Book Reviews


Karen A. Cerulo
*Rutgers University*

Richard Peterson’s name has long been synonymous with studies addressing the production of popular culture. Over the past 25 years, Peterson has penned myriad articles that explore the complex interaction of popular music makers, the individuals and organizations that promote them, and the fans that consume and embrace their works. Within this tradition, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* arguably represents his best offering to date. This book provides an interesting social history of American country music. Readers begin their excursion in June of 1923, the year in which country music formally burst onto the recording scene, and they journey to the present where they share in Peterson’s speculations regarding the role of country music in the 21st century.

Three specific issues drive Peterson’s analysis of the country music industry. First, the author argues for a certain uniqueness to the institutionalization of country music, and he carefully traces for readers the distinctive ways in which the genre grew, solidified, and flourished. Peterson explores, for example, the prejudices of entertainment impresarios, noting that such industry players found themselves in the uncomfortable position of packaging and promoting a genre that was antithetical to their own aesthetic sensibilities. The author examines the ways in which these biases slowed country music’s march toward commercialization. Peterson also charts the creation of the distinctive country music images and icons. We learn the story behind images such as the “old-timers,” the “hillbilly,” and the “cowboy,” and we gain entrée to the plans of those involved in their construction—Henry Ford, George Hay, and Nat Levine, among others. Finally, Peterson explores the technological milieu surrounding country music’s institutionalization. He charts the ways in which three new media—radio, records, and the growth of hard-surface roads—made possible the commercialization of the genre. Peterson crafts this story with very readable and inviting prose. Students of history and popular music buffs, as well as sociologists of culture and organizations, will feel equally at home in traveling this historical terrain.

As a second task, Peterson takes up the issue of authenticity. The author argues that authenticity represents the hallmark of country music. As such, he explores the meaning of the word and the politics inherent in attributing authenticity to a cultural product. In this all too brief excursion, Peterson notes that sincerity and credibility dominate the meaning of authenticity in the country music world, and he reviews some of the
self-conscious ways in which artists and industry figures construct these “natural” characteristics. This section represents the freshest dimension of Peterson’s book. One cannot help but wish he had pursued this discussion in greater depth and detail. Peterson’s treatment of the social construction of authenticity provides readers with some interesting categories for thought: authenticity work, signifiers of authenticity, the process of authenticity renewal. His discussion also engages (albeit much too hastily) an exciting literature addressing the mechanics by which value, in its various forms, is constructed. And Peterson’s conclusions regarding the nature of authenticity in country music are provocative and important. He argues that authenticity does not refer to some clear standard or essential element from the past. Rather, authenticity is a reconstruction of various aspects of the past, elements continually selected and crafted to meet the needs of the present. Readers will see the exciting potential of these arguments, and many will wish that Peterson had unpacked them in a more elaborate way.

If the author’s conceptualization of authenticity is correct, then one must view country music as a vital and dynamic form. It is on this note that the author concludes his work. Specifically, Peterson briefly speculates on the particular structural conditions (i.e., changes in the production system, generational cycles, changing audience tastes, and so on) that could maintain and foster country music’s authenticity in the 21st century. In the author’s words, “So long as country music remains the shared property of performers, the industry, and fans, the sense of authenticity will be preserved as it is changed” (p. 233).

Creating Country Music promises wide appeal. Researchers sympathetic to the neoinstitutional approach will find the book a fascinating case study of an American industry’s development. Similarly, those dedicated to the process of social construction will appreciate the book’s historical detail and the analytic frame used to trace the institutionalization of this genre. On a pedagogical note, the book can make a valuable contribution to graduate and undergraduate seminars addressing the sociology of art, the sociology of culture, or organizations and society. And beyond sociology, the book could easily find a home in courses addressing modern American culture or music of the 20th century.


Daniel Thomas Cook
University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana

This book runs counter to the general trajectory of most discussions of aesthetics, taste, and fashion now found in the sociology of culture and cultural studies. In an intellectual climate generally abhorrent of totaliz-
Jukka Gronow has produced a “treatise on taste” (p. ix).

Drawing on a variety of works, Gronow develops parallels “between the aesthetic of taste and gastronomy, on the one hand, and between the need discourse and modern nutrition science, on the other” (p. 2). Questions of need, surplus, and pleasure are common to these fields and discourses. That which is over and above “need” becomes surplus, and surplus easily translates into “luxury” and “hedonism” when discussed in pecuniary contexts. Whether the field is food consumption or economic consumption, however, Gronow sees pleasure and beauty as overriding tropes in a vocabulary of action.

The analogy between taste and gastronomy and needs and nutrition reveals a central problem in the sociology of taste— that is, the antinomy between the individual and the social or, to put it another way, the singular and the universal. Gronow shows how this antinomy is central to the project of Kant—who, along with Simmel, is his main philosophical forbearer. For Kant, “the feeling of beauty requires that it be shared universally, but how could something that was exclusively based on the subjective feeling of pleasure be universally valid, too?” (p. 11). The sociology of taste thus addresses the paradox of the coexistence of the sensuous experience of the individual and aesthetic judgments of the collective (e.g., what is beauty, what is art). “Good taste,” he argues, has served as an “ideal means” for making social distinction precisely because it adjudicates between the personal and the social.

Gronow favors expressive value over the instrumental, particularly when it comes to deciphering human motivation (individual or collective). In this way, he is antirationalist as well as anti-rational choice. It is not surprising, therefore, that he does not deal with perspectives that invoke dominant class ideology as a determinant of taste, for that would be an instrumental explanation. Drawing selectively upon Bourdieu, Gronow rightly argues that not all status competition is hierarchically ordered class competition (pp. 22–30). Kitsch, for example, is a cheap mass-produced copy of something once considered elegant. In the 19th century, it gained social import from appearing to have adopted the status symbols of the elite, only to trivialize those symbols by turning them into articles of daily use (e.g., “a provincial coat-of-arms reproduced on the handle of a spoon” [p. 43]). Kitsch pokes fun at but does not try to imitate elite styles and values; it is a kind of a game. (The case of the Soviet Union is particularly interesting [pp. 49–70].)

The current fashion system (kitsch was intermediary between elite-class fashion of the 18th century and the mass fashion of the 20th) is analyzed by way of Simmel, Kant, and Blumer. It provides opportunity for both individual expression and shared taste. Fashion presents a kind of objectified commonality, a way to make judgments about ourselves vis-à-vis others and about others vis-à-vis ourselves. Making much of Blumer’s “collective selection” thesis, Gronow all but claims that the
modern fashion system is an expression of zeitgeist (pp. 101–5), which registers collective good taste.

He concludes by attempting to integrate Simmel’s and Kant’s views on play and art with Simmel’s formal sociology. “Because pure association . . . is necessarily reciprocal, it and only it can be called beautiful without any reservations. . . . With every other kind of social interaction—even if they are not ‘pure’—an aesthetic element is associated, too” (p. 152). All social interaction thus has both ludic and aesthetic qualities.

This aspect of his sociology of taste resembles more an act of art appreciation than an invitation to disciplined interpretation. That is, Gronow is preoccupied with examining the object of observation and less mindful of the act of observation. Amid some insightful analyses and discussions of a number of contemporary and classic works on taste and consumption, Gronow draws attention away from his arguments in the act of presenting them. In short, his is a problem of voice.

His voice is often authoritative, offering no avenue to examine the basis of its authority. At times, it seems like he believes that truth is located somewhere in the integration of perspectives—taking something from Kant, a little from Simmel, a bit more from Blumer, he finds it legitimate to posit the fashion system. His voice is univocal. There is scant accounting for the place of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and age—major sociological dimensions of identity—and thus little discussion of various forms of power beyond social class. These comments notwithstanding, Gronow urges us to take seriously the aesthetic and ludic dimensions of social life, both of which remain neglected in some of the most “cultural” of cultural studies.


Matt K. Matsuda
Rutgers University

Historian David Lowenthal, author of The Past is a Foreign Country (Cambridge University Press, 1985), continues in the realm he has made very much his own: the questioning of history and heritage and the analysis of appropriations and uses of the past. If, in his previous work, he has explored how in the past “they do things differently,” this latest work is very present-minded. It is not a history per se, but historiography, a tightly argued, auspiciously organized, and elegantly written dissection of contemporary historical thinking. The accomplishment of the work lies in how it manages to replicate the diversity of its subject, moving from Cicero to Disney’s Pocohantas, from TV talk shows to Chinese emperors, from Maori and Caribbean ethnic struggles to Elvis and the Elgin mar-
The argument follows the book’s title. It is very much about “possession,” and the author proposes a formidable array of genealogies of the term by inquiring how control of the past is related to questions of authenticity, to blood lines, to patrimony (in the old sense of transference of property), legacies, and allegiances—personal, communal, ethnic, “national,” and imaginary. “Possession” thus suggests both the frenzy of commemorative ritual that attends assertions of cultural identity, as well as the hand of the marketplace where the very real buying and selling of the past takes place—with all of its attendant pitfalls: commodification as vulgarization, representation as sanitization, educational value as measured by the box office. Lowenthal does a fine meditation on advocates of reconstructing the past the way it should have been, the problems of “authenticity,” and no small accounting of politicians, publicists, entrepreneurs, and just plain folks who see that history is far too important to be left to “historians.”

Subtitling the work “the heritage crusade and the spoils of history” is equally evocative, since the book is about crusading in its most vainglorious and righteous incarnations and the notion of “spoils” invites a critical look at both the foibles of “winners” who get to write history and the revenge of the dispossessed in claiming voice. The thesis is organized around a dialectical interplay between definitions, uses, and distinctions between “heritage” and “history.” Basically, history is proposed as a critical discipline that strives, however forlornly, for judgments of the past that one might call (in Popper’s terms) “falsifiable.” Heritage is quite the opposite; it is a series of strategies for representing the past in a way so as not only to make it unverifiable but to make its truth or falsity beside the point. Heritage operates on the principle of “it could have happened,” “it captures the spirit,” or increasingly, “based on a true story,” even if, especially in popular reconstructions, words are put in the mouths of those who never spoke them, unrelated figures are made to interact, and entire periods of history are collapsed into synecdochic models that simply “stand for” a given period.

Lowenthal shows how both history and heritage work in contemporary culture and ends by demonstrating, despite many distinctions, their general inseparability. He is master of the anecdote and brings his critical spirit and humor to such wonderfully overdetermined examples as a video game (“Play with history—in the ancient hills of Judea . . . pursued by a Philistine who is trying to kill you!”), which thoughtfully reassures potential players, “No prior knowledge of the Bible is required.”

Critical readers will note that Lowenthal covers a laundry list of academic issues: the question of the end of history; the role of ethics and interpretation in writing; the problem of “objectivity”; the roles of race, class, and gender in social analysis; the “linguistic turn”; the meanings of narrative; the politics of representing the past. Presenting “heritage” in such thematic forums as “being innate” or “being first” allows the author
to investigate how hybridity, racial mixing, and status work in the Caribbean, the sort of research one would expect in an ethnological monograph, not this broad treatise. Woven into a rich fabric of examples and anecdotes, one encounters the lexicon of contemporary critical historiography: identity, imperialism, hybridity, discourse, questions of memory and nation building, postmodernity.

One wonders what Lowenthal would make of extending his critical skills in directions taken by other historiographers who have suggested the role of ethical categories to give historians some equilibrium in the storm-tossed present of history and its reconstructions. Lowenthal is observant of all sorts of moralities and their ambiguous uses in Possessed, so perhaps new paradigms are not his desiderata; to be possessed by the past is certainly something he knows, and we are fortunate to have his vision in the present.


John Bodnar
Indiana University

Richard Morris explores the process of memorializing the dead in 19th-century America by studying the rhetoric used by various groups in society to remember Abraham Lincoln. He supplements this analysis with a highly original and insightful scrutiny of words and images in American cemeteries of the time. His purpose is to disclose how the process of memorializing the dead was inscribed by a much more extensive cultural war between competing worldviews, each vying for the minds of men and women in the past. As such, his work contributes significantly to the growing scholarship on the construction of American collective memory over time and to the emerging understanding of how the technologies of culture—words, images, symbols—can affect the way we see the past, present, and future.

Morris feels that an actual event—Lincoln’s death—created a condition for intensified cultural debate between powerful worldviews in mid-19th-century America. As many citizens looked to victory and the end of four years of hostility, the assassination of the president came as an immense shock, a tragedy that begged for explanation. The process of imagining Lincoln was extensive but dominated, in the author’s view, by three powerful traditions or ways of seeing the world: religionist, romanticist, and heroist. Taking advantage of the cultural “chaos” created by Lincoln’s death, all three viewpoints sought to “lay claim to the nation’s public memory through their value-laden portrayals” (p. 42) of the president.

The three American cultures described here dominated the rhetorical
battle over how to remember Lincoln and all who died. The religionists, whom Morris felt “held sway over social life” and “public memory” (p. 45), attempted to persuade all who would hear them that experience was largely conditioned by the will and laws of God. Individuals mattered only in that they were instruments of God’s will; Lincoln himself was only a gift from God that served the nation well. But power was ultimately divine. Consequently, their burial practices and grave markers were modest, minimizing the importance of the individual and of life on earth. Glory was to be found in the afterlife, not in this one.

The ethos of the romanticists moved away from heavenly goals and envisioned a harmonious community on earth. The basis of their moral view of life and of their veneration of Lincoln was to be found in their dream of a unity between all men and between man and nature. They celebrated Lincoln as one who drew wisdom from his early attachment to the land in Illinois. And they imagined a society where all men, despite class and race, would be seen as brothers. Thus, their gravescapes moved away from the minimalist words and headstones of the religionist toward the design of places from which the living could derive emotional satisfaction in the here and now. Often they built beautiful cemeteries with picturesque settings and objects of art.

The final contender in the public debate over memorializing were the heroists. This was essentially a tradition that celebrated the expression of individualism over the idea of submission to God or nature. Morris argues that, in their eyes, Lincoln earned his immortality because he was a “meritist.” He pulled himself up from humble beginnings to a high position, heroically triumphed over adversity, and, consequently, stood as an inspiration to all citizens that the realization of their lives could be found on earth through their own efforts. Heroists tended to memorialize the dead with statues of soldiers who were celebrated for their individual action on battlefields or with massive tributes to powerful individuals like the Washington Monument, begun in 1848.

No doubt the cultural perspectives described here were important, but it is difficult to see how they could be studied without reference to the cultural (and political) position of American nationalism as they are in this book. Nationalism would come to dominate the way in which Americans framed the past over the course of much of their history. A substantial literature already suggests that this way of thinking collectively was gaining substantial ground before the Civil War. Any discourse over Lincoln could not have remained insulated from the views of the nationalists, which may have been expansive enough to imagine a past, present, and future that included religionists, romanticists, and heroists. Perhaps all the traditions discussed in this book were forced to confront the image of Lincoln because they could not flee from the growing cultural power of the nation, with its imagined links to the will of God, to the promise of social cohesion, and to the idea of opportunity for all individuals.
Deciphering the relation between communal laughter and social vicissitudes that generates a particular comedic climate is tricky and rests on juxtaposing empirical data with historical inferences,” Joseph Boskin states (p. 201). Yet, Boskin accomplishes just such an analysis. In 13 enlightening and entertaining chapters, Boskin justifies why Americans told and laughed at particular types of jokes during certain periods of time. In his introduction, he acknowledges that his thesis rests on an old argument, previously made by other authors such as Constance Rourke in *American Humor: A Study of National Character* (Harcourt Brace, 1931). Like many before him, Boskin asserts that all humor expresses rather than represses contemporary conflicts and anxieties. Therefore, when people want to stifle dissent, they will label certain types of jokes as sick or racist, as unworthy of being told or heard. Thus, political correctness spurs rebellious humor or laughter.

Boskin’s original contribution lies in his ability to connect humor and history. He correlates the joke cycles that came and went across the United States from the 1940s until the 1990s with the social, political, and economic changes that occurred during those five decades. Boskin insists that what makes American humor unique is its ironic commentary on “The American Dream.” For example, the one-liner, “Whoever dies with the most toys wins,” was most popular during the materialistic 1980s. In fact, the rise of one-liner jokes (“Take my wife, please”) mirrors the lifestyle changes of Americans as they moved from slow-paced rural towns to fast-paced metropolitan cities. Stand-up comedians and one-liners, rather than yarn-spinners and tall tales, serve humor to people too busy to sit still. Similarly, an explosion of jokes about race and gender told by women and men of all colors (including whites) coincided with Civil Rights and feminist movements in the 1960s. Jokes about success and failure, minorities and majorities, and cities and rural areas are American staples.

Next, Boskin examines the most popular American jokes in the last half of the 20th century: child jokes, giant jokes, sick jokes, lightbulb jokes, politically incorrect or correct jokes, and joke wars (“Whoever dies with the most toys, still dies.”) All of these joke cycles challenged an American ideal. Dead baby jokes ridiculed the sanctity of the American family. Elephant jokes questioned superpower imperialism: “How do you stop an elephant from charging? Take away his credit card” (p. 66). Popular in the 1970s, lightbulb jokes expressed concerns about impotence in sexual relations (with their emphasis on screwing), bright ideas (which lightbulbs symbolize), the OPEC oil crisis (lightbulbs require energy), and
simple accomplishments (replacing a lightbulb). Politically correct or incorrect jokes abounded as gender and race relations changed. For example, “Why is a husband better than a cucumber? Because he can take out the garbage” (p. 169) and “What is the difference between a nigger and a black? A nigger is a black who has left the room.” Inevitably, jokes that make fun of gender, race, or controversial issues offend some people who take gender, race, and other controversial subjects seriously. Equally inevitably, some offended people try to impose their seriousness with regard to these issues on the public at large. In short, social crises and changes inspire jokes that then prompt prohibitions against telling those jokes. During these prohibitions against jokes, critics say that Americans have lost their sense of humor. Boskin excels whenever he details the recurrent repression of controversial humor and humorists.

*Rebellious Laughter* is an incisive social history of American humor, but it is also flawed. Boskin demonstrates convincingly that temporal correlations existed between historical events and the popularity of certain jokes, but he never really clarifies the causal connections. Personally, as a thirty-something black male raised in a predominantly white, middle-class college town, I remember as a child sharing many of the jokes Boskin lists, especially the elephant jokes. Therefore, I wonder how telling and listening to elephant jokes was caused by my worries about American imperialism? Moreover, what does the popularity of situation comedies like *Seinfeld* say about 1990s America? Boskin gives us no independent means of answering these questions. His logic has a certain intuitive circularity. He argues that people’s experiences shape their jokes then shows readers how people’s jokes fit their experiences. What I want to know is How can we use one milieu to predict the other? Histories look backward, but they should also give readers clues as to how they can look forward.


Eva Illouz  
Tel Aviv University

Susan Davis’s new book, *Spectacular Nature*, is an important addition to the now well-established field of studies on theme parks. In minute ethnographic detail, she describes the many ways in which ocean life is produced and packaged for an audience of adults and children by the Californian marine park, Sea World.

The general intent of the book is to understand how the myriad of displays and performances, as well as the spatial layout constructed by the park, concur to create an intricate system of meanings representing ocean wildlife, nature, and animals. This system of representation is in
turn geared toward profit making and enhancing the public image of the Anheuser-Busch corporation, the owner of the park. This already indicates that Davis’s study is at odds with previous approaches that viewed theme parks as festive cultural niches celebrating pleasure and semiotic inventiveness. Instead, Davis makes a convincing case for the importance of examining theme parks in general and Sea World in particular as corporate economic institutions interlocked with the structure and strategies of late capitalist market. In contrast to studies of popular culture that view mass-produced meanings in terms of the desires and pleasures they tap into and empower consumers with, Davis brings the study of commercial entertainment back to the firm ground of social and economic critique. Toward this end, the book follows two threads: one accounts for the commodification of public space; the other concerns the problem of the representation of nature and the environment in the mass media. Sea World, Davis claims, ties remarkably well the corporate and the natural and mobilizes a battery of sophisticated symbolic devices to blend one into the other. Thus when visitors enter Sea World, they are not simply spectators of some remote reality; they are immersed into an experience of nature, exoticism, and wilderness, all cast in the authoritative aura of science. While experiencing such meanings, the consumer is subtly manipulated so that she can be at once relaxed, entertained, educated, and transported to the exotic landscapes of wildlife.

Through a carefully crafted methodology, Davis shows that the multiplicity of meanings that are artfully orchestrated in the park are the result of well-thought-out marketing research and strategies. Through in-depth interviews with Sea World personnel, repeated visits to Sea World spanning from 1987 to 1995, and an analysis of photographs of the park, Davis shows that in Sea World, nothing is more carefully planned than surprises, spontaneity, and wilderness. In minute and fascinating detail she exposes the ways in which the “Sea World experience” is manufactured through marketing research, architectural engineering, careful scheduling of the shows, location of the restaurants, strict control over the personnel’s performance, and the conversion of the visitor’s gaze into a tourist’s and even (Western) colonizer’s gaze.

The analysis is not only “internal” but “external” as well, aiming to identify the reasons why Sea World resonates with American culture. The response provided by the book is many-stranded, but a few central themes can be readily identified: Davis undercuts Sea World’s self-image by judiciously locating the park in the tradition of circus and animal training; Sea World taps into a long-standing Western cultural tradition of nature appreciation and animal displays, both of which are organically connected to the Western project of economic control and cultural rationality. Thus the packaging of nature and animals or the gaze and consumption still functions as a powerful metaphor for political, intellectual, and geographic control. Furthermore, by packaging itself as an “educational experience” for the family, Sea World resonates with middle-class ideals of education and learning.
One could argue that Davis’s analysis is hampered by the absence of voices representing the millions of middle- and upper-middle-class white Americans who attend and (presumably) enjoy Sea World. She offers two convincing arguments to offset this criticism: (1) because the decisions made by Sea World staff are based on and fed by ongoing market research, the consumers’ cultural habits, modes of perception, and desires are in fact “written in the text” of Sea World (2) the spatial, temporal, human, and animal design of the park directs and constrains so much of the consumers’ experience that an analysis of those constraints yields an essential aspect of that experience.

As can be expected from an analysis that is predicated on the tasks of social criticism, the conclusions of the book are not optimistic. Sea World and its like point to a worrisome social reality. Public space is increasingly commodified as our contact with nature is increasingly mediated by corporate institutions. This money-based and close-to-home tourism alters our relation to nature and our ability to grasp the devastating effects of human action on the environment. What Davis finally unravels is the gentle but ever more powerful face of corporate strength at the century’s end. By displaying a philanthropic concern for the environment, which takes the form of wildlife preservation, corporations, exemplified here by Anheuser-Busch, can have their cake and eat it; they can comfortably sustain social relations of exploitation and the economic system that gives rise to pollution and yet save their public image by claiming to be nature lovers. Thus the recycled image of nature and wildlife, so meticulously constructed by Sea World, ends up reaffirming the authority of science, corporate power, and economic exploitation.

This book offers a well-documented example of the ways in which entertainment, education, leisure, and such sacred meanings as nature and family interlock with the strategies of marketing research. To the student of culture, it offers a model of the ways in which ethnography can illuminate the complex interlocking of meaning and economy in the culture of late capitalist societies. But despite the clarity of the argument, the elegance of the writing, and the seriousness of the research, the book is disappointing in that it seems oblivious to much of recent research on culture, organizations, and capitalism.

As Davis is undoubtedly aware, a great deal has been written on the production of culture by corporate organizations, on the construction of scientific authority in the media, on commodification, and on the interlocking of culture and economy in late capitalism. Unfortunately, with the exception of a few evocative lines in the introductory chapter, no trace of these vibrant debates can be found in the book. Second, although I have a great deal of sympathy with Davis’s return to a political and economic analysis of contemporary commercial culture, and although Davis takes great pains to present the Sea World text as an ideological compromise between consumers and producers, one is left with yet another reduction of culture to ideology and economic interests. In the end, Sea World is presented as nothing but a machine that lures us in and
prevents us from grasping our real environmental interests, a position difficult to sustain after so many studies have shown that “commodities” and “consumption” work at the interface between corporate interests and everyday life and have cunning ways of undercutting the cultural logic that produced them. Finally, Davis’s analysis suggests that corporate representations of nature, such as that of Sea World, displace, replace, and ultimately corrupt a more direct relationship with nature, an idea that is as plausible as its opposite, namely that the more capitalism destroys nature, the more sacralized the image of nature becomes, thus paradoxically reinforcing rather than undermining our relation with it. Like many studies that undertake the difficult task of understanding the effects of capitalism, Davis’s work is predicated on too simple an idea of what money, commodities, and rationality do to people and culture. As the works of Alan Silver, Paul Willis, Viviana Zelizer, Michael Schudson, Thomas Haskell, Nathan Sznaider, and others have suggested, such concepts as “market,” “commodities,” or “money” are sociological “black boxes” that need to be opened if we want to make sense of the eerie contradictions that make up the culture of late capitalism.

Trapped in the Net: The Unanticipated Consequences of Computerization.

Rob Kling
Indiana University

Gene Rochlin wants to alert the readers of his ambitious book to the significant, but often invisible, social risks of intensive computerization through networked systems. Aside from the introductory and concluding chapters, the book is divided into two major parts. In the first part (composed of three chapters), Rochlin briefly recounts the history of computerization in North America, with special attention to the Internet’s precursors. He also examines how managerial ideologies, such as scientific management, have helped shape the computerization of work and have often reduced workers’ discretion and skill. The book’s second part (seven chapters) is a set of vividly drawn cases that examine the computerization of trading in financial markets and the computerization of battlefield command and control systems. These chapters form the empirical core of the book and the most detailed evidence on which Rochlin anchors his arguments.

Rochlin’s analysis of the ways in which computerized trading has altered the structure of traders’ work and of financial markets is circumstantial, but worrisome. Computer systems have been critical for creating new financial instruments, such as derivatives, that have been at the heart of several multihundred million dollar losses and bankrupted some local governments. They were also at the heart of the multibillion dollar
loss through which an individual trader in Singapore bankrupted Barings P.L.C., a 200-year-old British firm, in 1995. Rochlin argues that traders were subject to substantially more organizational control before computer systems became commonplace in trading. In these cases, the managers who were charged with financial oversight misunderstood the complexity of the derivatives.

In addition to trading complex “artificial” (or highly symbolic) goods, traders can work around the clock in a variety of world markets. The ways that the recent rapid declines of the Hong Kong and Indonesian currency markets in the fall of 1997 shook stock markets worldwide (and led to declines in the value of pension funds in the United States, for example) indicates that these markets are much more integrated than most analysts heretofore realized. Thus the book’s subtitle, *The Unanticipated Consequences of Computerization*, is especially apt. The international currency and stock markets, however, are coupled in ways that go well beyond market-trading operations. For example, the stock of MNCs, wherever they are headquartered, can rise or fall with business prospects in their major markets, such as Asia. Unfortunately, Rochlin does not examine the ways that the business practices of MNCs links markets around the world, and he may be overemphasizing the importance of computerized trading on international financial instability.

Rochlin’s most compelling analysis of electronic battlefields is based on a detailed account of the way that a cruiser with an unusually sophisticated command and control systems, the Aegis-equipped USS Vincennes, shot down a commercial Iranian airliner and killed the 290 people on board in 1988. Rochlin uses official reports to portray the cognitive framing of the ships’ officers, who were simultaneously in a fire fight with small boats, and the flow of clues about the airliner’s movements, and their misinterpretations of its character and its pilots’ intentions. He reports how Aegis miscued the ship’s officers during a stressful episode. The airliner was ascending, but the lack of altitude information on the main screen allowed the operator to believe it was descending. The operator had earlier locked onto an Iranian F-14 fighter still on the runway, and believed the commercial flight to be that fighter. The official Navy reports treated the episode as an accident caused by human error. Rochlin uses this case and others to draw a more sociological conclusion, “that a highly automated, rapid-response battle system that depends for its function on real-time interactions between complex computerized systems and human operators may have an inherently high probability of error in any crisis situation that has not been anticipated, planned, and rehearsed” (p. 168).

Financial and airline mishaps, such as those discussed by Rochlin, have been taken very seriously by computer scientists who study “high-risk” systems and who develop normative practices from observations like his (see, e.g., Peter G. Neumann, *Computer-Related Risks* [Addison-Wesley, 1995]). Unfortunately, Rochlin does not examine this literature or assess the extent to which the design of newer high-risk systems are being influ-
enced by this kind of professional “best practice.” These professional reforms may be organizationally inadequate or have little influence, but Rochlin ignores the debates and their importance for his overall arguments.

Sociologists can find this book to be a helpful introduction to the organizational character of some high-risk computer systems. The book offers a provocative series of cautionary tales. The underlying argument about the social risks of complex highly coupled sociotechnical systems builds on Charles Perrow’s study of routinize catastrophes (Normal Accidents; Living with High-Risk Technologies [Basic Books, 1984]). Unfortunately, Perrow’s analysis is merely mentioned in a footnote in a late chapter. Rochlin effectively identifies some of the problems that come as a byproduct of managers and professionals enthusiastically embracing new “technological imperatives,” but he does not theorize their computerization movements and the structure of the debates inside or outside these organizations (see, e.g., my own “Systems Safety, Normal Accidents, and Social Vulnerability” and Suzanne Iacono and Rob Kling, “Computerization Movements and Tales of Technological Utopianism” Computerization and Controversy: Value Conflicts and Social Choices 2d ed. [Academic Press, 1996]). Rochlin’s book is an intriguing invitation for theoretically inclined sociologists to theorize seriously these kinds of events. Princeton University Press has posted the book’s complete contents at on the Internet (http://pup.princeton.edu/books) for those who would like to preview it before purchase.


Melissa W. Wright
University of Georgia

In his book, The Terror of the Machine, Devon Peña sets out to tell the human story of the maquiladoras. “The point,” he writes, “is to understand the dynamic and intersecting contradictions in the evolution of capitalist domination and workers’ struggles” (p. 28) without “(reducing) human beings to mere labor power.” And so he promises to tell the story with some Marxist insights into capital without committing metanarrative and overdeterminist errors.

Peña correctly identifies the neglect of human stories in the much studied maquiladora industry. With only a few exceptions over the last two decades, accounts of human rights abuses along with industrial transformation within the maquilas have tended to cast the still largely female and poorly educated workforce as either agentless victims or as homogenous units of production. Years of public attention and scores of academic texts have molded a profile of the “typical” maquila worker who
Peña promises not to mimic such offenses. His interview-rich text details poignant illustrations of worker, largely female, views on the pressures they face in the maquilas and how they confront a dehumanizing environment. "I have emphasized the workers' own voices simply because the workers have direct and, in my opinion, more accurate knowledge of the factory" (p. 17). Yet as Peña progresses through an engaging argument, which begins with Henry Ford and ends with NAFTA, he unfortunately, and rather surprisingly, commits those very errors he criticizes. He recreates archetypal characters who do not change through time and denies the diversity integral to a vast labor force with varied personal histories.

First signs of a universalizing rendition of workers occurs early on when Peña declares, "I share the maquila workers' commitment to social change, workplace democracy, and economic justice. I share their concern for the earth and the rampant ecological destruction that capitalism produces . . ." (p. 17). Who are these earth-loving people? Are we really to believe that all maquila workers share a common vision for social justice?

Such universal depictions are inevitable consequences, I believe, of Peña's decision to make contemporary claims based on data more than a decade old. As I read, I kept wishing he had offered a historical account of the early 1980s. His fascinating description of the worker organization, The Center for the Orientation of Women Workers (COMO), which is central to his argument, reveals a vibrant and inspiring endeavor worthy of historical attention. Yet he insists upon making claims that his data simply do not support.

In its heyday, COMO defied all expectations by scholars, such as the renown New International Division of Labor crowd, who claimed that all third world women workers were damned to live in the dismal conditions of a docile proletariat. The women who formed COMO demonstrated that they were anything but docile. While many were not highly educated, they articulated their politics with unwavering clarity and startled a maquila elite who thought they had stumbled upon an inexhaustible mine of passive females. Why Peña does not develop the strengths of his research on COMO in the early 1980 period is mystifying and, in the end, crippling to his objective. COMO is now defunct as a political force in Ciudad Juárez, and since Peña insists upon linking this organization to contemporary events, his failure to explain the demise of this group is glaring.

Peña reveals his distance from the contemporary site of his research in other areas. Long before his 1997 publication date, a number of independent worker groups had made their presence felt along the border. In 1994, one of them, the Frente Auténtico de Trabajo (FAT), had almost succeeded in organizing an independent union (a union not affiliated with a political party) in a General Electric–owned facility located in Ciudad
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Juárez. Last year, workers in the Han Young factory in Tijuana, with the assistance of the FAT and some U.S. groups, did elect the maquiladora’s first independent union. Peña does not mention the FAT. One gets the feeling that he simply lost touch with current forms of resistance among maquiladora workers.

As Peña readily admits, he has lost track of some of the principle characters in his story. “What happened to Juana Ortega?” he asks in the beginning of a chapter entitled, “Mexico in the Fast Lane.” He wonders if she is “somewhere in the United States.” Last I heard, she was still in Ciudad Juárez and not too difficult to find. My point here is to stress that with some recent research, this and other questions or assertions Peña makes would have changed.

Maquiladora workers are women and men from many walks of life. Some are migrants, as most were in the early 1980s, but many are now the children of those workers Peña interviewed. They represent another generation of the maquiladora labor force, and their views, ambitions, and work experiences should not be collapsed with those of an earlier time. Peña’s interviews and observations had the potential of supporting a fascinating and necessary historical account of worker responses in the incipient decades of maquiladora expansion, if only he had written that history.


James Rinehart
University of Western Ontario

Does lean production (LP) provide, indeed require, challenging jobs performed by multiskilled workers in a high-trust, participatory environment? Or is LP driven by the goal of work intensification and staffed by workers whose jobs require minimal skill and whose participation is restricted to suggesting productivity improvements? To what extent is LP being diffused, and how are unions responding? These articles address such questions by examining employment practices of auto companies in 13 countries. The editors are associated with MIT’s International Motor Vehicle Program (IMVP), which is funded by the auto industry.

IMVP maintains lean production (just-in-time practices, small buffers and lot sizes, and so on) gets best results when accompanied by “high involvement” work practices and human resource policies. In recent global surveys, MacDuffie and Pil give high scores on “involvement” to automakers that have teams, extensive job rotation, problem solving groups, suggestion programs, inspection by production workers, nontra-
ditional hiring criteria, much training, contingent compensation, and few status differentials. The data show convergence toward “high involvement” measures but with considerable variation.

Tight labor markets and worker discontent have led the undisputed champion of LP, Toyota in Japan, to relax some key aspects of lean production. Ishida questions whether LP requires a high-involvement environment. At Toyota, improvement activity (kaizen) is done mainly by managers, engineers, and team leaders. Job design is Taylorist, production is planned and managed from the top, and all employees experience “relentless” pressure.

Most Big Three plants in the United States, including NUMMI, are LP-mass production hybrids but with large differences across companies and plants owned by the same company. Fear of plant closure is an important determinant of union locals’ agreement to elements of LP. Saturn is considered a post-lean company due to its extensive joint governance structures.

Big Three plants in Canada rank high on productivity and quality without many “high-involvement” practices. Their absence is due partly to union resistance (which Kumar and Holmes view as formidable). Nevertheless, companies have implemented just-in-time practices, eliminated subassemblies, outsourced jobs, and reduced non-value-added labor—all elements of lean production. These changes “invariably” increased the pace and intensity of work.

The German autoworkers union, which regards LP as a cost- and job-cutting system, agreed to elements of LP in exchange for employment security guarantees. Roth maintains the leanest plant in Germany, General Motors (GM) Opel, has the most narrowly defined jobs and allows workers the least discretion. Automakers in Great Britain have introduced LP employment practices. Fiat, Renault, and Seat have eliminated several layers of management and introduced teams, but worker discretion remains minimal due to control by first-line supervisors and systematic monitoring.

A Volvo plant has bucked the trend to standardized work by increasing job cycle times from two to between 10 and 28 minutes and allowing work groups considerable autonomy. At a Saab (GM-owned) factory, teams also have broad responsibilities, but they are expected to reduce cycle time.

In Australia, automakers have introduced some lean work practices, but teamwork is retarded by the union, which views it as manipulative with no autonomy. Most plants remain “neo-Fordist.”

Wildcat strikes convinced automakers in South Africa to shelve some “Japanese-inspired” initiatives. The union has proposed changes beneficial to companies and workers (e.g., literacy and skills training), but automakers continue to rely on traditional production and management methods.

In Brazil, traditions of parent companies have led to different ap-
proaches to restructuring. GM’s top-down strategy emphasizes production and uses NUMMI as a model. Mercedes-Benz negotiates change and stresses labor-management relations.

South Korean automakers must contend with the growing power of unions, strike waves, and high labor turnover. Assemblers and parts producers exhibit a wide range of practices but with little movement toward leanness.

The editors conclude there has been considerable diffusion of LP employment practices in auto plants in the 1990s. However, substantial variations arise from differences in company strategies, culture, government policies, and union strength. LP generally is impeded by powerful unions and spurred by competition, overcapacity, and declining profits. The book’s title is misleading. Most automakers are far from having adopted the complete lean package, let alone having gone beyond it (whatever that might entail).

Some IMVP involvement criteria give no indication of involvement. For example, plants get high scores solely on the basis of having a large percentage of their workforce organized in teams. Teams in most auto plants, including the leanest, have only a fraction of the discretion enjoyed by workers in some Scandinavian factories. The same criticism applies to training and job rotation, which is mistakenly equated with multiskilling. IMVP does not measure workloads, work intensity, job complexity, and health and safety problems, especially repetitive strain injuries. “High-involvement” practices do not preclude a stressful working environment, nor do they ensure optimal efficiency.

This is an informative book that provides an excellent overview of developments in the global auto industry. The LP debate continues, as both proponents and critics will find in these articles support for their positions.

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Carol Nagy Jacklin
University of Southern California

Virginia Valian asks an important question. How can it be that most women and men truly believe that they should not and do not discriminate by sex, while progress in the employment and particularly in the promotion of women in the professions has been so slow. Worse, discriminatory promotion decisions are often made in the belief that the decision maker is doing his or her egalitarian best.

The answer, according to Valian, is that small discriminatory decisions accumulate. These small decisions are to be found in many areas but can be found most prominently in evaluation processes. The accumulation of
these very small differences cause large differences in the number of women and men found in prestigious positions in all areas of the workplace.

Good summaries of research literature are presented in many areas of gender schema. The summaries are made memorial by apt anecdotes, many of them from Valian’s own experience. She also presents mathematical models demonstrating convincingly how a few small differences early in one’s career can translate into big differences in professional outcomes.

Research is summarized for various relevant aspects of gender issues including gender schema socialization; biological explanations of gender differences, particularly biological explanations of cognition; gender schema theory and how it affects the workplace, the evaluation processes, and our sense of self.

The real strength of this book is not in its research summaries, good as they are, but in its new framing of old questions. Without preaching, Valian shows just how deeply ingrained sexism is by showing how we frame both research questions and the general understanding of our social world. We cannot understand how questions are framed without understanding the sexism that pervades them. For example, neither female nor male academics have asked how girl’s superior conversational verbal skills get in the way of their math word problem test scores. Few female or male researchers have asked why male hormone cycles and consequences do not get into popular culture as have the simplistic view of women’s hormonal cycles. Few female or male researchers have asked why men are not given an equal chance at the important human experience of parenthood. Valian shows how fruitful such new question formulation can be. Of particular virtuosity is Valian’s analysis of the cost to a woman in the workplace of being perceived as feminine or of being perceived as masculine.

The last section of the book is devoted to suggesting how to speed the advancement of women. Valian believes that if individuals understand that biases in the evaluation process are an outcome of gender schemas, the individuals will change their evaluation behaviors. Several specific suggestions and the Johns Hopkins case study are given to show how this change can be instantiated. Although I agree that this remedy will somewhat speed the advancement of women, I am less optimistic that it will radically change the workplace.

I wish I had Valian’s faith that when people understand their discriminatory behaviors they will change their ways. My cynicism is not with her analysis and suggested remedies. The accumulation of small discriminatory decisions in the workplace no doubt occurs. Her remedies no doubt redress that bias. However, I would add a larger dollop than Valian would of the variable “power” and the rewards to some men and some women of keeping power and privilege away from whomever does not have it. My cynicism has to do with just how many people of egalitarian goodwill there really are in the workplace.
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Our different views may be generational. Valian suggests that women enter fields, such as psychology, where there are already many women. I am only a few months into emeritus status, but that advice would have been impossible for me to follow only a few decades ago, even in the field of psychology. I hope I am wrong and she is right in believing the number of egalitarian thinking women and men out there is very large. Even if my cynical view is correct, Valian’s analysis and suggestions of how women can “take” power are very good and illustrate much about the nature of power.

*Why So Slow* will make an admirable text in social psychology, sociology, and gender studies classes with empirical orientations. It will make an excellent topics class text in sociology or psychology or an excellent optional text for introductory classes.

But I wish for this book a larger audience than the college classroom. Because of its solid research summaries, its formulation of the accumulation of advantage concept, and especially because of its taking old questions framed by the culture’s pervasive sexism and reformulating them into new ways of viewing our world, *Why So Slow* should be read by all thinking women and men.


Jerry Floersch
*University of Chicago*

Leslie Margolin reverses the idea that social workers help, a method borrowed from Michel Foucault, and marshals data from case records and social work texts to effectively and lucidly criticize the function and practices of 19th- and 20th-century social work. Professional social workers control the poor through their unique, ubiquitous, and largely unconscious discourse on helping and kindness. I find the book’s strength in its exemplary reversal of the idea of a benevolent helper. I find its central weakness in its overreliance on a Foucauldian analysis.

Margolin presents social work’s internal critique but fails to place his research alongside many important external criticisms: Roy Lubove (*Professional Altruist* [Harvard University Press, 1965] points out the contradictions between altruistic helping and professional bureaucracy; Joel Handler (*The Coercive Social Worker* [Rand McNally College Publishing, 1973]) shows that caseworkers misuse power; Michael Lipsky (*Street-Level Bureaucracy* [Russell Sage Foundation, 1980]) demonstrates that social workers leverage power over clients by manipulating social welfare regulations and work environments; Andrew Polsky (*The Rise of the Therapeutic State* [Princeton University Press, 1991]) argues that social workers define and control “juvenile delinquents”; Regina Kunzel (*Fallen
Women, Problem Girls [Yale University Press, 1993]) looks at social workers who dominate unwed, pregnant mothers; Mary Odem (Delinquent Daughters [University of North Carolina Press, 1995]) shows how social workers manage female delinquency; Elizabeth Lunbeck (The Psychiatric Persuasion [Princeton University Press, 1994]) argues that they manipulate, among others, hypersexualized females; and finally, Linda Gordon’s social workers (Pitied but Not Entitled [Free Press, 1994]) confine poor women to the home. These scholars, unlike Margolin, do not rely solely on Foucauldian analysis. Thus, in this review of Under the Cover of Kindness I evaluate the limits and potential of the Foucauldian analysis of social work.

Margolin examines the birth of social work (pt. 1), its “aggressive” phase (pt. 2), and recent “new excuses” (pt. 3) for its perpetuation. The first four chapters, “Basic Social Work,” are especially good at illustrating a “social work gaze.” Through close readings of texts and case records Margolin argues that social work coincides with the moral, political, and social need to investigate 19th-century urban poverty. Because investigation can be an onerous task, social work learned to use “sympathy and friendliness . . . to gain entry into private places” (p. 23). Home visits (surveillance) became “social work’s totem technique, corresponding to the psychometric test of the psychologist or the physician’s prescription” (p. 26). The use of “emotional support” to access information became a source of Orwellian doublethink: social workers consciously used friendliness to investigate unconventional and suspicious behavior while at the same time “forgetting” that such manipulation was itself suspicious. The invisible and secret were transformed into “facts” through biographical social histories recorded in case records. Moreover, the social work ruse is hidden from social workers by self-mystification (p. 60).

In part 2, Margolin argues that social work continued to “penetrate” the “hard-to-reach” even after its first, self-reflective, post–World War II phase. For example, the profession blamed the poor for societal failures and assisted psychiatrists in carrying out thousands of lobotomies, all in the name of helping. In the 1960s, social workers discover “empowerment” (pt. 3), a “brilliant strategy” (p. 120) to ensnare new clients. But social workers were never fully conscious of their discursive strategies. They became unwitting victims: “Whatever system of rules and obligations is operating here originates neither in the social worker nor in the client but in the discourse itself” (p. 134).

I find this book wrought with all the potential and limits of a strict Foucauldian reading of social work. I agree: horrific actions can be justified in the many languages of social workers, teachers, and scholars. And language is fraught with ambiguity and infinite meanings; yet, social life is dependent upon speech and writing. Are we to assume that all of the appalling acts of humanity, including those that take place under the watchful eye of social workers, are beyond our knowledge and exist merely in the relativizing discourses of professionals? If I know artifice, then I can reasonably identify the authentic. For Margolin, social work
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is reduced to artifice alone. Moreover, had social workers been so clever at hiding their intentions, why were they not equally capable at disguising case records and texts? For Margolin to identify judiciously the artifice in social work discourse, he limits the analysis to social work texts (excluding reference to actual events), and he must read social work actions as a mirror of everyday speech acts. Margolin needs a method for discerning artifice from authenticity, but his Foucauldian analysis is limited by the lack of any epistemological criteria to evaluate knowledge claims. Margolin’s central error is, then, the epistemic fallacy: reducing what we know to how we know it.

Discourse is reality and reality is discourse. If one follows this logic, Margolin’s analysis is flawless. On the other hand, if there is more to knowledge than mere language events, this work may only be a starting point for researching the complex relationship between power and language in social work action.


Jean E. Wallace  
University of Calgary

Studies on the legal profession often focus on law firm practice, and many are restricted even further to large law firms. Consequently, the less prestigious and less powerful segments of the legal profession tend to be overlooked. Van Hoy offers an exception in Franchise Law Firms and the Transformation of Personal Legal Services, which provides an in-depth, qualitative analysis of the work experiences of lawyers in this relatively new segment of the legal profession. His analysis is based on in-office observations and interviews that he conducted over a year in the local branches of two national franchise law firms.

Van Hoy begins with an overview of the rise of franchise law firms in the personal legal services market. Franchise law firms successfully penetrated a market that was historically managed by sole and small-firm practitioners largely by exploiting both the cheap supply of legal labor and an untapped pool of middle-class consumers. Franchise firms offer a very limited menu of routine personal legal services that are mass marketed and mass produced.

Franchise law firms refer to chains of local law offices located in strip malls, shopping malls, or other retail business districts. A typical branch office includes a managing attorney, one or two staff attorneys, and a number of secretaries. Between each branch office and each firm’s founding partner are several levels of management that may be organized along district, regional, and sometimes national lines.

Van Hoy provides a rich, informative description of the division of
Managing attorneys are responsible for the day-to-day operations of their branch office; they must ensure productivity and profitability. Staff attorneys are hired to consult with clients and sell services. Their work appears more focused around clerical and sales duties than researching and solving legal problems. Secretaries are instrumental to the success of the office and have the broadest range of tasks and responsibilities. They are acknowledged by all members of franchise firms as essential and we see that in many ways secretaries are more important to the functioning of these firms than are the staff attorneys.

Van Hoy paints a bleak picture of the work experiences of franchise firm’s staff attorneys. Consultation with clients lasts 15 minutes or less, and clients are “herded through a production system that maximizes productivity and efficiency” (p. 2). Prepackaged law in the form of computer boilerplates is the key element in the mass production of routine legal services and for maintaining office productivity. The extreme standardization not only results in restrictive, repetitive, and boring work for franchise attorneys, but also significantly limits their autonomy, their influence on clients decisions, and the scope of legal skills they exercise in their daily work. Staff attorneys are poorly paid, work long hours, and have limited potential for promotion opportunities. “Staff attorneys are neither essential nor considered legal experts. They are extra help to facilitate selling services to clients” (p. 41). The standardized production technique grants significant legal decision-making responsibilities to secretaries who write letters, draft documents, and manage case files. The secretaries are more satisfied with their work, often appear to have more decision-making authority than attorneys, and their compensation is comparable to and sometimes more than the attorneys they work for.

Van Hoy’s attention to this curious work situation is interesting and highlights his attentiveness to the complexities of franchise law firms and the workers involved, even workers who are not members of legal profession. He also examines lawyers in sole and small-firm practice who provide similar legal services but who do so in very different contexts and in a much more personal way. He conducted interviews with a sample of these lawyers so he could systematically compare their work settings and work experiences with franchise lawyers.

Van Hoy examines the alienating conditions of franchise law firms and discusses why efforts to unionize have been unsuccessful. He explains that lawyers take these jobs largely because of the overcrowded labor market. Inexperienced law school graduates turn to franchise firms as a last alternative, and most leave within two years. He closes by discussing the role of computer technology, the degradation of legal skills, and the future for lawyers providing personal legal services.

One of the major strengths of *Franchise Law Firms* is that Van Hoy’s analysis is clearly and directly tied to the classical and contemporary literature on professional occupations in general and the legal profession in particular. He skillfully locates his work in the broader sociological literature thereby challenging us to rethink our traditional notions about law-
yers and their work experiences. *Franchise Law Firms* will be valuable to students of work, occupations, and professions and especially those interested in the legal profession or professional control. Van Hoy presents rich, vivid quotes throughout that detail the occupational context and work experiences of franchise lawyers. In doing so, he demonstrates the need for conducting in-depth field research in order to disentangle the complexity of factors related to occupational change and reorganization and the workplace implications such changes have for members of the occupations involved.


Rob Barrett
*University of Adelaide*

If the interface between traditional institutions is increasingly the site at which social categories are created, defined, and reproduced, then Stefan Sjöström’s recently published study of the psychiatric and legal processes associated with compulsory care in Sweden is a paradigmatic study of power in contemporary society. *Party or Patient* will quickly find its way to the bookshelves and course reading lists in a number of disciplines. Sociologists will read it for its intelligent use of ethnomethodology, which enables Sjöström to build a fine-grained picture of ordinary language, its shifting contexts, and its relation to the minutiae of day-to-day practice. Medical anthropologists will read it for its discerning analysis of the way mental illness is defined in a hybrid psychiatric/judicial culture; lawyers, because it is an important study of a legal setting that has become psychologized. Mental health professionals will be sobered by its penetrating account of the way stock-in-trade, practical categories (such as “dangerousness,” “insight,” “boundaries”) are actually produced and reproduced at ground level—sometimes substantiated empirically, sometimes not—by the staff as they go about their day-to-day clinical work. The social processes that Sjöström dissects so sedulously would be recognized by forensic psychiatrists throughout the English speaking world, which makes this a relevant and significant contribution to the international literature. At the same time, the book contains a wealth of material on Scandinavian mental health legislation, of more specific to value to forensic psychiatrists working in that region.

One might picture an ideal-typical contrast between psychiatry (with its caring orientation, its open-ended diagnostic logic, and its tendency to include cases in categories rather than exclude them) and the law (with its adversarial orientation, its formal, rule-governed logic, and its criteria of relevance narrowly defined). Yet in the two ethnographic settings of this study, the Kronosund General Hospital Psychiatric Clinic and the
County Administrative Court, the distinctions are blurred. Sjöström’s shows us a psychiatry that can become quite adversarial, at least from the patient’s perspective, and a form of law in which attorneys do not always take an adversarial stance on behalf of their patients. Rules of evidence become elastic and categories are applied loosely. Psychiatric and legal personnel—chief psychiatrists, judges, public defenders, court appointed psychiatrists—are united by the shared orientations of a professional class, by universalizing language that can have the effect of decontextualizing the patient, by an easy-going companionship (the latter three groups of people lunch together between hearings), and by their tacitly agreed, commonsense notions of what it is to be mentally ill, irrational, potentially violent, or not responsible for one’s own behavior. Though professionals all, these are people who speak about patients as “nuts” or “crazy.” Formally speaking, the patient is a party (appellant or defendant) at such hearings; yet at an informal level, he or she tends to remain, in the eyes of these doctors and lawyers, a patient all along, and usually a crazy one, at that.

Sjöström’s command over his technique, both as ethnographer and writer, brings the various actors in these clinical and legal settings to life, notably the patients themselves, and none more so than one doughty, resilient soul who the author has called Ake Sjögren. Ake reappears, in chapter upon chapter, as we follow his path through hospital admission unit, to the compulsory care unit, to his day in court. If the ethnographic description of these sites appears too detailed at times, then the author can be forgiven, because it is through such passages that he takes you into the inner workings—the conversations, the conferences, the talking, the writing—of these busy and powerful workplaces. And the extended transcripts provided in this book are invaluable in that they allow one to fully appreciate the deftness of the microresistance achieved by Ake in the arena of language. As he fights out his losing battle with one doctor then the next, he nevertheless manages to twist their questions around, confuse and outwit them, and at least win more than half of the skirmishes by means of his irony, his wordplay, and his gently teasing mockery, as in the following exchange, which took place on the 12th of March, between Dr. Boström and Ake: “Do you know what day it is?” “Well in my world it is the 12th of March” (p. 107). The reader develops an admiration for Ake as underdog, as I suspect the author did, but in the process the microanatomy of power is displayed in the full richness of which good ethnography is capable.

Sjöström’s method of displaying the practical knowledge and discretionary power of institutions, while at the same time demonstrating the vicissitudes of an individual who traverses these institutions, is exemplary. Well crafted, theoretically penetrating, with a methodology that is made transparent, and a valuable discussion of the ethics of fieldwork, Party or Patient is a model ethnographic study of what is, perhaps, one of the most intrusive exercises of state power.
In many respects, *Disrupted Lives* represents medical anthropology at its best. It is firmly grounded in empirical research involving qualitative analysis of victims of various disruptions and disorders. At the same time, it addresses a carefully formulated theoretical problem, which concerns the relationship between the body, metaphor, and personal identity. Biographically, Gay Becker, whom we discover was herself the victim of childhood illness that included asthma, is closely woven into her own research topic. The volume represents an interesting and instructive dialogue between author and her informants, which, as a result, has an important ethical dimension. The notion of “disruption” leads us toward a reflexive uncovering of the frailty of our lives and the precarious character of the institutions that underpin them. This study is also marked by the characteristic shortcoming of cultural anthropology, namely a lack of attention to the political framework within which body and metaphor are connected.

The book is composed of five separate but interconnected studies. These are (1) an infertility study that examined how couples cope with the cultural disruption of childlessness and how men and women differ in their responses to the condition, (2) a midlife study of people between the ages of 35 and 65 years, which examined identity and disruption, (3) a stroke study, which examined how people’s lives were radically changed by an abrupt, chronic, disabling illness, (4) a late-life transition study, which explored the transition from independence to dependence among people over 80 years, and finally (5) a study of ethnic minorities, which examined cultural responses to chronic illness in 240 people over 50 years. These five studies shared a common methodology because they were based on in-depth interviews, they were longitudinal, and the data were analyzed qualitatively by means of one process.

We can locate this study in the context of a profound and systematic criticism of the legacy of Descartes, specifically the mind/body dichotomy. Both sociology and anthropology have demonstrated that identity is fundamentally embodied. Both subjective and objective identity cannot be easily separated from embodiment. It follows that “self” is not an enduring or stable fact but changes with aging and the life-course. Hence, radical disruptions to self occur as a result of traumatic illness, which often breaks our relationship with significant others, reorganizes our life-world, and threatens to destroy the comfortable relationship between self, body, and others. In North America, where there is an important emphasis on youthfulness, activism, and independence, disruptions to everyday life from sickness and aging represent, as Talcott Parsons argued in the
sick role, a profound challenge to the sense of self identity. Because disruptions from sickness can transform the body-image, others have significant problems of routine interaction in responding to representational ambiguities and disfigurement.

Becker argues that metaphors of illness play an important part in helping people make sense of these unwanted discontinuities. Metaphors help us to understand, but they also have therapeutic qualities. These narratives of disruption are moral accounts of people’s lives. Metaphors are the vehicles that express the values that make life meaningful and coherent. Narratives of healing are part of the process of healing. Given the importance of activism and individualism in American culture, healing narratives are typically structured around themes of disruption and the assumption of personal responsibility. One obvious weakness of this study, however, is the neglect of power relationships in the negotiation of these narratives. There is only one passage in the book where Becker briefly enters into a discussion of how the interaction between therapist and patient involves power (p. 176), but in general terms, the hierarchical structure of power in relation to medical knowledge is fundamental to such questions as: What metaphors are available to patients and how are they legitimized? Are there deviant narratives of illness that subvert medical power? In short, meanings and metaphors are negotiated in medical settings, where resources are unequal. These issues have been constitutive of contemporary medical sociology, where, in the last decade, the work of Michel Foucault has been influential.

This absence fortunately does not vitiate the quality of this study of illness narratives and the self. In fact, there is a submerged theme in her study that requires special attention and suggests a radical alternative to the conventional perspective on the body/self couple. The stability of everyday life requires the presumption of a continuous and reliable self, and hence we assume that disruptions are exceptional interventions within this normality. Toward the end of her study, Becker came to the conclusion that “continuity is an illusion. Disruption to life is a constant human experience” (p. 190). Only the body itself has some continuity, but it is also vulnerable. Hence, the everyday world involves a constant struggle to sustain the illusions of order and continuity against a backdrop of persistent and ineluctable disorder. Metaphors, which mediate between the self and chaos, provide the building blocks of cultural meaning.
It is the case that even committed feminists who seek equality in all jobs historically labeled as male draw the line at women firefighters. The image of a burning building and a fireman carrying a victim down a ladder to safety just does not permit appreciation of a woman doing that job. Thus it is not surprising that resistance to women’s entry into the occupation has been strong, although a substantial number of women have joined the firefighting corps in many urban communities and have proven themselves able and enthusiastic members having gained entry through litigation and breaking down barriers against them.

This vivid and engaging account of the entry of women and minority firefighters into a formerly white male bastion tells us not only something of the nature of prejudice and the mechanisms that enforce isolation of “undesirable” members but also about the culture of the firehouse and the socialization of new recruits. Based on fieldwork in the Oakland Fire Department during the period of academy training and 18-month probation period, this is a sensitive and multidimensioned analysis and description of an occupational community. Furthermore, it shows how much new recruits rely on informal structure to learn the ropes of their trade and how dependent they are on the goodwill and cooperation of old-timers on the job. Not merely a matter of good performance in the formal training that precedes work on the job, competence is as dependent on “belonging” as it is on the acquisition of skills. Similar to situations in professional life (such as the law, which I have studied), women find that coworkers and officers can facilitate or inhibit opportunities to prove oneself by the possibility to be in or out of the action at fire scenes. The lack of opportunities to prove oneself—whether the result of being in a slow station or being purposely kept out of the action—means a delay in acceptance by coworkers.

Furthermore, to those scholars who suggest that individuals’ sense of confidence or lack of confidence is a function of their upbringing (or race or gender) alone, Chetkovich shows how situationally determined confidence can be. Both women and members of minorities in firehouses either gain opportunities to demonstrate skills and thus build confidence, or they find that a lack of opportunity to perform well leads to self-doubts.

It is no easy matter for anyone to join the firefighting ranks. New recruits of majority groups go through hazing much like military academies and fraternities—often cruel and painful and always a “testing” procedure to determine how much a person can “take it.” Unrelated to the work, practical jokes and casting the newcomer into a position of servitude create a climate of uncertainty to any rookie, but they bear down
especially harshly to white and minority women and minority men to whom many of the practices can only be interpreted as racist and sexist. Trying to balance their responses between good humor and the maintenance of dignity means balancing a tightrope requiring strong interpersonal skills and at least a little help from sympathetic insiders.

Chetkovitch’s work is rich in illustration of the rituals and rites of passage all firefighters go through. Charting the social practices, she then shows the differences between the ability of women and minority men to fit into hostile environments and the ways in which the majority themselves learn to cope with “aliens” in their midst or to continue to reject them.

Chetkovitch’s analysis will be helpful to scholars of occupations and professions and to policy makers, to say nothing of firefighting administrators who may well reflect on how their “culture” impedes or facilitates the integration of its nontraditional members. It is an important contribution also to the debates on affirmative action, showing how real inclusion is necessary for creating competence in the new recruits and that programs that do not seem successful may have much less to do with the excellence of the outsiders who are brought inside and more to do with the ways in which they are permitted to learn the tools of their trade.

*Global Diasporas: An Introduction.* By Robin Cohen. Seattle: University of Washington Press. Pp. xii + 228. $50.00 (cloth); $19.95 (paper).

Movindri Reddy
*Occidental College*

The strength of Cohen’s book lies in his attempts to give specific meaning to the term “Diaspora.” He does so by constructing a typology that pivots the definition within the historical experiences of specific ethnic groups. The main weakness of this book lies precisely in this attempt to correlate each diasporic category with a specific ethnic group. Throughout, there is a tendency to neatly reduce a wide range of experiences to these ascribed categories. Given the intense and vibrant debates on the hybridity and malleability of identities, the endeavor to concretize this very fluid concept is problematic.

Cohen proposes that the typology of diasporic communities as victim, imperial, labor, trade and cultural, respectively, correlates with Africans and Armenians, Britons, Indians, Chinese and Lebanese, and Caribbeans. Jews are analyzed in terms of representing the general diasporic condition, and Cohen provides an eloquent and informative narrative undermining the assumption that the Jewish experience and the term Diaspora are synonymous, or that their experiences determine the meaning of the term. He stipulates six conditions that are necessary for applying the term Diaspora to any community. These include having a
single traumatic event occur that coincides with dispersal, the creation of imagined homelands, voluntary and involuntary movement of people, collective memories, and common identity with coethnic members in other countries.

Cohen’s analysis of other diasporic groups are enlighting but not always convincing. For example, according to his typology, Africans and Armenians are “victim” diasporas and hence have abiding homeland myths. The country, symbol, and idea of Ethiopia provides, according to Cohen, a powerful source of collective memory and imaginings for Africans in the Caribbean, Mexico, and Brazil. The pogroms of 1915–16, when over one million were killed by the Turks, serves as the most abiding common memory of community and identity. What is the purpose of comparing these two groups? That as “victims,” they construct identities and create diasporas in specific ways. Cohen concludes that both groups exhibit similarities, in that they show solidarity with their homelands, have a strong ethnic group consciousness, experience a troubled relationship with their host countries, and have a sense of empathy with other coethnic members. This being true of many “diasporic” communities, how exactly does Cohen’s typology enhance our understanding of the term itself and diasporas in general?

Analyses about diaspora tend to be awkwardly situated between a broadly defined macrolevel analysis and an intricate microlevel study. Broad trends and overarching features oftentimes underplay detailed ethnographic data. What then are the strengths of macrolevel diasporic studies? Broadly defined group identities are recognized and highlighted. A partial explanation for in-groupness, coherence, and resilience of such groups is provided. Relevance is given to overarching historical narratives associated with shared ancestry and with common social and political experiences. These studies also alert us to the possibilities of evaluating whether specific diasporic groups are capable of becoming active in political moves for secession, federalism, repatriation, and critical support for partisan homeland politics. Diasporic studies channel us toward clearer definitions, especially when the categories of ethnic and religious groups remain amorphous and imprecise. These studies enable analytical distinctions between diasporas and other ethnic groups, be they indigenous, immigrants, political refugees, migrants, or others.

Cohen has tried to straddle the delicate divide between a generalized analysis and intricate empirical studies. The chapters in this book are analytically uneven with the first chapter discussing the Jewish diaspora being the strongest. The rest of the book displays moments of eloquence and insight, punctuated by glib statements that sometimes trivialize the narrative. To his credit, Cohen includes postmodern approaches, in his effort to illustrate the “cultural” diasporic disposition of Caribbean peoples. Although he successfully focuses on some of the more compelling elements of these approaches, particularly those concepts about the constructed character of identities, Cohen only uses them to analyze one ty-
polity and people. This has in part contributed toward a more rigid, less fluid and less nuanced analysis of other diasporic communities. If he had, for example, chosen to analyze the Chinese, Indian, African, and Armenian communities from the perspective of his typologies, and also as fluid, malleable, hybrid identities on the frontlines of difference, he would have written a more compelling account. Cohen’s desire to provide a series of categories for more precise definitions undermines elements of difference within these categories. By taking on board the notion of identities as constructed and hybrid, Cohen would have been able to reflect more accurately the everyday struggles of diasporic communities living in the borderlands between “homeland” and home.

Different histories, experiences, and differences in time and space make the task of comparing diasporas exceedingly difficult. Cohen has managed to accomplish this with a great deal of dignity, contributing to an ongoing and vibrant debate on identity and diasporas.


Stephen Steinberg
Queens College and Graduate Center, CUNY

_The Racial Contract_ is a work of political philosophy that offers a bold conceptualization of the racial order and a critique of the way it has been (mis)represented within the domain of scholarship. How does a society founded on principles of democracy and equality countenance slavery and Jim Crow? And how do scholars who provide the intellectual framework for liberal democracy reconcile their ideational system with the reality of a racism so embedded in the nation’s political structures that it vitiates all claims to “democracy?” Many tomes have been and continue to be written that seek to reconcile the irreconcilable. But the elemental truths can be stated concisely, and, in this slim, well-crafted volume, Mills cuts through the shibboleths and the mystifications that pervade both popular and academic discourse on race.

Mills’s argument is that alongside the social contract that is embedded in the Constitution and that is the framework for liberal democracy is “a racial contract” that excludes whole groups from the rights of citizenship and relegates them to a twilight zone defined by violence, exploitation, debasing poverty, and, in the personal sphere, denial of one’s personhood. In a rebuke to the Myrdalian orthodoxy still cherished by sociologists, Mills writes: “There is obviously all the difference in the world between saying the system is basically sound despite some unfortunate racist deviations, and saying that the polity is racially structured, the state white-supremacist, and races themselves significant existents that an adequate political ontology needs to accommodate” (pp. 123–24). For Mills, racism is not merely an ignominious exception to the social con-
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tract, but like overseas colonization, it yielded important material benefits to whites and even provided the basis, ironically, for their vaunted freedoms.

_The Racial Contract_ offers a theoretical framework that ought to serve as the starting point for any serious study of race in American society. Mills criticizes political philosophers for their glaring failure to include the inconvenient facts of white supremacy and racial subjugation in their theoretical disquisitions. In sociology, of course, there has been no dearth of studies of race and racism. However, Mills has a message that is equally searing. The thrust of scholarship has been “to evade and to elide and to skim over,” thereby providing moral justification for racial oppression or denying its existence altogether. Indeed, according to Mills, there has been “an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance . . . producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made” (p. 18).

Mills’s critique of race scholarship pertains not just to those who provide intellectual sustenance for the racial contract, but even to liberals and Marxists who elide race within their universalistic scheme of values. As he writes, “The preoccupation of nonwhite moral and political thought with issues of race, puzzling alike to a white liberalism predicated on colorless atomic individuals and a white Marxism predicated on colorless classes in struggle, thus becomes readily explicable once the reality of the racial contract has been conceded” (pp. 110–11). Implicitly, Mills offers a rejoinder to recent writers who contend that it is time to get “beyond race,” who envision “a postethnic society,” or who dismiss racial mobilization as a gratuitous expression of “identity politics.”

Mills also offers a counterargument to those who think that the passage of landmark civil rights legislation amounts to an abrogation of the racial contract. He scoffs at “the pretence that formal, juridical equality is sufficient to remedy inequities created on a foundation of several hundred years of racial privilege” (p. 73). I wish that Mills had done more to expose and dissect the new incarnations of the racial contract. Nevertheless, at a time when “the epistemology of ignorance” is ascendent, we can be grateful for a book that speaks the unpalatable truth.


Philip Smith
_University of Queensland_

_Angels' Town_ is an ethnographic study that explores the poetics of everyday life as experienced by urban Mexican Americans. Author Ralph Cintron’s aim is not so much to describe actions and institutions as to capture the ethos of the fieldwork site. This mission involves a detailed examination of the rhetorics, symbolisms, and performatives that constitute the
public life of the community. For this reason, the text blends the concerns of critical ethnography with those of contemporary cultural studies and rhetorical theory.

*Angels' Town* also bears the imprint of the poststructural critique of the traditional ethnographic enterprise. There is an abundance of self-reflexivity, with Cintron questioning his own *latinidad*, researcher status, and the writing process. Such themes are, of course, common in postmodern ethnography, and often they lead to a concern with texts and autobiography rather than the field site itself. A strength of *Angels' Town* is its ability to discuss these issues with sensitivity and yet avoid the retreat into a defeatist, solipsistic relativism.

These same poststructural influences make summarizing the substantive content of the book rather difficult. Cintron, perhaps rightly, is hesitant about making sweeping claims for his research findings. Instead, each chapter has its own concerns and uncovers ethos by teeing off from specific research sites. The result is a text characterized by a series of more or less discrete points of tentative illumination. The first, and most important of these, is Don Angel, an older man who works as a gardener and janitor. Cintron's discussion of Don Angel centers on his facility with *chero* folkways. He is a *curandero* and is skilled in *viejito* discourses such as those associated with divination and the bawdy wordplay of *albures*. According to Cintron, Don Angel uses this traditional knowledge as a way of momentarily affirming his dignity and status despite his objective social location: “In finding talented parts of himself in these actions, then, he found moments that allowed him to individualize himself within conditions of apparent hegemonic oppression, or to create respect under conditions of little or no respect” (p. 92).

This search for respect and identity is a leitmotif that Cintron uses in other chapters to explain phenomena as diverse as the posters on a boy’s bedroom wall, gangs with their graffiti and codes of violence, low-rider cars called “thumpers” and “Too Low Flow,” and the blacktopping of a parking space by an ordinary family. A second theme running throughout the text is the search for order and its role in the intersection of life-world and system-world. Here Cintron explores the collision of the rhetorics of town plans, visas, and social security numbers with the everyday orderings of Mexican Americans. The central aim here is to demonstrate the adaptive and creative qualities of the textualities (e.g., forged documents, graffiti) through which Mexican Americans negotiate and order both public spaces and the labyrinthine world of bureaucracy with its “discourses of measurement.”

All things considered, *Angels' Town* is a significant and beautifully written contribution to the fast-growing field of Mexican American ethnography. It succeeds admirably in the difficult task of documenting the voices of ordinary people and at the same time contributing generalizable knowledge to its field. As with any book, there are some things that might have been done differently—and perhaps better. At times, Cintron draws a long bow in moving from observable behavior to speculation on the
motivations and interior lives of his subjects. The result are occasional moments of interpretation that are perhaps too deeply rooted in humanist psychology and that sit rather uncomfortably with the poststructural theories of texts and discourse deployed elsewhere in the book.

A second set of concerns surrounds the treatment of gender issues. Cintron acknowledges that his informants were predominantly male. Yet masculinity hardly figures in explanations of their behaviors and beliefs. Are automobiles, graffiti, militaristic imagery, gangs, guns, and sexually explicit joking behavior most fruitfully viewed as attempts to generate a sense of control and respect or as specifically gendered ways to accomplish this aim? A substantial and well-known literature on masculinity supports this alternate position. A final issue is ethical. Angels’ Town appears to be littered with clues that could be used to identify the research site and, possibly, the persons involved in the study. Finding a way of providing contextual information for the reader while protecting informant confidentiality is a difficult task. If too little detail is provided, the text will be characterized by abstraction, sterility, and hermeneutic inadequacy. Yet if too much information is given away, the research site will be compromised. Red herrings offer a colorful solution but can lead to ersatz ethnography that lacks conviction and intellectual integrity. It is not clear that Angels’ Town has located a happy equilibrium between these contending evils.


Andrew J. Cherlin
Johns Hopkins University

What are the long-term effects on children of the great changes in the family that have occurred over the past several decades? We are just beginning to assemble the answers to this question. Most social scientists think in terms of shorter time horizons, in large part because that is the way funding agencies and promotion committees think. In addition, the changes that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s (and have in some cases continued through the 1980s and 1990s) have only now gone on long enough so that we can study the first generation of adults who experienced the transformed family as children. Paul Amato and Alan Booth’s impressive study is one of the first to provide us with long-term data on this generation.

It is not adequate to merely question today’s twenty- and thirty-somethings about their families of origin and then to correlate what they say about their childhoods with how they are doing as adults. For one thing, it is hard to know how much their recollections of the past are colored by their current state of mind. In addition, there are some aspects of their
childhood family lives that they cannot be expected to report accurately on. What is needed, therefore, are long-term, longitudinal studies that provide detailed baseline information on families and then follow their children for at least a decade. This is the kind of study Amato and Booth present, and their finding are enlightening.

Their data come from a study that began as telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of married couples in 1980. Crucially, the investigators asked their respondents not only standard sociodemographic questions but also multiple questions on marital quality, including marital happiness, marital interaction (e.g., “How often do you eat your main meal together?”), marital conflict (e.g., “How many serious quarrels have you had in the past two months?”), and divorce proneness (e.g., “Has the thought of getting a divorce or separation crossed your mind in the last three years?”). The parents were interviewed again in 1983, 1988, and 1992. And in 1992, the researchers interviewed all of the children who had lived with their parents in 1980 and who were now age 19 or older. The offspring were contacted again in 1995. This book examines the lives of the adult children, age 19 and over (median age of 23), in the context of their parents’ marriages in 1980.

The authors find that marital quality in 1980 is broadly associated with offspring’s characteristics in 1992. In fact, its associations are stronger and more consistent than are the associations with parents’ gender role nontraditionalism (which generally has modest effects) or even parental socioeconomic characteristics. “Marital quality is the key variable,” the authors write, “for it is bound up with virtually every dimension of offspring well-being” (p. 221).

Of particular interest is the authors’ analysis of the long-term effects of parental divorce. Theirs is one of the few longitudinal surveys to measure marital quality and then to follow offspring for a long period, during which some of the parents divorce. Therefore, they can address the issue of whether it is marital distress or divorce itself that disadvantages some offspring. Their answer is that both appear to have independent, long-term effects on children’s lives.

They go further, however, by comparing divorces that occurred in marriages that had low conflict in 1980 to divorces that occurred in high-conflict marriages. They report that offspring who experienced high marital conflict in 1980 were doing better in 1992 if their parents had divorced after 1980 than if they had stayed together; conversely, offspring from low-conflict families were doing worse if their parents had divorced. This finding confirms the oft-stated but rarely substantiated belief that if family conflict is severe, children may benefit from a divorce. Does this mean that we should not be concerned about the rise in divorce? No, say the authors. They note that only a minority of the divorces that occurred were in high-conflict marriages. The majority occurred in marriages where children would not be expected to benefit from the split.

The seeming effects of marital quality are so pervasive that one wonders if the authors’ measures reflect more than just how well the spouses
are getting along. For example, parents and children in some families might both be susceptible to major depression for partly genetic reasons; if so, one would expect this shared trait to contribute both to lowering the quality of the parents’ marriages and reducing the quality of their children’s adult lives. The safest conclusion to draw from this book is that marital quality and unmeasured characteristics of the parents and children associated with marital quality are strong indicators of how well the children’s lives will turn out.

There are some limitations to the study. Since only married couples were selected in 1980, the survey provides little information about the consequences of growing up in a single-parent family. The 1992 sample of offspring is 94% white, a consequence of the white, middle-class bias often encountered in telephone surveys (and worsened by differential attrition by race between 1980 and 1992). Overall, though, A Generation at Risk is an important addition to the literature on the long-term effects of families on their children.


Doris R. Entwisle
Johns Hopkins University

This book is small but tackles a big job: the possibilities and limitations of school finance reform. As the authors say, the distribution of resources to schools is the most contentious and thorny issue facing educators and policy makers since desegregation. Do schools for children in financially poor districts deserve the same (or more) support as those in rich districts? Even if the answer is yes, is it possible to appropriate and use financial resources to redress present-day inequities?

The authors of this book, well-qualified as they are to consider these questions, chose to pursue a mixture of qualitative and quantitative strategies. They compiled detailed longitudinal case histories for 12 (out of 500) school districts in New Jersey and also analyzed a statewide survey. They first examined inequities in community, fiscal, and administrative contexts in which the New Jersey schools functioned. They then tried to assess whether the Quality Education Act (QEA), a statute designed to bring educational services into parity across districts, actually did achieve that goal and by which means that goal was approached. Put somewhat differently, the main issue around which the book is organized is whether the QEA could counteract gross inequities in the educational opportunities offered students in New Jersey.

They found that urban districts did improve the services they provided poor students after the QEA was enacted, but some districts progressed
more rapidly toward parity than others. Some districts took better advantage of the new funding than others did because of enrollment changes, but local political constraints and community cohesion played a role too. Even among districts that made the most headway, a large gap remained between rich and poor districts, however.

Analysis of fiscal changes revealed that poor urban districts did use most of their new money directly for education. Despite roughly comparable teacher-student and administrator-student ratios in rich and poor districts, professionals in wealthy districts continued to earn more than their colleagues with equivalent education and experience in poor districts. In addition, teachers in poor urban districts generally had less experience and less formal education than those in wealthy districts.

A separate issue is that “special needs” districts—those generally the very poorest—used some of the additional resources provided them by QEA to deal with growing social problems in their school populations. They offered their clients full-day kindergarten, extended-day programs, and school breakfast programs, as well as more counselors and social services. Some even added preschool programs, health services, and programs for parents. The distressed physical conditions of schools in the special needs districts, which had developed over a long period of time, could not be corrected by the local tax relief made possible by the QEA. The QEA funding allowed districts to undertake badly needed capital improvements, but the gap between rich and poor districts in school facilities remained huge.

The amount and character of the data assembled in this small book are impressive, as is the authors’ courage in tackling almost intractable issues such as whether appropriated funds actually go where they are supposed to go. What comes through clearly is that more money can help poor districts provide better services, but parity across schools remains an elusive (unattainable) goal. A point not so explicitly made is that the “services” furnished by many schools go far beyond student instruction and even serve an expanded recipient pool (preschoolers and parents). The tasks that some poor districts take on are overwhelming. They are feeding as well as instructing students and helping parents take care of preschoolers as well as school-age youngsters.

As this book attests, effects of school finance reform are not easy to assess. The methods used here, however, go far toward giving a fuller picture, for example, by noting community differences in the implementation of reforms or by cataloging the many ways that poorer schools must stretch their funds. All in all, these authors have written clearly, carefully, and understandably about vexing problems that concern educators and laypersons alike.
In Community Service and Higher Learning: Explorations of the Caring Self, Richard Rhoads conceptualizes and illustrates ways college students’ community service experiences may help develop students’ capacity for caring and civic participation. Specifically, he believes “understanding the social processes associated with community service can shed light on how higher learning might be restructured as we struggle to build democratic communities within the tensions and strains of a postmodern world” (p. 2).

Rhoads’ first three chapters provide an extensive and thoughtful synthesis of social and educational theory. Drawing on George Herbert Mead, Carol Gilligan, Nel Noddings, Erik Erikson, Paulo Freire, John Dewey, Henry Giroux, and others, Rhoads considers how and when community service experiences interact with college students’ “evolving sense of self” to promote a more caring, just, respectful, and democratic society. Given the underconceptualized nature of much writing on community service, this synthesis struck me as the book’s most substantial contribution.

Having set the stage, chapters 4–6 report data from Rhoads interviews and observations of students who worked in soup kitchens, helped to restore homes, and implemented an afterschool program for children. Some of these experiences occurred during spring or winter breaks and some occurred during the semester. These brief service experiences were not integrated into students’ academic course work.

The author’s evidence that these experiences helped students transcend otherness while fostering a sense of mutuality and community, factors Rhoads relates to an ethic of care, comes mainly in the form of quotations. The college students said, for example, “working with the people of the streets has transformed ‘those people’ into real faces, real lives, and real friends” (p. 109). “You can’t blame the poor for being poor, at least not in most cases” (p. 146). Students consistently reported that their experiences personalized the pain of homelessness and poverty; they expressed sympathy for those in need; and they described their service experiences as rewarding, empowering, and supporting their own growth.

Unfortunately, the subtle theoretical analysis Rhoads employs in the first section of the book is not maintained when he interprets this data. Most often, assertions made by students that they found their service experience profoundly moving, that they built “real” relationships, and that they now cared for and were more sympathetic toward those they served was taken as evidence of success. We are not told about the ways their caring relationships with these people are similar and different from car-
ing relationships they have with individuals more like themselves. How often, for example, do students stay in touch with those they now consider friends? Although reflection is trumpeted as crucial, we do not learn about any reflective sessions that took place so that we can analyze the ways such sessions might help shape beliefs and understandings.

We also get little help unpacking saccharin statements from students about the “life-changing” consequences of brief experiences providing useful forms of charity work. “I learned that children are the light of the world. They are perfect examples of a love that knows no boundaries of color” (p. 166). In this and most other cases, Rhoads does not do enough to help readers interpret the significance of such statements. Consequently, it is hard to feel confident about when or how these experiences might influence students’ behaviors in the future or the place of these experiences in students’ life narratives.

Are some of these students becoming sympathetic missionaries? What tradeoffs are embodied in emphasizing service rather than solidarity or structural change? Do service providers develop an inflated view of their own importance? Many of these issues are ably dealt with theoretically and conceptually (especially in the last two chapters that examine the importance of reflection and of “critical community service”), but the qualitative data Rhoads provides does not do enough to portray the prevalence or nature of less desirable outcomes.

Unfortunately, the author waits until page 200 to write “For the majority of the students in this study . . . connecting their participation in community service to larger social issues was not a primary concern.” Most, Rhoads says, simply wanted to help others during spring or winter break. “Why are there so many homeless people in this country? . . . I’m not sure I want to know the answers because it would probably mean I’d have to consider a lot of serious issues and where I stand on them” (p. 200). By limiting his portrait of such sentiments to a few paragraphs, the author missed an opportunity to use his data to consider how, when, and why community service may not foster development related to care and justice. Attending to this data could also help clarify the meanings students bring to care and justice and the ways they balance conflicting priorities such as personal consumption, individualism, community, and kindness.

In terms of charting a theory-based vision of how community service might enrich higher learning, the book succeeds. The empirical analysis demonstrates that brief and intensive service experiences are often viewed positively by participants. In addition, these experiences often lead participants to articulate generous stances toward those in need and to question stereotypes. This portrait tells readers more about community service’s potential than about its limits.
Richard L. Wood
University of New Mexico

This book joins an abundant harvest of recent and soon-to-be-published works on the political culture of contemporary American society, most produced by scholars trained in sociology or political science at Berkeley or Harvard, now spread out as junior faculty around the country. While often highly theoretically-informed, this emerging genre typically keeps high theorizing to a minimum in order to focus on illuminating the real social world through ethnographic and interview-based research.

*Political Activists in America* displays many of the strengths of this body of work. First, the book comes to life for the reader. It opens with a vivid account of a student journalist “crossing the line” into civil disobedience at an antinuclear demonstration and his subsequent reflections on the symbolic line that he crossed within himself that day. Throughout, Teske intersperses such accounts of the experiences and reflections of political activists with his own sociological argument and interpretation. Second, Teske starts with a smart question: Why do some people become heavily engaged in political activism, rather than free-riding on the activism of others? Of course, this question has motivated a great deal of research in the 30 years since Mancur Olson provided its classic formulation. This extensive literature might have made the current book superfluous, but Teske makes a convincing case that our understanding of what motivates activists remains impoverished.

Third, Teske’s research design allows for strong comparative cases to inform his analysis. *Political Activists* draws on 80 open-ended interviews with leaders of four kinds of political associations: environmental organizations, social justice advocacy groups, pro-life organizations, and business interest associations. The first three “activist” groups help control for patterns specific to a particular kind of issue focus or political orientation, and the latter “lobbyist” group provides a strong contrast case of “insider politics.”

This combination of accessible writing, strong theoretical framing of a smart research question, comparative research design, and rich empirical data mined insightfully makes for a strong sociological argument and an engaging read. Teske argues that the conceptual categories underlying both rational actor and antirational actor approaches to political participation undermine any real understanding of activism by drawing a false dichotomy between self-interested and altruistic motives. Drawing on activists’ reflections on their work, he shows how they articulate—and through their activism *enact*—a moral world in which political participation transcends such categories by serving oneself, others and the wider society. The main argument proposes an “identity construction model,”
which rejects both rational actor approaches (with their reduction of persons to economic actors calculating utility functions) and altruistic approaches (with their invocation of a heroic, non-self-interested ethic) by questioning the model of the “self” underlying both. In their place, this model posits an understanding of the self as a moral but not heroic actor; activists engage in politics because through politics broadly understood they “develop certain identities for themselves” and “instantiate” certain qualities they value. In evoking the worldview and self-understanding of his interviewees—in ways deeply respectful of the divergent political positions they hold—Teske enriches our understanding of why people become activists.

_Political Activists in America_ also displays some of the weaknesses of this emerging corpus on American political culture. First, the intensive data gathering necessary for such work often leads researchers, lacking time or funding for extensive travel, to focus their empirical work close to home. In this case, Teske’s political activists all reside in northern California, where the identities and shared culture among political activists may be atypical.

Second, an argument based on probing the worldviews of research subjects must be balanced by a critical stance that sees beyond those subjects’ taken-for-granted understandings of the world. Teske often achieves this balance but falls short in his presentation of political identity construction as a highly self-directed endeavor that occurs exclusively within the process of political activism. By accepting activists’ sense of identity construction as occurring solely in the midst of their political work, this study begs the question of how these activists came to be available for political identity construction in the first place.

For many of the activists portrayed here, religious formation—whether still embraced or now shed—appears to have been central to identity construction earlier in life, particularly in leading them to seek moral meaning in the world and ethical integrity in their own lives. Teske discusses how religious faith often shapes present activism but not how earlier religious or secular ethical formation prepared the ground for it. By drawing on interviewee’s reflections, Teske illuminates the self-conscious formation of the political self, but the formation of what might be called the “proto-political self” remains opaque. Accounting for this crucial aspect of political identity construction would require attention to the cultural currents flowing in the wider society, beyond the confines of the activist organizations studied here.

Teske has written a fine book appropriate for advanced undergraduates and graduate students of political sociology, political culture, and social movements. And we specialists—of positivist and reflexive persuasions alike—will do better work for having read it closely.

Bryan Wilson
University of Oxford

The 10 papers collected in this volume address a variety of issues affecting the recent development of the Charismatic Renewal movement, with some concentration on its prospects in the third millennium. That focus is not induced by any suggestion that latter-day neo-Pentecostalism is committed to any premillennialist agenda: Indeed, the argument of those contributors who take up that concern is specifically to make the point that, for many contemporary Charismatics, the debate between pre- and postmillennial theories of the advent is distinctly passé. The reference point for several authors is rather the effect in Britain of the ecstatic outbursts in Toronto in 1994, which, as “the Toronto blessing,” has galvanized some church congregations and revived, at least for the time being, some perhaps otherwise fading charismatic fellowships. Whether the blessing has actually expanded these churches’ market share is open to doubt, as Philip Richter makes plain in a supply-side analysis of what Charismatic Christianity now has to offer. However, the book is by no means exclusively concerned with the effect of the Toronto phenomenon, and some papers deal with the somewhat longer history of the movement in its various ramifications, particularly in Britain.

What emerges is a picture of the bewilderingly fissile and inchoate tangle of communities, fellowships, personalities, schisms, and theologies that have been thrown up by charismatic enthusiasm, largely to the cost of the older institutionalized denominations that have sometimes, albeit not without misgivings, played host to these new iconoclastic fashions in styles of worship. Andrew Walker, who has sought in earlier work to sort out the strands constituting Restorationism and to distinguish among the various “House Church” bodies, contributes the key paper to the collection in which he debates whether the new phenomenon is to be properly recognized as postmodern religion. He seeks to rebut the idea that the so-called classical Pentecostalism was antimodern, pointing to its ready adoption of a variety of essentially modern procedures and techniques of advertising, recruitment, organized revivalism, and ministerial training. The issue of finding the appropriate label for contemporary Charismatic phenomena fails, however, to infuse the discussion by most other contributors and may ultimately be of no abiding significance. What is apparent is that neo-Pentecostalism attracts a different public from the sectarian Pentecostalism of the first 50 years of the present century: they are better-to-do, better educated, albeit not less anti-intellectual. Both Walker and Martyn Percy independently trace the theological origins of this style of Christianity back to Schleiermacher.

These essays are primarily descriptive, and sociological analysis is lim-
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ited to particular cases. Thus Paul Chambers brings a formidable apparatus of sociological theory to the analysis of a double schism within a congregation in Wales that began as a run-of-the-mill classical Pentecostal church, acquired an innovating pastor, and was joined, but subsequently abandoned, by a radical clientele of quasi-hippy, communitarian Charismatics. More strictly descriptive is Keith Newell’s account (perhaps an ex-insider’s account) of another particular communitarian development of Charismatic Christianity in the Jesus Fellowship based in a British Midlands village. Martyn Percy, in a theologically informed sociological discussion, describes neo-Pentecostalism as “a major shareholder in the totality of Christian expression.” (He estimates that Pentecostals—of all kinds—may be as many as 400 million people worldwide, while Douglas McBain suggests over 600 million.) Yet, quite persuasively, he questions the durability of a pattern of Christian worship that is rooted in emotional experience and that he sees as having fostered schism, induced sectarianism and syncretism, experienced failure, and which, for some, has led to disaster. He sees this fragmentation, the distrust of coherence and metanarratives, and the playfulness and the pleasure principle that are so conspicuous in charismatic worship, and excessively so in the Toronto blessing, as echoing the prescriptions of postmodernism.

The themes addressed in these papers are primarily of interest to sociologists of religion, but it may be remarked that at least four of the 10 authors are clerics and that the theological input is considerable. Perhaps the paper most directly linked to wider sociological issues, at least to the sociology of morals and culture, is William Thompson’s densely written discussion of Charismatic politics. Thompson examines the role of Charismatics in the formation in Britain of moral pressure groups on such concerns as pornography, abortion law, Sunday trading, broadcasting standards, and general resistance to the influence of the post-1960s wave of moral permissiveness. His canvass is of course one that encompasses a wider spectrum of fundamentalism than is embraced by the charismatic movement per se, the specific influence and importance of which is perhaps not easy to determine.


Mark A. Noll
Wheaton College

This book is most helpful when it documents the persistent efforts by self-described protestant “Evangelicals” to define the identity of their movement after its emergence from self-described “fundamentalists” in the 1940s. Jon R. Stone, who teaches interdisciplinary studies at the University of California, Berkeley, argues that participants in this movement
have employed a series of metaphors to describe their own unity-within-diversity. Of those metaphors, Stone feels that historian Timothy L. Smith’s evocations of a “mosaic” or a “kaleidoscope” are most interesting. Yet Stone argues that all such metaphors lack analytical rigor. Drawing upon insights from Mary Douglas, Robert Wuthnow, and anthropologist Anthony Cohen, Stone proposes that the postwar evangelical movement is more fruitfully described as a shifting “coalition” preoccupied with the task of securing its boundaries against both a religious right and a religious left. In his sequencing, Stone sees these Evangelicals working hard in the 1940s and early 1950s to differentiate themselves from fundamentalists. He suggests that during the 1950s and 1960s, they achieved modest success in creating a theological esprit and at exerting meaningful social influence, but only because they were able to maintain a conceptual border against fundamentalists while still discriminating themselves from mainstream Protestantism. In the 1970s and 1980s, Stone thinks that evangelical boundary maintenance broke down; the evangelical leaders who had succeeded in setting themselves apart from fundamentalists were not able to hold at bay the often subtle influences of liberalism within their own ranks. Neither did they reach their goal of meaningful social influence, but rather they were forced to observe reenergized fundamentalists (Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, the New Christian Right) succeed where they had failed. In making his case, Stone relies heavily on the writing of a pastor and founding president of Fuller Theological Seminary, Harold John Ockenga; the theologian and founding editor of Christianity Today, Carl F. H. Henry; the theologian and later president of Fuller Seminary, E. J. Carnell; and the evangelist Billy Graham.

As a study of persistent concern for identity formation among these important religious figures, the book is reasonably successful. For broader purposes, there are problems. First and most important are equivocations over definitions. The leaders featured in Stone’s analysis never made up the whole of even self-described “Evangelicalism.” They constitute an even smaller segment of the various protestant movements that scholars routinely label “evangelical.” Thus, Stone acknowledges insights by the historian Timothy Smith, but the Nazarene, Wesleyan, and Holiness constituencies whose perspectives Smith reflected are never mentioned. This is a serious matter since it means that Stone is unable to show where many of the currently visible evangelical leaders come from, for example, the Nazarene radio psychologist Dr. James Dobson, host of Focus on the Family, who has been the politically most influential “Evangelical” in the United States of the last decade. The same may be said about Stone’s failure to incorporate into his account major groups like the Southern Baptists and Pentecostals in denominations like the Assemblies of God, whom almost everyone regards as Evangelicals.

Second, Stone may well overstate the boundary-making fixations of even his target group of self-described evangelical leaders. He writes, for example, that “Evangelicalism has been captivated by the issue of defining its boundaries” (p. 179) and that “this boundary dynamic has been
of central concern to Evangelicals” (p. 179). But these are claims requiring more comprehensive study, since the evangelical leaders themselves all would have said they were much more concerned about “winning people to Christ” or encouraging the faithful to lead holy lives than they were about defining evangelical identity.

Third, it is not clear that theories about “coalition” yield better results for this religious movement than does intensive research in data from either field research or the primary written sources generated by the people under consideration. Historians like Timothy Smith may not solve all boundary-marking questions, but their research is often broader, deeper, and hence more satisfying than the quick move made by Stone from a relatively restricted body of sources to grand social generalizations. Despite the contributions of this book, therefore, those who are interested in the boundaries of “Evangelicalism” would do better to consult the empirical social scientists who are working hard to define “evangelical” operationally, including (among others) Roger Finke, John Green, James Guth, Dean Hoge, Ted Jelen, Lyman Kellstedt, and Corwin Smidt. Or they can be referred with profit to a long-standing tradition of debate on such questions by historians like George Marsden (e.g., Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism [1987]), Donald Dayton (e.g., “The Search for the Historical Evangelicalism: George Marsden’s History of Fuller Seminary as a Case Study,” Christian Scholar’s Review 23 [September 1993]: 12–33), Joel Carpenter (Reawakening of America’s Fundamentalism [1997]), or Douglas Sweeney (“The Essential Fundamentalism Dialectic: The Historiography of the Early Neo-Evangelical Movement,” Church History 60 [March 1991]: 70–84).


Arthur L. Stinchcombe
Northwestern University

Runciman is trying here to use his theory of evolution of social practices to give a theoretical slant to a narrative of major social changes and major continuities in England from about 1880 to 1990. His most frequent citations are to the first two volumes, and he seems to have read no evolutionary theory since starting the first. The work of John Holland, Stephen J. Gould, Edward O. Wilson, David Hull, Donald Campbell, or the newer subdisciplines of organizational ecology, molecular biology, ecological archeology, neural network theory, coevolution, parasitism and symbiosis, and animal ethology have all passed him by. People who ignore most recent evolutionary theory cannot be taken seriously as theorists in the field.
Nevertheless, Runciman’s idea that the units of social evolution are social practices of conflict and cooperation is fundamentally right, I think. It is because organizations are now the main carriers and creators of such practices that organizational ecology has taught us (if not Runciman) so much. This, in turn, means that keeping an eye on what social practices pay off at a given time and place for a given social category, and what causes these payoffs to rise or decline, is a good start for social history.

If we turn from the theory to the substance, recent social changes in England (and occasionally Wales), the relevant comparisons are synthetic accounts of social structures of national societies: for the United States, Robin Williams and Alexis de Tocqueville; for Norway, the book edited by Natalie Rogoff Ramsoy; or for England, earlier Hobsbawm’s big book on the industrial and political revolutions.

Compared to those models, Runciman is ponderous and tedious but solid. Part of the tedium is his excessive care to explain why the words he uses are justified. Runciman has a Linnean bent, distinguishing varieties within species (e.g., capitalism with and without strong collective bargaining), species within genuses (e.g., socialist, right wing authoritarian, and liberal government of economies), and repeating differentiating features each time the words are used.

Runciman seems to be speaking to an array of imagined critics of his center-of-the-road analysis. He reminds one of C. Wright Mills’s description of the ideological audiences that American trade union leaders played to, from Trotskyist to utopian capitalist. But C. Wright Mills regarded these as determinants of the repertoire from which social practices were selected; Runciman mostly sees them as audiences that will not like his book. And Mills, like Robin Williams, de Tocqueville, and Rogoff Ramsoy, could write about the world without reminding one that he had remarked on a given point two volumes ago, in chapter 5, section 2.

Perhaps the most original substantive problem Runciman tackles is the decline of interpersonal deference, such as status differences in clothing (white collar, robes, wigs, hunting costumes, cloth caps), forms of upward address (vocative use of titles and surnames), body language deference (touching the forelock, salutes in the military, curtseying), and the expectation that higher status people in meetings will speak longer, introduce new issues, and close previous ones. A related phenomenon on the continent, documented in Roger Brown’s old social psychology text (1965; it is absent in the new edition), is the near disappearance of the more formal second person pronouns (e.g., vous, Sie, Usted) and the rise of the informal ones (tu, du, tu).

Runciman’s general idea is that authority is less surrounded with rituals of interpersonal deference, a less permanent feature of the superiors and inferiors and more attuned to rules and diagnoses of situations than to hierarchies of persons. This is a change in the socially organized “mode of persuasion” in a more democratic as well as more impersonal direction Runciman says. Authority no longer persuades by personal inequality of deference and honor but by arguments about law and public policy. The
explanation turns out to be hard to identify in Runciman’s treatment. The explanation is not given in Brown, either. One has to say that at least evolutionary theory is no worse than social psychological theory.

This is then a book of medium value as a description of the recent history of the English part of Great Britain. But it fails to improve evolutionary theory, it tangles the tale with much talk about using the rights words, and the rate of self-citation to previous volumes is something of a scandal—too much vanity too publicly displayed. We need someone more like Hobsbawm or de Tocqueville to write this book for us.


Guenther Roth
Columbia University

Thirty years ago, the historian Fritz Ringer established his reputation with The Decline of the German Mandarins, 1890–1933 (1969). A companion piece, Fields of Knowledge: French Academic Culture in Historical Perspective, 1890–1920, followed in 1992. Toward the end of his career, he has turned to a big biographical project on Weber, of which this essay is said to be an advance. A relative newcomer to Weberian studies, he shows fresh enthusiasm, claiming “that Weber’s methodology remains remarkably relevant and fruitful even today” (p. 171).

As a native speaker and modern German historian, Ringer has enviable qualifications that almost all American sociologists cannot help lacking. But disappointingly, he uses his skills for an uncritical, even celebratory, restatement of Weber’s so-called methodological writings along a well-traveled path. The progression is indicated by the chapter headings (and subheadings): the German historical tradition (humanism contra positivism); Weber’s adaptation of Heinrich Rickert; singular causal analysis (objective probability and adequate causation); interpretation and explanation (interpretive sociology and ideal type); objectivity and value neutrality. A last chapter moves from “theory to practice” and ends with five pages on the “practice” of the Protestant ethic study. Only the conclusion, barely six pages, addresses the theme indicated in the book’s subtitle, The Unification of the Cultural and Social Sciences, as an intended critical response to the “intra-academic cultural wars” (p. 174). In Ringer’s eyes, what makes Weber so crucial today is the defense of causal analysis against a congeries of subjectivist, deconstructionist, and other literary fashions. At the same time, Ringer even slays the ghost from the opposite extreme to the current fashions, Carl Hempel’s neopositivism, now more than half a century old.

Rather than engaging the recent threats head-on, Ringer opts for an immanent interpretation. His central effort is the treatment of Weber the
“causalist” (p. 62), not to be mistaken for a positivist. This involves a dense summary of objective probability and adequate causation, ranging from Weber’s precursor Johannes von Kries to Hempel’s alternative neopositivist scheme. The latter is treated critically in a sort of excursus based on a previous publication on causality (pp. 81–91), a segment tenuously related to Weber with some rhetorical devices (“needless to say,” “clearly”). For Ringer, the notion of “singular causal analysis” (apparently meaning historically specific explanation) also becomes a promise to bridge the gap between interpretation and explanation.

For the most part, however, Ringer limits himself, at one extreme, to running commentaries on a large number of secondary authors and, on the other, to conventional textbook expositions—some parts are for the cognoscenti, others for the untutored. The reader understands with whom he agrees or disagrees but not sufficiently the grounds of his judgments. Thus, impatient with Rickert’s “philosophical obscurities” (p. 169), he finds it “impossible to accept the view that Weber was essentially a follower of Rickert, a view proposed by Thomas Burger and fully developed by Guy Oakes” (p. 51), but their acute philosophical reasoning is not addressed. Ringer does not face the daunting problems posed by the fragmentary, elliptical, tortuous—and self-torturing—nature of the “methodological” writings, apart from conceding “Weber’s occasionally difficult arguments” (p. 90). There are severe limitations to treating these writings in isolation rather than reconstructing Weber’s research strategy and program on a broader basis, as Wolfgang Schluchter and Stephen Kalberg have done in their divergent ways. After all, Weber’s international fame rests not on any advocacy of “singular causal analysis” but on the (non-causal) “structural phenomenology of world history” (Johannes Winckelmann) in *Economy and Society* and *The Economic Ethics of the World Religions*.

If nothing else, the format of such an extended essay—too long for an article, too short for a book—works here against making a real contribution to the vast literature on Weber that has accumulated over the decades. From the present exposition, neither friend nor foe, historian nor sociologist, is likely to get new insights for confronting the perceived current crisis. I doubt that such a narrow methodological celebration of Weber will win any battles. If one wants to join the fray on Weber’s side, one might start with the “politically incorrect” passage from “Objective Possibility and Adequate Causation”: “The fact that [the battle of Marathon] decided between these two possibilities [the rise of western civilization and theocratic domination under the Persians] is obviously . . . the only reason why we are historically interested in it. . . . Without an appraisal of those possibilities and of the irreplaceable cultural values which . . . depend on that decision, a statement regarding its significance would be impossible. . . . There would in truth be no reason why we should not rate that decisive contest equally with a scuffle between two tribes of Kaffirs or Indians. . . . The notion of a sort of social justice which would—finally, finally!—take the disdainfully neglected Kaffir and In-
dian tribes at least as seriously as the Athenians . . . is merely childish.” *(The Methodology of the Social Sciences)* [Free Press, 1949], p. 172). That would make Weber’s methodology “remarkably relevant,” with a vengeance.


Margaret Levi
*University of Washington, Seattle*

Adam B. Seligman offers the strong claim that the problem of trust, that is the widespread lament for its decline, is an effect of the increased dependence upon trust just at the moment when the conditions for trust are being undermined by structural change. He grounds his account of trust in role segmentation, role conflicts, system limits, and institutionalization, and he draws heavily on history, philosophy, religious theory, and political theory to examine and support his position. For Seligman, both trust and its opposite, mistrust, emerge only with individualism and only when agents can and must negotiate over role expectations. Trust is a modern phenomenon that mediates relationships among individuals; it involves risk of a kind that can only occur when individual agents find themselves having to interact with strangers or with those whose responses they cannot confidently predict.

Seligman has a multitude of purposes in his book. He constructs a sociological, rather than a psychological, concept by giving trust a structural basis. He differentiates trust from other terms in a general family of concepts that include reliance, confidence, faith, fides, familiarity. He considers and evaluates a set of related literatures. He aims to explain why declining trust has become a subject of concern.

Seligman makes considerable progress toward clarifying the sociological dimensions of trust. Contrasting his position with Émile Durkheim’s and drawing on a host of authorities, most notably Robert K. Merton, Niklas Luhmann, Charles Taylor, S. N. Eisenstadt, and Ralph Turner, he identifies interpersonal trust as a means to mediate certain kinds of role conflict that evolve with the large-scale political, social, and particularly economic changes that produce modernity. Seligman nicely links trust to the “social conditions of risk” (p. 170) and to the development of individuals who are capable of forming and sharing strong evaluations.

In the process of providing his sociological and historical analysis, Seligman distinguishes trust from related concepts. His distinctions are as good as any. He is convincing that there are numerous phenomena, with quite different sources, that often bear the same name. In clearing the brush, he clarifies what is central to trust, namely, a social interaction among individuals who find themselves in social situations “that can no
longer be adequately encompassed within the matrix of normatively defined role expectations” (p. 63).

Seligman then turns to a diverse set of literatures to develop and apply his concept. He is an extremely learned scholar, but his erudition often produces too many citations per sentence and makes these chapters turgid and hard going. More importantly, he offers no major insights in his lengthy discussions of civil society, civil virtue, social capital, the public, and the private. Though there are interesting observations (and there are several), they seem less the result of the analytic usefulness of Seligman’s conception of trust than of the application of his mind to the questions at hand.

Sometimes, Seligman’s discussions muddy the issues, rather than clarify, as in the chapter on generalized exchange. He appears to be offering a critique of the way in which Robert Putnam, Francis Fukyama, Kenneth Arrow, James Coleman, and others use terms such as trust and social capital. While he notes the variety of principles of generalized exchange, he argues that trust “emerges and is predicated on only one particular way of providing the unconditional bases of system confidence. It is . . . one that is undoubtedly connected with the ‘rise of the West’” (p. 85). At this point, I begin to find myself lost, and by the end of this chapter, I am as unclear as I was at the beginning about Seligman’s position on social capital or on Arrow’s argument for trust as a lubricant of exchange.

My dissatisfaction with the argument continues through the end. Seligman is not playing to his strengths when he attempts to generate hypotheses, make predictions, or submit strong empirical claims based on his conception of trust. His contrast of the United States and Europe does not stand up to careful scrutiny, nor is it consistent with his assertion that the same sociological consequences are being experienced on both continents. His conclusion that the decline of trust is taking place as a consequence of the destruction of individualism and too great a complexity of role differentiation rests on several problematic assumptions about the nature of structural change in the contemporary era and about the effects of increased role differentiation.

The fact that Seligman is more compelling in explaining the past than in predicting the future is hardly damning. His account of the structural conditions for the emergence of trust is largely convincing, and with it he both complements and adds to a considerable—and growing—literature.


John P. Hewitt
*University of Massachusetts at Amherst*

Prophetic sociology risks dramatic oversimplification as it presents its truths about the social world, and it is prone to fulminant predictions of
doom unless its advice is heeded. This fine book largely avoids these pit-
falls. Although its version of truth is rooted in the sociological tradition
of Durkheim and Mead, it considers and gives a fair hearing to a variety
of remedies for the contemporary social breakdown. This book is not yet
another jeremiad; Hearn’s stance is one of earnest hope, not self-righ-
teousness, as he attempts to revive this sociological tradition as a way of
approaching contemporary problems.

Contemporary American society is in crisis, Hearn argues, as social
institutions such as the family weaken and communitarian interdepen-
dencies are eroded. The crisis is the bitter fruit of the enduring conflict
between the individualism fostered by liberal modernity and the senti-
ments and practices of community on which social and moral order de-
pend. Individualism is championed both by the capitalist market econ-
omy, with its rhetoric of individual choice, and by the liberal democratic
(and, lately, welfare) state, with its rhetoric of individual rights. These
forms of individualism have expanded at the expense of sociability and
social solidarity, for they “detract from the social settings most congenial
to the growth of trust, gratitude, mutuality, and social and personal re-
ponsibility” (p. xii). Although both right-wing advocates of the market
economy and left-wing advocates of the welfare state promise to solve
the problems of family collapse, neighborhood decay, crime, and social
alienation, their proposals exacerbate the conditions they are intended to
improve. The way out of the contemporary crisis, Hearn argues, lies in
an updated version of Durkheim’s moral individualism; it is sociology’s
task to illuminate the social conditions under which moral individuals
flourish and to promulgate a sociological language in which problems of
social disorder may be conceived.

Moral individuals feel tied to others. They are grateful for the gifts
they have received from them and are affectively bound to duties to them
rather than merely rationally committed to personal goals. They trust
others and feel generally that others can be trusted. They feel responsible
not only to secure their own ends, but to help others secure theirs. They
value the worth and dignity of the individual and understand that these
ends are best promoted (and the skills necessary to securing them best
learned) in an active, vigorous social life. Human beings have a natural
sociability that inclines them to seek out others, to develop relationships
with them, and to seek not only the approval and respect of others but
self-respect as well. And moral individuals in the modern world must
learn to extend their moral sentiments not only to those in whose midst
they have learned them, but to a wider community of human beings.

In chapters 1 and 2, Hearn applies his approach to contemporary prob-
lems of “bad parents” and “bad neighbors,” explaining how both the mar-
et economy and the liberal welfare state undermine social institutions,
social control, and communitarian interdependencies. Chapter 3 develops
the sociological critique of liberal modernity and links it to the anomie
of contemporary life. Chapter 4 explicates Durkheim’s theory of morality
in illuminating detail. Chapter 5 is in many ways the best chapter in the
book because of its incisive critique of the idea of social capital and re-casting of it in terms of gifts and the sacred (and also because of its de-lightful and effective use of the Frank Capra film, “It’s a Wonderful Life,” to develop its argument). Chapter 6 presents another particularly in-sightful analysis of the manifest “attention deficit disorders” of con-tempor-ary life and argues for sociology’s role in promoting a language of soli-darity to contend with the insistent languages of individual choices and rights.

This book does not so much break new ground as it cultivates and fertilizes the sociological acreage in interesting, enlightening, and produc-tive ways. It will be of particular use in the advanced undergraduate and beginning graduate classroom—in courses in classical and contemporary sociological theory as well as in courses in social problems and community sociology—where it will both inform the student and serve as a vivid model of sociological analysis and insight. Seasoned professionals will also find much of value, for the author seeks not only to teach his students but also to reawaken the sociological imagination of his colleagues. His book has a perhaps understandable tendency to hope for more influence by such reawakened sociologists than they may ever have. And, like oth-ers in its genre, it gives too little credit to the capacity of those contempo-rary men and women with whose lives the author is deeply concerned both to recognize the origins of their own problems and to take matters into their own hands. Communitarian sentiments and practices are more widespread than most sociological prophets imagine, and we must learn to recognize them when we see them. Nonetheless, the book succeeds in its goals, and it deserves to be widely read.


Lawrence Alfred Powell
*University of Auckland, New Zealand*

It has now been nearly half a century since political scientist David Tru-man penned his classic statement of the “interest group politics” para-digm, *The Governmental Process* (Alfred Knopf, 1951). Variants on Tru-man’s original approach—reflecting inherent assumptions that political behavior can be understood as rational action by self-interested partici-pants, and that “lobby” or “pressure” groups emerge within political sys-tems in order to aggregate those interests in demanding particularistic responses from government—have long since become the taken-for-granted premises informing a great deal of modern scholarship on the political sociology of groups.

But, as Elisabeth Clemens aptly illustrates in *The People’s Lobby,* “in-
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terest group politics entails more than (just) the aggregated interests of self-interested individuals” (p. 6). In a refreshing attempt to get beyond the explanatory limitations of earlier accounts of how group politics arose in the American context, Clemens skillfully integrates the best of recent organizational and cultural approaches to historical sociology, weaving a rich analysis of the “social origins” of interest group politics during the Progressive Era. The central premise of this book, and the related theoretical debates it invites, will be of particular interest to political scientists, historians, sociologists, and students of the dynamics of social change. Clemens contends that during the period between 1890 and 1925 an American political order, which up to that point had been largely dominated by party organizations and elections, was rather dramatically transformed by an emergent “people’s lobby”—manifesting new processes of “organizational innovation” in which citizens/voters began to learn how to hold their elected representatives accountable at the polls, how to monitor legislative processes, and how to effectively institutionalize their ongoing participation in shaping administrative and legislative policies. These changing forms of civic engagement during the Progressive Era, invented by citizens/voters as strategies to circumvent the parties, are examined within the politics of three exemplary states—California, Washington, and Wisconsin—using organized labor, farmers, and “the organizational accomplishments of disenfranchised women” as examples of mobilized interests. What emerges from this analysis is a considerably more complex and multifaceted account of the nature of American interest group politics and its social roots than is to be found in previous accounts of this period—particularly with respect to processes of organizational and institutional change.

What weaknesses there are in this volume—and they are relatively minor—stem from a reluctance to fully relinquish some of the old “group politics” premises it initially sets out to remedy. Though the book’s prologue ambitiously critiques the old Arthur Bentley-David Truman interest group politics paradigm as outmoded, the alternative analysis that follows in fact retains some of that paradigm’s explanatory limitations. First, the historical account continues to rely on motivational assumptions that imply that participants’ attempts, in 1890–1925, to revise the existing American sociopolitical order were essentially a matter of self-interested rational choice. As political scientist Murray Edelman discovered years ago in his analysis of “tired groups” in Symbolic Uses of Politics (University of Illinois Press, 1964), rational choice models can explain at best only part of the variance in human political behavior, and institutional and organizational factors tend to be of limited utility in explaining the rest of it. Most political behavior—then as now—is not strictly rational but is usually also symbolic, involving the social creation of meaning and arbitrary definitions of “political reality.” Second, the book’s primary focus on interest organizations, as distinct entities that articulated circumscribed group interests, tends to obscure the convergence during that era of more profound societal forces—both progressive and reactionary—
thus missing the forest for the trees. Viewing Progressive-Era populism
directly within the broader perspective of ongoing social movements and
class relations would help bypass some of these myopic limitations of the
interest group pluralist model, focusing attention instead on some of the
ways in which citizens during this era attempted to form coalitions that
went significantly beyond particularistic interests, in response to larger
perceived societal needs. Finally, the volume’s focus on interest organiza-
tions tends to obscure the pivotal importance of the class-skewed “critical
realignment” of 1896—which fundamentally reshaped the political sys-
tem along class lines in a more conservative, pro-business direction, and
precipitated the pre–New Deal electoral demobilization of lower strata
voters that rendered the “rise of interest group politics” necessary for so-
ciopolitical survival. (See Walter Dean Burnham’s Critical Elections and
the Mainsprings of American Politics [W. W. Norton, 1970]; and E. E.
Schattschneider’s The Semisovereign People [Holt, 1960].)

These minor reservations aside, Elisabeth Clemens has produced a val-
uable scholarly contribution to our understanding of the social roots of
interest group politics in the United States in the 1890–1925 period,
which deserves careful scrutiny by students of 20th-century U.S. history,
organizational change processes, and the political sociology of group be-
behavior.

Plutocracy and Politics in New York City. By Gabriel A. Almond. Boul-

G. William Domhoff
University of California, Santa Cruz

This book represents the belated publication of a 1938 dissertation by
political scientist Gabriel Almond, who provides an introductory “remem-
brace of things past” notable for its comments on famous University of
Chicago professors of the 1930s and its critique of those who think demo-
cratic market societies can function satisfactorily without a “redistribu-
tive welfare net” (p. xxv). The book begins with a six-page forword by
urban political theorist Clarence Stone, who sees Almond’s findings as an
anticipation of his “regime” theory.

The book has many interesting insights on the role of glittery social
events in creating a sense of in-group cohesion in the “plutocracy,” Al-
mond’s term for both rich people as a social stratum and a polity in which
rich people “enjoy a substantially unequal share of political power” (p.
xxii). The main empirical findings of the book, however, concern the so-
cial backgrounds and connections of government officials, political fig-
ures, and directors of business associations in New York from the 1770s
to the 1930s. Generally, Almond reports a decline in “high society’s”
involvement in business groups and a decline in direct political involve-
ment by both high-society and business leaders, although he finds the
decline is much less for the most important political offices. Moreover, he is quick to say that the control of New York politics by the plutocracy did continue by others means, especially campaign finance, lobbying, and philanthropy. Further, he argues that the “various strata of the plutocracy,” which differ in religion, national origins, and the age of their wealth, can unite and return to politics directly when they need to, such as times of government corruption, wars, or depressions (p. 239).

Almond attributes the decline of the plutocracy’s direct involvement in New York politics to several factors: the Revolutionary War, which legitimated lower-class involvement in politics; the stratification of the plutocracy into “old” families and “parvenues”; and the need for full-time involvement in politics in order to succeed in a society where everyone can vote. The end result in times of social tranquility is a relatively isolated plutocracy that indulges in social extravaganzas and a “class of professional politicians,” mostly lawyers, “who engage in politics as a business enterprise, profit oriented, and hence safe as far as the plutocracy was concerned, since profits were to be gained by working along with the wealthy business interests” (p. 237).

In his foreword, Stone claims Almond’s dissertation is an anticipation of the idea that local government officials join with business interests because organized business usually provides the most stable and reliable coalition partner, thus creating the typical urban power structure, which he calls a “regime.” He says that “Almond shows the shift away from domination by individuals of wealth and prestige, in the early days of the nation, to a more diverse set of officeholders as democratization takes hold” (p. xiii). In Stone’s version, “holders of wealth” merely have to be “reckoned with to a special degree” by government officials (p. xiv). But it seems more likely that Almond shows the shift from one form of class domination to another.

Both Almond and Stone ignore the fact that the “good government” movement of the Progressive Era reduced the need for direct business involvement in local government by institutionalizing a variety of procedures, commissions, and governmental structures that minimized the impact of average voters and elected officials. They also ignore another likely factor in the overall decline of direct plutocratic involvement in city politics, the differentiation of business interests into local growth coalitions, based in the intensification of land use, that involve themselves in urban politics, and a nationwide capitalist class that makes profits through the sales of goods and services and usually has little direct involvement in local politics (John Logan and Harvey Molotch, Urban Fortunes [University of California Press, 1987]). That is, as nationwide markets developed and the federal government became more important to capitalists operating in those markets, it should not be expected that the plutocracy as a whole would be involved in city politics.

Almond and Stone lament the “deterioration” of the inner city. Almond attributes this “crisis” to “the resistance of the economically advantaged strata to maintain, to say nothing of increasing, the level of social expen-
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Stone asks why slum clearance and the building of convention centers and sports arenas has not “prevented an escalating crime problem and deteriorating schools” and answers that it is because “cities have been enabled to do only those things that were directly profitable and appealing to business interests” (p. xvi). But neither stresses that growth coalitions directly create many of these problems by expanding the downtown and urban universities into neighborhoods, as Stone shows for urban renewal in Atlanta (Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent [University of North Carolina Press, 1976]). Almond’s book is worth pondering, but neither Almond nor Stone provides the best starting point for understanding urban politics.


Linda L. Fowler
Dartmouth College

After languishing during the 1980s, legislative recruitment has once again become a vital area of research. Driven partly by the desire to explore the obstacles women and minority groups encounter in seeking public office and partly by the need to understand how widespread changes in national party systems affect the nomination and selection of candidates, studies have proliferated on both sides of the Atlantic and, to a lesser extent, in Asia and Latin America. Meaningful comparisons across countries, however, have suffered from the lack of a common conceptual scheme that enables scholars to assess the relative impact of institutions, party systems, and personal calculations in the attainment of legislative office. This volume, Passages to Power, edited by Pippa Norris, is an important step in bringing order to an unruly subfield.

The core question of the book is how individual actors—potential candidates and gatekeepers—“interact within different institutional settings” (p. 1). Nine countries, plus the European Parliament, provide the institutional variation, ranging from the fragmented multiparty systems of Finland and the Netherlands, to the moderate multiparty systems of Australia, Canada, Germany, and New Zealand (after 1993), to the two-party systems of the United Kingdom and United States, and finally, to the predominantly one-party but transitional system of Japan. Each of these countries differs, as well, in its use of single-member districts, proportional representation, or combined methods for allocating votes. The common thread amidst this welter of institutional arrangements is the authors’ focus on the supply of candidates and the demands of the “selectorate” that designates nominees. By supply-side factors, the authors typically mean the personal experiences and attributes that motivate candidates to seek office. By demand-side factors, they focus on the judgments
of party officials and activists regarding the capacity of individual candidates to represent the public and win elections.

Each of the chapters stands on its own in providing a comprehensive analysis of the recruitment process in the selected countries. In this respect, the book will be of interest to country and area specialists, to students of political parties and electoral institutions, and to those interested in the social and political stratification of advanced industrial societies. But the contributors to *Passages to Power* have also shown a commendable self-discipline in adhering to their common framework of analysis. By including careful descriptions of the opportunity structures found in each country and combining them with surveys of the relevant elites engaged in legislative recruitment (with the exception of Fukui and Herrnson who wrote on Japan and the United States, respectively), they have embedded their findings about the attitudes of candidates and party activists in a broader context. An examination of recruitment from both a macro- and microlevel perspective is a research strategy that several scholars, including this writer, have advocated for some time, and so it is intriguing to see it attempted in so many different national contexts.

Upon closer inspection, however, the supply and demand schema is not as tidy as it appears, because some traits, such as gender or prior ofﬁceholding and campaign experience, affect both the potential candidates’ level of political ambition and the selectors’ assessments about their ﬁtness for ofﬁce. Moreover, the authors tend to rely on it to organize the descriptions of their data rather than to model the relative inﬂuences of the various factors. Indeed, only the Norris analysis of recruitment to the European Parliament provides any systematic attention to the relative weight of supply and demand factors in estimating candidates’ electoral success.

Despite the ambiguity about the interaction of supply- and demand-side effects, what is quite remarkable about the studies collected here is the amount of agreement on what variables are important in explaining recruitment. A major achievement of the book, then, is its demonstration that scholars from widely different political systems can speak intelligibly to each other about one of the most important aspects of democratic politics.

What they have to say to each other cannot be easily generalized, however, which leaves the reader wishing for a concluding chapter that pulls the disparate country ﬁndings together. Several themes do emerge from the chapters: the socioeconomic and professional biases in recruitment, the continued underrepresentation of women, the institutionalization of a political class, and the increasing disaffection of voters with existing mechanisms for choosing leaders. In addition, some patterns emerge in several countries that invite speculation about causation, such as the connection between local control of nominations and the value of incum- bency or the importance of party lists in promoting women’s candidacies. Yet, these patterns are hardly news to anyone who has followed the liter-
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ature and genuine comparison on the fundamental questions of who pursues legislative office, and how the winnowing of candidates takes place remains elusive.

If the book does not live up to its full potential, it is nevertheless a landmark in the development of collaborative approaches to political recruitment. The authors have established the baseline survey data and institutional contexts for their respective countries. They have also identified the key variables and created the conceptual foundation for a truly comparative effort in the future.


Lynn Sanders
University of Chicago

This careful book examines changes in the political and legal discourse surrounding the Australian regulation of prostitution and pornography. Since World War II, in Australia as in the United States, these two "sex industries" have expanded dramatically. Massage parlors, escort services, videos, and the Internet have joined or replaced brothels, street solicitation, sex shops, and printed materials to produce the wide variety of commercial sex now available. These transformations have in turn led to alterations in the politico-legal discourse of regulation, which Sullivan traces by looking at state and federal statutes and parliamentary debates about prostitution and pornography over the last century.

Sullivan's book is organized chronologically, illustrating how commercial sex has been regulated and discussed in the Australian states at different times. At the beginning of her book, she justifies her focus on legislation: parliamentary debates show how "public figures constitute authoritative meanings" (p. 9). New understandings of sex work have emerged, Sullivan suggests, in a context of broader social transformation. They track with a growing emphasis on mutuality in Australian definitions of normal (hetero) sexuality, with the success of feminist efforts to acknowledge sex work as real work, and with an increase, from 2% in 1972 to 11% in 1989, in the representation of women in Australian parliaments. Sullivan surrounds her discussion of regulation with references to these broader changes. The idealization of reciprocity and equality in heterosexual relationships, for instance, is reflected in pornography regulations that acknowledge both the right to use it and the demand not to see it, and in prostitution regulations directed at clients as well as prostitutes.

Readers interested in theory, about law and social change or about the processes by which some sexual practices emerge as normal and others as pathological, will not find it here. Sullivan refers to broad changes and
processes but does not venture far to explain them. Both the strengths and weaknesses of Sullivan’s heavily descriptive account are evident, for instance, in her discussion of prostitution in the current period. Australia, Sullivan remarks, “has a greater diversity of laws addressed to prostitution—and has implemented a larger range of decriminalisation strategies—than any other country in the world” (p. 199). The details of these differences are fascinating. But Sullivan does not make strong claims about why the different Australian states have arrived at the radically different regulatory strategies she describes or how, within jurisdictions, legislators balance conflicting priorities.

This agnosticism may frustrate some, and indeed, absent a clear theoretical apparatus, it is often difficult to keep track of the details Sullivan offers. She may back off from theory for a specific reason: the book reflects her own dissatisfaction with feminist arguments, such as those advanced by Carole Pateman and Kathleen Barry, that sex work is sexual slavery. “‘Big’ arguments” about women’s oppression cannot address the diversity of sex work or guide feminist politics, she says (p. 241). Sullivan definitely succeeds in her aim to dispute essentialist claims both by feminists (that sex work is always slavery) and by others (that these industries serve enduring natural needs—as suggested by the remark that prostitution is the world’s oldest profession). Clearly what Australians have considered pornography and prostitution has hardly been fixed; in the Australian Capital Territory and in Queensland, for instance, prostitution now may include acts of masturbation and voyeurism (p. 205).

The book does offer an interesting case for students of comparative politics and sociology, law, constitutionalism, and social movements. There are many similarities in the ways that Australians and Americans have defined and regulated pornography and prostitution, which are particularly interesting because Australians enjoy no constitutionally protected right to free speech. The First Amendment rhetoric that governs so many American discussions of pornography is absent from Australian debates, and Australian legislatures have been much more willing to accept the claim that violent pornography is dangerous. Arguments by Australian feminist activists have also entered legislation about prostitution, especially in the claim that sex work is real work.

A paradox about sex work in Australia emerges from Sullivan’s book. Commercial sex is, in a way, increasingly tolerated but only as it has been increasingly removed from visibility. Though prostitution is regulated in diverse ways, all Australian legislatures have moved in the recent past to penalize street solicitation (and open homosexual cruising, whether solicitation or not); pornography, too, is regulated to keep it from the eyes of those who would be offended by it. Such efforts to keep sex from view of course require extensive regulations and expansive bureaucracy. Indeed, the book, in general, sketches the development of increasingly complicated, perhaps frightening, mechanisms for regulation and surveillance, which Sullivan only occasionally bemoans. These regulations often contain substantive reflections of feminist arguments she applauds. In her
view, “debates about what should count as normal and appropriate sexual practice have often been advantageous for women” (p. 241).


Suzanne J. Kessler
Purchase College, State University of New York

Richard Ekins, Director of the Trans-Gender Archive at the University of Ulster, has studied male cross-dressers and “sex changers” in contemporary Britain. His analysis is based on access to archival material and the opportunity to meet, over the last 17 years, more transvestites, transsexuals, and transgenderists than most gender researchers.

Although vague about his role vis-à-vis his informants (describing himself as a “casual participant” and “overt observer”), he notes that “in the course of . . . mutual exchange I have earned the confidence of the transgender community” (p. 4), and the reader does have the sense that Ekins is a trusted reporter and knows what he is writing about.

Ekins coined the term “male femaling,” a phrasing that at first seems awkward but is actually a very useful expression for clustering the various ways that “genetic males” (his usage) appropriate female/feminine properties: in fantasy or in reality, sporadically or continuously, publicly or privately, alone or with companions, deliberately or impulsively, permanently or temporarily.

Whether one “females” through one’s body or one’s clothing is not particularly important, argues Ekins, nor is it conceptually important whether one’s “femaling” has an erotic component. Theoreticians and clinicians who assign gender-related categories on these bases are focusing on dimensions that may not be the most relevant to those doing the “femaling.” Traditional categories like transvestite or transsexual (or even the newer category transgender) presuppose fixed identities and meanings, and Ekins convincingly shows “the ambiguous, ambivalent, multi-contextual, multi-dimensional, emergent nature of much cross-dressing and sex-changing phenomena” (p. 2).

The bulk of the book describes the five-phase career path of “male femaling”: beginning, fantasying, doing, constituting, and consolidating. Through numerous powerful illustrations, Ekins demonstrates that the meanings people ascribe to their gender choices are much more fluid than has customarily been credited.

One “male femaler” who Ekins profiles enjoys clothes shopping in female attire without finding these trips sexually arousing at the time. But when “he” returns home, thoughts of being one of the women in the communal dressing room and of desiring them triggers sexual arousal. Is the desire experienced as a woman or as a man? Why does the pleasure ap-
prehended through the penis not inhibit the “male femaler’s” identification with the female? These are some of the fascinating questions that Ekins considers. There are no obvious answers—none that would permit us to unequivocally classify the “male femaler.”

Ekins’s central point is that “male femaling” is more complex than most previous researchers and clinicians have considered. Even when “male femalers” adopt one of the available categories, their adoption does not make the category natural or their placement in it correct. “In actual lived experience, development and order are constructed post facto, and anew from the standpoint of each new present. The phases . . . may be circled and cycled again and again” (p. 130).

The core of the book follows three theoretical chapters that Ekins says the reader can skip. I agree. His explanation of grounded theory is not developed enough to permit readers not previously familiar with Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss’s (The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research [Aldine, 1967]) initial formulation to grasp it. According to Ekins, those who work within grounded theory’s framework “enter the research setting with as few predetermined ideas as possible, and should be prepared to change those they already have, readily and frequently. They avoid imposing their own particular version of reality on their subjects” (p. 37). It is one thing to pledge this; it is another to demonstrate it and distinguish this commitment from similar commitments of other post-positivist theories. His summaries of other theoretical approaches to cross-gender dressing and category switching are unnecessary for advanced students and will not suffice for the beginner.

Ekins is correct that he is riding on the crest of a wave of interest in cross-dressing and sex-changing. He is mistaken that he is the only researcher to have written from the informants’ point of view. Nor has he (as he claimed) provided an analysis completely different than anything that has come before it. Anne Bolin, Dallas Denny, Holly Devor, Deborah Feinbloom, John Talamini, and Annie Woodhouse (all of whom he cites) have collected first-person accounts and attempted to frame them within some kind of gender theory.

I have two additional criticisms. In spite of discussing his data in ways that he believes deeply challenge gender essentialism, Ekins has in fact maintained a sex/gender (biological-cultural) distinction and failed to fully integrate the social constructionist view of gender held by progressive gender theorists. Secondly, although he acknowledges the feminist critique that “male femaling might be seen as reinforcing gender role stereotypes thereby reproducing rather than changing the existing arrangements between the sexes” (p. 40), he provides no response to it and regards his role as researcher to “plot these reproductions.” That will hardly satisfy most critics.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the book is worth reading. Ekins has selected vivid cases of gender arrangements and encourages readers to think about them in the broadest possible way. He concludes by urging others to study “female maling,” “male maling,” and “female femaling.”
This recognition that all “gendering” is an accomplishment and that “male femaling” is but a single example is exactly the message readers need to take with them.


Mary Bernstein
*Arizona State University*

In *Queer Fictions of the Past*, Scott Bravmann argues that historical narratives serve as cultural and political interventions into the present by constructing contemporary queer subjectivities. Bravmann contests queer historiography’s construction of stable homosexual identities that elide racial, gender, and class differences. Bravmann concludes that “hybrid texts” that mix biography with fiction are better suited to understanding diverse lesbian and gay subjectivities.

Bravmann begins by challenging narratives that assert conditions associated with modernity, such as anonymity and economic freedom from the traditional family structure, allowed a homosexual identity to develop. Rather than understanding such texts as fact, they must be understood as narratives that actively construct the “fiction” of the modern homosexual. The modernist account “anchors present identities in a stable, coherent personal and social past . . . overrides, disallows, and denies other experiences; and implicitly grounds conceptions of gay identity within the specific experiences of urban, middle-class white men” (p. 10). The linear trajectory of materialist social histories is belied by differences among queer subjects, past and present.

Bravmann argues that recent historiographies attuned to multiple social differences attest to the inadequacy of the modernist and materialist thesis. Contrary to Bravmann’s interpretation, however, it remains unclear that differences produced by the intersections of race, class, and gender cannot be at least partially explained by more sophisticated structuralist accounts. For example, the development of working-class queer identities can in part be attributed to the separation of work and leisure time allowed by a modern economy.

According to Bravmann, a search for racial diversity and gender parity has led social scientists and activists alike to re-form the 1969 Stonewall riots into a glorious tale of multiracial gender-neutral heroism and triumph, which those in the present should strive to replicate. While Stonewall has been racialized, other aspects of lesbian and gay history have not been. “This absence is . . . a veil which obscures racial differences and racial meanings under the unifying category of homosexuality” (p. 77). Similarly, Bravmann argues that the contemporary desire for gender inclusion has been refracted back onto Stonewall to highlight lesbian par-
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ticipation in what was in reality only a minor event in lesbian history. Relying on one photograph for evidence, Bravmann contends that lesbians were quite possibly not present at Stonewall and, even if they were present, were probably not as integral to this event as queer historiography would have us believe. In short, the multiracial, cogened Mecca of Stonewall is a case of historical wishful thinking.

The political strategy associated with the modernist promise of a stable identity in a world of change is “coming out.” By itself, Bravmann claims, this strategy is of questionable political value because it mandates homogeneity by demanding primacy for a core lesbian or gay identity. The post-Stonewall emphasis on visibility provides the basis for a politics among people who otherwise have little in common. By openly confronting the racial and gender tensions present at Stonewall, we can assess the potential for developing communities that recognize difference.

The crux of Bravmann’s argument is that historiographies should be understood as representations and performative sites that intervene in the present. “Hybrid texts . . . that weave autobiography, poetry, documentary material, feminist theory, personal narratives of desire, critical analyses of the structures of social domination, (science) fiction, and at times visual images into complex representations of queer historical subjects” (p. 96) are more effective interventions into the present. Queer fictions of the past by lesbians and gay men of color destabilize identity categories and therefore contest the modernist project of historiography. Such narratives, for example, interrogate the use of national borders as a site for studying history and culture. Historical representation, in other words, should be considered “a way of struggling over and addressing current social problems” (p. 113).

This provocative book made me think critically about both my own scholarship and the work of others. The intelligent deconstruction of the sacred cows of queer historiography should remind scholars and activists alike to examine our own epistemological assumptions and our roles in creating queer fictions of the past and their potential to influence the present. But Bravmann does not sufficiently acknowledge that different “narrative” forms address different questions. Judging one form by the standards of another misses the complementarity of different approaches. While hybrid texts address the internal dimensions of gay and lesbian subjectivities, they are less able to explain the development of the visible lesbian and gay movement.

Although representations of lesbians and gay men may intervene in the present, the dense narrative style of *Queer Fictions* ensures that it will do so only for a few. Nonetheless, this book would be useful in graduate courses on epistemology, the sociology of knowledge, or queer theory and postmodernism. This book should remind sociologists to think critically about the questions we ask, the subjects we choose, and the groups we omit.
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Mercer L. Sullivan
Rutgers University

This lean and direct volume delivers on its title. The authors located and interviewed 86 active armed robbers in St. Louis. In semistructured interviews, they elicited accounts of why and how these people committed their crimes. The book presents their findings along with discussions of sampling, the hazards and contingencies of the field research, how their findings compare with previous research, and policy implications.

The book’s main claim to originality is that it is the most comprehensive study to date of active, as opposed to incarcerated, armed robbers. As such, according to the authors, it is able to explore the motivations, attitudes, and values of this population in a way quite different than has previously been possible based on research with incarcerated persons who are perhaps chastened and are certainly both demonstrated failures and removed from the heated logic of contingency of freedom.

The accounts of the fieldwork do not recommend this sort of research to the faint of heart. As might be expected, the authors were suspected of being police agents by some of their violent interviewees. They also experienced some close direct encounters with violent events. The descriptions of the fieldwork are matter of fact and to the point, as is the rest of the book. Building on an earlier field study, the authors built a snowball sample through existing contacts. The final sample consisted primarily of black, poor, male practitioners of high-risk, low-yield street robbery, along with a few females and a handful of higher-level practitioners of commercial robbery.

Their chapters progress from initial motivations to commit robbery, through choosing of targets, and then to the mechanics of the act. Most sample members are described as living in a “street culture” based on “desperate partying.” Though poor, the cycle of desperate partying leading to robbery for means to continue partying and back to robbery set them apart from other poor people.

Some of the most fascinating analyses concern the logic of choice of target. As might be predicted, the robbers preferred to prey on females and elderly people because they thought them more vulnerable. With regard to race of victim and geographical area, robbers of similar motivation and circumstance revealed quite different views. While some judged white victims to be wealthier and less likely to resist, others thought black victims more likely to be carrying cash. Similarly, areas outside the inner city were preferred by some for having more lucrative targets, while others preferred to operate close to home because they were less conspicuous in the local area and knew more escape routes.

The authors give careful consideration to theories about the moral and
sensual attractions of doing evil, but the weight of their evidence points to instrumental rather than expressive motivations among this group of offenders. While some described being thrilled by the sense of power, most committed robbery primarily for money. Few expressed regret, but few seemed primarily driven by inner compulsions to do harm or to dominate. The expressive side of their motivations was linked to their involvement in lifestyles of desperate partying and displays of contempt for the world of conformity in which their skills and education could allow access only to low wages and social marginality. Most were repeat offenders, many with prior experience and most with present expectation of future incarceration.

The authors claim in the introduction that their contact with active rather than incarcerated robbers will yield new insights for public policy. As the reader progresses through the book, it becomes difficult to imagine what these insights might be. The robbers portrayed here are indeed desperate and ruthless characters, mired in poverty and personal pathology, heedless of consequences. As such, they appear resistant to social programs, psychiatry, and criminal justice sanctions alike. Yet, this book is as coherent as it is concise. The policy prescriptions are specific and firmly grounded in the analysis. They include educating people in general not to display signs of vulnerability and not to resist if they are accosted, educating specific groups about specific dangers, such as johns exposing themselves to predatory prostitutes, and providing better banking services to poor people so that they do not have to carry cash in the street.

Within its stated objectives, this book succeeds admirably and seems destined to provide baseline data on its delimited field of inquiry for some time to come. The frustrations of reading this book result from the questions not addressed, best exemplified by the casual acceptance of the notion of “street culture.” The descriptions in the book convince the reader that there is something real and specific indicated by this term. Indeed, street culture figures here as the master concept, the fount of most armed robbery. Its origins, however, and the conditions under which it reproduces, expands, or contracts are utterly outside the discussion.