

SECTION CULTURE



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Letter from the Chair

Clayton Childress



As a superfan of structuring devices, knowing I had to write three of these letters I decided to make the first one about the past and the second one about the present. Where that leaves us is with me wishing that I were also a superfan of strategic planning for the future. Back then the imaginary future me was going to have something insightful to say about where I think we might be heading as a subfield and a section. But I don't. Sociologists have rightly gotten out of the business of predicting the future (I now insist, as I try to wriggle out of the trap I've set for myself). Call it a sense of professional obligation.

Instead of writing about the future, I'd rather hedge, and use a different structuring device to do so. If you'd prefer to stop here, please know this: it has truly been an honor spending time this year tending to the garden of our section, or if you'd rather, our section of the garden. I like this. I like us. I like what we do. I like what we have to offer. I'm grateful to be a part of it. Thank you.

Things I Think I Think:

I think about [Figure 1](#) in Purhonen et al.'s (2023) [Poetics](#) paper a lot, and would love to see North American data on the same question. I think about it because learning that such a narrow definition of culture is still circulating so widely is a good reminder to me of how blinkered my worldview is, and how when talking about culture, I'm probably failing to meet people where they are. In general I think sociologists of culture have more to offer the world

than we do, and that what we have to offer is much less heady and abstract than we probably realize.

*On that topic, I think there's an uncomfortable irony to simultaneously being one of the largest sections at ASA, and dismissed by some as a boutique Prada bag of a subfield, which I somehow still hear. We can't control that, but we can control if and when we choose to act like a boutique subfield or not. I think an easy thing we can probably do a better job of is picking cases that resonate with non-specialists. To do that we don't have to sacrifice an iota of insight, empiricism, or dedication to theory generation. An example of this type of work might be Oshotse, Berda, and Goldberg's 2024 [tariffing](#) paper, the topic for which my students *loooooove* to pretend that they're above, before invariably descending into deep engagement with. I think Jelani Ince's upcoming book on a St. Louis church trying and failing to diversify, and Japonica Brown-Saracino's upcoming book on the cultural life of gentrification as a concept and term are both going to be great for these types of discussions, and public engagement too.*

*I've said it before, but something I particularly enjoy about our online *Culture and Contemporary Life Series* is that through our panels we've been able to bring more international scholars into the fold, and non-section members into the conversation too. I also wish attendance were better, and am not sure how to change that.*

As our subfield grows more international, the stakes of the cases under examination are rising accordingly, which excites me. Two books underway that are representative of this trend are Virág Molnár's new project on far-right nationalist Hungarian cultural production, and Fiona Greenland's project on cultural destruction in Ukraine, the latter of which you can learn more about in this issue.

One thing about the future I'd like to talk about is our next chair. Back at my old job I had a department chair who would sometimes refer to job candidates and new hires as "future chair material." I first met Hannah Wohl way back when she was gearing up to start her dissertation research. Even back then, in addition to being a brilliant sociologist of culture, she was also clearly "future chair material."

"[Symbols, not people, are pliable.](#)" In the last five years it has felt like strong media effects claims have started to

creep back in. And it's not just the same old theoretical ghosts that have been reanimated to do the haunting, either. I wonder if the decline of reception studies, at the expense of consumption and taste studies, is partially to blame. Does the sociology of culture allow for settled science, or if we don't continue to nurture and develop our insights from reception studies of meaning making, do they eventually end up being forgotten? I hope for the former but fear it's the latter.

["Sociologists should rediscover that forgotten soul, the author, who has been deconstructed into oblivion."](#) There's been great recent work on team-based creativity by folks like [Taylor Price](#), [Rachel Skaggs](#), [Gordon Brett](#), and [Kim de Laat](#). With a refocused analysis of reception perhaps studies of meaning could be more fully integrated into work on cultural creation too.

Here's five fun facts I couldn't find thematic space for in the section announcements, but wish I could:

1. The famed jazz musician Charles Mingus named his cat Nightlife. He also created a pamphlet about his experiences with Nightlife titled "The Charles Mingus CAT-alog for How To Potty Train Your Cat." [You can read it here.](#)
2. The term "spoiler" was [coined by Doug Kenney in the April 1971 issue of National Lampoon](#). Two all-time great spoilers are the DVD menu screen of *The Usual Suspects* (which shows who Keyser Söze is), and the title of [Track 11 on the soundtrack album for The Sixth Sense](#).
3. The sprinter Usain Bolt won three gold medals at the 2008 Olympics. While there he claimed to have lived off 100 McDonald's chicken nuggets each day, [explaining](#) that he wanted to stick to a food that he was familiar with, and that he knew would not upset his stomach.
4. The first mass-produced tortilla chips in the U.S. were [Doritos](#), which were first made at Casa de Fritos, which was Frito-Lay's Mexican-themed restaurant at Disneyland in the 1950s. Doritos were a riff on *totopo*, and originally created as a way to salvage tortillas that would have otherwise been thrown away.
5. 30 percent of Americans [report having consulted](#) a fortune teller, tarot card reader, astrologer or

horoscope at least twice in the last year. Astrology was the most common, with 27 percent of Americans reporting having consulted it. This is pretty stable, going all the way back to 1990. It's almost all just for fun, as only 1 percent of people say they lean a lot on astrology for guidance.

What I love about the culture section is the same thing that I love about sociology: It's a centerless subfield in a centerless discipline. Or put another way, the culture section reception is a bunch of people who probably don't belong in a room together, who are at a conference of people who probably don't belong at a conference together. It's an arrangement that probably works more smoothly in more settled times, but might be even more vital and worthy of preservation in unsettled times, I think.

Do I also worry that the messiness of it all goes too far sometimes? Yes. As the person who was tasked with caring this year, I have to admit that I'm not sure how to make sense of the fact that a fair amount of what we're engaging in and promoting as a section barely even purports to be interested in culture in any identifiable way. When culture doesn't even come up in passing, let alone in any intentional way, it does, I think, test the limits of how much an otherwise beautifully centerless subfield can hold.

Or maybe that's wrong and my job was just to sit with my face too close to the screen this year. By way of allegory, the one time I saw Prince perform was around the turn of the century in Marin County, just north of San Francisco. He was late. Very late. When he came out he played a fifteen-minute medley of hits and then ended the show. And to make it worse, and because it was Prince, maybe even to rub it in, as he left the stage he yelled out, "Good night, Los Angeles!" But because he was late his openers, first, Graham Central Station, and then Chaka Khan, each played headliner-length sets and then came back out for a third impromptu set together. Maybe this is all something like that: something that's frustrating at the moment because it doesn't meet your expectations, but with the benefit of hindsight you wouldn't change anything about it at all.

Our section is atypically active. In the past five years or so we've increased what we're doing from the standard suite of section activities by over 70%. And in addition to changing the procedures for what we've always done,

practically all of our new activities, resources, and offerings (the Hall Award, Mohr grant, CCL, mentorship program, and climate survey) are explicitly equity focused. In the relationship between values and action, our approach has been one of more action, and less chitchat. I think that's the right approach, but an unintended consequence of it is that if you're not crowing about what you're up to, your action-oriented approaches can also end up going unrecognized.

On that topic, I think it's mostly outside the scope of our disciplinary training to think about unintended consequences. But as sociologists increasingly play in policy spaces that will probably have to change.

How about four more fun facts:

1. In San Francisco, still known by some as the tech capital of the world, the Municipal Transportation Agency is currently [spending \\$212 million](#) to transfer their citywide train control system off of what it's been running on since 1998: 5.25-inch [floppy disks](#). The transition started seven years ago, in 2018. If they actually pull it off soon the upgrade will move the control system five generations forward.
2. Since the runaway successes of *The Last Dance* and *OJ: Made in America*, the percentage of all newly commissioned documentaries that are [sports-themed](#) has quadrupled from 3% to 12%. But viewership has been trailing off, suggesting the number of sports documentaries produced will likely soon cool off too.
3. Did you know that Winnipeg, Canada is known as the Slurpee capital of the world? An average of 188,000 Slurpees are [sold each month in Winnipeg](#), with Manitoba doubling the per capita Canadian average for Slurpee sales, and Winnipeg selling more Slurpees per capita than anywhere else in the world.
4. You may know [Paul Winchell](#) from his voice acting. He did the voices both for Tigger in *Winnie the Pooh*, and Gargamel in *The Smurfs*. Or maybe you know him because he invented the first artificial heart, or because with Dr. Henry Heimlich, he created the Heimlich maneuver to save choking victims, or because he invented the

first disposable razor, and the first retractable fountain pen.

We're now almost a half century into omnivorousness being a higher-status mode of consumption and taste. I'm about the same age as *Caddyshack*, and from *Caddyshack* forward (or maybe even earlier) I can't think of a single movie that portrays classic snobs as anything but villains. In my more conspiratorial moments I worry that high culture capital elites (ahem, like sociologists) still like to drag out the desiccated corpses of classic snobs because those snobs are good alibis for the cultural status games that contemporary elites are playing. To be fair there still are classic snobs today, but they might not be who you think they are: They seem to be first-generation cultural capital holders, who have a lot of education but weren't raised in high cultural capital households that inculcated an omnivorous disposition (see in the top left quadrant of figure 3 [here](#)). This means that these days, when omnivores condescend about snobs, what we're probably seeing is multigenerational cultural capital holders condescending about first-generation cultural capital holders. Put through that lens, what we're seeing is old (cultural) money holders condescending about the *nouveau* (cultural) *riche*, which is more *Great Gatsby* than *Caddyshack*, and is in fact the exact opposite of the enlightened, cultural openness that it purports to be.

On the topic of tastes, I think Shane Torres' now forgotten "[Guy Fieri](#)" bit got to the heart of the absurdities of hierarchies of taste in a crystal clear way that consumption scholars have been trying to push for decades now. It reminds me of a conversation I had a few years back with a sociologist who has a very big public platform. She told me she had been trying to figure out a way to write about omnivorousness for the general public for a long time, but hadn't cracked it. Around the same time I was talking about omnivorousness with a group of incredibly sharp and up-to-date organizations scholars and economic sociologists. Surprise, surprise, they too had never heard the term, and despite best efforts, I'm quite confident that in that moment I too tried and failed to crack its importance for them.

As scholars wiser than I have noted, one reason humor is interesting is that laughing is automatic, and happens before deliberative cognition can kick in. That means you can appreciate the humor of something without actually

having found it funny, just as you can find something funny and then feel guilty about having laughed at it. The most maniacally out of control I've felt laughing in the last decade was during the nursing scene in the [third episode](#) of the second season of *The Rehearsal*. That's not a recommendation. The time before that was in 2022 while watching Atusko Okatsuko perform her [first special](#) in a small, smelly club. I toggled between automatic pure joy from what I was watching, and moments of deliberative glee about all the pure joy I was feeling. Again, that's not a recommendation. Humor recommendations usually fail, as they should. It's one of the many reasons why I think comedy can be artistic, but almost inevitably fails when it aspires to be art.

As someone who studies culture producing industries, the wealth of work in communications, media studies, and cultural studies on online and new media compared to the relative lack of work on these industries from within the sociology of culture has always stood out to me. I'm hoping new books by folks like Angèle Christin and Ashley Mears will change that.

Here's three Sylvester Stallone fun facts, because why not:

1. Sylvester Stallone was such a big star he had an overall deal at Paramount that gave him first pass to star in every single movie the studio produced. When the script for *Beverly Hills Cop* came in, to everyone's surprise, Stallone decided he wanted the part, and wanted Martin Scorsese to direct it too. Scorsese passed, but Stallone was undeterred. He renamed the main character Axel Cobretti. He added a scene in which he played chicken with an oncoming freight train in a stolen Lamborghini, which he was driving from outside the window while holding onto the door. He was still rewriting the script a month before filming was scheduled to start, when Paramount broke the news that they just couldn't do it. Pissed off, Stallone took his script for *Beverly Hills Cop* to Warner Bros. who quickly agreed to make it, under a new title, *Cobra*. Stallone's *Cobra* was nominated for six Razzie awards, including Worst Actor, Worst Actress, Worst Supporting Actor, Worst New Star, Worst Screenplay, and Worst Movie.
2. After *The Godfather Part II* came out, Sylvester Stallone decided he wanted to make his own *Godfather* movie, starring himself, and Eddie Murphy. It might have happened too, if Murphy hadn't done Stallone a favor and cast his wife in a movie. Stallone's wife, Brigitte Nielsen, was reeling from being nominated for a Razzie in *Cobra* (Stallone's aforementioned fake *Beverly Hills Cop* movie), so Murphy agreed to cast her in his next movie, *Beverly Hills Cop 2*. During filming for *Beverly Hills Cop 2*, however, Stallone called Murphy furious, believing a rumor that Murphy and Nielsen had slept together, and saying that both their friendship and their *Godfather* movie were over.
3. A few years later Stallone had developed a rivalry with Arnold Schwarzenegger that had reached an obsessive level. Annoyed by it, Schwarzenegger came up with a master plan. He had recently read what he thought was one of the worst scripts for one of the dumbest ideas for a movie that he had ever seen. It was for a buddy cop comedy called *Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot*, about a cop whose mom becomes his partner on the police force. Laying the trap for Stallone, Schwarzenegger leaked to the press that he was hugely excited about the script, and eager to star in the movie. Stallone took the bait, signed on to star in *Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot* just to beat Schwarzenegger, and suffered one of the biggest bombs of his career.

"There's no such thing as a department that's one middle-aged cultural sociologist away from fulfilling their strategic plan," I said, probably 20 times in the last two years, when explaining how I had become a drag on my family's occupational mobility. If you're planning on or hoping to retire soon, or moving jobs, before leaving please do everything you can to advocate for a replacement line in the area of culture for one of the truly exceptional PhD candidates or postdocs in our subfield. We're in this together, and we need you.

On that topic, the progenitors of our subfield are now retiring. Their earliest students, who are now full professors, are arguably the first generation to actually be

trained in cultural sociology as a coherent subfield. When I came up, I got into sociology through Bill Hoynes, who was a Bill Gamson student, and I had no way of knowing that what Bill was doing wasn't just the way it had always been done. I can't imagine I would have become a sociologist without Bill Hoynes, or without the theoretical sandboxes that were set up for people like me to play in. I'd like to do more to honor that, and more to honor the people who built those sandboxes.

One place to start could be with commemoration. The 40th anniversary of the founding of the section is coming up, for example, in 2028, which will feel very far away until it doesn't.

Here's two media fun facts from right around when the section was founded:

1. *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, starring Steve Martin and Michael Caine, was originally supposed to star Mick Jagger and David Bowie. What happened was Martin Scorsese got wind of it, didn't like it, and pried Jagger and Bowie away by [promising to make them movie stars in their own movie](#) that he would direct. That movie never happened.
2. The original *Law & Order* episodes were perfectly split in time between the "law" side of the episode (with the police) and the "order" side (with the lawyers). And the first scene of the "order" half was always exposition by the lawyers explaining beat-by-beat what had happened with the cops in the first 30 minutes during the "law" side. This was because syndication rights at the time were sold in 30-minute blocks, and NBC head Brandon Tartikoff wanted to be able to sell each half of each episode into syndication as its own show if need be.

As someone who gets professional development funds, even for me, as one of the lucky ones, without a research grant I can't attend ASA without paying for the majority of my expenses out of pocket. By my math, the difference between professional development funds and the true cost of attending ASA in NYC next year is about \$2500 (in USD).

On that same topic, on a grant application of mine that was rejected this year, one of the explanations provided was that

the (well and accurately documented) total I had budgeted for conferences on the grant was "unreasonable." I agree.

Because of all this, when interacting with people at ASA, remember that there is very likely an inverse relationship between status (e.g., prof/postdoc/grad student; public/private institution; R1; R2; teaching-focused institution) and how much people have had to pay out of pocket to be there.

And yet, I've been at every day of every ASA for fifteen years straight. This year, for the first time in a long time, I'll be in Chicago for all of ASA, but only at the conference for about a day and a half. If you see me, I'll likely be rushing. And sweating too. But please, don't let that deter you: say hi! One good place to say hi would be at the business meeting, which is 3:00-3:30 on Saturday at the Swissotel, Concourse Level, Zurich D.

And one last fun fact:

Abraham Lincoln used to [store things in his top hat](#).

Cultural Filtration and Hybrid War in Russia's Occupation of Ukraine

By Fiona Rose Greenland

Fiona Rose Greenland is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Virginia.

The Ukrainian translation of this essay by Antonina Yashchuk is available on [the website of the ASA Culture Section](#).

The Russian Federation is an annexationist empire¹ that uses hybrid warfare to divide and dominate target populations. Its current war is based on the lie that Ukraine is not a real nation. Human rights defenders explain Russian filtration as a systematic attempt to eliminate Ukrainian national identity. The cultural work of filtration, and its role in re-engineering occupied Ukrainian territories, is my focus in this essay.



Figure 1. Ukrainian poet Lesya Ukrainka (1871-1913) has become a symbol of resistance to Russia's attacks on Ukrainian national identity. Street art, Kharkiv, February 2025. Photo: F. Greenland.

“Hybrid” may suggest a softer type of war, but the opposite is true. Think of it as *war plus*: the kinetic weapons of conventional fighting plus the cultural tools of social and psychological manipulation.² In the 25-year reign of Vladimir Putin, the Russian government has applied these tools to undermine independence movements and democratic governments in multiple countries.³ In Ukraine, they came into force in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and portions of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.⁴ When the Russian Federation Armed Forces (RFAF) crossed the Belarusian border into Ukraine in February 2022, it kicked off the full-scale invasion and a more aggressive phase of hybrid war.

I am a sociologist of culture, and for most of my career have studied nationalism and cultural heritage policies. One year after the full-scale invasion, the US Department of State invited me to join the Conflict Observatory, an independent research consortium that investigated alleged war crimes committed by Russians in Ukraine.⁵ I completed open-source intelligence training with the Berkeley Center for Human Rights and the Institute for International Criminal Investigations in the Hague, and assembled a team of cultural heritage experts. We documented damage to physical sites and objects that are enshrined in Ukrainian law as cultural heritage. Our colleagues in Kyiv urged us to look further, to the less

¹ On annexationist empires and their ideational and cultural strategies: Skarpelis, A. “When Whiteness Fails: Mixed-Race Germans and the Multiple Ontologies of Race in Nazi Germany.” Working paper.

² Bertelsen, O. (2023). Russian Front Organizations and Western Academia, *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 36(4): 1184-1209.

³ As Ukrainian sociologists have noted, the same techniques have consequences for Russians’ perceptions of Ukrainians and of the full-scale invasion (referred to euphemistically as the “Special Military Operation” or SVO). See Alyukov, M. et al. (2022). “Resigning Themselves to Inevitability: How Russians Justified the Military Invasion of Ukraine.” *Public Sociology Lab, The Russia Program at GW*.

⁴ The plight of Crimean Tatars deserves separate discussion and study. Crimean Tatars are a Muslim-majority people recognized as an indigenous community to Ukraine. In 1944, the entire Tatar population (200,000 people) was deported from Crimea by the Soviet government. Nearly 50% died from hunger and disease. In May 2025, the Ukrainian government called on world leaders to recognize the 1944 deportation as an act of genocide. For a recent study of current abuses of Tatars by Russian occupation authorities in Crimea: Yaremchuk, O. (ed.) (2025). *The Free Voices of Crimea*. Kharkiv: Vivat. For an excellent study of the cultural history of the aftermath: Finnin, R. (2022). *Blood of Others: Stalin's Crimean Atrocity and the Poetics of Solidarity*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

⁵ In the early months of the Trump Administration, the Conflict Observatory was shuttered, along with other State Department human rights bureaus and programs.

spectacular but more insidious attacks on Ukrainians' bodies and relationships. They understood the deeper story of Russia's hybrid war on Ukraine.

Across the temporarily occupied territories (TOT), Ukrainian civilians are monitored and assessed through a multi-step process of filtration. Filtration (Ukrainian: фільтраційний) is the process of sorting people into bureaucratic categories that determine their civic and criminal status. Russian authorities implemented filtration shortly after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. By May 2022, the FSB (Russian state security forces) had established at least 21 filtration centers in Donetsk, and additional centers in Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, and Luhansk oblasts.⁶ At least one has been documented in Belarus.⁷ Some were set up in existing buildings such as schools and police stations. Others were makeshift, comprising tents and portable offices. Filtration can occur anywhere, including private residences, schools, parks and cafes, places of employment, and cars. People's names, intimate relations, places of residence, nationality, and other attributes are documented in a 20-point checklist.

By collecting a large amount of information, the Russian security service can monitor and control people's day-to-day movements.⁸ They can restrict movement altogether, and make arrests at any time. The reason for doing all this, according to the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs, is to "counter the ideology of terrorism" of purported Ukrainian neo-Nazism. In reality, there is no "neo-Nazi regime" running Ukraine. To compensate, the Kremlin needs to conjure internal enemies. Perceived cultural attributes serve as a proxy for political ideology, and filtration abets their documentation.

FSB and RFAF personnel search cell phones for playlists, podcasts, and eBooks that are critical of Russia (or just supportive of other points of view). Media posts are also fair game. Ukrainian journalist Stanislav Aseyev was arrested in 2017 for publishing a story in which he put in quotation marks the name of the pro-Kremlin puppet government operating in Donetsk. For this, he was found guilty of seven crimes and sent to the notorious torture camp, "Isolation."⁹ Rape, electrocution, deprivation of sleep, food, and water, prolonged isolation, beatings, solitary confinement, and psychological torture: all have been used to flush out Ukrainian cultural identities. One woman was forced to recite Pushkin and sing the Russian national anthem when she was filtered, as proof of her solidarity with Russia. She didn't know the words to the anthem, and was eventually turned away at the checkpoint.¹⁰ In Donetsk oblast, Russian troops interrogated a man about his allegiances, and took him into detention. He spent three months in a filtration center where he was tortured. Asked afterwards why he thought he was targeted, he explained that the troops suspected that his choice of footwear - Ugg slippers - betrayed him as a militant.¹¹

Some people don't survive filtration.¹² Ukraine's Unified Register of Persons Missing Under Special Circumstances listed nearly 63,000 missing persons in early 2025. Many of them disappeared during filtration.¹³

⁶ "System of Filtration: Mapping Russia's Detention Operations in Donetsk Oblast," Yale Conflict Observatory & Humanitarian Research Lab, Yale School of Public Health. August 25, 2022.

⁷ <https://militaryni.com/uk/news/u-bilorusi-znajshly-rosijskyj-filtratsijnyj-tabir-de-katuvaly-ukrayinskyh-tsyvilnyh-ta-vijskovyh/> ; <https://investigatebel.org/ru/investigations/lager-rossijskih-voennyh-narovlya>

⁸ <http://www.vpg.net.ua/fullread/790>

⁹ Aseyev published a book about his 969 days in Russian captivity. It details the physical and mental torture of occupation prisons. Aseyev, S. (2023). *The Torture Camp on Paradise Street*. Trans. Zenia Tompkins and Nina Murray. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute.

¹⁰ <https://www.0629.com.ua/news/3824203/spivali-gimn-rosii-citali-puskina-ak-rosiani-znusausta-nad-ukraincami-v-aeroportu-seremetevo>

¹¹ <https://mip1.org.ua/en/ihor-talay-three-months-of-filtration-in-torture-chambers-of-occupied-donetsk-region/>

¹² At Sheremetyevo Airport, one of the primary filtration centers as of 2025, 13 elderly persons were reported to have died of exhaustion and pulmonary distress after three days of waiting. Fearing threats that they would lose their place in the queue, they died standing on their feet.

¹³ Shevchenko, A. (2025). A unified online platform for finding missing persons launched in Ukraine, *Kyiv24* July 1, 2025. <https://kyiv24.com/en/unified-online-platform-for-finding/>

Putin's pretext for invasion in 2014 was to protect Russian speakers and "ethnic Russians" from supposed persecution by Kyiv. He has insisted that there is a historical link between Russia and Ukraine and suggested that reunification is the inevitable fate of these "fraternal" nations. But filtration ensnares everyone. Kinetic warfare kills indiscriminately, and Russian and Ukrainian speakers alike have suffered the consequences. How do we explain the apparent contradiction? For starters, contradictions do not matter if there is no narrative, and the Kremlin no longer has a fixed narrative about Ukraine. In place of narrative, there is a series of lies so ridiculous that people believe everything and nothing at all. They stop demanding transparency. This is how it becomes possible for Ukrainians to be Russians' "Little Brother" while they are also terrorists and neo-Nazis. Autocrats prefer lies to narratives because lies are more easily disposed of. Lies undermine the knowledge base of civic participation and transparency.¹⁴ With the de facto closure of the civic and cultural spheres, the path is cleared for another phase of hybrid war: massive social re-engineering of annexed territories.

According to human rights activist Pavlo Lysyansky, Russian authorities want to leave only 20% of the pre-invasion local population in the temporarily occupied territories, with the remaining 80% to be "Russians."¹⁵ Seizing property is one tool for ridding occupied cities of Ukrainians. Homes and jobs present institutional and financial ties to a place. "Return" filtration stops Ukrainians from returning to their properties and can permanently keep them out. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has documented property seizures by occupation authorities across the TOT. The properties are given to Russian citizens who agree to resettle in the occupied territories. Advertisements in Russian state media and pro-Kremlin blogs show beautiful parks and beaches in Mariupol and Crimea, encouraging Russians to move here for a better life. Whether they know that they inhabit apartments taken from dead, exiled, or disappeared people is unclear.

Re-engineering TOT societies also involves ideological work. "Measures to Prevent and Combat Manifestations of Extremism and Terrorism in Educational Activities of the Donetsk People's Republic in the 2024-25 Academic Year" includes lessons, teaching prizes, school visits with patriotic "heroes," and celebrations of (Russian) national holidays.¹⁶ The fourth paragraph promotes lectures and special tutorials "aimed at clarifying the criminal nature of terrorist, Ukrainian nationalist, and neo-Nazi organizations." The children, many of whom are from Ukrainian households, are taught to hate the families and communities that raised them. And on December 30, 2023, Putin approved the "Comprehensive Plan to Counter the Ideology of Terrorism in the Russian Federation for 2024-2028." This document systematically mentions the word Ukraine (Ukrainian special services, Ukrainian neo-Nazis, etc.) next to the word terrorism. No other names of terrorist organizations are mentioned in its pages.¹⁷

Russia's end-goal has been described as "post-Ukraine" (постУкраина), or a Ukraine without Ukrainians.¹⁸ Pointing to this concept and the pattern of policies being implemented to isolate and punish Ukrainian cultural identities, legal scholars and human rights activists have begun to use a new word: *natiocide*, "the destruction of the Ukrainian nation, its culture,

¹⁴ Applebaum, A. (2024). *Autocracy, Inc. The Dictators Who Want to Run the World*. New York: Doubleday; Kennedy, M.D. (2014). *Globalizing Knowledge*. Stanford: Stanford University Press; Pomerantsev, P. (2024). *How to Win and Information War*. London: Faber & Faber.

¹⁵ @pvllys/tm June 20, 2024.

¹⁶ Source: @pvllys/tm. Telegram post, 27 June 2025. The scan of the posted document, attributed to the Donetsk People's Republic occupation government, is dated 2 September 2024.

¹⁷ Комплексный план противодействия идеологии терроризма в Российской Федерации на 2024 - 2028 годы. Executive Order signed by Vladimir Putin, Moscow 2023.

¹⁸ The term features in the title of Semen Uralov's 2024 book, *ПостУкраина. Страна без государства*. For commentary on its political objectives, see @pvllysm/tm June 20, 2024. ДИКТАТОРСКИЙ РЕЖИМ КРЕМЛЯ УСИЛИВАЕТ АНТИУКРАИНСКУЮ РИТОРИКУ ВНУТРИ РФ И УЖЕСТОЧАЕТ ДЕЙСТВИЯ ПО ОТНОШЕНИЮ К УКРАИНЦАМ В ОКУПАЦИИ.

language, history and statehood.”¹⁹ The term fits the Russian annexationist aspirations to take over land and extirpate the people and practices that threaten Russian political and ideological hegemony.²⁰

In his 2022 *Footnotes* essay, Michael Kennedy proposed that existing sociological schemata are “too polysemous” to capture the “deceit, injustice, and criminality” in Russia’s invasion.²¹ Sociologists of culture are well positioned to take up this challenge. We can start by naming and theorizing *anti-schemata*: cultural models or frameworks that are based on no ontology, support no critical interpretation, and serve as instruments of chaos agents. Anti-schemata thrive on existential issues about culture and national identity. These are issues with no scope for compromise: a person is either pro-Moscow or she isn’t, and if she isn’t, she can be detained and shot. A Kremlin bot is not a “voice” and we don’t need Baudrillard to understand the meaning of the bullet in her brain.

If you are one of the 2 billion people living through war today, your experience of the social world has been underrepresented in sociology.²² About a quarter of the world’s population lives in a conflict zone, yet US sociologists tend to leave *non-conflict* zones unmarked. Perhaps we don’t bother to mark them because, for many of us, it reflects our own experience of the world and thus of culture, creativity, and meaning-making. Yet many people today have only ever known a society in conflict or under violent occupation (or both). How much do they figure in our theories of social ties, creativity, love, or future-building? They write songs and plant gardens, work jobs, care for loved ones, organize neighborhood assistance or homegrown resistance movements, and articulate a future. They may not fantasize at all about an escape to US society. To live one’s entire life without encountering war is a privilege of geopolitics, class, and race. Ukraine is one of those places that can expand our understanding of why culture matters and how people are resisting the trap of existential divisions in favor of inclusive communities.

Acknowledgements: Antonina Yashchuk provided translation from English to Ukrainian. Anna Skarpelis and Giovanni Zampieri read and commented on previous versions of the essay. Colleagues at INDEX-Ukraine (Lviv) and the Käte Hamburger Kolleg-CURE (Saarbrücken) are a source of continued dialogue and feedback. I’m grateful for this collective of fellow thinkers.

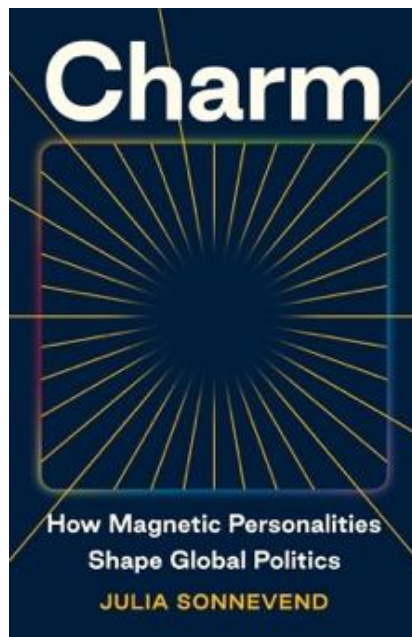
¹⁹ Pylypenko, V. (2023). Russian Genocide in Ukraine as an Attempt to Destroy the Ukrainian Nation. *Review of European and Comparative Law*, (Special Issue), 77–88. <https://doi.org/10.31743/recl.16607>

²⁰ There is a much longer history of Russian imperial and USSR practices and policies of subverting, occluding, and diminishing the local and national histories of their annexed territories. For an overview: Eristavi, M. (2023). *Russian Colonialism 101*. __ist publishing.

²¹ Kennedy, M.D. (2023). How Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine Matters: A Knowledge Cultural Sociology,” *Footnotes* 51(1). <https://www.asanet.org/footnotes-article/how-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-matters-a-knowledge-cultural-sociology/>

²² The figure comes from a 2020 United Nations report, and it was limited to state conflicts and does not include Gaza or Ukraine. <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15184.doc.htm>.

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Charm is a timely analysis of culture, media, and politics. It probes the mysterious yet powerful dimension of global politics in opposition to the rational term, “realpolitik,” or the national interest. Charm is the “ability to attract and delight as if by magic”. It works like “a vacuum cleaner,” in Sonnevend’s vivid depiction, makes you “going along ... like a dance, a gentle push and pull.” In modern politics, the faith in institutions and political parties has transferred to trust in politicians. Therefore, Sonnevend found that the charm of leaders plays an important role in reaching consensus, facilitating policy change, negotiation, and so on. It opens up a new angle for sociologists to understand the operation of politics in the era of social media.

Sonnevend focused on how charming political figures present themselves on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter/X. This book made a great effort in documenting the images, sayings, and posts on social media, systematically showing the power buried in them. She deciphered five strategies that politicians use to construct charm: performing authenticity, demasking, breaking from routine, restaging, and equalizing. Following five case studies of hyper-visible global leaders, Sonnevend presented various images of the roles these politicians played in global politics. Jacinda Ardern is a liberal leader, while Viktor Orban is a conservative, populist, and “illiberal” leader. Mohammad Zarif and Kim Jong-un struck an unexpected “charm offensive” that attracted their Western counterparts. Angela Merkel, on the other hand, reached success with a “not charming” image in an environment that distrusts charm. Despite differences in effects, politicians wield the power of charm to “strive toward the role of superheroes.” Our readers and the audience of global politics may take different stances on political views, but it is worth noting how charm plays a role in shaping the international political arena. This book does not provide a strict definition of charm. Instead, it portrays lively pictures of charming leaders, their followers, and the irresistible power of performance between them. Standing at the intersection of culture, media, and politics, Sonnevend’s analysis of charm provides a vision for our democratic future.

It is not strange for sociologists to study charm. Max Weber laid the ground for the study of charisma as a type of legitimacy, the battle over which has arguably been the most important struggle for any sovereign or leader. A clear difference between Sonnevend and Weber is the subject of the research on charm. In other words, who is the central figure in the framework? Weber’s approach is intuitive. Charismatic figures possess charm and use it to attract followers, formulate systems, and achieve success. Sonnevend, on the other hand, recognizes charm through the lens of the audience. She argued that charm only exists through the recognition of the audience. This shift of view is valuable and parallels the rising literature that focuses on the agency of audiences in political performances. Isaac Reed proposed the “spirals of success” to describe how affect, interactions, and interpretation between performers and the audience form “the back-and-forth, dialectical resonance between them” and “heightens energy in a spiraling motion”. Anne Taylor furthered this effort of identifying and theorizing the importance of the audience in political performances and developed the concept of “arcs of fusion,” which captures the agency of audiences and the “charismatic attribution by audiences.” Sociologists started to see performances as a circle, a two-way street. The clapping or booing from the audience seats is included in the analysis, rather than solely about spotlight-lit figures on the stage.

Sonnevend's analysis of the charm offensive of Kim Jong-un shows the merit of this shift in lens. In the case study of Kim Jong-un, the critical moment for his charm to work in the Western world is when the New York Times reported and recognized his diplomatic gesture. In the Summer of 2018, a selfie of Kim Jong-un, the minister of foreign affairs of Singapore, and the minister of education of Singapore went viral on Twitter. The New York Times described it "as if he were a fraternity brother blowing off his senior thesis for a night on the town." In Sonnevend's depiction, we can see that Kim Jong-un's charm is a chain effect. It started with a selfie at a conference and was amplified by news agencies and social media, eventually forming a successful performance between him and the global audience. As a result, newspapers in South Korea and the United States started to use positive words to describe Kim Jong-un, like "open and confident", "honest and bold," and a "diplomacy blitz."

Sonnevend used the notion of "charming offensive" to capture Kim Jong-un's moment. The brilliance of this term is, of course, about its implication of intentionality and the new message always buried in every social performance. The outbreak of this offensive was surprising and somewhat improvised. However, it contains an assemblage of aforementioned strategies. For instance, Kim Jong-un demasked and constructed authenticity in a series of political events by increasing the media coverage. Kim Jong-un successfully conveyed the new image of himself and North Korea to people who had tried to demonize him formerly. Further, I think it naturally brings people to ask: an offense to whom? From the probing of the recipients, the viewers, or we can conceptualize them as "participants" of charm, since they are not just passively receiving the charm, we can continue to analyze the effect on the audience, their feedback to the charming figure, and eventually a dynamic loop that mobilizes both parties. The potential for comparing Sonnevend's work and that of Alexander, Reed, and Taylor is on the call.

Social performances, especially in Alexander's sense and the school of strong program, aim to effectively convey new messages. It also sets social performance apart from everyday dramaturgy, while the latter also carries the function of maintaining social order on a micro but visible level. The everyday presentation of self through waving to friends and smiling at colleagues is the basic unit of the social world. However, when the potent political figure drafted proper scripts according to the background representation, designed authentic figures, set the stage to control *mise-en-scène*, controlled the methods of symbolic production, and eventually fused the shattered elements of successful performance, you know it is something extraordinary, it is something else. It creates a fascinating effect to revive Durkheimian rituals. The critical point is that it is an effect for whom? Performers make a scene not for themselves but for the audience. Taking one step further, the effect of fused performance conveys new impressions, new information, or new messages that refresh the preconception of the audience. It targets to exceed. *Charm*, in the same vein, is an interpersonal effect that facilitates admiration, new friendships, or political movements.

Briefly consider Sonnevend's case study of Jacinda Ardern, the Prime Minister of New Zealand. Jacinda Ardern successfully utilized Facebook to convey new messages and established a charming, liberal image with global influence. For instance, she knew that the identity of a female and a mother would bring stereotypical negative evaluation of her work, so she strategically countered this image to acquire legitimacy. Since 2017, she has publicly discussed her infertility and the process of being pregnant on Facebook and Instagram. Through her expression of the difficulties that mothers face in society and her initiation of other social media events targeting kids, Jacinda Ardern successfully overturned the imagined "motherhood penalties" to show charm. It was conveyed through these performances that Ardern is an approachable, "always there," real caregiver. Not only caring about her family, but also the citizens of New Zealand as a community. In many details that I cannot cover here, Sonnevend successfully demonstrated how the new images delivered by performances acquire recognition and eventually contribute to legitimacy and charm.

Despite considerable effort, this approach still has much room for further refinement at the current stage. Let's start by considering the concept of audience more closely. One problem of studying the audience in social performance is that spotlights make performers bright and shiny, while lowering the visibility of the audience. Imagine the people sitting in

the dark theatre. They seem to be amorphous, blurred, and silent. The first barrier, therefore, is to define the audience. The audience shares a nominal definition, since the term literally refers to the reception and viewing of the performance. But empirically, it is difficult to locate them. For charm, the accumulation of it is a lasting process. Thus, the audience is not limited to those who are at the scene of a single campaign. Many are spatially separated from the event itself, but they read the message and news, and they are also attracted and recognize the performer's charm, like US residents who read and saw Kim Jong-un's selfie on Twitter. Many more get to know the event and recognize the charm not at the moment it happened, but afterwards. Like the followers of Arden's Facebook, some of them might find it after a hundred posts, but get attracted immediately, then they browse every post beforehand, eventually recognize her charm. Temporally and spatially, the audience should be imagined as a diaspora heterogeneously distributed in society. Therefore, the audience could be a continuously flowing, ever-changing group of social actors. It lacks clear membership, but they share emotion, belief in the charming one, and sometimes collectively act like a real community.

One remaining question is about the agency of the audience. Current analysis could easily be read off as a tautology: only those who recognize the charm are counted as the audience. Since many social media platforms do not display "thumbs-down" but only "thumbs-up," we could be misguided to only see the part of the audience who provides recognition. People who pressed the "like" button are the audience, but what about those who dissent? Are they the audience of Kim Jong-un's selfies? If so, charm is not solely the recognition of "the audience," but only a part of it. Further, can they wield their dissent and eventually lead to a collapse of someone's charm? It is important to view the audience as a heterogeneous group in their attitudes towards charm or charming performances as well.

Sonnevend provides some traces of the interaction between the audience and the charming figures in her account of Orban and Merkel. For instance, Sonnevend quoted from a long-term acquaintance, who said, "He has incredible charisma about him, he's a real politician. I hate the things Orbán represents now, but each time I see him, I feel that attraction to him again. I can't draw myself out of this magic spell." It is the most precise footnote on how charm works and the reception of Orban's charm. However, documentation of such reception is not as rich as the performers' posts, sayings, or strategies in this book. This unevenness of empirical evidence might have originated from the technical issues in data collection. But the effect of it is that the "spiral of success" or the "arcs of fusion" looks one-sided, even though the intention is to present a full-scale one. I believe it is a great attempt with much potential to reveal how the audience receives, reacts to, and affects the operation of charm.

Besides being temporally and spatially heterogeneous, the recognition provided by the audience is not always tangible. The audience, especially on social media platforms, is not sitting in front of the screen all the time. They might miss a charming post or an important event easily. Even within their attention, they might just smile and press a thumb for a picture of Orban buying groceries. In this singular moment, can we interpret this thumb-up as recognition for Orban's charm? It is difficult to make this assertion. It could be interpreted as a recognition of something else. For instance, some could recognize Orban's familiarity with local goods as cordiality, not charm. It could be charming, but that's not necessarily the case. Can we draw a line between recognition of non-charming reasons and charm? If not, the analysis of recognition will be retrospective: we already know Orban is a charming person after all, so we just assert that everyone likes him and provides recognition. With this premise, we go for traces of recognition and say this thumbs-up for his post counts. The shift from charming figure to audience becomes a tautology in this warp.

So, what counts as a recognition of charm? Sonnevend describes charm as an effect built by several performing strategies. Since charm is a synthetic effect of performances, I hesitate to read the recognition of charm as recognition of a single performance or some successful usage of strategies. It should be more like a personal affiliation, generating an impulse like "a vacuum," with the charming figure. The charm and its effect are consistent, while the recognition might not be. An obfuscating layer is that the audience of one post could diverge from the audience of another one. It is easy to imagine some young generation Hungarians might appreciate Orban's effort to promote local cultural symbols or observe ordinary

lifestyles, but they do not like his conservative opinion on gender. The inconsistency is not only coming from the audience, but the charming figure also intentionally slices the recognition as well. We can also see Orban segregating the domestic audience and international audience in Sonnevend's account. It is an effective strategy according to Goffman. One of the keys to impression management is to provide the charm that each portion of the audience recognizes and to segregate their gazes. However, it obscures whether they are recognizing the performance or the performer.

In this vein, a bold reading of the relationship between recognition and charm can be raised. The model of strategy and effect implies a chronological order of the following events: performers carry out many strategies, gain recognition from the audience, and build the effect of charm. Through the discussion, we found that it is barely possible to locate recognition of charm in this temporality. Therefore, I propose to accept the retrospective view of recognition, in which recognition of charm does not exist before the charm itself. They are coexisting and co-emerging. The charm is a lasting, multi-faceted, and complex compound that cannot be reduced to many charming moments, despite being founded by them. Likewise, society is beyond the aggregation of individuals, despite consisting of them. Society emerges from successful rituals where collective effervescences spread. Likewise, charm emerges from successful performances where recognition aggregates. Even though Sonnevend used words like seduction and deception to illustrate the "danger" of charm, I think charm is worth more warning. In Weber's account, charisma is the only type of legitimacy that is subverting and has the potential to fight against the current order. In this book, Sonnevend does a great job of exhibiting different figures sharing one commonality: charm. Arden, Orban, Zarif, Kim Jong-un, and Merkel are so different in political stances, values, and policy orientations. But at one moment, each of them has the attention and the power of charm almost globally. It is their chance to make a difference to the world. This potential for change brought by charm adds another reading of recognition: the recognition is not only given out by the audience, but also it will be returned to them as a momentum to act. The study of charm could expand to the return of such recognition, for instance, what action it leads to. Sonnevend also warned us in the concluding chapter: "Charm can also be weaponized in the service of abuse." However, charm is not something that needs to be abused to be a weapon. It is born to be a weapon.

Reports on the Culture and Contemporary Life Seminar Series

By Emma Brandt and Ana López Ricoy

Global Media and Politics

April 11, 2025

By Emma Brandt

The April edition of the Culture and Contemporary Life Talk Series brought together scholars with diverse regional expertise to discuss the political and cultural stakes of media in the current moment. Kenzie Burchell (University of Toronto) brought insights from comparative news analysis in Eastern and Western Europe, Yuan Hsiao (Yale University) spoke about digital public spheres in East Asia and North America, and Jeffrey Swindle (Harvard University/UC Irvine) drew on his work in Africa and Central America.

The panelists considered the question of what media looks like today ("What isn't media today?" asked Burchell rhetorically), and how it can serve both as a place to renegotiate cultural and social norms and as a source of overload and overwhelm. Their comments converged in an analysis of the ways that both national governments and civil society actors use media as an arena for diffusing their narratives, which complicates discussions of legitimate information, protest, and violence. "Disinformation is weaponized as a term for contention regardless of whether the term is true or false," noted Hsiao, speaking about social and political conflict between citizens on social media. Swindle, meanwhile, spoke about

networks of liberal and illiberal actors that intentionally use media as tools of influence to spread their values internationally.

Overall, the panel examined changes to global public spheres due to increasing political and technological interconnectedness, highlighting the contestation and cooperation of civic and political actors through media platforms. Moderated by Emma Brandt (University of Waterloo) and Ana Velitchkova (University of Mississippi), the discussion raised issues of temporality, geography, and the modern public sphere. We extend our thanks to the panelists for their thoughtful reflections, and to the attendees for their engaged participation; we look forward to further conversations.

The Professional Sociologist: Public Facing Possibilities
May 26, 2025
By Ana López Ricoy

The closing episode of the Culture and Contemporary Life Talk Series sought to examine the role of the “public sociologist”. We had a panel of three prominent sociologists with a trajectory of doing public facing work tell us about their experiences.

First, Dr. Pawan Dhinga (Amherst College) shared his experience as a curator for the Smithsonian Museum. This work made him appreciate the wide impact of academic work when showcased in major museums. In addition, his second book was picked up by a documentary, which gave it a lot of visibility. Both experiences have led Dr. Dhinga to see the value of speaking to different audiences, outside of academia. His advice was that the most compelling public work “stems from research and advance our research arguments.”

Dr. Arlie Hochschild (UC Berkeley) shared how her book *The Second Shift* caught a lot of public attention. Writing about division of labor in the household resonated because it reflected common personal experiences. However, Dr. Hochschild also highlights that she wrote it clearly and without jargon. She invites sociologists to ask themselves: “who do we imagine is our audience as we write?” and shares the advice: “don’t write simply, don’t dumb down your ideas, but write well, write clearly”.

Dr. Daniel Morrison (University of Alabama) told us the story of how his first notions of public sociology came from discussing Michael Burawoy’s work on the topic during college. This encouraged him to continue to graduate school. Years later he became involved in the production of “The Annex” podcast after he suggested they cover a book that was just published. Since then, Dr. Morrison has hosted over 60 podcast episodes covering recently published books in sociology.

The discussion then pivoted into things people should be aware of when doing public sociology and the most rewarding things about doing it. Dr. Dhinga mentioned that this work is not always taken into account for promotion files, and—referencing our current political climate—he pointed out that there are political risks involved in being a more visible sociologist, “especially when someone like yourself is not normative.” However, Dr. Dhinga balances this by pointing out that public sociologist can be personally rewarding. Although he acknowledges that some work is impactful, this is hard to assess: “It may not have much of an impact. So the value has to be for you.”

When reflecting about the risks of public sociology Dr. Hochschild shared stories of how her work has facilitated a spotlight for people she does not agree with politically. Hence, the work you do may have unintended consequences and you can’t always control what happens to the ideas you put out there. She asks: “am I helping the right wing? Yeah, I could be”. However, she reflects that this is part of our job as sociologists, and even when there are some risks, she invites

people to “not shy away” from the public part of sociology. In terms of the rewarding experiences, she shared lessons from the relationships she built through research, highlighting how people have modelled for her “empathy bridges”, making her realize “how can we reconnect the different sectors of our culture”.

Dr. Morrison reflected on being able to run his podcast because, at his teaching-focused institution, they gave him freedom to be visibly public. Nevertheless, he shares that recently he had to include a disclaimer in his podcast as a precaution. In terms of benefits, Dr. Morrison acknowledges that one of the largest ones is “relationship building”: “the fact that I could reach out to people who I don’t know personally” and invite them to the podcast.

Overall, the panelists were enthusiastic about public sociology. Dr. Morrison described it as a way to “share some of that love and commitment to the kinds of inquiry that we’re dedicated to” and Dr. Hoschild described it as “both something I believe in and that’s been a source of enormous personal joy.”

Program of the Culture Section at the ASA Annual Meeting

Saturday, August 9th

Culture and Computational Social Science (Co-sponsored by Section on Mathematical Sociology)

West Tower, Hyatt Regency Chicago, Ballroom Level/Gold, San Francisco, 8:00-9:30am

Presider: Anna K.M. Skarpelis, CUNY-Queens

College Auditing Multimodal Large Language Models for Contextualized Hate Speech Detection Using Conjoint Experiments - Thomas Davidson, Rutgers University-New Brunswick

From Codebooks to Promptbooks: Extracting Information from Text with Generative Large Language Models - Oscar Stuhler, Northwestern University; Etienne Ollion, Centre national de la recherche scientifique; Cat Dang Ton
Generative AI in Sociological Research: A Survey of Computational Sociologists - AJ Alvero, Cornell University; Dustin S. Stoltz, Lehigh University; Marshall A. Taylor, New Mexico State University; Oscar Stuhler, Northwestern University

Interpretative Variation: How Interpretations Diverge in the U.S. Congress - Miriam Hurtado Bodell, Stanford University; Amir Goldberg, Stanford University

Discussant: Carly Knight, New York University Session

Organizer: Anna K.M. Skarpelis, CUNY-Queens College

Section on Sociology of Culture Roundtables

East Tower, Hyatt Regency Chicago, Ballroom Level/Gold, Grand Ballroom A, 10:00-11:30am

Session Organizers: Sara Tyberg, University of California-Santa Barbara; Parker Muzzerall, University of British Columbia; Kevin Kiley, North Carolina State University

Professional Development Panel: Writing To The Public

Swissotel, Concourse Level, Zurich D, 2:00-3:00pm

Presider: Manning Zhang, Brandeis University

Panelists: Allison Pugh, Johns Hopkins University; Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve, Brown University; Elena G. Van Stee, University of Pennsylvania

Session Organizer: Giovanni Zampieri, University of Padova (Italy)

Section on Sociology of Culture Business Meeting

Swissotel, Concourse Level, Zurich D, 3:00-3:30pm

Feminist and Critical Complicities, Injustices, and Culture (Race, Gender, Class Section Session, Co-sponsored by Section on Sociology of Culture)

West Tower, Hyatt Regency Chicago, Ballroom Level/Gold, Acapulco, 2:00-3:30pm

Presider: Yushan Wang, University of Pennsylvania

“Eugenics Brought Home”: White Women Physicians and Reproductive Authority - Margaret Ruth Eby, University of Pennsylvania

Statistical Gaslighting, Fetishization of Data & Dual Evidentiary Systems: OMB & Census as Sites of Racial Formation

- Nancy López, University of New Mexico-Albuquerque; Sharan Kaur Mehta, The University of New Mexico; Attiya White, University of New Mexico; Joaquín Argüello de Jesús, University of New Mexico; Michelle Johnson, University of New Mexico; Yasmiyn Irizarry, University of Texas at Austin; Edward D. Vargas, Arizona State University-Tempe

What Can Feminist Activism Teach Us About Cancel Culture? - Golshan Golriz, Queen's University

“What Can We Do at Home?” (De)Constructing the Role of the Home in Parental Engagement Discourse - Alyssa Lyons, CUNY-Lehman College

Session Organizer: Victoria Reyes, University of California- Riverside

Cultural Ideas and Ideals

Swissotel, Concourse Level, Zurich D, 4:00-5:30pm

Presider: Laura Halcomb, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Dignity, Personhood, or Sacred Selves? Complicating Medical Literature and Caregiver Narratives in Dementia Care - Cindy L. Cain, The University of Alabama at Birmingham

Expanding the Axes of Information Diversity: Cultural Toolkits and Political Participation - Hsin-Keng Ling, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor

Imagined Futures: How American Teens Understand the Nation, the World, and Themselves - Claire Schafer, University of Virginia

The Boundaries of Privacy: A Cinematic Narrative of Home Before and After the 1979 Iranian Revolution - Pouya Morshedi, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador

What a Buzzword Does: The Rhetoric of Community in Elder Care and Social Media Marketing - Guillermina Altomonte, New York University; Angèle Christin, Stanford University

Session Organizer: Laura Halcomb, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Sunday, August 10th

Cultural Mechanisms of Inequality

Swissotel, Concourse Level, Zurich D, 8:00-9:30am

Presider: Jelani I. Ince, University of Washington
Cultural and Reparative Frames and Diversity Rhetoric in U.S Law - Michaela McMillian Jenkins, Emory University
Escaping the Pink Dungeon: Professional Women Pastry Chefs Navigating Houston's Neoliberal Restaurant Industry - Melissa DeRemer, University of Houston
Everybody Shot: Youth, Violence, & Radical Inclusivity - Calvin John Smiley, CUNY-Hunter College
Racialization at Work: Coercive, Cognitive, and Normative Linkages between Who and How - Pamela A. Popielarz, University of Illinois-Chicago
Reflection upon Bourdieu's Cultural Sociology: a Case Study of the Development History of Peking Opera - Wanting Wang, University of Pennsylvania

Discussant: Desiree Salais, University of Washington
Session Organizer: Jelani I. Ince, University of Washington

Producing, Circulating, and Evaluating Culture
Swissotel, Concourse Level, Zurich D, 10:00-11:30am

Presider: Katherine Beekman, Vanderbilt University
Becoming Gendered: The Gender-Divided Market of Chinese Online Fiction - Wanze Ma, Zhejiang University
From Selling-Out to Sold-Out: Structural-Symbolic Interaction in the Gilded Age of Documentary - Christine Delp, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities
Relational Authenticity Work in the American Culinary Field - Eli R. Wilson, University of New Mexico-Albuquerque; Ellen T. Meiser, University of Hawaii-Hilo
Conformity to Beauty in the Matrix of Domination - Katie Duarte, Smith College
Valuing Cursed Objects: Mitigating Suspicions Around Engagement Rings Sold on Facebook Marketplace - Kenadi Silcox, University of Notre Dame; Terence Emmett McDonnell, University of Notre Dame

Discussant: Katherine Beekman, Vanderbilt University
Session Organizer: Laura Garbes, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities

Joint Reception: Section on Sociology of Sex and Gender; Section on Sociology of Culture; Theory Section

Offsite, Pinstripes, 6:30-8:30pm

Announcements

Publications

Gracia J. Lee. 2025. "From Equality to Economic Development: Culture, Intersectionality, and Justifications for Women's Entrepreneurship Policy in the United States, 1973–1988." *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*. Online first.

Abstract: This article examines the discursive strategies underpinning advocacy for women's entrepreneurship policy in the United States between 1973 and 1988. It demonstrates a shift in policy justifications from equality to economic development leading up to the passage of the Women's Business Ownership Act in 1988. This discursive shift shows how women evoked the cultural ideas of gender sameness and equal opportunity, yet their claims were further shaped by the masculine logics of small business, policy changes, and pushback against affirmative action in the 1980s. Bridging ideas from the civil rights, anti-poverty, and women's movements in the United States and abroad, advocates also addressed the problems and interests of intersectionally marginalized poor mothers and Black women, alongside middle-class White women. The case of women entrepreneurs thus highlights the need for attention to the

interplay between cultural ideas, the sociopolitical context, and intersectional dynamics when analyzing gender as a political category.

Kurakin, Dmitry. 2025. "Narratives we live by: sequentiality and timeliness in temporal structuring of action." *Theory and Society*. Online first.

Abstract: Cultural structures can organize experience either independently of time—‘transversely’ to its flow—or temporally—‘longitudinally’ along it. Most existing concepts—binaries, codes, norms—represent the former. Temporal structuring is much less theorized. While sociologists frequently invoke ‘narratives,’ they often use the term loosely, as a more evocative synonym for beliefs or values (e.g., ‘ecological narrative’). Recent work in pragmatism and interactionism has reintroduced temporality into theories of action. I argue, however, that further progress is hindered by the ‘aporia of time’—the enduring difficulty of simultaneously accounting for subjective and objective time. To address this problem, I adopt Ricoeur’s solution and extend it by introducing timeliness as a dimension of narrative. While narratives are typically understood as sequences of segments, timeliness captures how the duration of those segments also shapes meaning-making. It ties narrative to both the inner flow of time and social time—producing harmony or dissonance (e.g., ‘untimely,’ ‘premature,’ etc.). This helps us understand how the narratives we live by—such as the ‘American Dream’—structure our actions and our sense of temporal movement. I explore this theoretical innovation through an empirical case of educational decision-making. Using longitudinal data from Russia, I examine a puzzling pattern: vocational-track students often revise their plans mid-course. I show that this shift results from a temporal conflict between the unfolding meta-narrative of ‘coming-of-age’ they often employ and the pressures of real-life time.

Reyes, Victoria. 2025. “my body.” *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research* 14 (2): 37-44 (poem and methodological note)

Abstract: This poem was written after a sexual assault at a conference and heeds Moussawi’s (2022) call to center affect and “bad feelings” in our writing. Embracing Rosamond King’s (2019) call for radical interdisciplinarity and Audre Lorde’s (1984) assertion that poetry is not a luxury, I write how the sexual assault was both traumatic and familiar. The poem and methodological note that follows aims to open up conversations about what it means to study feelings, the body, and embodiment when for many, we are detached from our bodies. For those who have experienced traumatic events, our mind and body often disassociate, and this specter of trauma and disembodiment haunts the lives of women of color.

Reyes, Victoria. 2025. “Apologies to All the People in Palestine,” *Feminist Formations* 37 (1): 238-244 (Poesía)

Garbes, Laura. 2025. *Listeners Like Who?: Exclusion and Resistance in the Public Radio Industry*. Princeton University Press.

National Public Radio was established in 1970 with a mission to provide programming for all Americans, yet the gap between public radio’s pluralistic mandate and its failure to serve marginalized communities has plagued the industry from the start. *Listeners Like Who?* takes readers inside the public radio industry, revealing how the network’s sound and listenership are reflections of its inherent whiteness, and describing the experiences of the nonwhite journalists who are fighting for change. Centering sound in how we think about the workplace and organizational life, *Listeners Like Who?* provides insights into the media’s role in upholding racial inequality and the complex creative labor by nonwhite journalists to expand who and what gets heard on public radio.

Hayes, Adam. 2025. *Irrational Together. The Social Forces That Invisibly Shape Our Economic Behavior*. The University of Chicago Press.

In *Irrational Together*, economic sociologist Adam S. Hayes takes readers on a fascinating journey to uncover the often-unseen social forces that shape our financial behavior. Drawing on original research and engaging real-world examples, Hayes challenges not only the notion that economic decisions are purely rational but also the prevailing behavioral economics view that irrational choices stem primarily from individual beliefs. Instead, he argues that our

economic choices and actions are deeply embedded in our social and cultural contexts and that understanding these influences is crucial to fully grasp the complexities of financial decision-making. From the impact of social class and cultural capital on risk-taking and the role of social networks and group identities in shaping consumer choices to the gendered dimensions of financial advice and literacy, this book weaves together insights from sociology, behavioral economics, and cultural studies to paint a nuanced picture of how we navigate the economic landscape as inherently social beings. Why, for example, would someone choose to continue paying 20% interest on a large credit card debt rather than taking out a low-interest mortgage on their home to pay off the card? As Hayes makes clear through rigorous analysis, cultural values—like those related to home ownership—hold as much or more sway over us than financial best practices. Bridging the gap between behavioral economics and sociology, this groundbreaking work paves the way for a more holistic understanding of the social and cultural influences on economic behavior. Hayes also looks to the future and argues that to correct major disparities in our social understanding of wealth and money, we need to construct financial systems that consider a diversity of social backgrounds. With its accessible language and thought-provoking insights, *Irrational Together* is an essential guide for anyone seeking to understand the intersection of money, society, and human behavior.

Stuart, Alanna, & de Laat, Kim. 2025. Bearing psychic weight and accountability: navigating racism and microaggressions in creative work. *Work, Employment and Society*, 39(2), 361-379.

This article examines how Indigenous, Black, and people of colour (IBPOC) music industry workers navigate moments of racism and microaggressions. Through interviews with musical artists and industry workers (N = 55), the article identifies two strategies for navigating situational acts of racism: alleviation and confrontation. Those choosing to alleviate reactions to racism express a psychic weight that stays with them, while those choosing to confront racism report that social accountability guides their actions. These strategies reveal both the persistence of and resistance to the music industry's somatic norm – the corporeal baseline of whiteness against which non-White bodies are perceived and judged. They also result in a longer-term mental load that becomes constitutive of career advancement efforts.

Mears, Ashley, and Taylor Beauvais. 2025. “Learning to Like the Likes and the Hate: The Labor of Internet Fame in the New Attention Economy.” *Social Problems*, online first, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spaf028>

How do people experience internet fame? Whereas public visibility and reputation were once tightly coupled, these can be decoupled in the new media attention economy. We illustrate this with an ethnography of virality. Going viral on social media can be a destabilizing experience, given the problems of hyper-visibility, context collapse, and hateful commentary from unknown audiences. Yet many people pursue online virality, reporting the experience to be pleasurable, even addictive. Bridging classic theories of deviance and emotions with science and technology studies, we examine how content creators learn to experience virality as affectively rewarding, akin to getting high on drugs. Through immersive ethnography and interviews with high-performing content creators, we develop a phenomenology of virality. We trace how platforms afford affective experiences with the strategic delivery of metrics, which creators learn to interpret as pleasurable as they interact with each other and with their screens. By documenting the embodied and affective experience of work on social media, we show a novel mode of labor control in the age of platforms.

Vahabli, Danial. “Mentioning the Unmentionable: Perception of Opportunities, Agency, Emotions, and Identity in Iranian Resistance Rap Prior and during the Women, Life, Freedom Uprisings.” *Poetics* 111 (August 1, 2025): 102020. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2025.102020>.

- Winner of the Conflict, Social Action, and Change Division's Student Paper Competition from SSSP.

Scholarship on resistance in a strong authoritarian context focuses on everyday acts of resistance and loose solidarity networks prior to protests and overt discursive resistance during the protests. These trends are disjointed since they ignore the public discursive spaces surrounding dissidents in their everyday life and hence fail to historicize overt discursive resistance. To bridge this gap, I introduce “discursive nonmovements” which refer to covertly transgressive yet public discursive spaces that are produced independent of the government, social movement organizations, or political leaders. Such spaces facilitate the creation of loose solidarity networks prior to protests and build the foundation for communicating radical dissent in opportune times without the help of political leaders.

Further during uprisings, creators turn the discursive nonmovements to overt protest discourse. By analyzing Iranian rap songs prior and during the Women, Life, Freedom movement using critical discourse analysis, I show how songs have changed from implicit, hopeless, allegorical, and melancholic to explicit, hopeful, and vengeful. The transition is a process of “mentioning the unmentionable” which serves as a public open invitation for ordinary citizens to engage in extraordinary acts of resistance.

Kotarba, Joseph A. 2024. “Symbolic Interactionist Methods for Studying Music.” *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*. 60: 93-104.

Symbolic interactionist methods for studying music are important for two reasons. First, these methods allow us to investigate numerous facets of the everyday life world of music, one of the more accessible areas of culture. Second, these methods can be applied to and translated for use in examining other realms of culture in the arts, communications, and language. In this chapter, I organize and evaluate symbolic interactionist-inspired research on music in terms of the concepts used to drive this research. These concepts include subculture, self, identity, community, scene, idioculture, interaction, and authenticity. This line of research highlights the value of team-oriented studies; true participant-observation; applied projects; and the application of findings from music research to interactionist theory.

Blume Oeur, F. (2025). Language Loss and Return in the Cambodian Diaspora: A Sociological Memoir. *Critical Sociology*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205251354989>

Written as a memoir, this essay contemplates who is absent and present in family pictures—who has died and who has outlived the dead—to frame a conversation about how my own Cambodian family has come to speak with one another. I reflect on the incapacity to speak about trauma and the loss of native language skills as braided processes. Drawing inspiration from the practice of Du Boisian autoethnography, as well as the work of Cambodian scholars and memory workers, my memoir offers self-reflection to probe a history of how colonialism and whiteness engendered the Cambodian genocide and shape their sonic reverberations: wounds that repeat within and across generations. Yet a return is more than a reliving of injury. I describe how so through four relationships and their varied returns: with my mother, my father, myself, and my son. Fifty years after the Cambodian genocide, this essay embraces the power of memoir writing in the face of social loss, interrogates empire’s aphasic relationship with Cambodia, turns the gaze on the dark shadows of refugee impairment, and examines how broken language allows me as a language broker to translate forms of affirmation for refugees and their children.