Handbook of Cultural Sociology

Edited by
John R. Hall, Laura Grindstaff,
and Ming-Cheng Lo

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

Introduction

Culture, lifeworlds, and globalization

John R. Hall, Laura Grindstaff, and Ming-Cheng Lo

Let's start by considering some culture. In recent years, aided by the rise of the internet, the fascination with *animé* (animation) that started in Japanese *manga* (comics) has spread worldwide. Like many other forms of popular culture, *animé* generates interest ranging from casual engagement to organized fandom. But in Japan, a preoccupation with *animé* has intersected with another cultural reality—the difficulties that some adults have establishing friendships with people of the opposite sex. The convergence manifests in *moe* ↓★★★ intense imaginary relationships that some (typically male) Japanese establish with (typically female) *animé* characters. However, *moe* relationships are not always imaginary, private affairs. In one district of Tokyo, middle-aged men can be found carrying around body pillows with printed covers featuring full-size *animé* girls with their trademark doe eyes. One man, claiming to have been brought back from the brink of suicide by his 2-D relationships, touts the possibility of having more than one pillowcase and "dating around" (something he believes is discouraged in normal social life). Other men reportedly prefer 2-D over 3-D relationships because the former, unlike the latter, are "pure," unthreatening, and unconditional (Katayama 2009; http://www.anime-bliss.com/smf/index.php?action=printpage;topic=201.0).

In Japan and elsewhere, people will find elements both familiar and bizarre in *moe* culture; many will also no doubt be disturbed, just as people are variously disturbed by video games that supposedly blur fantasy and reality, by the popularity of staged "reality" television shows, or by the pursuit of status through lavish "lifestyle" purchases. Ultimately, what is considered normal, bizarre, fictive, or real is a cultural matter, and a socially constructed one—either on a broad public basis, in face-to-face social life, or both. As the anthropologist Clifford Geertz once wrote, people are animals "suspended in webs of significance" that they themselves spin (1973: 5).

Of course, how people spin "webs of significance" is culturally variable. Multiple social and cultural considerations shape the ethical, moral, and aesthetic sensibilities that yield perspectives on whether something appears strange, foreign, or bizarre. In particular, in a rapidly globalizing era, it is increasingly difficult to sustain the stereotypical assumption that such variations occur primarily along societal or national lines. Thus, the *moe* phenomenon may (for now) be localized among certain Japanese men, but we

would be grossly mistaken to generalize it as characteristic of "Japanese society." By the opposite token, frustrations over love and romantic relationships are expressed in culturally diverse ways around the world. Although most of them do not involve dating one's pillowcase, we should not miss the widely shared social tension that underwrites alternative cultural expressions of frustration.

As the example of Japanese *moe* culture suggests, culture, social life, and social institutions are mutually implicated. Following any single strand of cultural analysis is likely to quickly open out into a broad set of lifeworldly considerations: of personal relationships, everyday life, economic institutions and their cultural bases, public etiquette, transnational differences, technology and culture, global diffusion, and more. The ways in which the social and cultural intersect and mutually constitute one another routinely connect lifeworlds and globalization. A specifically cultural sociology, as we editors envision it, takes up the challenge of understanding these analytic relationships. A cultural sociology, optimally, is sociology *tout court*.

A brief history of cultural sociology

Sociology is itself cultural, and triply so. First, the discipline has always involved cultural acts of social reflexivity, initially born of Enlightenment dreams confronting the possibilities and hard realities of the Industrial Revolution. Second, culture as an analytic issue can be found at the center of much classical and post-classical sociology ↓*** for example in Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Simmel, Veblen, Gramsci, Pareto, Mannheim, Horkheimer and Adorno, and Parsons. Third, although the nineteenth-century *Methodenstreit* (conflict over methods) in the social sciences will continue to be debated, there can no longer be any serious doubt concerning one contention in that debate: cultural meanings are fundamental to organization of the social and how it unfolds (Hall 1999: 10–11, 45–46).

Despite the importance of culture to the sociological enterprise, controversy about it has divided the discipline virtually from the beginning. Indeed, various sociological dismissals make the contemporary turn toward culture all the more striking. The antimonies evident during the high-modern epoch of sociology following World War II and the rapid eclipse of that epoch in the 1960s and 1970s are revealing. A wide variety of sociologists interested in social structure—including both positivists and marxists—when they discussed culture at all (typically by reference to ideas and values), dismissed it as ephemeral, lacking any robust role in social causation. Marxists were most emphatic, identifying an ideal "superstructure" as little more than a reflection of the material "base" of the society—constituted in the forces and relations that organize production. Differences between positivist and marxist structuralist theories already suggest that the high moment of modernist sociology was not all of a piece. But there is more: even sociological approaches sympathetic to cultural analysis sometimes could have a dialectical tendency to undermine any project of cultural sociology. Thus, Durkheim's analysis of the transition from organic to mechanical solidarity might be read as a lament about the erosion of shared communitarian meanings binding people to the social order, and modern theorists of secularization made direct arguments about the declining importance of religion for public life, which left the status of the (e.g. Parsonian) idea of cultural values as an overarching societal subsystem in doubt.

Nor did the waning of the high modernist epoch of sociology eliminate antipathy to cultural analysis. Perhaps the most daring expression of a disinterested view was offered

by Theda Skocpol, who, in *States and Social Revolutions*, acknowledged that her hypotheses gave "short shrift" to any importance of revolutionary ideology in accounting for success of revolutions, because "Peasant goals in the French, Russian, and Chinese Revolutions were not intrinsically different from previous peasant aims in rebellions or riots" (1979: 114, original emphasis).

Yet those who would chart the emergence of cultural sociology could find stirrings long before Skocpol wrote her pithy dismissal. In the conventional division of academic labor before World War II, culture—whether understood as systems of ideas, meanings, and practices, or as material tools and products of human action remained largely the purview of anthropologists. However, from World War II through 1970, as a perusal of Sociological Abstracts will show, things changed. Sociologists in Europe and North and South America were exploring the work of Thorstein Veblen, framing a sociology of comparative literature, studying issues of cultural relativity, and considering art, theater, radio, popular music, and the "jam session," as well as cultural aspects of individual consciousness, mass society, social and religious conflict, and even terror.

From the 1970s onward, to borrow Parsons's language, the differentiation of now conventional subfields—stratification, social movements, family, and so on—took place across the entire discipline of sociology. Following this pattern, the sociology of culture emerged as a distinct enterprise in the 1970s and 1980s, centered on questions about popular culture and high culture largely refracted in relation to conventional modern tropes of Culture (in a holistic sense), subcultures, and countercultures as relatively coherent packages; and increasingly focused on issues of the production of culture. But a puzzle remains. The big surprise was not that the sociology of culture, like other specialties, became a recognizable and increasingly coherent subfield, but that cultural issues began to permeate virtually all subfields of sociology, such that today people conventionally talk about a "cultural sociology"—that is, a general sociology that is cultural on every front, in every subdiscipline. How is it that cultural sociology has become so important so widely? There are both sociohistorical and intellectual shifts that help explain this development.

The sociohistorical shifts certainly include the broad transformation from a society organized along industrial lines to a society centrally ordered through a postindustrial logic. This shift created conditions in which leisure gained in importance relative to work, yielding an increased valuation to self-expression through cultural choices and practices, thus turbocharging sociological interest in the (often "popular") culture of everyday life.

Paralleling the socioeconomic shift, beginning in the late 1950s and more concertedly in the 1960s, eruptions of diverse, often broad-based, social and countercultural movements challenged the previously conventional assumption that culture could be viewed as a relatively coherent societal package. Both the anti-Vietnam War movement and civil-rights movements in the US and radical movements in Europe (France in 1968, for example) shifted away from strictly class-based issues. Moreover, emergent "new," non-classed-based social movements (e.g. concerned with gender, ethnicity, the environment) often focused not only on pursuit of political objectives but also on the construction of new cultural identities. The disruptions brought by such movements, including countermovements (for example of religious fundamentalism) unveiled the "arbitrary" and socially constructed character of previously conventional and taken-for-granted institutionalized cultural patterns. In short, under postindustrial conditions, cultural objects, practices, and processes arguably became more central to how the

social works. Insofar as sociology is an empirical discipline, these shifts inspired new attention to culture as an object of sociological analysis.

As for intellectual developments, they subtend the essays in this handbook. In brief, a sociology that could be mapped fairly completely fifty years ago in relation to structural-functionalism, systems theory, quantitative empiricism, symbolic interactionism, and radical critique underwent an efflorescence that opened it up to wider intellectual currents. The consequences for cultural analysis in sociology became forged by appropriations of diverse approaches and thinkers—hermeneutics (e.g. Clifford Geertz, Paul Ricoeur), semiotics and symbolic structuralism (Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Lévi-Strauss), phenomenology and social constructionism (Peter Berger and colleagues, and Dorothy Smith, all drawing on Alfred Schutz), poststructuralism (philosophically, Jacques Derrida; epistemologically and in a way that broke with all conventions while maintaining a program of substantive analysis, Michel Foucault), feminist theory and analysis (Judith Butler, Donna Haraway), and postcolonial theory (Franz Fanon, Edward Said, and, in a somewhat different vein, W.E.B. duBois).

These currents and their interminglings both threatened and at times enriched structural marxism and structuralist sociologies, but in the final analysis, historical events overwhelmed intellectual ones: the end of the Cold War spelled the end of any robust marxist intellectual project. Arguably, this development sharpened the broad "cultural turn" that was by then already taking place. Because this turn occurred with near simultaneity across the human sciences, the importance of interdisciplinarity cannot be overstated: the cultural turn was both a cause and consequence of increasing dialogue across the social sciences and humanities. For cultural sociology and certain of its "sister fields" such as cultural history, cultural anthropology, and cultural studies, interdisciplinary dialogue was particularly fruitful.

Certain key developments carried inquiry along the cultural turn. One was what Lawrence Stone (1979) called a "revival of narrative." And with narrative came cultural history, itself something of a successor to the social history that in the 1950s and 1960s had begun to supplant grand metanarrative and political history. Amplifying this development, the cultural turn in the corridors of literary criticism and the humanities more generally encompassed a turn toward history, in the so-called "new historicism" championed by Stephen Greenblatt, and a turn toward social theory, in which Pierre Bourdieu gained a considerable following. The border crossings and poachings in all directions have proceeded apace ever since.

Given that the anthropological enterprise was fundamentally cultural from the beginning, the cultural turn there might seem a non-event. But just as empirical observation and structural analysis replaced armchair philosophizing during the early days of the discipline, feminist and postmodern critiques of objectivity challenged the modernist goal of theorizing case studies in relation to general social processes. Attention to the politics of meaning and representation, coupled with political critiques of asymmetrical power relations and exploitation of research subjects, has ushered in a more thoroughly "cultural" cultural anthropology, one increasingly concerned with the symbolic and ideological dimensions of both "objects" of inquiry and categories and modes of analysis. Similar concerns have informed the rise and development of cultural studies. From the emergence in the 1960s of the Birmingham School in Britain to current trends in postcolonial and queer scholarship both in the US and elsewhere, there has been an increasing recognition that social life is thoroughly constituted by language, subjectivity, and power.

outside the West, and, for all scholarship, to bring comparative cases and global processes into consideration where appropriate. The resulting handbook, with its diverse short essays, blurs genres. Organized like a conventional handbook, it nevertheless covers topics in a way more encyclopedic.

We are indebted to various handbooks that precede and inform our approach. Lyn Spillman's (2002) *Cultural Sociology*, for example, is important not only for its representation of the field but also for its thoughtful discussions of how cultural sociology developed over time, and why the field differentiated as it did in response to various institutional pressures and disciplinary practices. Spillman employs the concept of meaning-making as her organizing principle, using it to connect cultural sociology's different analytic traditions—notably theoretical, institutional, and interactional/ethnographic—as well as contributors' different substantive foci. In a related vein, Jacobs and Hanrahan's (2005) *Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Culture* employs aesthetics as a metaphor for understanding the operation of culture in society, and for holding in productive tension the various strands of cultural sociology as represented in their volume. For them, an aesthetic conception of culture highlights the ways in which culture mediates agency and structure, honoring difference while also facilitating social solidarity.

Both collections—and other scholarship as well—move sociological discussions beyond arguments about whether culture is derivative or autonomous—by insisting upon more complex, contradictory formulations in which culture is both the medium of everyday lived experience and the scaffolding on which institutions and systems emerge, cohere, and change. The authors contributing to the present handbook are in productive dialogue with this scholarship even as they expand the conversation. They address many different social manifestations with cultural aspects—discourses, identities, practices, material objects, systems, beliefs and values, and so on. Although this complexity makes the field of cultural sociology somewhat unwieldy, it also invites interdisciplinary cross-fertilization and disperses cultural authority. We do not presume to speak for our authors, but, for our part, we believe that this Broad Program of cultural sociology, connecting lifeworld and globality, is the basis on which both sociology and cultural analysis more generally can best proceed in the twenty-first century.

References

Adams, Julia, Clemens, Elisabeth, and Orloff, Ann. 2005. "Introduction: Social Theory, Modernity, and the Three Waves of Historical Sociology." Pp. 1–72 in Julia Adams, Elisabeth Clemens, and Ann Orloff, eds., *Remaking Modernity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Berger, Peter L., Berger, Brigitte, and Kellner, Hansfried. 1973. *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness*. New York: Random House.

Chakrabarty, D. 2000. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Connell, R.W. 1997. "Why Is Classical Theory Classical?" *American Journal of Sociology* 102: 1511–57.

Eisenstadt, S.N. 1999. "Multiple Modernities in an Age of Globalization." *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 24: 283–95.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1987 (1981). *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2: *Lifeworld and System*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Hall, John R. 1999. *Cultures of Inquiry From Epistemology to Discourse in Sociohistorical Research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

——. 2003. "Cultural History Is Dead (Long Live the Hydra)." Pp. 151–67 in Gerard Delanty and Engin Isin, eds., *Handbook for Historical Sociology*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

——. 2009. *Apocalypse: From Antiquity to the Empire of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.

Jacobs, Mark. 2009. "Message from the Chair: Global Differences in Conceptualizing Culture." *Culture*, newsletter of the American Sociological Association Section on the Sociology of Culture 23(1): 1–3.

Jacobs, Mark D. and Hanrahan, Nancy Weiss. 2005. *The Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Culture*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Katayama, Lisa. 2009. "Love in 2-D." *New York Times Magazine*. July 26: 19–21.

Lo, Ming-Cheng. 2002. *Doctors within Borders: Profession, Ethnicity, and Modernity in Colonial Taiwan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Scott, James. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Skocpol, Theda. 1979. *States and Social Revolutions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Spillman, Lyn. 2002. *Cultural Sociology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Steinmetz, George. 2007. *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Stone, Lawrence. 1979. "The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History." *Past & Present* 85 (November): 3–24.

Tilly, Charles. 1984. *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.