taking himself seriously made it easy for us not to take ourselves too seriously. And his willingness to laugh at mistakes rather than be critical of them made being around him a good environment for trying ideas and seeing how they were received. He was a leader of a great pack of students when I was a graduate student, too, because it was during the Vietnam War. There were a large number of graduate students who were there to avoid the draft. So there were, I don't know, something like 50 graduate students in my cohort rather than 15 or so. Howie going down the hall would often be like a duck followed by a bunch of grads.

Howie liked doing things with graduate students. He would go out to lunch with us. And he would drive us crazy. When you would say "What do you think I should be reading? What would be the most important book to read in social psychology?" He would reply, "Whyask me? .. there are hundreds of good things." Maybe he would name a book, maybe not. He would usually just advise us to start reading and keep following the footnotes. You know, essentially saying, "Figure it out." His unwillingness to take a position of authority was incredibly frustrating, but also a good education. It was a lesson in how you learn about something when you don't have a mentor around or when you're not in a class. I thought he was a wonderful mentor because I loved his lack of attachment to authority, and I became friends with him. I would visit him after graduate school with my boyfriend who was a photographer like Howie. We had sort of a mini community that was very warm and playful.

CEB
You took one of the seminars on arts with him, right?

CM
Yes, I was in the first sociology of art seminar. That was really interesting. In his usual way, Howie said "Wellwell, I don't know how to do this" but then went on saying, "I don't know what a sociology of art should be, but I know the things that I think it shouldn't be." And so we read a number of things and talked about why maybe they were not good models. I remember we read Arnold Hauser's historical sociology of art, and Bourdieu and Boltanski's book on photography that had just been published in English. Howie was disdainful of Hauser's Marxist history. He said repeatedly that art historians do history of art better than sociologists because they pay attention to period practices and context. Hauser was treating art

as epiphenomenal and Howie didn't think that was right. He did not feel that art was a simple expression of relations of political power. He felt that art had a certain degree of autonomy and that was part of the reason it was interesting. Then we went on to Bourdieu. The idea that social relations were reproduced through art was much more attractive to Howie because it focused on the production of reality through practices, but Howie really hated thinking about hierarchy. Still, he saw promise in Bourdieu and Boltanski because they were using observations of practices to see how family photographs recreated class distinctions. But he didn't like how little they attended to the people who were doing the photographs. If you're going to do a formal family setup, what kinds of assumptions do the photographers bring about the family? You know, what is their role in all of this? We must have read some Gombrich, too, or maybe we did this later. Howie was a great fan of Gombrich who really felt provided a good model of social analysis. Gombrich was not only a better historian, but in some ways, a better observer than most of the social milieux in which artists would work. He would pay attention to where the pigments came from and the kinds of materials that a painter would paint on. Those were things that showed up in Art Worlds.

CEB
I have three different issues I want to raise. I was hoping you could say more about the context in which you knew Howie, namely, the specific time you were at Northwestern, the effects of the sociology of art seminar on his work, and the influence of photography and Zen on him.

CM
OK. Alright. I was in grad school at Northwestern from 67-71. I think it was probably late 67 or early 68 when he had his first art seminar. I don't think it was my first year. It's more likely my second year. Chicago in 68 changed everything. In 1968 in Chicago, my officemate and one of Howie's other students, Lee Weiner, was arrested as one of the Chicago 8. I had been sharing an office with him for over a year, I guess, before he was arrested. We talked continuously about the poverty on the South Side of Chicago that he was studying, following in the tradition of the Chicago school. There was a lot of upheaval at the university. Howie wasn't a critical political sociologist, but had a disdain for institutions that fit the times . But he was so non-institutional [chuckles], right? His sociology was the equivalent of outsider art for that period. Symbolic interactionism was growing, but was subordinate to functionalism, which dominated US sociology. For radicals, the functionalist ideas of societies as a system of functional institutions didn't capture social reality at all. So, as an opponent of this perspective, Howie gained a kind of respect and following. His attention to ordinary people trying to negotiate everyday life seemed real and his constructivism provided a kind of hope.

CEB
I'm looking, and "Art as Collective Action" was published in 74. Means he probably wrote it towards the end of your time there, right?

CM
Yeah. Yeah. When I entered grad school, Boys in White about med students had been published and was a big success. So, he was deciding what to do next, and was turning to art. He was playing jazz and his wife, Nan, was an artist. He wanted to study art as he had medical students. But how do you do that? The scale of such an analysis was a big problem. Howie mentioned talking with Anselm Strauss about this and the idea of social worlds. Social worlds theory seemed to provide a way to deal with issues of scale. And studying art worlds could demonstrate the value of social worlds analysis.
Howie's pacifism and contempt for institutional power were part of his Zen attitude connected to the Bohemian community he inhabited as a musician. He was part of a generation that Allan Kaprow described, as coming out of World War 2. They were completely disillusioned with modern culture. The assumption that human beings were rational had been destroyed by fascism, putting rationality in the service of hatred, greed, desire, violence, and oppression. The bohemian community in San Francisco where Howie went in the summer was filled with jazz musicians, poets and performance artists. There he strove to be marginal. It was better to be unimportant because important people were worthless or boring. He embraced the margins in sociology through the tradition of the Chicago school where sociology focused on socially unimportant people and gave voice to the voiceless. He did not seek influence in Washington, but took pride in being a legitimate member of a marginal group. That was one of the fascinating things about Howie's description of art worlds. Artists were both, you know, managing their marginality and employing the genre conventions of their community.

Howies's connection to Zen Buddhism was through Bohemia. He was, in the language of the times, very much of a peace and love pacifist. In that sense, he was a California Buddhist, less religious than disciplined and playful. He was a friends-

with-Allen-Ginsberg kind of guy, right? Poets and jazz musicians performed together in San Francisco. And Zen Buddhism permeated the San Francisco Renaissance poetry scene to which he was attached through jazz.
I found the Zen influences on Howie in a lot of areas. His pacifism was the most obvious. But he had a kind of personal discipline that was very Zen. He was into health food before other people. Research and teaching were disciplines to him— places to reflect on how you live your life, how to live a good life. It was a form of taking yourself seriously, but not taking your position seriously. Howie's impulse to laugh at himself, life, and the world came from this kind of world-weary rejection of self-importance, rejecting ego. I also saw his Buddhist tendencies when Howie took a bunch of graduate students, including me, to Tassajara, a Zen retreat. It was an educational field trip of sorts. He was teaching us, you know, how to be quiet and observe. It was a very unusual form of training for an ethnographer, but it was pretty good. Observation was revealed as a meditative state, learning to forget yourself to appreciate everything else around you. Yeah, it was... It was amazing.

I remember playing horseshoes with Howie and another senior sociologist there in Tassajara, and learning another lesson from him. I was doing really well at the game, and then Howie's friend who was losing proposed an experiment, a Garfinkel kind of experiment. He just said "fear of success." That was it. But the term was being used at the time to explain what was holding back women. And after the senior scholar said that, I did not play well, and he laughed. Later, Howie pulled me aside to ask if the incident upset me. Rather than scream that being treated as a research object by a powerful man like that was outrageous, I said in my most Zen quiet voice, yes; it made me really, really mad. Then Howie said," It doesn't matter." He said,: "You are good no matter what anybody says and you should just understand that you are very, very good at what you do. Period." That was wonderful- a good life lesson, too. Staying centered is an essential skill of self and life. Knowing that you are— just and always— good enough.

CB
Did he have a lot of students who were formally his, you know, advisees or he worked with a lot of people that he was just part of their committees?

CM
He had a lot of advisees and he had a lot of students who took classes with him, so he had a lot of influence, but he didn't... how do you say it? He did not form a school of followers that had to do what he did. Many of the students dispersed after graduate school anyhow. They were there to avoid the draft. They were not really interested in starting a career in sociology. And jobs were almost impossible to find when the huge cohorts from many grad programs that had been evading the war went on the market. And a lot of my cohort that did get jobs didn't get tenure. They were popular with students, but many senior faculty didn't want their graduate students to move toward SI. It was really hard for my cohort. I was very lucky to get a job.

CEB
if I were to ask you what, what do you think from Howie's sociology has survived in your own work?

CM
The differences are obvious, of course, because I study art from a historical perspective and I study institutional power. A perfect rebellion of sorts. I had to get political. I shared an office with Lee Werner of the 8, and I was barred from a seminar in political sociology because I was a woman. The seminar leader wanted "serious" students, and women did not count. He was an ass, and made me think about who holds power and who doesn't. But my turn to history was actually due to Al(vin) Gouldner. Al Gouldner came by to give a talk, and met with graduate students. He asked me, "What do you want to do?" And I said "Sociology of art." And he said, "How do you want to do it?" And I said, "Well, Howie says to do ethnography. But I love art history", he said, "Do history if you want to do history; he'll get used to it." I started doing history almost immediately after leaving graduate school. But that is not to say I forgot what Howie taught me. I became a historical ethnographer. I think you called me that, Claudio. I study the forms of everyday life and everyday people in 17th-century France— gardeners, women peasants, surveyors, and hydraulic engineers. I study "unimportant" people that matter, changing history and developing tools of territorial politics.

What has influenced me most recently in Howie's writing is the new work on improvisation. As he argues, improvisation is a model of everyday social interaction. We make it up as we go along. It is also, I think, key to how culture works at the macro scale. Culture is a very flimsy fabric and has to be woven and rewoven all the time, and it's done in improvisatory

ways. Culture develops, I think, like the oral tradition: you take something that's there already and you adapt it to new circumstances, repeating it, but changing it at the same time. In this sense, culture is essentially historical, always undergoing transformation. Howie and I started talking about improvisation a few years ago. At first, he didn't like the way I talked about it. To get Howie agitated was unusual but enlightening. The result was a really wonderful conversation. We started hammering out the details of our arguments with all kinds of empirical examples. He emphasized how normal improvisation was: it was done in order to achieve normal ends and to meet expectations in art worlds. The job was to to come on time and treat people the way you're supposed to treat people in your social world. In contrast, I really felt that improvisation was different. I thought it was a site of possibility and radical change in which the rules of the game and precedents in the arts were there to be broken and broken in collaborations that mattered. Art was different, I argued, because it was a form of social life built around imagination rather than reasoning. Different sides of the brain were employed, right and left both equally human and ordinary. Everyone since Foucault recognizes how much of social life is dominated by discourse. But some small portion of social life, an important portion of it, is dominated by imagination. This is the heart of culture, the social mobilization of imagination. Sometimes it is not what people think but what they can dream up that matters. It is not just in jazz improvisation and art studios or theaters, but also in social movements or efforts at educational innovation. These are sites in which people reveal their dreams and fancies to each other. Howie didn't like my way of thinking about it. He wanted art to be ordinary, unimportant, and wonderful because of it.. But for all our differences, he remains an important influence. To me, Do You Know? describes the forms of everyday reasoning that allow group life to be governed by imagination.

I have been deeply influenced by Howie's passion for methodology, too. I've tried to bring genealogical methods to historical sociology. And I have turned to material evidence to find clues about ordinary lives in the past. The result is a kind of sociological archeology, documenting life at the level of mundane practice by examining its residues. In his methodological experiments, Howie has really influenced my sense of freedom in doing sociology.

CEB
It occurs to me that there are a lot of similarities between what we see in American STS and what Howie had done with art. It's as if both had taken Hughes into different yet somewhat related directions, and; and so sometimes I wonder if Leigh Star and Howie went into thinking some similar issues in different ways, but then in your case, you entered into a different conversation with infrastructure studies and with the French take on pragmatism.

CM
Yeah. Exactly. SI and STS share the same attention to everyday practices but study them for different purposes. This explains why Leigh (Starr) and Bruno (Latour) were colleagues as well as rivals. I was initially drawn to Bruno when he was doing research in Salk because he was doing an interesting ethnography. But I was also fascinated by the use of this method to address questions of epistemology rather than practice, and I was drawn to the materiality in STS. But focusing on epistemology excluded addressing power. It seemed nonsensical to deny the political given the amount governments spent on science. Eventually , Steve Epstein and I fought to bring politics into STS and to show how issues other than epistemological ones drive science and technology.

Howie's overt influence over me had waned by the time I wrote Impossible Engineering. I was by this time deeply embedded in science studies and more influenced by Bruno. Howie was still interested in distributed cognition as a particular form of "doing things together." And he was right. Plus my study of the Canal du Midi was a study of unimportant people. It was meant to be my most unimportant book, too. No one, I would tell myself, would read a book on the engineering of a 17th-century canal. So I was free to write it as I saw fit. I was centered in Howie's sense, and it made me smile. "Sociology is what sociologists do," he would say.

Howie's training in ethnography and my own feminist impulses also drove me to spend five years figuring out why so many peasant women worked on the canal. It was clear from the archives that there were thousands of women working on the water supply. The records just left no clue about where they came from, or what they were doing, or why they mattered. I was determined to find out. You have to assure yourself that you have not overlooked something that you should have understood, Howie would say. So, I went to the Pyrenees to answer my questions. The result of these efforts transformed the book.

If I ever finish my next book [laughs] and we all know how that is, you'll see my debts to Howie's work on improvisation.

I am writing about artisans and their collaborative practices used at and royal arsenals, conjuring up the state. Howie is everywhere in the manuscript. I am working through ideas on improvisation and imagination deeply shaped by my conversations with him. I follow flows of imagination within the artisanal community, different dreams of power and history playing off each in (among other places) the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles.

CEB
So maybe the classic last question from any and every interview. Is there anything else?

CM
One thing I haven't really talked about is his photography. You did ask me about that before, and I didn't really answer it. In studying photography, he was at one level responding to what he saw as the limitations of Bourdieu and Boltanski. He could critique their work by studying the photographers they trivialized. But photography had much more importance in his life. He started going to the Art Institute in San Francisco a lot after his wife, Nan, died. He was taking classes and doing fieldwork there. It was something that he could do even in hard times, and it was also a way of transforming himself. He was being forced by death to build a new life. He gained new friends in the photographic community, and gathered data on an art for Art Worlds. Best of all, through photography, he met his wife, Diane Hagmann. Diane was, you know, just this wonderful tonic for him, sharing his crazy sense of humor, his love of France, and his very Zen or disciplined way of life. They inhabited a kind of open, cleanly lit, and quiet place. The radio played French programs in the mornings, I think, a language they loved. Diane transformed him into a new kind of happy person, nurturing his love for collaboration with Rob Faulkner and working on projects with him herself. He had a new creative force in his life that inspired him.
This is when Howie went more deeply into studies of collaboration and improvisation. I think it changed his way of thinking about the sociology of art, as he wrote more about the depth of feeling in improvisations that worked. He and Diane worked together, too. I was particularly moved by a piece they did on corners. Rather than taking photographs down streets of Paris, as many photographers had done, they focused on the corners between streets. Diane used a wide-anglelens to capture views of the converging streets. It was a wonderful vision of collaboration, a meeting place of different forces. (…)

Howie's Invisible College

By Jonathan Wynn (UMass – Amherst)

Feeling like an impostor to write about Howie Becker has been, in the end, the reason why I think it might be of value. When I started my correspondence with him, I was assuredly at the most precarious point in my career. Over various points in the decade-plus of receiving his supportive and generous comradery, that impostor-voice whispered: "Why would Howie bother with me?" I now realize that our exchange points to a better question: What does the answer to that question teach us about how to be a scholar?

One Buddy to Another
In a non-tenure track visiting professor gig at a small liberal arts college known for its plucky students, I worked on transforming my dissertation into a book. Leading a class discussion about Bourgois's In Search of Respect we ended on a curious methodological puzzle. At the start of the next class a student raised her hand and said: "Well, I emailed Prof. Bourgois and here's what he said to me…" as if it were the easiest thing in the world.

I went home and thought about a conundrum in my own work related to Howard Becker's research and, inspired by my students, emailed him. I quickly learned two things: that he preferred "Howie," and that he was quite an enthusiastic pen pal. The result of that conversation is in an article, "Ethnographic Characters, from The Hobo to Doormen."

Shortly after the reader reports came in for my first book—with a characteristic "Huzzah" from the legendary University of Chicago Press editor, Doug Mitchell—Howie sent me an email, disclosing himself as one of my reviewers. He had additional notes and ideas for the book he felt were outside the bounds of the formal reader report. Disclosure is uncommon, but Howie did with others as well.

We stayed in touch over the years, writing, as he said as "one buddy to another." He gave feedback on drafts for everything I published during that span. I always provided an 'out' to our conversations (e.g., "Thank you so much! Safe travels to

Paris…") and he always refused to 'take the out.' His emails always extended the conversation (e.g., "…what do you think?") We only met in person once and even then, it was in a large group.

Reviews, Reports, and Collaborative Thinking

Our biographies intersected at different stages of our careers. When I reached out to him, he was in an indistinct phase of his career, having recently retired from the University of Washington. Not only was that the start of a highly productive string of now classic touchstones for doing sociology (Writing for Social Scientists, Evidence, etc.), it was also a phase of his career that built an almost hidden-to-each-other network of scholars.

Although I am sure he kept in contact with former students, friends, and colleagues, I think it is important to note that he also found time to read book manuscripts and provide mentorship. Howie built a kind of 'invisible college'—a term to describe a group of scholars who are informally connected with each other—of young scholars.

After his passing in August 2023, I reached out to Claudio Benzecry, Andrew Deener, Jason Hughes, Colin Jerolmack, Forrest Stuart, and Iddo Tavory to learn about others' experiences. Some shared stories like my own: Howie had either reviewed a book prospectus or reviewed a tenure and promotion file and disclosed himself. This wasn't always the case, however. Jason Hughes, author of Learning to Smoke: Tobacco use in the West, wasn't a student of Howie's, but developed a correspondence out of a shared harmony in research topics. And Howie reached out to Forrest Stuart after reading his work and, noting a common employment history (Howie was at Stanford between 1962 and 1965, Stuart from 2019 to present), hosted a regular happy hour with Stuart, for a few years.

While some of these conversations were over email, and others over beers, there were similarities. Exchanges with Howie were a mix of sharing old stories and talking about the work of doing sociology. Jerolmack, who met Howie through his mentor, told me their mentoring conversations were grounded in his approach to empirical work: "How do you know that?" He was, for Jerolmack, "excited in being a colleague."

These collaborative exchanges were similar to what's on display in Thinking Together: An E-mail Exchange, and all that Jazz, his 'book about writing a book,' coauthored with collaborator Robert Faulkner. Iddo Tavory shared one illustrative comment from their exchanges:

It's funny, because what you and I are missing in a lot of this stuff is just what is happening before their eyes! When we both have time maybe we can discuss this, what can we call it? Maybe we can just speak of it as the "work of experiencing and acting" or something ike that, no, that isn'[t it. Ill think more about it.

The exchanges were not just in ideas. Jerolmack quickly switched from having his book reviewed by Howie to reviewing Howie's books, in turn, only a few years later.

Similarly, folks told me his tenure reviews and reader reports were frank, curious, and entirely about the work itself. Tavory noted that his feedback was "generous, but never sugar-coated." They were also devoid of the trappings of other evaluative measures: No h-index, no citation counts, no mentions of the prestige of the venues for publications.

In like fashion, Howie seemed uninterested in boosting his own citation count. "Our conversations were not about gaining acolytes," Jason told me, but about an investment in passing along his characteristically subtle approach to studying social life. According to Hughes, Howie tied together a "transatlantic, trans-European" network of scholarship, and was particularly interested in folks who shared a focus on practice. "For Howie," Hughes told me, "sociology is something you do, and that's why he was interested in thinking together about the work." When I asked why he thought Howie was interested in mentoring a younger generation of scholars, Stuart told me: "To borrow from Goffman, Howie wanted to be where the action was." He continued, "Howie wanted to talk with practicing fieldworkers, with shared commitments who have a set of operating practices that, in his view, were increasingly rare."

Some Notes on Commitment

Through these conversations, I think I have settled on a few answers on why Howie did this work, and why it matters. Howie certainly didn't engage in the time-consuming book review process for the free books.

When I asked him about this 'invisible college' idea, back in 2014, Howie told me:

I do read a lot of manuscripts for Doug and give advice on them. And do the same thing for a lot of other stuff people send me. Partly because it's how I keep up with things, partly out of sheer curiosity. This provides a certain randomness to my reading, which is something I like to encourage in myself. As a result, I know a little bit about a lot of things which for me, given the kind of work I do, is an advantage.

Random reading is something I can't avoid because, partly, that's the way my head works and partly because I've accumulated so many buddies over the years who write about so many different things. One thing it for sure does is give you a collection things to think about that are different from what everyone else thinks about!

So, two answers for why he did this are that he built up a network of "buddies" and that it corresponded with his way of thinking.

As for buddies, there were few who rose to the level of Doug Mitchell, who had to be one of his most devoted pen pals. It was a relationship that only arose when the University of California Press refused to publish his brilliant Writing for Social Sciences and then extended to reviewing books.

Regarding his way of thinking, there's little doubt that he was concerned about the demise of his approach to sociology in the discipline. His approach to sociology was idiosyncratic or, as Claudio Benzecry described it in a Northwestern workshop on Howie's legacy, about being "flexible." He was certainly suspicious of excessive theorizing. He told Jerolmack to eschew the "theoretical throat clearing" of his early work. Stuart received similar feedback: "Whenever the work veered into theory, he'd ask: 'But what are the people doing?'" (At the same time, Tavory notes that his conversations with Howie were much like his writing: "misleadingly simple." His "Aw, shucks style of saying complex things" was, in Tavory's eyes, a highly practiced commitment to the style of sociology he wanted to see in the world.)

Passing along that approach was likely an important part of engaging with younger scholars. His correspondence was what Hughes called his "generational responsibility to pass on the craft." One snippet from his notes for a 2008 talk he gave in Paris illustrates this:

…You can add to this the argument of Andrew Abbott, that more senior people in the field (whatever field it is) are overwhelmed with requests to review articles and often refuse, so that in the end the articles are not reviewed by experts, but by more junior people and often by graduate students.

He filled this role.

In talking about it with Andrew Deener, he said that Howie liked the work. He was 'committed.' It recalled Howie's 1960 article, "Notes on the Concept of Commitment," wherein he mentions that to understand a consistent line of activity, you should learn about what 'side bets' they've made to stay in that job (e.g., staying in a career or organization to satisfy other interests extraneous to the original intent), and the values or valuables behind those bets. Commitments are "one mechanism producing consistent human behavior," that arise "when a person, by making a side bet, links extraneous interests with a consistent line of activity. Side bets are often a consequence of the person's participation in social organizations." I don't know what exactly Howie's side bets were and how they lasted well after his participation in the social organizations of formal university life, but he certainly maintained his participation in the world of sociology.

CCL Event: "Culture Across the Discipline Experience at the Boundaries"

By Manning Zhang

On February 29, 2024, the Culture Section of the American Sociological Association held a live discussion themed "Culture Across the Discipline Experience at the Boundaries," as the first event of this year's Culture and Contemporary Life Series. Michael O. Johnston (William Penn University) and Jessie K. Finch (Northern Arizona University) both moderated the discussion. Allison Pugh (University of Virginia), Pamela Zabala Ortiz (Duke University), Derron Wallace (Brandeis University), and Alyson K. Spurgas (Trinity College) participated as panelists.

You can watch the recording of this event on YouTube. Here are highlighted remarks from the discussion.

Jessie K. Finch, as the co-moderator, highlighted that this panel aimed to bring sociologists from different subsections to share their understanding of cultural theory, and how they integrate culture with their expertise. Then, all the panelists discussed their scholarships and how can these works connect to culture.

Pamela Zabala Ortiz started the conversation by discussing her interdisciplinary scholarships on the Black and Latinx identities. Her current dissertation project explores Black ethnoracial authenticity and discusses the hegemonic Blackness, as American Blackness has been used as a measuring stick for other Blackness in different cultural contexts globally. **Zabala Ortiz** delineated two contrasting cognitive processes observed among Afro-Dominican interlocutors when confronted with the notion of Black inauthenticity: the internalization of policing and the reassertion of Black identity.

Derron Wallace introduced his new book, Culture Trap, in which he argues that the overemphasis on culture as a secret to students' success and failure at school is not only tricky but also a trap. Culture serves as a unifying lens in looking at the diverse but related, misrepresentations of racial minority groups. Creatively, **Wallace** shared a video as his book trailer with the rest of the panel. His research was sparked by a question about the Caribbean achievement paradox posed by a Black educator, Ms. Bell, whom **Wallace** encountered during his studies and community-organizing endeavors in South London. **Wallace** connects the accounts of Stuart Hall and Bourdieu and contextualizes colonialism as global networked arrangements, and schools as cultural institutions.

Alyson K. Spurgas shared her identity as a sociologist of medicine and science, and race, class, gender, and sexuality, with a specific focus on the technologies of care and intersectional feminist studies. **Spurgas** introduced her co-authored book, Decolonizing Self-Care, and their argument that the medical supplementary alternative and the commodified self-help spheres are not separate anymore. Using the case of Onetaste Inc., a formal business that promoted practices of orgasmic meditation (OM) and slow sex, **Spurgas** and her colleague made the point that sexual fulfillment and heterosexual female pleasure became the target of capitalism. **Spurgas** ended her speech with a happier note, indicating that many people are trying to find the radical root of self-care and think about decolonizing self-care, especially for marginalized communities.

Allison Pugh expressed the excitement to see the diverse interpretation of culture among different speakers. She introduced her non-traditional journal into academia and her interest in various sociological subsections. **Pugh** underscored the importance of methodological openness and omnivorousness in sociology, especially cultural sociology, when other social science fields are becoming increasingly narrow and monocultural about methods. **Pugh** urged cultural scholars to acknowledge the distance between cultural ideals and individuals' interpretation of lived experiences. To bridge the gap requires effortful cultural reconciliation work, including coding emotional cues. Pursuing similar goals, her research helped explain the duality of culture as both emotion-laden practice and meaning. **Pugh**'s most recent book explores the automation of humane interpersonal work and how culture has been used to justify its legitimacy.

In the Q&A session, **Zawadi Rucks-Ahidiana** asked for advice on navigating abstract lingos. **Pugh** referenced a Greek metaphor The Hedgehog and the Fox ("a fox knows many things, but a hedgehog knows one big thing") to indicate that the audience dictates the complexity of the lingos to be used. She also pointed out that using lingos is a gesture of respect to people working in the field. **Wallace** commented that he has been consistently thinking about race from a cultural perspective, and some key debates appeared repeatedly, such as the culture of poverty and the model minority paradox. The sensitivity to the historical literature, as he argued, is helpful for one to move away from the harm of the past.

Edna Na Lamiley Nazarov asked about the demarcation line between racial and ethnic identities in the context of capitalism. They also asked a specific question to **Wallace** about the sub-hierarchy within the Black diaspora, and another question to **Zabala Ortiz**, about how the "mestizo" category may obscure the struggles experienced by different Afro-Latinx groups. **Wallace** outlined two goals he wanted to achieve in his book. First, he aimed to push past the national blinders that suggest the lived experience of one racial group only exists in the United States. He directed Nazarov to the fourth chapter of his book, which discusses how Caribbean students in the US and the UK distanced themselves from other Black groups. Wallace also addressed another objective, expressing his desire for people not to isolate the internal disputes and ethnic conflicts within the Black community. **Zabala Ortiz** noted that in her research, respondents' perceptions of their identities are heavily influenced by contextual factors. For example, some of her Dominican participants would switch languages depending on the situation, as a means of expressing their identities out of necessity.

The following CCL event was scheduled on Mar 14th at 5 pm Eastern time, with the theme of "Culture: In, On, and Around the Body". We will have a report on this panel in our next issue.

Bios of Participants

Dr. Jessie K. Finch is the Chair of the Department of Sociology at Northern Arizona University and an Assistant Professor. She studies migration, race and ethnicity, deviance, social psychology, emotions, culture, health, and pedagogy. She has published in peer-reviewed journals such as Teaching Sociology, Race and Social Problems, and Sociological Spectrum and has received grants from the National Science Foundation as well as the American Sociological Association.

Dr. Michael O. Johnston is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at William Penn University. He uses celebrations and festivals as a lens to capture the sociology of both the body and place. He uses media representations from local newspapers and online videos to understand the local history and culture that people share and incorporate into their construction of place and identity.

Dr. Pamela Zabala Ortiz earned her PhD in Sociology from Duke University and will be Assistant Professor of Sociology at Boston University. Her work thinks about migration, racism and racial stratification in the U.S. and Latin America. Her current research touches on transnational constructions of Blackness and how Afro-Latinxs navigate competing definitions of Black identity in the U.S.

Dr. Allison Pugh is Professor of Sociology and Chair of the Department of Women, Gender and Sexuality at the University of Virginia. Her research and teaching focus on how economic trends – from commodification to job insecurity to automation – shape the way people forge connections and find meaning and dignity at home and at work.

Dr. Alyson K. Spurgas is Associate Professor of Sociology and affiliated faculty in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Trinity College. She researches, writes, and teaches about the sociology of trauma, the politics of desire, and technologies of care from an interdisciplinary and intersectional feminist perspective.

Dr. Derron Wallace is a cultural sociologist of race, ethnicity, and education. He is the Jacob S. Potofsky Chair in Sociology and associate professor of sociology and education at Brandeis University. His research focuses on structural and cultural inequalities in urban schools and neighborhoods as experienced by Black youth.

CCL Event: "Culture In and Around the Body"

By Clara Cirdan

"Culture In and Around the Body" was part of the Culture and Contemporary Life Series and took place on the 29th of March and can be watched here. Different scholars were invited to think about the intersection of social, cultural, and historical processes in understanding the body and embodiment. Participants reflected on these larger themes by referring to tattooing practices, reproductive technologies, and healthcare disparities.

Michael O'Johnston from William Penn University kicked off the conversation by asking: 'What is a body in research?'

Renne Almeling was the first to respond, saying the body is never simply physical; it always connects to the larger social structures existing in the world, interconnected with the physical body. In other words, the body is made through and with the social. Referring to the nesting doll analogy, **Virginia Brendt** suggests how one can never influence one layer of the body without impacting all others: the physical body, social body, and governing social norms are all interconnected.

Asking whether we are 'more than just flesh,' **David Lane** introduces the notion of the mind-body split in the context of tattooing. Once associated with criminality, **David** mentions, tattoos have undergone significant shifts in cultural perceptions over time. Tattooing is now also associated with a form of self-expression through which individuals can reclaim their own bodies after traumatic experiences, **Virginia** adds.

Tattoo designs also carry gender and class connotations, illustrating how intersectionality is embedded within body art. **David** recounts how one of his research participants mentioned that even though tattoos are not gender-segregated as previously, skulls on women's bodies are still done with softer lines than those for males, which retain a harsher quality. Similarly, tattoos can be class markers, **David** continues: even when one desires to overcome certain class stereotypes, individuals from a lower-class background could most likely not afford an intricate Japanese-style tattoo which would enable them to, for instance.

Intersectionality is also addressed during the event in relation to reproductive technologies. **Rene** starts the discussion by prompting reflections on the historical context and contemporary challenges regarding abortion rights in America. Moreover, despite more varied and creative contraceptive methods being available, access to these disproportionately affects individuals from lower economic backgrounds, **Virginia** suggests. The issue becomes more complex when further reflecting on the psychological effects. When asked to think about how they feel about contraceptive methods that are more 'bodily' (such as IUDs or the ring) instead of a pill which dissolves into the body, most of the self-identified women **Virginia** spoke to refuse to try them because 'it feels freaky.' This illustrates how powerful embodiment can feel and how it can dismantle the mind – thinking; body – action dichotomy.

The final part of the discussion focused on translating research and knowledge into policies and actionable practices. **Rene** posed a stimulating question: 'Why do we have all the knowledge in the world and still don't act on it?' Encouraging a change in the kinds of data collected and research questions we ask, **Virginia** echoed this sentiment and suggested we, as scholars, focus on engagement with and across wider audiences than academic ones. Speaking from her own experience of talking at medical conferences, she highlights the importance of bridging the gap between academic research and practical policy implementation.

The **Q & A** further addressed the importance of interdisciplinary approaches when considering making positive social contributions from research, citing unexpected shifts in smoking rates and the current normalisation of safety belts and helmet usages as examples of research impact.

The session concluded with an encouragement to think about potential unintended consequences of cultural changes, such as an increase in tattooing and its unknown long-term health effects. Participants mentioned ongoing research areas like food allergies to point at the intricacies of the sociology of the body. Overall, the event provided a platform for rich and nuanced discussion around the body within and across culture and social processes, showcasing a range of perspectives from the panellists.

Participant Bios

Dr. Rene Almeling is Professor of Sociology at Yale University. Her primary research and teaching interests are gender medicine and reproduction. She uses a range of qualitative historical and quantitative methods to examine how biological bodies and cultural norms interact to influence scientific knowledge.

Dr. Virginia Berndt is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Texas A&M International University. Her research centres on health and illness and examines dimensions of reproductive health as it relates to disasters and the environment body.

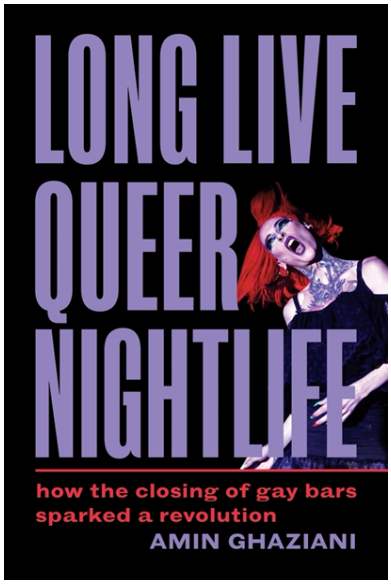
Dr. David Lane is Associate Professor of Criminal Justice at the department of Criminal Justice Sciences at Illinois State University. His research focuses on the relationship between disasters and crime.

Moderator: **Dr. Michael O. Johnston** is Assistant Professor in Sociology at William Pen University.

Co-moderator: **Dr. Adriana Munson** is Assistant Professor of Sociology at University of Nevada Las Vegas.

Book Review of Amin Ghaziani's "Long Live Queer Nightlife"

By Andy Holmes (University of Toronto)



Gay bars are closing - and quickly. In the United States between 2007 and 2017, gay bars declined by 37 percent and between 2006 and 2016 in London, England by a staggering 58 percent. Should we be unsettled by these numbers? Long Live Queer Nightlife: How the Closing of Gay Bars Sparked a Revolution (Princeton University Press, 2024), argues that alarming statistics pointing to the closure of gay bars elide the emergence of vibrant queer cultures rising in its wake. Participating in forty-two club events and conducting 112 in-depth interviews, author Amin Ghaziani asks, "How is nightlife changing? How is it persisting?" (p. 5). Rather than lamenting about why gay bars are closing, Ghaziani immerses himself in the heart of queer nightlife in London to discover ways in which queer culture persists.

This book makes several important contributions to cultural sociology. While existing studies tend to focus on nightlife as fixed places (such as bars and pubs) in distinct or entertainment districts, Ghaziani challenges this literature by conceptualizing nightlife as an inventory of time-limited events. This switch, from fixed, place-based bars to episodic and ephemeral event-based scenes, should be of interest to cultural sociologists researching time, temporality, and place. Ghaziani also considers the closure of gay bars as a "disruption event" – an unsettled period where anticipation and unexpected consequences alter our routines and ideas we take for granted. Long Live Queer Nightlife pushes this literature forward by challenging the effects of disruptions. The conventional understanding is that disruptive events are followed by moments of replication or renewal to stabilize an unsettling situation, but Ghaziani shows an alternate pathway, where disruption instead incites creativity in cultural forms.

Long Live Queer Nightlife immerses readers in these creative cultural forms through seven ethnographic snippets of different exhilarating events – from The Cocoa Butter Club (featuring Black, Asian, and racialized performers) to The CAMPerVAN (a beautifully gritty working-class party located in a railway parking lot). Put simply, Long Live Queer Nightlife is an ode to recognizing defiantly joyful representations of belonging for those too often left behind on the margins, unpopular, or appropriated in traditional (often mainstream white and male-centered) gay clubs: Queer people of color, trans people, femmes, and the working class.

While Ghaziani aptly recognizes that "Gay bars were, and in many places around the world still are, a radical invention," some people "need a refuge from the refuge" (pp. 118-119). There are three important overarching themes in Long Live Queer Nightlife that animate contemporary cultural place-making: 1) Inventive Organizational Forms, 2) Inclusive Cultural Practices of intersectional queer life, and 3) Centering cultural joy rather than the hackneyed narrative of only loss or suffering.

Ghaziani investigates what happens in the aftermath of cultural deconstructions – when gay bars as cultural infrastructures wane, how is queerness reconfigured and expressed? Inventive organizational forms in Long Live Queer Nightlife are ways people creatively produce new cultural practices. While some scholars describe gay bars as "anchors," queer night events are unique – they are better thought of as "pop-ups" or "episodic." Some venues are therefore event-based rather than fixed places with static locations. One reason for this shift towards ephemeral place-making is structural. Chapter three: When Capitalism Crushes, explores how rising rent prices in cities have made permanent gay bars economically unviable. Yet, Ghaziani's ethnography of queer nightlife reveals financial disparities create unique forms of temporary cultural innovations. He considers how gay bars often are characterized by rainbow flags while queer spaces, as Ghaziani reflects, operate differently – "It is the feeling of the space, not the look of the space, that matters – and the people who fill the space imbue those feelings with queerness" (p. 185). But this poses implications. Little statistical data exist or can be obtained on

queer nightlife – and for good reason - because of their clandestine and short-lasting moments. Nonetheless, for cultural sociologists, Ghaziani provides striking evidence of a move away from aesthetics in defined spaces towards rather the salience of emotional feelings, movement, and messiness.

One way queer people form safer communities is through organizational forms and economic practices expressing an ethos of collective intersectional care. For instance, one of the night parties Ghaziani attends, Pxssy Palace, implements a "taxi fund" to cover the travel costs of trans women of color who fear being attacked when leaving night events. Another unique cultural innovation is a tiered-ticketing policy prioritizing marginalized queer communities. "There aren't a lot of places that BIPOC queer women, trans, and nonbinary people can go to and feel welcomed," says an organizer of the Pxssy Palace party (p. 95). According to organizers of the event that attracts over 700 attendees in a month, "The idea behind the tiers is to respond to the unfair economic imbalance that exists within our society" (p. 95). Such organizational forms create moments of euphoria and safety for groups too often denied moments celebrating their humanity.

In Long Live Queer Nightlife, the running thread of queer joy is among Ghaziani's most impactful contributions. He is pushing against the entire discipline's preoccupation with deficit, loss, and suffering. By emphasizing joy, Ghaziani calls on sociologists, including cultural sociologists, to guard against selection bias in their depictions of the social world. As he poignantly states, "Marginalized groups struggle and suffer…but they also find moments of joy" (p. 206). While discussions of the closure of gay bars have sometimes been dubbed the "closure epidemic," Ghaziani argues that such hopeless conclusions on "the decline of nightlife hinge on the erasure of these groups and their cultural creations – and this I absolutely cannot and will not do" (p. 13). Uncritically interpreting statistics on the closure of gay bars, therefore, may reproduce reductive ideas of queerness (and even uphold heteronormative perspectives) if we ignore its replacement by queer nightlife. As one of Ghaziani's queer nightlife interviewees states, "Marginalized people stride through their annihilation, turning pain and struggle into opulence" (p. 118).

Because Ghaziani oscillates between frameworks of institutional oppression and euphoric bliss, he does not suggest we dismiss our attention to social inequalities but rather reminds us why joy and love are culturally worth protecting. Perhaps social deprivation feels poignant because we conjure images in our minds of groups who deserve better. Cultural sociologists will find that Long Live Queer Nightlife contributes an important conversation about transitory spaces as opposed to set locations, as well as the production of new cultures in the aftermath of crisis moments. Ghaziani leaves us with a feeling of hope where partying on the fringes of society has never felt more urgently liberating.

Announcements

Notes from Section Members

Note from Marshall Taylor:

The Culture Section of the American Sociological Association is hosting the fifth annual Mentorship Program as part of the 2024 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.

As in previous years, there are two separate forms for the Mentorship Program: one for mentors and one for mentees. The form to be a mentor for the program is now live and can be found here: bit.ly/culture_mentor_app. The deadline to fill out this mentor application is May 20, 2024.

The application for mentees will be released on May 27, 2024. Applicants who wish to serve as both mentors and mentees should fill out both applications.

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. Mentors should expect to get paired with at least two mentees.

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

Note from Tim Hallett

Call for Nominations -- Herriot Award 2024

The Herriot Award Committee invites nominations for the 2024 Roger Herriot Award for Innovation in Federal Statistics.

The award is intended to reflect the characteristics that marked Roger Herriot's career including:
-- Dedication to the issues of measurement;
-- Improvements in the efficiency of data collection programs; and
-- Improvements and use of statistical data for policy analysis.

The award is not limited to senior members of an organization, nor is it to be considered as a culmination of a long period of service. Individuals or teams at all levels within Federal statistical agencies, other government organizations, nonprofit organizations, the private sector, and the academic community may be nominated on the basis of their contributions.

Nominations for the 2024 award will be accepted until April 15, 2024. Nomination packages should contain:
-- A nomination letter that includes references to specific examples of the nominee's contributions to innovation in Federal statistics. These contributions can be to methodology, procedure, organization, administration, or other areas of Federal statistics, and need not have been made by or while a Federal employee.
-- Up to three supporting letters that further demonstrate the nominee's contributions.
-- A CV for the nominee with current contact information. For team nominations, the CVs of all team members should be included.

Please see this website for more information on the award and where to send the nomination package:
washstat.org/awards/herriot.html

Publications

Articles

Cerulo, Karen A. 2023. “Enduring Relationships: Social Aspects of Perceived Interactions with the Dead.” Socius 9: 1-14.

Fang, Jun. 2024. “The Culture of Censorship: State Intervention and Complicit Creativity in Global Film Production.” *American Sociological Review*. https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224241236750

Hallett, T., & Gougherty, M. (2024). Learning to Think Like an Economist without Becoming One: Ambivalent Reproduction and Policy Couplings in a Masters of Public Affairs Program. *American Sociological Review*, *89*(2), 227-255. https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224241231985

Netta Kahana, Paved with Good Intentions: Moral Evaluation of Volunteer Tourism as Social Action, *Social Problems*, 2023;, spad060, https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spad060

Triplett, Jen. 2024. "Ideological Consolidation, Subject Formation, and the Discursive Creation of the 'New Woman' in Revolutionary Cuba." *Qualitative Sociology*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-024-09560-2.

Books

Cerulo, Karen A. and Janet M. Ruane. 2022 (paperback issued April 2024). Dreams of a Lifetime: How Who We Are Shapes How We Imagine Our Future. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Karen Cerulo and Janet Ruane argue that our social location shapes the seemingly private and unique life of our minds. We are all free to dream about possibilities, but not all dreamers are equal. Cerulo and Ruane show how our social position ingrains itself on our mind's eye, quietly influencing the nature of our dreams, whether we embrace dreaming or dream at all, and whether we believe that our dreams, from the attainable to the improbable, can become realities. They explore how inequalities stemming from social disadvantages pattern our dreams for ourselves, and how sociocultural disparities in how we dream exacerbate social inequalities and limit the life paths we believe are open to us.

Drawing on a wealth of original interviews with people from diverse social backgrounds, Dreams of a Lifetime demonstrates how the study of our dreams can provide new avenues for understanding and combating inequality—including inequalities that precede action or outcome.

Katherine Jensen. 2023. *The Color of Asylum: The Racial Politics of Safe Haven in Brazil.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

In The Color of Asylum, Katherine Jensen offers an ethnographic look at the process of asylum seeking in Brazil, uncovering the different ways asylum seekers are treated and the racial logic behind their treatment. She focuses on two of the largest and most successful groups of asylum seekers: Syrian and Congolese refugees. While the groups obtain asylum status in Brazil at roughly equivalent rates, their journey to that status could not be more different, with Congolese refugees enduring significantly greater difficulties at each stage, from arrival through to their treatment by Brazilian officials. As Jensen shows, Syrians, meanwhile, receive better treatment because the Brazilian state recognizes them as white, in a nation that has historically privileged white immigration. Ultimately, however, Jensen reaches an unexpected conclusion: Regardless of their country of origin, even migrants who do secure asylum status find their lives remain extremely difficult, marked by struggle and discrimination.

Cossu, Andrea and Fontdevila, Jorge (Eds). 2023. *Interpretive Sociology and the Semiotic Imagination*. Bristol, UK: Bristol University Press.
https://bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/interpretive-sociology-and-the-semiotic-imagination

Semiotics provides key analytical tools to understand the creation and reproduction of meaning in social life. Although some fields have productively incorporated semiotic models, sociology still needs to engage with semiotic mediation. Written by a diverse group of authors in interpretive sociology, this ambitious volume asks what the relationship between meaning systems and action is, how we can describe culture and which roles we assign to language, social processes and cognition in a sociological context. Contributors offer empirical research that not only outlines the conceptual issues at stake, but also demonstrates 'how to do things' with semiotics through case studies. Synthesizing a diverse and fragmented landscape, this is a key reference work for scholars interested in the connection between semiotics and sociology.