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A Message from the Chair
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History and Social Identity: The Socio-Cognitive Organization of Ancestry and Descent

One of the most common ways of linking the past and the present is through historic "chains" of individuals.¹ The essentialist undertones of such genealogical bridges are the foundations on which our familial, ethnic, and national identities are typically based. As we knew long before modern genetics, social continuity seems more convincing when it entails elements of biological continuity. By presenting their fellow countrymen's blood as the same blood that had once flowed in the veins of Akhenaten and Ramses, early Egyptian nationalists tried to invoke a national "personality" that has persisted throughout the thirty-two centuries separating them from those ancient pharaohs.

Genealogical affiliations are usually articulated in terms of ancestry and "descent." That involves envisioning actual chains of individuals forming continuous "lines of succession" throughout history. Such chains are often institutionalized in the form of dynasties, like the royal Japanese line featuring Emperor Akhito as a descendant of Jimmu, who allegedly founded it in 660 B.C.

Not all social dynasties, however, are based on biological ancestry. We also articulate social descent in terms of formal occupancy of "offices," as when we depict Bill Clinton as the forty-second link in a presidential chain going back to Washington. Based on a direct mentoring

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A Symposium on "The Future"
with contributions by
Ann Mische, Rutgers University
Megan Sweeney, Rutgers University

Editor's Note: *With the new millennium upon us, it is natural for thoughts to run to "the future." The two essays to follow suggest new and exciting ways in which sociologists might incorporate the concept of the future into their studies.*

Projects and Possibilities: Researching Futures in Action

Ann Mische
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In his introduction to *The Sociology of Hope* (1979), Henri Desroche describes the religious tradition of the miracle of the rope. In various cultural renditions of the story, a person throws a rope into the air, where, instead of falling down, it supports him in his climb toward heaven. "Hope is a rope," Desroche says, in that it too is founded upon the unfounded, the imaginary, and yet "it holds," it

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Charity Begins at Home(Pages):
Civic Involvement and the Internet
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A popular pastime of the past few years has been documenting the transformation of civil society in America. Some writers paint a discouraging picture. Robert Putnam (2000) sees our present society, as suffering from a virus of civic disengagement. More and more of us are "bowling alone" and losing our chances to build social capital. If we compare ourselves to our parents, we will find that we are less engaged, less connected than the last generation.

Other writers, like Robert Wuthnow (1998), paint a more optimistic picture. Wuthnow agrees that because we switch jobs often, because a sizeable number of us live

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chain leading from Georg Simmel (through Robert Park, Everett Hughes, Erving Goffman, and myself) to my own students, I consider them his great-great-great-grandstudents!

Simmel was the first one to define social structure in terms of interpersonal ties, and it may actually be useful to apply his social networks perspective to the way we envision diachronic ties among past and present members of descent systems. We normally calculate the length of such chains in terms of generations, the temporal equivalents of "degrees of separation." That helps psychologically compress actual historical distances. As I envision a line of twenty people linking me to Christopher Columbus, he seems somewhat closer to me, since "twenty persons away" feels closer than "five hundred years ago." Such distances seem even shorter, since we actually need fewer *interactional* contacts to cross them. My great-grandmother, who was born in Russia in 1876 and died when I was fifteen, could have actually heard from her own great-grandmother an eyewitness account of the Napoleonic wars! Realizing that I may be just "two conversations away" from a contemporary of Napoleon (or Haydn, who died in 1809) offers a peculiar sense of participation in history. The feeling that "I was almost there" when Napoleon invaded Russia invokes the kind of interpersonal transitivity that operates when we hire someone who knows someone we know.

My being situated just "two conversations away" from a contemporary of Haydn (who was born in 1732!) is also a function of the fact that my great-grandmother died at the age of eighty-seven, thereby calling attention to the number of baton passes such imaginary relay races involve, and thus to how the number of links connecting us to the past affects our experience of historical distances. That is why buying a house whose previous owners lived there for only two years still makes their direct predecessors feel almost prehistorical to us.

The symbolic immortality that such chains entail presupposes some temporal overlap or at least contiguity between consecutive links. If successive monarchs are to constitute a continuous royal "line," one should not notice any gaps between them. Despite some actual periods of vacancy (from 304 to 308 as well as from 638 to 640), we regard John Paul II as the 265th link in a seemingly gapless apostolic chain going back to Saint Peter.

Yet lines of descent also connect us to our contemporaries. Common descent is a powerful basis of mechanical solidarity. Knowing that we descend from some common ancestor makes us feel "connected."

Such solidarity is the basis of lineages, whose size is proportional to the number of generations separating members from their common ancestor. The deeper the lineage, the more inclusive it is. This underscores the cen-

trality of history to the organization of our identity, which also depends on the temporal depth of our social ties. Our various levels of identification are related to the number of generations we go back, since a greater number entails a wider range of "related" contemporaries. While I only need to go a few generations back to bond with my distant cousins, I need several million years to locate the common ancestor I share with orangutans!

Social distance is partly a function of historical distance from some common ancestor. We generally regard as closer to us individuals or groups whose historical distance from some ancestor we commonly share is shorter than others'. Social proximity is partly a function of having a recent common ancestor!

The interdependence of the social breadth and historical depth of lineages is reflected in their conventional representation in family trees that show how the more recent the phylogenetic split between objects the shorter the social distance between them. A perfect manifestation of such representations of descent are phylogenetic trees that depict the evolutionary history of populations, since genetic distances between organisms are measured in terms of the amount of time that has passed since the species to which they belong diverged. We measure such distance by calculating the number of genetic mutations that differentiate populations from one another. If there is one different alpha chain hemoglobin amino acid between humans and gorillas yet twenty-six between humans and rabbits, we are clearly closer to gorillas than to rabbits, as much less time has evidently passed since we split off from the former than from the latter. Such "molecular clocks" underscore the relation between the breadth and genealogical depth of any social identity.

They also remind us, however, how closely linked we all are, which receives much genealogical support the deeper in time we venture and thus explains the centrality of genealogy to the socio-cognitive construction of social groups ranging from families, ethnic communities, and nations to the entire human race. Indeed, the difference between all those social clusters is just a matter of scale!

Yet such clusters entail different levels of historicity. Although we are all cousins at some level (since we all share some common ancestors), the question is whether we are first or 731st "cousins." Indeed, if we go back enough in time, our "cousins" also include penguins, anchovies, and cockroaches!

How far back in time we go to find a common ancestor is a matter of choice. After all, it is I who decided whether to regard only my first or also my fifth cousins as "relatives" whom I had to invite to my wedding. It is up to us to mentally truncate extended families that can in theory include every organism that has ever lived on our planet! We must thus recognize the nonbiological nature of cognitive decisions concerning the level at which we experience our identity, since different levels of cousinhood connect me to Ital-

ians, Australian aborigines, camels, and pears.

Yet such choices are not just personal. They often presuppose *sociomental* structures of genealogical relatedness and are therefore social. It is social convention that dictates how many degrees of separation would still qualify us as each other's cousins, thereby disqualifying us as sexual partners.

Yet society dictates not only the length of the mental thread linking generations but also the *rules* according to which we weave it in our minds. Since nature provides us with both fathers and mothers, it is *society* that makes us choose between matriliney and patriliney as the single genealogical route through which we transfer property rights from one generation to the next. Only society's wish to establish the continuity of its structure in the least ambiguous (and therefore potentially contentious) way accounts for our organizing intergenerational succession unilineally.

Having established whether descent is organized in an ambilineal or unilineal fashion, it is also society that determines whether unilineality is to involve matrilineal or patrilineal descent. And it is particularly in institutionalizing patriliney as the predominant route of intergenerational succession that its role is most evident.

Only rarely does birth provide infallible evidence of paternity. Among many species, offspring do not even know who their fathers are. That would also be true of humans were it not for the institutionalization of marriage and the social taboo against female sexual promiscuity, both designed to enhance paternal legitimacy.

A strictly patrilineal organization of descent is inevitably social. Patriliney ignores those responsible for biological reproduction by basing its entire descent system on those responsible for social reproduction. The social organization of human intergenerational continuity is thus often done without women. From looking at biblical genealogies one would never guess that they actually played even a minor part in such multigenerational process of "begetting." In such descent systems women have formally no descendants!

Genealogies, in short, are accounts of social rather than strictly biological descent. Various forms of adoption further remind us that the ancestors from which we trace our descent are not necessarily our biological progenitors.

Long after they die, ancestors still constitute formidable foci of collective sentiments, thereby commanding considerable symbolic presence. That is why we draw on them as sources of legitimacy (which is not confined to biological ties, as evident from presidential candidates' attempts to invoke past presidents in an effort to weave in voters' minds a string of popular presidents leading to themselves. Such symbolic threads often seem more seamless than they actually are and may even entail skipping generations that might spoil otherwise "neat" narratives.

Such concern with pedigree accounts for our obses-

sive preoccupation with our "roots." Who we are is still affected by where we genealogically come from. That explains the serious identity crises undergone by people who only as adults come to discover that they have actually been adopted.

Since pedigree is measured in terms of number of steps of filiation, the greater one's ancestral depth the more convincing one's legitimacy as a descendant, as evident from comparing third- and tenth-generation pure-bred canine "champions." The most venerated ancestors are therefore often the "founding fathers" from whom entire lineages allegedly descend (which explains why the last Shah of Iran tried to weave a seemingly gapless 2,500-year symbolic thread linking him to Persia's first king Cyrus despite the fact that his dynasty actually went back only to his father). Founding ancestors help solidify the tie among all members of the group that claims descent from them, which is why racists often promote the vision of the various "races" as descending from altogether separate ancestors.

Origin myths that tell how we collectively began are obviously critical to group identity. By tracing a symbolic thread connecting all members to a collective point of origin they provide the group's history with a certain "direction."

As evident from the general reaction to Darwin, deep concerns about origins often generate disputes. When Clinton chose Uganda as the site of his 1998 apology for America's historical role in enslaving Africans, many African-Americans regarded the genealogical depth he invoked in that choice somewhat exaggerated. "The former slaves are here," noted one black New Yorker, "not back in Africa"!

There are many alternative answers to the question where "ancestral rivers" actually begin. After all, like the Mississippi, we all have more than just one genealogical "source" and therefore also multiple genealogically-based identities. Even a staunch advocate of unilineal Pan-Africanist visions such as Du Bois could actually trace his descent back to his Dutch, rather than African, roots.

Yet while it is a matter of choice in what genealogical direction as well as how far back in time we trace such "roots," it is not just a personal but often a social choice grounded in social norms and traditions of remembering. Although memory is clearly a mental process, it is a personal *as well as a social one*.

ENDNOTES

¹ This piece is an abridged version of a section of a chapter from my forthcoming book *Time Maps: Social Memory and the Topography of the Past*.

undergirds actions, it produces events. In this sense hope is real, or rather, has real social effects, even if in "believing they are bringing heaven down to earth, they are only moving their ancient lands up towards new heavens." Hope is both constituted and constitutive; it provides the emotional substratum, so to speak, of the dialectic between the old and the new, between the reproduction and the transformation of social structures as these processes figure in thinking and acting individuals. "[F]orces of *pressure* pose and define a question. But it is the forces of *aspiration* which formulate and offer an answer" (Desroche 1979, p. 3).

Although cultural analysis has seen a recent surge of interest in the "social imaginary," social scientists have dealt only peripherally, when at all, with the impact of the imagined future on social events. Even when they have taken seriously the category of the imaginary, most have used it to understand how people represent their present reality (and how the categories of those representations change), or else how people imaginatively reconstruct the past. A seeming exception is the rich tradition of utopian literature; Desroche's book is in fact a study of the connection between religious millenarianisms, utopian movements, and revolutionary ideologies. Certainly the study of such grand, totalizing hopes can teach us much about the mobilizing force of imagined futures. But what of the equally powerful (and not unrelated) force exerted by the less grand, less total aspirations of everyday lives, the future images that inform social practices from the mundane to the heroic? How can we understand the social impact of visions of a projected future, taking into account both the institutional determinants of hopes and their personal inventiveness? How can we document the repercussions, often contrary to intentions, "back from" such projected futures to the production and transformation of social structures?

These are some of the questions to be addressed by social science research that attempts to look seriously at the effects of a projected future as a dynamic force undergirding social change. In this essay I want to discuss briefly some of the reasons why the analysis of the future has been so neglected in sociological theory and research, then sketch a possible framework for reincorporating it, and finally describe one attempt to apply this perspective to empirical research on social movement activism.

Projectivity and a theory of action

One fruitful way, I argue, to incorporate the future into sociological research is to revive the notion of *projects*, or *projectivity*, as a tool for social analysis. With roots in Heideggerian existentialism and the social phenomenology of Alfred Schutz (1967), the idea of projectivity captures an essential aspect of human agency (one of three dimensions described by Mustafa Emirbayer and I in our *AJS* article, "What is Agency?" [1998]). However, it has never been widely used in American sociology, due in part to the his-

torical division between structural-functionalism and the abstract voluntarism of rational choice. In his early action theory, Parsons was in fact highly attuned to the future-oriented dimension of action (whether normative or utilitarian), which he described as its "teleological" structure, that is, the fact that action always refers to a possible future state, "which would not come into existence if something were not done about it by the actor" (Parsons 1968, p.45). However, by the end of his career, the integrative-systemic conception of structural functionalism had largely eclipsed the temporal dimension of his theory. As a result, concern with the future was abandoned by culturally inclined normative theorists in most of American social science. Unfortunately, it became almost the sole domain of rational choice theory, which reduced the future to post-hoc rationalizations of action abstracted from the human experience of time.

In a much neglected criticism of Parsons's early action theory, Schutz (1967, 1978) developed the concept of the "project" as the "primary and fundamental meaning of action." Schutz was concerned to understand action from the subjective perspective of the temporally embedded actor, insisting that the teleological structure of action appears very different to the observer who sees the act as a completed, past event capable of objective interpretation, than it does to the actor who sees it as a yet-to-be-realized future possibility. Human action, as Schutz observed, is constructed within an imaginative horizon of multiple plans and possibilities; actors engage in a retrospective/prospective process by which they draw upon previously collected "stocks of knowledge," or "typifications," of possible paths of actions, while "fantasizing" in relation to the developing act in progress. Such an imaginative process differs from that of choosing among clearly defined possibilities, as instrumentalist theories propose; rather, it entails focusing "rays of attention" upon a plurality of possible states until one or more alternatives detach themselves "like overripe fruit" and appear before the reflective consciousness as possible objects of choice (Schutz 1967, pp. 67-68).

One implication of this conception is that one only knows with clarity what the choice is after it has been taken, through what Garfinkel (1984) calls "post-hoc accounting practices." For Garfinkel, as for "practice theorists" such as Bourdieu and Giddens, engagement of the future clearly plays second fiddle to the deeper layers of the "taken-for-granted" practical consciousness underlying conscious choice-making. Bourdieu's *habitus* and Giddens's structuration theory provide a useful corrective to an overly voluntaristic conception of future orientations by linking action to the recursive relationship between received structures and situated practices. In this view, aspirations are strongly conditioned by one's position in a social field, which in turn is determined by the objective structure of social relations as well as by the dispositions and competences internalized during one's

early experiences.

Yet there is a danger here: in basing an analysis of future possibility on the “objective” structure of fields of action, we risk losing precisely that element that Schutz had warned Parsons not to neglect: namely, the open, indeterminate, “polythetic” perception of the field from the point of view of the actor surveying the future in terms of multiple possibilities, as opposed to the “monothetic” view of the actor (or observer) who interprets the decision after it has already been taken. For this reason, Bourdieu provides us with a theory of “strategies” and “expectations,” but not, in Schutz’s sense, of projects. And neither Bourdieu nor Giddens – nor Schutz himself, for that matter – offers an adequate theorization of how such projects can be restructured through imaginative human practice. Taking a step beyond all of these theorists, I would argue that the process of projectivity involves creative as well as willful foresight; during the ongoing procedure of motivated, selective “protention”, as Schutz calls it, received categories of thought and action may be put together in new ways through a process of imaginative experimentation with projected courses of action.

Researching projects-in-formation

If hope is a rope, as Desroche suggests, which is cast into an uncertain and shifting future horizon, then how do we study it? Perhaps we are justified in backing away when it comes to the tenuous, hard to see (or verify) effects of future projections on social action. Most survey or interview research is based upon post-hoc reports of attitudes, goals, or motivations, in which the open-ended, multi-pronged, experimental nature of future perspectives has been smoothed over into ex post narratives that are almost certainly more coherent and orderly than the process of decision-formation that preceded them. One way to overcome this problem is through longitudinal research, in which answers to queries about expectations, aspirations or goals at T1 can be significantly correlated with particular outcomes at T2. There may, of course, be confounding variables (perhaps the same social conditions that “cause” the particular future perspective also underlie the outcomes in question), so locating the “real social effects” of a particular way of imagining the future is a slippery task at best.

As cultural analysts, we should also suspect that the process isn’t quite captured by a simple correlation between attitude and outcome. We need to know something about the character of the rope itself: how long or short it is, its thickness, strength, and flexibility; whether it consists of a single cord or multiple interwoven strands; whether it is cast upward to one imagined target or to several targets at once. And as rope-climbing is a temporal process, we also must be aware that the shape and feel of the rope change over time, as do the winds buffeting the climber and the latter’s own sense of capacity to bridge the sociotemporal distance the rope represents. Moreover (and here is where the rope analogy begins to break down), one does not in fact climb alone; the process of project-formation also entails the capacity to interpret and coordinate one’s actions in accordance with the motives and projects of other ac-

tors.

In my own work on social movements, I suggest a working definition of projects as *evolving, imaginatively constructed configurations of desired social possibility, accompanied by an implicit or explicit theorization of personal and/or collective capacity to act to achieve that possibility*. These always involve a narrative construction of projected future time, envisioned with varying degrees of clarity or detail. Such “projective narratives” can vary in their *depth*, or extension (i.e., their reach into the short, middle, or long term future), as well as in their *breadth*, or complexity (i.e., the range of factors or possibilities considered at any given moment). They can also posit different forms of *logical connection* among different temporal elements. The relationship between tactic and strategy is one example of such a logical connection, as are various other narrative structures, such as dramatic rupture, redemptive intervention, pragmatic problem-solving or incremental reform. All of these can be considered different *genres* of projective narratives, representing culturally embedded (and often socially contested) models of how processes of social change are envisioned to occur.

Personal and collective projects

In my ethnographic work on Brazilian youth activists in the 1990s, I examine how all three of these dimensions – depth, breadth, and logical connection – are involved in the construction of projects within (and across) particular organizational contexts. I do this by studying the discourse and practice of youth activists who at a formative moment in their own personal histories become involved in collectivities whose projects to some degree surpass their own. Here we need to distinguish between the personal or “life” projects of particular activists, and the collective projects articulated by the organizations and movements to which they belong. An individual’s projects can include what we might call “life goals” or objectives, related to institutionalized trajectories of family, career, or lifestyle; they may also include what Rom Harre (1984) calls “projects of personhood,” which in Western culture tend to be aimed at cultivating a sense of ourselves as autonomous actors with unique, relatively consistent, and socially recognizable personal “identities.”

Collective projects, on the other hand, can be defined as public narratives of proposed interventions by groups or collectivities (Mische and Pattison 2000; Mische 1996). Such narratives clearly have a projective dimension, in that they “embed identities in time and place” (Somers 1992); they give a sense of where a society and an organization have come from, while also delimiting where actors think, hope, or fear they may be going. Sometimes those collective projects encompass the youths’ own “projects-in-formation”; sometimes they expand or challenge them; and sometimes they conflict with or cause internal dissension in an activist’s perceived sense of direction and possibility.

More often than not, the challenge of reconciling personal and collective futures is compounded by the fact that most of these youth belong to not one, but multiple orga-

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nizations. Nearly all student activists in my study, for example, also belong to political parties and/or factions; many have previous or continuing experience in church, community, or professional organizations; many of them also accumulate multiple positions in internal coordinating bodies nested within these distinct movement sectors. This not only keeps them very busy; it also provides them with the challenging task of balancing multiple sets of collective projects. The institutional calendars of student, partisan, religious, and professional domains impinge upon and interact with each other through the intermediation of actors who participate in more than one. This sociotemporal juggling act creates both opportunities for and barriers to coordination, alliance-building, and joint action among groups and individuals, thus having a real effect upon day-to-day social process.

The projective narratives of different organizations have distinct temporal constructions that teach activists particular ways of imagining short-term, medium-term, and long-term futures. For example, in both the religious groups and many of the "old left" organizations, projections about the future take the form of well-developed narratives involving world-historical actors, regularized stages of conflict, climactic dramas and redemptive resolutions. However, while these narratives can sometimes be relatively fixed and rigid in their long-term segments, they can be incredibly flexible and open-ended in the short-term, allowing for a significant degree of tactical invention and maneuver. In other groups – including leftist groups that are more conflicted about the meaning of socialism in the post 1989 world – the shorter-term narratives may have less breadth and flexibility (making such groups rigidly purist as interaction partners), even while longer-term visions remain vague, confused, or undefined.

Social movement activists learn to articulate such projects in continual conversations with fellow activists and potential recruits, as well as with allies, opponents, and the media. They talk about the problems in the existing society as well as about the nature and shape of the alternative society that they believe they are working for; they debate issues of tactic and strategy; they plan events, negotiate logistics, and distribute responsibilities. And sometimes, either foregrounded in official movement settings or backgrounded to informal bar or car talk, they discuss their personal experiences, what the movement "means" to them, and what they hope to take out of it for their own still uncertain futures. Movements vary in the degree to which the personal dimension of the movement is explicitly thematized; some, like the religious youth groups in my study, make personal growth a core part of their mission, while others, like the student movement and political parties, tend to subordinate personal development to collective projects (although personal projects enter through the backdoor in the form of leadership ambitions). While young

activists caught up in the heat and pressure of movement activism are often not very preoccupied with plotting their personal futures beyond the short-term movement calendar, they are also aware that various institutional clocks are ticking away, involving their education, families, jobs, or career paths. In interactions across activist networks, they witness different models of how other activists have reconciled these tensions between personal and collective futures; some sort of personal work of evaluation and synthesis is necessary in order to carve out one's own individual pathways and projects from the multiple possibilities available.

Yet despite the personal work involved in interpretation, synthesis and choice, these complex, multi-stranded processes are, in fact, socially patterned, thus presenting us with "social facts" that can be probed for causal conditioning. Our job as analysts is to provide accounts of the social mechanisms by which this patterning occurs, as well as the implications for other sorts of social processes (e.g., in my case, for political alliances, leadership styles, career choices, etc.). The examples above indicate that the process of project formation is an inherently social phenomenon; that it often happens at Simmelian intersections of social worlds (rather than simply within them); and that precisely because it involves social intersections across a backdrop of temporal uncertainty, it can lead to the reformulation of received models of personal and social engagement.

On a more general level, this discussion points toward a "sociology of the future," by examining how future projections – often tenuous and uncertain – shape and are shaped by social processes. I would argue that it is high time that sociologists – and cultural sociologists in particular – reclaimed the analysis of the future and its effects from rational choice theorists and turned our attention to the nature of the "rope" and what makes it hold.

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Looking Forward and Looking Back: The Importance of Expectations and Uncertainty for Understanding Family Events

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The life course perspective has influenced much recent work among sociologists studying the family. This perspective broadly emphasizes four themes: the link between human lives and historical times, the timing and sequencing of events, the interdependence of lives over time, and human agency (Elder 1994). Of particular interest for this essay is the emphasis placed in the life course perspective on specific events as embedded in larger trajectories, such as career histories in the labor market or pathways into and out of various family statuses. Researchers working in the life course tradition have tended to emphasize the ways in which these accumulated past experiences influence current events. For example, the marital history of one's parents is found to influence offspring's own home-leaving and family formation behavior in young adulthood (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1993; Thornton 1991).

While Elder (1985) also argues that perceptions of the *future* life course influence actions taken in the current period, family scholars have devoted much less attention to understanding the significance of these expectations. My goal in this brief essay is to consider some of the ways in which expectations and uncertainty might improve our understanding of family events. I offer several examples of how I have incorporated these ideas into my own research, and suggest some ways to improve our understanding of how expectations and uncertainty contribute to the context of life events in future research.

Future Economic Standing and the Decision to Marry

Family sociologists are greatly interested in better understanding the economic context of marriage behavior. Two related sets of issues motivate this interest. First, researchers want to know if improvements in the labor market prospects of women have been the engine driving recent declines in marriage. This is not an unreasonable question, given that the past 25 years are characterized both by substantial delays in marriage and by

dramatic increases in women's labor force participation and earnings. Second, researchers are interested in understanding the implications of improvements in women's labor market prospects for the economic basis of marriage. Are women's new roles in the labor market influencing decisions about family life and the nature of economic arrangements within marriage? Answering each of these questions requires a clear understanding of the nature of the underlying individual-level relationship between women's economic prospects and their marriage behavior.

Much past research in this area has focused on observed characteristics of individuals and jobs, such as educational attainment, current occupation, or recent earnings, to measure position in the labor market. Yet in her seminal theory of marriage timing, Valerie Oppenheimer (1988) argues that economic prospects *over the longer-term* are particularly important for marriage timing. Because most individuals expect marriage to be a long-term relationship, the process of selecting the best marital match involves assessing one's own future characteristics, as well as those expected of potential partners. Oppenheimer argues that future labor market position is central to this process, as work structures life in important ways. The challenge lies in developing appropriate measures of these expected future characteristics.

Matthijs Kalmijn's (1994) analysis of patterns of assortative mating in the 1970 and 1980 U.S. censuses offers an interesting approach to measuring the expected future characteristics of newlyweds. To reflect expected mid-career economic and cultural status, Kalmijn (1994) used mean occupation-specific earnings and education for men and women in the newlywed's occupation at age 40. In other words, in evaluating the expected future economic standing of a 22 year-old law clerk, Kalmijn used mean occupation-specific education and earnings of 40-year old law clerks. While an excellent approach, this measure of expected future standing does not allow for changes between occupations and industries experienced as individuals advance along career trajectories. Many employment histories do involve such shifts, however, particularly during the young adult years (Spilerman 1977).

In my own work, I developed measures of expected future economic standing based on patterns of occupational mobility and earnings observed in data from the 1970 census. In these data, individuals reported both their earnings in the past year and the occupation, industry, and class of worker for the job they held in 1965. The construction of expected future earnings was accomplished in two stages. I first identified age-specific transition probabilities between various occupations over a five-year period. I then used these transition probabilities as weights in a series of age-specific regressions of earnings (in 1969) on sex, race, and dummy variables for 70 different occupational groupings (for jobs held in 1965). In analyses of data from the National Longitudi-

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nal Survey of Youth (NLSY), I found that men and women with the highest expected future earnings married more quickly than did individuals with relatively lower expected future earnings. More details of the construction of these variables, and the relationship of expected future earning to marriage behavior, is available in Sweeney (1999) and Cancian and Sweeney (2000).

Uncertainty and the Decision to Marry

Assessments of future outcomes are necessarily clouded by uncertainty. Indeed, Oppenheimer (1988) argues that uncertainty about longer-term economic characteristics of potential mates impedes the process of assortative mating, thus contributing to a delay in marriage. In an analysis of data from the NLSY, Oppenheimer and colleagues (1997) operationalize the concept of uncertainty as the degree of difficulty encountered in the career-entry process. These researchers distinguish "stop-gap" from "career" jobs, with stop-gap defined as occupations with large proportions of part-time workers and workers under age 25, and career jobs as all other jobs not characterized as stop-gap. As Oppenheimer's theory predicts, men in career-jobs were found to marry sooner than otherwise similar men in stop-gap jobs. In other research, Marin Clarkberg (1999) found that unstable employment histories similarly reduced the pace of entry into marriage among women.

I take a different approach in my own work on marriage, focusing directly on uncertainty with respect to future earnings. Like my previously described measures of expected future earnings, I used data from the 1970 Census to examine actual labor market outcomes experienced by women and men. I essentially based my measure of uncertainty on the degree of dispersion (measured by the inter-quartile range) in future earnings among individuals in a particular occupational grouping at an earlier point in time. When these measures were included in models of marriage formation, I found evidence that high uncertainty with respect to future earnings slows the pace of entry into marriage (Sweeney 1998, 1999). These findings offer further support to the idea that uncertainty about the future is a key factor in the decision to marry.

One potential criticism of both my measures of expected future earnings and uncertainty is that they are based on occupational trajectories observed during the period 1965-70, while the marital transitions investigated in this research took place predominantly during the 1980s. The obvious question is whether they are still useful for computing expected earnings for the cohorts studied here. While occupational trajectories may have changed somewhat during this period, it is not the actual employment histories of these cohorts which is most relevant for my study. It is instead the outcomes that are expected by these women and their potential spouses that are most relevant. These expectations

are not likely based on the actual future experiences of these cohorts, as their occupational trajectories are unfolding at the very time they are making decisions about marriage and thus cannot form the basis for the expectations themselves. These expectations are most likely based on earnings trajectories they are familiar with – specifically trajectories of the recent past.

Uncertainty in the Context of Past Events

While uncertainty is a key concept for thinking about the future, Allan Horwitz and I have also found this to be important for understanding the context of past events in our research on the mental health effects of divorce. We were interested in the importance of the emotional climate of divorce for mental health, and particularly in the contribution of spousal infidelity to this climate. Indeed, Weiss (1975) reports infidelity to be "the most hurtful of the afflictions of a failing marriage." In our analysis of data from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), we expected that individuals who believed their former spouses had been unfaithful would display a greater increase in depression in the years following marital separation than those who believed their former spouses had not been unfaithful.

When asking respondents whether they believe their spouses were involved with someone else before their marriage ended, the NSFH permits an "I don't know" response. This offered an opportunity to investigate the impact of uncertainty with respect to past events. While we anticipated that individuals who were uncertain about their spouses' fidelity would display post-divorce changes in mental health somewhere between those who did and did not believe an affair occurred, the story turned out to be somewhat different. In fact, uncertainty about the fidelity of one's spouse was associated both with substantially poorer mental health relative to believing no affair occurred and also somewhat poorer mental health relative to believing an affair *did* occur (Sweeney and Horwitz 2000). The mental health effects of uncertainty with respect to the fidelity of one's spouse seem to be particularly pronounced among men. While these results are preliminary, they suggest that uncertainty itself may be a central element of the emotional climate of divorce.

Future Relationship Options and the Decision to Divorce

Finally, I return again to the concept of the future, as it related to decisions people make about ending their marriages. Major theoretical perspectives on divorce suggest that perceived opportunities to enter new relationships in the future can contribute in important ways to the decision to end a marriage. For example, George Levinger (1979) argues that couple cohesiveness is determined by the balance of attractions to a marriage and the barriers to exiting the marriage, relative to the similar characteristics of potential alternative arrangements. Gary Becker (1981; Becker, Landes, and Michael 1977)

similarly argues that marital alternatives are often key factors in the decision to divorce. He posits that the stability of a marriage will change over time, as information about one's spouse and other potential partners improves and changes. Consistent with these theories, Bernard Farber (1988) argues that the American kinship structure is characterized by the norm of "permanent availability," such that individuals are permanently available for (another) marriage, regardless of their current marital status.

I tested these ideas in a recent analysis of the association between the decisions to begin and to end relationships. Using data from the National Survey of Families and Households, I investigated the association between the nature of a decision to divorce and the process of remarriage, hypothesizing that individuals who initiated separation would tend to have better prospects for remarriage than would their former partners. Consistent with the theories of Levinger and Becker, individuals who initiated a separation were found to remarry more quickly than those who would have preferred to remain married. These differences were relatively large, with individuals who initiated their divorces being twice as likely to remarry in the first three years following separation as those who would have preferred to stay married. These results indeed suggest that the decision to end one relationship may often be related to future prospects for entering another, potentially more desirable relationship.

Discussion

As sociologists, we are naturally interested in the contexts in which events unfold. As Elder (1985) suggests, both the accumulation of past experiences and perceptions of the future are important elements of this context. Although not emphasized by most social scientists working in the life course paradigm, uncertainty is a key concept for understanding the impact of both past experiences and expectations for the future. While far from offering a comprehensive account, I have provided a brief description of several specific ways that expectations and uncertainty have been incorporated into my own work, as well as that of other sociologists studying the family.

In conclusion, this essay suggests some key directions for future data collection efforts. First, additional questions are needed on our large-scale survey instruments regarding expectations for the future, both as explanatory factors in life events and as outcomes shaped by previous life events. For example, a series of questions in the about expectations with respect to marriage, life expectancy, and future socioeconomic attainment are asked in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. The National Survey of Families and Households includes questions about how respondents believe their lives would change were they to divorce or to marry. Our ability to study expectations and uncertainty would greatly improve were the number and scope of these

questions to be expanded. More attention is also needed to the measurement of uncertainty with respect to many domains of life experiences. Finally, more research is needed on the meaning of expectations and uncertainty from the perspective of the men, women, and children involved in these family events. Combining analyses from large-scale surveys with research based on in-depth interviewing or focus groups will be an important step towards this goal.

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Ruane: Charity Begins at Home(Pages), continued

alone, because many of us have long commutes, few of us engage in the civic involvement of yesterday — i.e. few of us get involved in traditional, local community organizations.

Yet Wuthnow does not believe that Americans have abandoned their civic concerns and duties. Rather Wuthnow argues that we are simply finding new ways of *defining* civic involvement and new ways of *achieving* civic engagement.

In the recent past, we defined civic involvement in terms of organizational memberships and long-standing (even life-long) relationships and service. We joined fraternal orders and service clubs (the Rotary, the Jaycees, the Elks, the League of Women Voters.) Leadership positions in these groups frequently required years of faithful membership and participation

Today formal memberships and lifelong service are seen as luxuries of time that the typical American doesn't have. Today, the idea of civic involvement has been transformed to mean our being concerned about focused, particular issues. Civic involvement sees us attending to effectively accomplishing specific goals via special interest groups. Furthermore, the issues or concerns we embrace often reflect the many (and frequently divided) loyalties of our saturated selves; they reflect our self-interests (i.e. our need to overcome our personal shortcomings or addictions) as much as they are concerned with general community interests.

In short, we have adopted what I call a "smart missile" conception of civic involvement. We target a need, lock on an appropriate action, execute a solution, and then we move on, looking for the next cause that needs some special attention.

Civic Involvement and Loose Connections

Wuthnow believes that a new form of social relationships complements this new conception of civic involvement: loose connections. Loose connections are fluid, flexible, sporadic, ad hoc connections and they are the civil connections of our times. In embracing loose civil connections, individu-

als are demanding that civic involvement be limited and convenient. Indeed, the loose connections model suggests that our civic involvement with any particular group might best be described as here today and gone tomorrow. The "cause" we take on today may not be our "cause" of tomorrow.

A telling example of our desire for innovative, "loose" forms of civic engagement is found in a new civic-minded activity: the volunteer vacation (Klein 2000). Busy individuals who can't find the time to fit community service into their typical workweek or work year, can now book a vacation dedicated to civic engagement. The civic minded can spend a week or two grooming rain-forests in Costa Rica, collecting data on sea turtles in the Pacific or restoring historic railroads in the Southwest. The arrangement is growing in popularity despite the fact that the volunteer vacation is costly — the volunteer must be willing to give both time and money. Volunteer vacationers can expect to spend over \$1500 per week (air fare excluded) to satisfy their desire for civic involvement.

Volunteer vacations indicate that Americas are looking for new innovative ways to meet their civic duties. And I think that Wuthnow is correct is urging us to see the desire for loose connections — the desire for effectiveness without commitment — as the driving force behind new forms of civic participation.

Loose Connections and the Internet

In searching out new forms for our civic involvement, one avenue seems particularly worthy of investigation — that avenue is the Internet. Indeed, the Internet appears to be custom made for pursuing civic involvement via loose connections. The Internet supports both limited involvement and convenient involvement; involvement is restricted to our computer connections but involvement is only a click away

The potential of the Internet for satisfying our desire for loose connections has already been recognized by sev-

eral different online services. Consider, for instance, an Internet site called *VolunteerMatch.org*. *VolunteerMatch* connects would-be volunteers with nonprofit groups. In using *VolunteerMatch.org* interested parties are able to stipulate the conditions or terms of their volunteer service:

- * They can indicate the distance they are willing to travel,
- * They can specify the time frame for their volunteer work,
- * They can stipulate whether their volunteering will be a one-time affair or an ongoing relationship
- * They can specify the type of cause or issues with which they want to be associated.

Once all the terms of one's volunteering are specified and submitted online, the site then searches for an organization that will work with all the noted parameters.

VolunteerMatch.org also offers another option for the loosely connected civic minded: virtual volunteering. With this option, the person who wants to volunteer without leaving their home is able to do so. Virtual volunteers perform their volunteer activities either online or by fax, by phone or by mail.

Each day the site recruits up to 5000 volunteers (Ciabattari 2000). Since its inception, *VolunteerMatch.org* has made over 200,000 matches between volunteers and the 10,000 nonprofit organizations that are registered with the service. Clearly loose connections are a form of civic involvement that resonate with many Americans.

Additional evidence of the natural fit between loose connections and the Internet can be found in a few other relatively new online sites:

- * www.thehungersite.com
- * www.greatergood.com
- * www.therainforestsitesite.com

Each of these sites is geared toward making one's civic involvement easy and convenient. *Thehungersite.com* was created just about a year ago as the world's first "click-to-donate" site. The site allows a visitor to donate a cup and a half of rice or grain a day by the mere click of a button. (The site also gives visitors the opportunity to sign a petition to the United Nations requesting an increase in the UN's commitment of resources to end world hunger.) *The rainforestsitesite.com* offers visitors "real solutions for problems of development." Once daily, visitors can click a button and have the Nature Conservancy set aside approximately 14 square feet of rain forest. Both *Thehungersite.com* and *The rainforestsitesite.com* work on the same principle—as soon as visitors click to donate food or to save a portion of the rain forest, they see banner ads of the corporate sponsors who pay for the food and/or land donations.

Greatergood.com ties civic involvement to consumerism — it invites visitors to "make a difference every time you shop online." At *Greatergood.com*, the civic-minded consumer can purchase goods and services at registered retailers and see up to 15% of their purchases donated to

the "cause" of their choice.

Reinventing Civic Involvement Online

These online sites help to illustrate an emerging tie between the Internet, loose connections, and civic involvement. Notably, however, it's a tie that hasn't received much attention from those interested in civic engagement.

To be sure, there are those who still have nagging doubts about the Internet's ability to foster the kinds of relationships that are supportive of civic involvement. Many question the ability of computer mediated communication to promote civic participation. Calhoun (1998), for instance, suggests that public life is largely about *direct* personal relationships; since the Internet fosters indirect relationships, he is skeptical about the Internet's capacity to enhance citizen power and public interactions. And while Putnam's latest book on civic engagement has its own web site with links to various civic engagement forums, he nonetheless fears that communication technologies such as the Internet privatize our lives and retard investment in social capital which in turn leads to a decrease in civic engagement.

Even Wuthnow's work (1998) is curiously silent about loose connections and the Internet. In the many interviews reported on in the book, only one entails an explicit discussion of the Internet as a tool for civic involvement. More precisely it discusses the Internet as a tool for *coordinating* civic activity. Indeed, when Wuthnow discusses how special interest groups recognize or acknowledge the significance of loose connections, he does so with an eye toward how these organizations pursue loose connections *with other organizations*. There is no discussion of how organizations are responding to the loose connections model *vis a vis* the civic volunteer.

Yet this line of inquiry would appear to be a critical one for those interested in documenting the current state of civic life in America. Critics of the Putnam argument note that his dire take on civic engagement is due to his failure to acknowledge the new forms of civic engagement that are replacing old standbys (Willis 2000). Investigating new forms of civic involvement should also be of critical interest for those organizations interested in finding new ways to enlist people in their causes. If Wuthnow is correct about our growing desire for loose civic connections, organizations that don't embrace this model of civic engagement may well find themselves with ever dwindling numbers of members/volunteers.

The "online" reinvention of civic involvement in today's society suggests a new avenue with a new set of questions for research. The avenue: nonprofit organization homepages as innovative vehicles for achieving civic engagement. The questions are many. Consider a sampling: How are nonprofits employing their web pages to help Americans click on and achieve civic engagement via these sites? What are non-profits doing (if anything) to activate/cultivate a civic-minded identity among visitors to their web sites? Are organizations trying to communicate the change in models of civic involvement? Are they letting us know that they are open to participation without commitment?

(Ruane, continued)

Paths of Inquiry

In undertaking a research project that focuses on non-profit homepages, I recognize that the possibility of civic engagement via web sites is just that — *a possibility*. A web site is a starting point, but a site alone is not enough to get people involved with the organization. What then might be productive paths to pursue in an analysis of online civic involvement? Let me suggest but two possible lines of inquiry: tactics of engagement and strategies for establishing trust.

George Reis (2000), writing on fund raising management on the web, argues that organizations must *work at engaging* the donor via their web sites. Donors, he says, have a set of complex criteria and a set of expectations that must be met before they will respond to a web site's appeal for support. In short, web sites that hope to attract visitors to their causes must be engaging.

Central to my ongoing study of homepages is an investigation of the specific tactics of engagement employed on non-profits' web sites. Reis' work suggests several factors that need to be considered when exploring the question of engagement. Sites, for instance, can vary in the *level of activity* they offer visitors — i.e. sites can be passive or active. Passive sites are static, functioning primarily as online brochures. Active sites present visitors with opportunities for interaction and communication. Reis maintains that active sites are more successful than passive ones at engaging visitors. In considering the action-oriented options for homepages, I am interested in documenting an array of engaging homepage "activities:" online calendars, discussion forums, online meeting grounds, bulletin boards, email group distribution lists and chat functions. Reis also maintains that active, engaging web pages strive to emulate what Skocpol (1997) calls the federal structure model of volunteerism — i.e. linking members to local, state and federal levels of activity. Active sites also work to explicitly address the organization's goals and activities.

Any study of civic involvement must also consider the issue of trust. Those writing in the area of civic engagement put trust at the center of community service. Without trust, individual are left with a cynical attitude about social capital, good citizenship and civic involvement.

Wuthnow argues that in an era of loose connections, organizations can't count on time-driven means for establishing trust. Today, organizations must "provide space" in which the rules for making decisions of trust can be formulated. Taking this observation to an analysis of homepages, we can ask how these sites use their web space to win our trust? How are these sites organized for trust building? In exploring the trust issue, I am particularly interested in the degree to which web sites pursue four trust-building avenues suggested by Wuthnow's work: 1) inviting visitors to share experiences, 2) inviting visitors to disclose opinions, 3) inviting visitors to share feelings and emotions, and 4) offer-

ing visitors acts of kindness and courtesy

Changing Involvement for Changing Times

Every major period of social change has seen the emergence of new forms of civic engagement. Indeed Putnam (2000) credits Americans at the turn of the last century with being extremely inventive in creating the new forms of civic involvement that characterized the Progressive Era. Surely we can expect the same as we face the new century. Our computer-based, Internet and time driven age will direct and shape new forms of social connections. Rather than lamenting the disappearance of old, comfortable ways of building social capital, we would do well to consider new ways of pursuing and achieving the same. As the above lines of inquiry suggest, there is much to be considered in the realm of online civic engagement. Placing these issues in the forefront of our research efforts may be the best antidote we can prescribe for alleged virus of civic disengagement.

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A Fond Farewell!

With this issue, I am stepping down as editor of *Culture*. At this time, I wish to thank the many contributors who allowed me to share their work with the membership. Thanks also to the many section members who regularly offered feedback on my issues.

Working on *Culture* has been a sheer pleasure. I am grateful for the opportunity to have served!

-Karen Cerulo

Studying Culture: Departments that Emphasize the Study of Culture

Editor's Note: This article continues the series devoted to departments that emphasize the study of culture

University of Virginia www.virginia.edu/sociology/

The best kept secret in cultural sociology is nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains among the vistas that inspired Thomas Jefferson and in the "academic village" he designed just for us — to foster intellectual community among faculty and students of all levels.

Virginia sociology defines its focus in a trinity of mutually reinforcing specialties (theory, culture, and inequality) and privileges the intersection of culture and inequality as a hallmark of the department. Take department leadership as an example:

Chair:	James Davison Hunter (<i>Culture Wars</i> .)
Associate Chair:	Sarah Corse (<i>Nationalism and Literature</i>).
Graduate Director:	Sharon Hays, (<i>The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood</i>)

Sharon Hays' recent book, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, serves as an archetypal example of work at the intersection of culture and inequality, in this case gender. This book won the Culture Section's Distinguished Book Award in 1997. Similarly, Milton Vickerman's recent book, *Crosscurrents: West Indian Immigrants and Race*, explores the intersection of racism and cultural difference, and Bethany Bryson's "Anything but Heavy Metal," (*ASR* 1996) analyzes musical distastes as symbolic markers of class-based cultural boundaries. Bryson's current work examines the production of multiculturalism in four college English departments, and she serves as secretary-treasurer of the Culture Section.

Sarah Corse, associate chair of our department, has written widely on cultural politics, literary canon formation, and organizational change. Her book, *Nationalism and Literature*, compares literary canons in the U.S. and Canada. Her work is complemented by that of Krishan Kumar who joined the department in 1996. He brings an expertise in historical sociology, and twelve books (not to mention countless articles) ranging broadly over the fields of national identity, revolution, modernity, post-modernity and utopia. He also chaired lectures this year for the Forum for Contemporary Thought — a lecture series that is central to Virginia's interdisciplinary community of cultural scholars.

Our Department Chair, James Davison Hunter is author of *Culture Wars* as well as six other books generally organized around the problem of meaning and moral order in the context of social change. He is also director of The Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, a program he estab-

lished in 1995. The center supports graduate and post-graduate research as well as a rich colloquium series that attracts important cultural scholars to the university. Hunter's interest in the Sociology of Religion is complemented by that of Jeff Hadden who is well known for his work in that field. His current project is a massive and database of new religious movements available at www.religiousfreedom.com.

Finally, the sociology of culture at Virginia benefits from the department's strong emphasis on sociological theory. Most prominently, Murray Milner's recent book, *Status and Sacredness* received the 1996 ASA Distinguished Publication Award. Among current members of the department, however, Theodore Caplow was the first to write on culture. "Transiency as a Cultural Pattern" appeared in the *American Sociological Review* in 1940. Donald Black, one of the discipline's most prolific theorists, has written on the sociology of morality in *The Social Structure of Right and Wrong*. That book won both the Theory Prize and a Distinguished Book Award from the American Sociological Association in 1994. Stephan Fuchs, specializes in the sociology of knowledge and has written on Pierre Bourdieu (in J. Turner's *The Structure of Sociological Theory*) among other topics. His forthcoming book is entitled *Against Essentialism*.

Though the current line-up is impressive there are even more exciting developments in our future. We have two tenure track positions open for Fall 2001, and the University has received a generous donation (including a chaired professorship) to establish a program in media studies. We have admitted an exceptionally strong group of graduate students for the Fall of 2000, and our advanced graduate students have had a productive year as well:

- * Syed Ali won a Fulbright-Hays award to study ethnic identity construction among muslims in Hyderabad, India for comparison with that of Muslims in New York.
- * Erin Davis received the 1999 Martin P. Levine Dissertation Fellowship from the ASA Section on Sex And Gender and is now completing her work on transsexuality
- * Edith Kurzweil defended her dissertation titled "Sculpting Memory: Who Made Chicago's Monuments and Why?"
- * Brian Lowe received a grant from The Center for Children, Family, and the Law, for his work on emerging moral vocabularies in the anti-tobacco and animal rights movements.
- * Bess Rothenburg received a Fulbright Award for her research on perceptions of post-war German national identity.

When I first arrived at Virginia two years ago, I was astounded to discover that there are three people in the department who are fully qualified to teach our course called: Sociology of Literature. Since that time I've grown accustomed to thinking of culture as the core of sociology. It's glorious.
--Bethany Bryson

For a Sociology of Art and Artists
*Danila Bertasio and Giorgio Marchetti**
Universita di Urbino

The purpose of this paper is twofold: first, to illustrate the theoretical premises and the methodological approach on which the work of our group is based; second, to describe the research we have carried out until now. We strongly believe that art can constitute a subject of the sociological research as long as the latter sets as its objective not only that of describing, explaining and predicting how the former reflects cultural events, but also how it generates new and different ones. The main problem is then to devise a level of analysis capable of avoiding the dangerous forms of reductionism represented by considering art as a variable either completely dependent on or completely independent of society. We think that such a level is met when we assume a position that approaches the study of art from both a sociological and artistic point of view, or, what we have termed a sociological-artistic approach to art. Consequently, our objective and effort has been, and is, to try to implement this approach and to apply it to our research.

The Theory and the Method

"La sociologie et l'art ne font pas bon menage. Cela tient à l'art et aux artistes (...) mais cela tient aussi aux sociologues ...": twenty years have passed from when Pierre Bourdieu pronounced these words at the École nationale supérieure des arts décoratifs (Bourdieu, 1984: 207), but the prejudice denounced by the French sociologist still survives. Sociologists' contribution to the study of art is still limited. As Strassoldo (1998) points out, only 0.5% of sociological production can be classified as the sociology of art. It is also partial: most of the sociological work on art has an introductory character or, at best, looks like a general program which is seldom brought into effect. It could not be otherwise, however, if, as Crane (1987: 148) observes, "few guidelines exist for a sociological examination of aesthetic and expressive content in art object."

The insufficient contribution of sociologists to the study of art can be ascribed to the difficulties they have in empirically approaching it: indeed, when they try to explain, for example, the cultural and structural conditions that promote audiences, they have to face numerous methodological problems raised by the complex set of variables involved. Nevertheless, the heritage of the old controversy which opposes the Marxist and structural points of view to the cultural ones cannot be underestimated. The current marginality of the sociology of art is due, in our opinion, to sociologists' prejudice against, and fear of, introducing into the analysis of art elements, methods and intellectual attitudes typical of the humanistic disciplines. In other words, sociologists have difficulty in admitting the "amphibian" nature (Strassoldo, 1998) of the sociology of art; because of the presupposition that their aim is to study objective facts, they

limit themselves to such things as the organization and consumption of artistic production.

It is necessary to emphasize the ambiguity implied by the concept of "objectivity" in this context: as shown by Weber (1919), all knowledge is partial because it always derives from a particular point of view or level of observation. Objectivity lies only in the appropriateness of research methods. Therefore, it seems obvious to question the opinion that studying the consumption of works of art is less problematic than studying artists and their works. Equally questionable is the position of sociologists following the earlier work of Wolff (1981) who, despite maintaining that the investigation of artistic phenomenon must be based on the analysis of the interdependence between structural and cultural variables, reduces the concepts of creativity, artist and work of art to the influence of economic, social and ideological factors. Demystifying, as Wolff does, the uniqueness of the work of art and of the artist, is not, in our opinion, the correct way to study art: in fact it means encouraging an exogenous approach to art. Presuming that artists are puppets completely controlled by critics, museum curators, dealers, art-gallery managers, etc., and that only these "others" can decide if their work is really art, entails, on the one hand, depreciating the cultural meaning that art has always been given, and, on the other hand, disregarding the fact that all the activities performed to legitimate works as art are made possible only because these works already exist, that is, because someone has produced them.

Certainly, it has never been as difficult as today to identify the rules and criteria that can assist the public in recognizing art and distinguishing it from other contemporary forms of expression. The way to overcome this difficulty is not by reducing the analysis of the phenomenon to either the sociological level of observation or the historical-esthetic one. What we propose is to assume a sociological-artistic level of observation. This new level is not just the product of the sum of the two other levels, but has its own status: in fact, as the theory of the artificial shows (Negrotti, 1999), when a level of observation is formed combining two different levels of observation, the former, while losing part of the characteristics of the latter, assumes new and specific characteristics that cannot be found in the latter. By setting up new concepts, models, methods, and theories, the sociological-artistic level of observation represents the instrument that allows the researcher to control the relations existing between sociological competence, on the one hand, and, on the other, art-historical, critical, and esthetic levels of competence. It will provide the researcher with the possibility of exploiting the opportunities offered by effectively connecting various levels of observation². It is worth notic-

ing that it is precisely those individuals who study art from a traditional point of view who propose the establishment of new relations between different disciplines: for example, art-history is progressively becoming the social history of art, and aesthetics recognizes the importance of opening itself up to the other human sciences.

The current difficulty in categorizing artistic activity explains, at least partially, why sociologists prefer to deal with those structural aspects of art that are characteristic of the empirical tradition, such as consumption, the market, and social institutions. It also explains why there is an increasing number of sociologists who choose to consider the communicative aspect of art. It is not our intention to devalue the contribution of the latter to the study of art. Art is also a form of communication. Contributions from Italian scholars working in this vein - Tessarolo (1998) and Sanguanini (1998) - are noteworthy in this context. Nevertheless, communication is not the central aspect of art. Artists generate objects that widely transfigure their ideas, images or feelings. If artists simply intended to communicate their ideas, images or feelings, they would use ordinary language. The fact that they invent new languages or that they elaborate the ordinary one implies that their objective is not transferring information about their mental state but generating esthetic knowledge, that is, adding a new value to their images and feelings, a value which transcends pure informational content. For this reason, the artists' message is always new, ambiguous and polysemic, and enriches the range of our knowledge. Paradoxically, it is precisely the analysis of art as communication that poses the problem of the importance of knowing artists and their activity. Trying to explain, as sociologists of communication do, what in art functions as communication, and how it functions implies knowing what is art and what is not, and how to distinguish it from other forms of expression. In other words, analyzing the communicative function of art, means first of all applying criteria that allow us to recognize if something is or is not art.

In our opinion, the sociological-artistic level of observation should enable us to achieve the proper balance between the traditional requirements of empirical sociological research and the necessity of effectively considering the autonomous role played by artists in the creation and realization of a work of art, and in inducing cultural change. Recognizing the autonomy of the artist is not a hindrance to sociological analysis but a precondition for it. Only by recognizing the autonomy of the artist is it possible to get the two following complementary variables under control: the influence of art on cultural development, and the artist's attitude to re-present consolidated cultural models. Indeed, in a work of art both social and individual representational forms can be found. A work of art testifies first of all to the artist's poetic world view, and secondly to his/her social and cultural context. As Padovani (1998) observes, if it is true that it is the artist who decides what forms of representation to choose, how to combine, relate and shape them, and what new forms to create, it is equally true that these

same forms of representation are the product of his/her social life, and as such, already classified and arranged in a specific hierarchy.

By autonomy we do not mean therefore a complete independence from the social context — a position that today could not be defended even by the most conservative art historian or aesthetician. Instead, we mean artists' specific ability to freely build their particular cultural identity within a range whose poles are the role of witness of one's age and of foreseer of future ages and models. Parsons (1961) holds that it is necessary to differentiate between artists who create new symbolic models and artists who carry these models (or models created by someone else) into effect. Nevertheless, we believe that even in the latter case, the work of art cannot be a mere reflection of the structure or the culture of the artist's age. Consider for instance the case of medieval artists (Bertasio 1996: 60). Notwithstanding what had been deliberated on their role by the second Nicene Council (AD 787) — that is, their passive manual and operative role as opposed to the active intellectual role of the clerics, who conceived and determined what artists had to realize — later the Church had to recognize that artists' activity could not be confined to such a passive role but deserved higher consideration since, unavoidably, they interpreted and transformed subjectively what clerics or patrons ordered them to do. Despite the fact that artists were given strict orders to adhere to certain rules and subjects, to represent things in a certain way, to use certain materials, they always brought in, intentionally or unintentionally, their own particular way of thinking, perceiving and seeing.

Because they transfigure their mental representations (re-creating them by means of materials and procedures different from those constituting the original representations), the role of artists is always innovative. It is in this transfigurative process that artists, exploring and exploiting the possibilities of materials, exercise their freedom of expression. In this way, they can invent expressive forms that, modifying or changing current patterns of perception, deeply affect the structure of socially consolidated cultural models. Effects of the artist's cultural action can be seen in innovations in ways of perceiving, in the modification of the definition of what is beautiful and ugly, in the introduction of new standards of composition and construction, and in the predominance of particular colors, forms and sounds. As Saussure observes, all that which is social, is always mediated by the individual. Artists can then be considered specialists in the creation, manipulation and application of expressive symbols: they anticipate or make manifest a series of values which can be seen and understood through an autonomous system of activities and knowledge.

The Research

The sociology of art can acquire greater scientific reliability only by coordinating empirical research with a theoretical framework centered on the relations between the various disciplines dealing with art. From the methodologi-

(Bertasio and Marchetti, continued)

cal point of view, our position is analogous to Wackernagel's (1994). After stating that his objective is not so much to treat the history of art either as a history of style or as a history of ideas, but as a history of the whole artistic life, he points out that it is necessary to consider artists as a group operating in the more extended context of the artistic system.

Placing artists at the center of the research can, however, involve two dangers for the sociologist: on the one hand, of doing not the sociology of art, but rather, as Becker says, "the sociology of occupations applied to artistic work" (Becker, 1984: xi). On the other hand, of ascribing a general explicative power to the life of the single artist, something equal to explaining the whole railway system by resorting only to the experience of a single passenger.

In order to avoid this danger, when in 1996-97 we undertook our research on Italian artists (Bertasio, 1997), we decided to assume an intermediate position: that which sees artists as a community of actors engaged in the pursuit of personal gratification and social visibility within a network of relations with other actors which, in turn, are pursuing their own professional success. Our objectives were, first of all, to identify the main characteristics which define the specificity of artists' work, secondly, to know how much artists influence public taste, and, thirdly, to identify the rules by which artists' communities maintain relations, and enter into negotiation with the other actors within the system. A sample of 238 artists were interviewed by postal questionnaire about their concepts of art, beauty and creativity, and about several aspects of their relationships with institutions, the market, critics, and art gallery managers.

On the one hand, the analysis of the data confirmed those artistic and taste changes which many estheticians and critics had already observed (Calabrese, 1993, Bodei, 1995):

- 1.the return to the figurative fashion: 45.4% of artists agree completely with the statement that art reproduces something, whereas only 18.1% are in total disagreement with this idea;
- 2.the return to a classical idea of beauty: in answer to the question: "Which is the geometrical form that expresses best the concept of beauty both in nature and in painting?", 40.3% of artists chose the circular one, 12.2% the triangular one, 6.7% the rectangular one, and only 10.5% a completely irregular form. In answer to the question "Which attribute represents best the concept of beauty?", 51.7% chose "Harmony", 5.5% "Perfection", 27.7% "Formal coherence", and only some artists mentioned attributes different from a classical idea of beauty, such as "chaos" or "informal";
- 3.the proliferation of languages and techniques: 37.8% of artists think that the use of new materials, techniques and forms of expression improves the quality of artistic work, 45% that it does not affect it, and only 16.4%

that it worsens it.

On the other hand, the analysis revealed how these very changes were deeply influencing the way artists conceived their role. These factors as well as others — such as the disillusion of the public with the exaggerated artistic experiments of the last decades and the often questionable criticisms meant to legitimate these experiments — made artists reconsider their role, their identity, and their relationships with the other actors within the art world. Artists' general dissatisfaction with their current role and situation could be observed not only in their answers to the questionnaire, but also in the comments and annotations they made in its margins, and in their continuous invitation to us to take new initiatives differing from the usual ones.

Artists affirmed the importance of their activity. The majority (77.3%) believe that the artist anticipates aesthetic tendencies and fashions. Similarly, 63.4% believe that art influences public taste. Many artists highlighted the distinctiveness of their role in society and the difference between it and that of the other actors involved in art worlds. According to 63% of the sample, "the artist is a creative person, whose artistic creativity differs from other kinds of creativity"³. At the same time, artists denounced their lack of autonomy and state of dependence on some actors — such as critics and gallery managers⁴ — whose choices and decisions are not always determined by purely artistic interest. They expressed their dissatisfaction with this state of dependence with sometimes violent statements about critics and art gallery managers. Some definitions they gave, for example, of the critic are: conceited, arrogant, artist manqué, fishmonger, unnecessary, merchant, false.

If we consider the fact that artists do not belong to a formal, institutionalized social organization of a national scale, then we will realize the importance of such findings: the convergence we observed can be considered as a true ideology characterizing a whole group of people.

As a consequence, we decided to analyze whether the community of critics had undergone or was undergoing changes similar to those of the community of artists. A survey of a sample of 181 Italian critics was conducted in 1998-1999 (see Bertasio and Marchetti, 2000). For some aspects, the figure of the contemporary Italian critic is highly uniform: 74.6% of critics have a university degree; 86% state that they have a good or very good relationship with artists and only 1.1% reported a bad relationship with them⁵. Similarly, 81.8% state that they deal with an artist only when they approve of his or her work, a statement implying the decline of the type of harsh criticism applied by critics to artists in the past. For other aspects, it is very heterogeneous: there is no prevailing opinion about his/her capacity to influence the judgement of the public and artists' work, what the role of the critic should be, why the critic has assumed such an important role in contemporary society, etc. Both uniformizing and differentiating aspects reveal what changes occurred in critics' activity in the last decades and how these changes led critics to abandon their past way of working.

The analysis of the data gave evidence of two other important facts. First, the low level of self-esteem expressed by a considerable part of the sample (nearly 46%): this phenomenon is inversely related to the age of the critics (critics below 56 express a level of self-esteem significantly lower than those over 56) and directly to the degree of uncertainty and indecision critics express when asked about the role they should play. Second, the gap existing between the activities of critics and artists: critics appear to have decided to ignore the subjective orientation of the artist to their own advantage. Critics' activity has recently assumed a specific importance and autonomy in the process which regulates the production of works of art. This autonomy gives critics the possibility of expressing their own thematics, and ideas, and of becoming artists themselves. As Heinich observes (1998: 324), "interpréter une œuvre d'art contemporain n'est pas seulement, pour un critique, l'expliquer, mais c'est aussi l'exécuter, comme on le dit d'une œuvre musicale"⁶.

Our future goals are to verify what changes occurred in other communities - such as, for example art gallery managers' and museum directors' — and to investigate the differences existing between artists' creativity and scientists' one.

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ENDNOTES

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¹"Sociology and art do not get along together. This is due to art and artists (...) but also to sociologists ...".

²A similar view is expressed by Bowler (1998) when she puts forward the proposal of a sociology of art capable of surmounting the traditional impasse that exists between institutional and interpretive approaches to the study of art.

³ On the specificity of artists' creativity and on the difference between it and other kind of creativity — such as scientists' creativity — see Marchetti (1999).

⁴ As many as 65.5% of the artists believe that the assistance of both critics and gallery managers is necessary for introduction to the national market. In contrast, only 19.7% believe that this is possible on the basis of artistic talent alone.

⁵ This data contrasts sharply with the data emerging from the previous survey of Italian artists: in fact, 30% of artists express a negative opinion about critics.

⁶ "For a critic, interpreting a contemporary work of art is not only explaining it, but also executing it, as it is said of a piece of music".

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Section Award Winners, 2000

Best Book Award

*Avoiding Politics:
How Americans Produce Apathy in
Everyday Life*

Nina Eliasoph
University of Wisconsin, Madison

Nina Eliasoph's book (Cambridge University Press, 1998) turns conventional wisdom on its head with her central, brilliant insight that political apathy is not the natural state of affairs, but the product of collective, concerted work. She demonstrates this in her careful, comparative, ethnographic analysis of voluntary groups, recreational groups, and activists in which citizens, in their talk, actions, and silences, construct "the public sphere" and the terms under which it is possible or impossible to talk about politics and its connections to their daily lives. Eliasoph's book teaches us that apathy takes hard work, and that our conceptions of democracy and political participation must account for the accumulated effects of this "culture of avoidance" if we want to understand and confront civic culture in America today. She also demonstrates that the way we talk to one another is a crucial mode of constructing politics, and that our political theories will be impoverished if they do not account for this fact.

*The Decline of Privilege:
The Modernization of Oxford University*

Joseph Soares
Yale University

In this beautifully written, meticulously researched book (Stanford University Press, 1999), Joseph Soares also demonstrates the frailty of conventional wisdom. He shows how anachronistic is Oxford's reputation as the aristocratic, clubby, liberal arts college depicted in *Brideshead Revisited*, but how politically useful this myth was to Thatcher's conservative government, which, in an effort to control higher education policies, effectively linked British decline to the anti-business ethos of its elite universities. Since the second World War, Oxford's natural sciences have eclipsed its humanities in resources and standing; its admissions are now grounded in merit, not family; and its students are mostly middle-class. Soares' analysis of how the university became modernized highlights the crucial role played by scientists who capitalized on generous government funding for research in the 1960s and the informal ties of reform-minded dons who wished to reclaim traditions of scholarship and self-governance. He also shows how their success as reformers left the university vulnerable to politics it could no longer control.

Honorable Mentions go to . . .

*Imperiled Innocents:
Anthony Comstock and Family Reproduction
in Victorian America*

Nicola Beisel
Northwestern University

A superb comparative historical analysis of Anthony Comstock's moral crusades against vice and pornography in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia (Princeton University Press, 1997).

Sidewalk

Mitchell Duneier
University of Wisconsin, Madison and
University of California, Santa Barbara

A masterpiece of urban ethnography that humanizes and situates the street vendors on 6th Avenue in New York City (Ferrari, Straus and Giroux, 2000).

Best Article Award

"The Talk and Back Talk of Collective Action:
A Dialogic Analysis of Repertoires of
Discourse among Nineteenth-Century
English Cotton Spinners."

American Journal of Sociology 105: 3: 736-780

Marc Steinberg
Smith College

Steinberg's work goes much beyond the present theory and methodology of research on social movements and the discourse they produce. Introducing Bakhtin's dialogic analysis of discourse as ongoing communication and potential conflict, Steinberg argues that the challengers are appropriate pieces of a dominant or hegemonic discourse. They remain within the repertoire of self-justification of the ruling group, but they "inflect it with their own subversive meanings" and strive to displace the hegemonic *genres* of the rulers. Steinberg's use of literary theory and his novel ideas make important contributions. A true test of his important contribution to the sociology of culture and the sociology of knowledge awaits both a more detailed discussion of the weavers/owners case, and extensive application to others. We are confident that the task will be taken up by Steinberg himself, and by others who will want to follow his lead.

Best Student Paper Award

**"On Remembering and Silencing the Past:
The Adult Children of the Disappeared
of Argentina and Uruguay in
Comparative Perspective."**

Gabriela Fried
UCLA

This paper tries to answer the question of how the now-adult children of the disappeared in the post-authoritarian societies of Argentinian and Uruguay remember these traumatic events.

Based on an analysis of 15-20 interviews of children of the disappeared in each country, Fried is able to show that they remember the traumatic incidents of their fathers' disappearances during the 1960s and 1970s in significantly different ways. Each country's national collective memory impacted the manner in which this community of children of the disappeared constructed their own collective memories. Drawing on collective memory theory, she argues that memory is not just a cognitive product of the social context, but also must be understood as intersubjectively constructed, socially embedded, and emotionally embedded. She shows how in each country, her interviewees constructed different social, symbolic, emotional and intersubjective memory practices.

ASA 2001 Meetings: *Culture Section Sessions*

Organizer: Cynthia Fuchs Epstein
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1. "Culture and the Media"

Chair: Barry Glassner
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Email: glassne@usc.edu

2. "Culture, Gender and Power: Specifying the Linkages"

Chair: Sharon Hays
Department of Sociology
P.O. Box 400766
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, VA 22903
Email: hays@virginia.edu

3. "The Impact of New Technology on the Production and Reception of Culture"

Chair: David Halle
Department of Sociology
UCL2201 Hershey Hall
610 Charles Young Drive
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4. "Theoretical and Methodological Implications of Cultural Repertoires" (co-sponsored with the Comparative History Section)

Chairs:: Michele Lamont
Department of Sociology
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Princeton, NJ 08540
Email: mlamont@princeton.edu

Charles Ragin
Center for Advanced Study in the
Behavioral Sciences
75 Alta Road
Stanford, CA 94305-8090
Email: cragin@northwestern.edu

5. Culture and Authenticity (Invitational Session)

Chair: Charles Kadushin
242 West 101st St.
New York, NY 10025
Email: Kadushin@Brandeis.edu

6. Section Roundtables.

Chair: Lynn Chancer
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Submit Today!

Section Award Committees for 2001

Section Chair Eviatar Zerubavel has just announced the award committees for the year 2001. All members are encouraged to nominate scholarly works that they believe deserve peer recognition. (Self nominations are welcomed.) If you wish to nominate a work, please send three copies of the piece (four copies for the book award) to the appropriate committee chair. (Check *Footnotes* for submission deadlines.) *Good luck to all!*

Best Book Award:

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Christena Nippert-Eng, Illinois Institute of Technology
Ann Swidler, University of California, Berkeley

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PO Box 400766, Charlottesville, VA 22904-4766
COMMITTEE MEMBERS:
Libby Schweber, Harvard University
Richard Williams, Rutgers University

Best Student Paper:

CHAIR: John Mohr, Univ. of California Santa Barbara
ADDRESS: Dept. of Sociology, UC Santa Barbara,
Ellison Hall, Rm. 2834, Santa Barbara, CA 93106-9430
COMMITTEE MEMBERS:
Wayne Brekhus, University of Missouri
Gary Marx, Univ. of Colorado at Boulder

And Note This!!!

At its last meeting, the Section Council agreed to assign actual names to the three section awards, a strategy adopted by several other sections. Please send your suggestions for the three award names to Eviatar Zerubavel by December

31, 2000 (zerubave@rci.rutgers.edu). Names will be discussed by the section council and the three "semiotic winners" will be announced later next year.

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