Victor Lidz

Strengthening the Strong Program in Cultural Sociology

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Content

Preface by the Dean,
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Helmut Staubmann

Victor Meyer Lidz is today's most eminent scholar in the field of action theory in the tradition of the work of Talcott Parsons. It is a great honor for our Faculty of Social and Political Sciences and the Department of Sociology respectively that he has become an important affiliate of our faculty. In 1999, he followed an invitation to serve as a keynote speaker at a conference in Innsbruck on "The Current Relevance of Talcott Parsons." Since 2003, he comes regularly to teach courses on topics ranging from American Society, Democracy in Civil Society, Democratic Social Condition in America, to Systems and Action Theory for our Master Program Social and Political Theory.

There is furthermore a long standing record of research cooperation that goes back to the academic year of 1991/92. At the time I was working on a project on action theory at the University of California in Los Angeles and was advised to get in touch with Victor Lidz who by then was already an internationally renowned scholar. I had known his name and some of his work. Being socialized in European academic conduct I was hesitant to simply call up a person of such prominence but at the end gave it a try. He immediately invited me to his house in Philadelphia. I vividly remember this first personal encounter and the long discussion in his up-stairs study room. It was a start of a long collegial cooperation of which a joint book series *Studies in the Theory of Action* is one visible outcome and, as I may proudly say, a long friendship ever since then.

Currently we are cooperating in the project The Unpublished Legacy of Talcott Parsons funded by Jubiläumsfonds, Österreichische Nationalbank. One outcome

is a two-volume edition, one already published and one to appear in the coming months, of an important project Parsons undertook during the late 1950s and early 1960s together with his student and junior colleague Winston White on American Society. Another significant result of our cooperation is the publication of papers of a faculty seminar at Harvard University in 1939/40 conducted by the Austrian economist then at Harvard University Josef A. Schumpeter and Talcott Parsons on *Rationality in the Social Sciences.* The topic of rationality was also taken up in his talk "Conceptualizing the Rational Actor and Rational Social Action" at the prestigious Böhm-Bawerk Lecture Series which is jointly organized by the Faculty of Business and Management, the Faculty of Economics and Statistics and our Faculty of Social and Political Sciences.

There is one episode in Victor Lidz' family history that might have facilitated my endeavors to bring him to Innsbruck: His mother, who had studied medicine at the University in Heidelberg, had decided to spend a year at the University of Innsbruck. She was attracted by the mountains and the skiing opportunities and planned to return to her *alma mater* in Heidelberg after a year. Upon her return to Heidelberg in spring of the year 1933 the University refused her registration. The official reason: she was 37.5 percent Jewish and that was above the percentage allowed for studying in Heidelberg. She eventually finished her medical studies at the University in Basel and later on immigrated to the United States. The precise calculation of 37.5 percent Jewishness reminds me on the Horkheimer-Adorno dialectics of enlightenment thesis that the European catastrophe was not grounded in irrationality but on a one-sided rationality stripped of other characteristics and criteria of the human condition, an idea that leads right to the title of today's lecture.

The presence of Victor M. Lidz at our university as a teacher and collegial research collaborator has significantly contributed to the international visibility and reputation of our faculty as a center for social theory. We therefore appreciate the decision of our rectorate and the senate to award him the honorary doctorate of our university.

Laudatio for Victor Lidz

Jeremy Tanner

Jürgen Habermas once commented that "no theory of society can be taken seriously if it does not at least situate itself with respect to the social theories of Talcott Parsons". Today we might add that no discussion of the legacy of Talcott Parsons, and of the theory of action which he developed, can be taken seriously if it does not situate itself in relation to the scholarship of our honorand today, Professor Victor Lidz, the most accomplished exponent of the most distinguished tradition of sociological theory to develop in the Western Academy in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Why is this tradition of sociological theory so important, and what makes Professor Lidz's contribution to it so seminal, and so salient for students of the social and cultural sciences today. Talcott Parsons' action theory sought to develop a system of concepts that could be used to describe, analyse and compare any system of human action, from the micro level of interactions between individuals, to the large scale processes which shape the formation, and disintegration, of nations and even civilizations. The particular genius of Parsons was to develop concepts and models which mediated between the emphasis on values and normative culture, characteristic of the German idealist tradition, and that on material, economic and political, interests and constraints characteristic of the English utilitarian and economic traditions. Parsons developed a genuinely integrative synthesis of these traditions, first through the concept of the unit act as a measure of social theory, then through a theory of action systems integrating the insights of cultural anthropology, psychology and sociology in a genuinely interdisciplinary venture that found its institutional expression in Harvard's Department of

Social Relations. Lastly, through his four function paradigm of action systems, Parsons developed a model which permitted the systematic exploration of interaction between ideal and material factors, conceptualised in terms of a cybernetic hierarchy: ideal factors like values shape and control material factors, but integration with the latter is the condition of the institutionaliation of values, and, in conditions of social disturbance, like revolutions, material factors may escape the controls of the encompassing values of established religious traditions.

Victor Lidz became part of the team of collaborators developing action theory in the 1960s as a graduate student in the Department of Social Relations at Harvard, and research assistant to Professor Parsons, before going on to teach and research at the University of Chicago, the University of Pennsylvania, Haverford College and most recently Drexel University in Philadelphia. His publications over the course of almost 50 years represent a series of landmarks in the development of action theory. There is almost no substantive sub-discipline within the field of sociology which Professor Lidz's essays have not illuminated in the course of his elaboration and refinement of the theory of action: social movement theory, and the role of invocation of values in social movement success; medical sociology, with a particular focus on the doctor-patient relationship; the sociology of law; the sociology of religion; sociologies of race and ethnic identity; the sociology and anthropology of death; social evolution and comparative historical sociology.

I could go on, but I wish to draw attention to just three of his most important contributions, which seem to me to have an exceptionally far-reaching character. First, identifying a convergence between the basic categories of action theory and those of linguistics, Lidz argued that the normative orders in social systems operated according to similar principles as grammar in transformational linguistics. Further, functioning in a way analogous to blood in the body, circulating crucial nutrients and chemical to the appropriate organs of the body, language operated as the most generalised medium of the internal environment of action systems, permitting the distribution of such crucial social resources and affect and influence within action systems.

Second, in a series of articles exploring the relationship between socio-cultural action and its biological foundations, Lidz identified convergences between ac-

tion theory and Jean Piaget's cognitive psychology. Developing a concept of the behavioural system or 'Mind' as the adaptive base of the general action system, Lidz was able to articulate the ways in which culture is conditioned by, but also appropriates and enduringly transforms basic neurological dispositions. He illustrates this with the difficulty of adults learning to hear and articulate appropriate sounds when learning a language radically different from their native tongue.

Thirdly, Professor Lidz has published path-breaking work exploring the character of social solidarity, what one might think of as being the central concern of the sociological tradition. Extending to the concept of 'influence' Parsons' use of the model of money to describe media circulating in action systems, Lidz has sought to explain how skilful or inept use of influence by actors, especially politicians, seeking support from diverse constituencies for political programs can inflate or deflate the value of such influence, undermining or enhancing levels of solidary commitment between different interest groups within a community, with profound implications for the cohesiveness of a community, and the effectiveness of political institutions.

All these contributions have freshness and relevance today. Professor Lidz's integrations of action theory with Chomsky's linguistics and Piaget's cognitive psychology offer the best available platform for integrating recent advances in cognitive linguistics and neuropsychology into genuinely interdisciplinary programme of social and behavioural science. His account of the role of influence, and the ways in which it use can inform the expansion or contraction of solidarity, could do much to explain the malaises which underlie both Brexit and the ongoing Eurozone crisis, and help shape better leadership strategies and institutional design than either the politicians of Britain and Greece, and or the technocrats of the EU have been able to achieve.

In short, Professor Lidz is one of the luminaries of modern social theory. His contributions have endowed theory of action with an intellectual sophistication, range of reference and depth of insight unequalled by any competing research programme in contemporary social science. We may feel confident that in honouring a scholar of the exceptional standing of Victor Lidz today, the University of Innsbruck is adding further lustre to its already distinguished traditions.

Strengthening the Strong Program in Cultural Sociology

Victor Lidz

Over the past few decades, a major trend in sociology, and in related fields of anthropology and history, has been the rise of cultural studies. Rarely emphasized in previous decades, studies of culture have become a "hot field," engaging many scholars, with many essays filling journals, and many books rolling of the presses. Yet the gain in new knowledge has not been commensurate with the efforts. In an influential essay, Jeffrey Alexander and Philip Smith argued that most of the recent studies have been reductionist.[1] Elements of culture have been studied with the object of explaining them in terms of a short list of social factors. One pattern has been Neo-Marxist, explaining cultural formations as serving dominant capitalist interests – for example, using the cultural tools of modern marketing to interest individuals and families in ever newly fascinating consumer items, thereby distracting them from how large corporations control their work lives. Another pattern has tied political domination to contemporary capitalistic institutions and interpreted aspects of culture as subjugating the citizenry to political orders controlled by narrow elites. A third, subtler pattern – the most prominent in sociology – has emphasized ways in which adherents of particular cultural complexes gain greater "cultural capital", adding it to economic and soci-

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1   Jeffrey C. Alexander and Philip Smith, "The Strong Program in Cultural Sociology: Elements of a Structural Hermeneutics" in Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The Meanings of Social Life; A Cultural Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). See also the review of approaches to cultural analysis in Philip Smith, *Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

al capital, and thereby attaining elevated status in society.[2] By contrast with these reductive perspectives, Alexander and Smith proposed a "strong program" in cultural sociology. It emphasizes the *autonomy* of culture and maintains that cultural formations should not be explained reductively in terms of the social interests and statuses of actors who create or sustain the formations. Rather, culture should be understood and analyzed as an autonomous form of the organization of human conduct. The task ahead is to apprehend culture's meanings and capacities to orient social action on their own terms as richly and fully as possible.

Characterizing Culture

First, what is culture? Thousands of answers have been proposed in the social scientific literature, so we cannot today tarry to sort through them methodically. My usage begins with Durkheim's concept of "collective representations" – representations that have meanings that are established within a complex of a culture and understood, respected, and cited by individuals familiar with that complex in a culture; not simple dictionary meanings, but the value-added meaning that comes from representing elements of a cultural formation. Not mass or force in everyday language, but mass, force, and acceleration, indeed, gravity, as Newtonian theory gives them more precise meanings. Not freedom in ordinary language, but the freedom of speech and press in the usage of a legal system; not "father" in everyday usage, but God the Father in Christian theology. Collective represen-

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2   This is the approach popularized by Pierre Bourdieu in his *Distinction; A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (London and New Yory: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1984; original French edition, 1979.) Note that the title of the book indicates a focus other than the sociology of culture, although the analysis has been assimilated to that domain. Some parts of the book, such as the analysis of class differences in diet and customs of eating and drinking come closer to a non-reductive cultural sociology. See also, Michele Lamont, *Money, Morals, and Manners; The Culture of the French and the American Upper-Middle Class* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1992), a study influenced by Bourdieu that emphasizes the ways that the upper middle class groups, somewhat differently in France and in America, use aspects of their cultures to draw exclusive boundaries around their class statuses. It delves somewhat more deeply into the two class culture, but remains basically reductive in its explanatory theory.

tations in this value-added sense convey conceptual clarity in culturally shaped discourse.

What, then, is the nature of the meanings that collective representations can convey? In a long essay[3] that Alexander and Smith do not cite, although Alexander had cited it earlier[4] and had also corresponded with the author about it, Talcott Parsons identified four major subsystems of culture: the sciences and intellectual disciplines (*Wissenschaften*); expressive symbolism and the arts; moral-evaluative and ideological culture; and constitutive or "religious" culture. A culture associated with a particular society or civilization includes all four of these, which Parsons called *subsystems* of culture. He then identified elements that together make up specific formations of culture within each of the four types of subsystems.

Parsons started with the case of scientific knowledge, identifying four elements of any specific body of knowledge, elements he drew from works in the methodology of science. Organized and empirically validated facts are a first element. The procedures for observing facts vary by discipline, from carefully designed and controlled experiments in particle physics or clinical trials in medicine to participant observation in the social sciences to hermeneutic interpretation in the humanities, but *validation* of empirical facts is the essential criterion. Second are problem solutions, that is, explanations for particular sets of phenomena of special interest in an intellectual discipline, sometimes matters of practical interest as well. Examples include understanding a disease process in medical science and analysis of how, in history, a particular event occurred in a given time, place, and social setting. The third element consists of abstract and general explanatory hypotheses or *theories*. Parsons often gave the Newtonian example of force equals mass times acceleration. It is highly abstract, as it applies to objects of all kinds from tiny particles to massive astrophysical bodies, and depends on specific definitions of force, mass, and acceleration. Fourth are the categories that comprise frames of reference for a body of knowledge, for example, the conceptual schemes for studying protein synthesis in living cells, the movement of tectonic plates

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3   Talcott Parsons, "Introduction to Part Four – Culture and the Social System" in Talcott Parsons, Edward Shills, Kaspar D. Naegele, and Jesse R. Pitts, editors, *Theories of Society*, vol. 2, pp. 963-993.
4   Jeffrey C Alexander, *The Modern Reconstruction of Classical Thought: Talcott Parsons*, volume four of *Theoretical Logic in Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

in geology, pheromone communication in ant colonies, or the development of character in novels. (I selected these domains of science and scholarship because they are ones in which high school classmates have conducted research in their professional careers.) Parsons emphasized that the frame of reference element is key to the *coherence* of a body of knowledge. It establishes the shared mode of abstraction that makes selected facts, problem solutions, and explanatory hypotheses salient to one another. Following Alfred North Whitehead, Parsons held that innovations in frames of reference are often the key elements in scientific revolutions.[5] Philosophical and methodological critiques, including mathematical and statistical theory, are often important to the shaping of frames of reference, as in clarifications of relativity and quantum theory in 20th century philosophy.

Parsons then proposed sets of concepts for the other three subsystems of culture that are parallel to the four elements of intellectual disciplines. For the sake of precision and clarity, I change his terms in places while, I believe, following his analytic intentions.

For expressive or artistic symbolism, the four elements are motifs, compositions, forms, and styles. All four elements are conceived in terms that apply to all of the arts – painting and sculpture, music, poetry, stories, and novels, the *Gesamtkunst* of opera. Motifs refer to the meaningful themes included in works of art: the Madonna and Child in Renaissance painting, the war-weariness of soldiers in Remarque's World War I novels, the dramatic first notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, erotic yearnings in popular songs. Compositions refer to completed works of art, typically expressive of combinations of motifs and embodying form. Thus, Goethe's novel, *Wilhelm Meister*, Schubert's late quartets, Monet's paintings of the Rouen Cathedral in the light of different weather and times of day, but also Rolling Stones concerts are all compositions in this sense. Compositions are the most direct means of conveying expressive meaning to the reader, listener, or observer. In all cases, they require sensual mediation to the interpretive mind and engaged personality. Form refers to the type of art or expressive symbolism involved, whether trio or symphony, painting, sculpture, poem, or novel. Artistic forms are not always stable. We attribute special creativity to artists who change

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5   Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*. New York: Macmillan, 1925.

forms: Haydn's creation of the classical quartet, Verdi's intense drama in opera, or James Joyce's personalized interior monologue in *Ulysses*. By style, we mean the framing conceptions of expressive, emotionally moving meanings that bring unity to multiple works, often across the individual arts. Romanticism in the early 19th century, Impressionism and Naturalism in the late 19th century, and Expressionism in the early 20th century are styles in this sense. Some artists create recognizable styles of their own, as in Monet's landscapes or Pollack's "action paintings". Styles often emerge from artistic movements, and it is in that context that they may encompass a variety of the arts. As movements, they often articulate criticisms of preceding styles and efforts to supercede them in expressive power. Think of Botticelli's paintings as compared with Fra Angelico's, Beethoven's late quartets, or the scope of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Jeremy Tanner's work has shown that critical writings on the history of the arts, often in philosophy, are frequently involved in the shaping of styles.[6]

The four elements of moral-evaluative culture are the ethical significance of specific types of conduct, ideological statements or formulations, moral-ethical principles, and frames of moral relevance. The first element may encompass any kind of individual conduct that appears to be morally or ethically significant, that may lead conduct to be subject to moral judgment, positive or negative: sexual behavior, activities in family relationships, advocacy in civic associations, or political alliances. Ideological statements are in a sense "problem solutions" in the moral-evaluative context. They guide people in orienting themselves to the social practices and institutions of their times and places.[7] We are familiar with free-market ideologies, Green ideologies, ideologies supporting freedom of speech and association, with "globalism" and with "anti-globalism". Moral-ethical principles are the generalizing propositions that serve to integrate ethical and ideological thought. Individualism and autonomy of individual conduct, nationalism

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6   Jeremy Tanner, *The Invention of Art History in Ancient Greece; Religion, Society and Artistic Rationalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

7   Parsons in several of his writings used the term ideology in a very special sense, applying it only to those cases where a moral-evaluative orientation mobilized distorted, empirically invalid social scientific propositions in its support. Parsons often implied that ideology in this sense tended to arise where a moral orientation was a distortion of the broader value-pattern of the society in question. I see no need for these potentially invidious judgments to be made by the social scientist.

and ideals of sovereignty, and emphasis on economic or political development are some examples. Frames of moral relevance establish the abstractions within which relevance to moral reflection and judgment will be perceived. Max Weber's concepts of *Zweckrationalitaet* and *Wertrationalitaet* are classic formulations of frames of moral relevance. Scientism, positivism, progressivism, and traditionalism also fit this category.

The elements of religious or constitutive culture are all, in Durkheim's terms, grounded in conceptions of the sacred as contrasted with, but also in relation to, the profane world. The four elements are meanings of performance, meanings of the spheres of life, conceptions of order in the world, and conceptions of ultimate reality.[8] Meanings of performance involve the character or qualities of acts as evaluated or judged in relation to the sacred. Kindness, respect for others, assuming responsibility for one's conduct, devotion to sacred causes, and conscientiousness of commitment tend to be valued in the worldly religious cultures of contemporary Western civilization. The second element, meaning of the spheres of life, concerns the underlying importance of action in the various domains of culture, social systems, personal motivation, and mental understanding, for example, scientific work, economic productivity, political authority, community leadership, artistic creation, and so forth. In Weber's analysis, Calvinistic inner-worldly asceticism placed special value on economic productivity and the creation of wealth. In classical Buddhism, however, the meaning of worldly spheres of social life is radically different; they can be conditionally approved for part of one's life as fulfilling essential duties, but only if there is stronger, longer-term commitment to

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8   In his late essay on the paradigm of the human condition, of 1978, Parsons, following suggestions from Robert N. Bellah, gave a classification of ultimate agency, ultimate purpose, ultimate order, and ultimate ground of being. I do not use it here because Parsons, again following Bellah, cited the four concepts as categories of the "telic order" transcending the entire action system, including religious culture. While the categories are interesting, I believe Parsons and Bellah made a category error; the concepts should apply to religious culture, not the "telic order". In Parsons' original 1974 memorandum on the "human condition", the "telic order" was formulated as a cross-tabulation of the Weberian categories, inner-worldly and other-worldly, asceticism and mysticism. The resulting four categories were treated as transcendental potentialities for the orientation of action and as modalities for resolving what Weber called "problems of meaning". I believe that formulation is a far stronger rendering of the transcendental "telic order". It should be understood as standing outside all elements of systems of action, hence above and beyond, as it were, any particular religious culture.

rejection of worldly entanglements. We can understand conceptions of the nature of order by comparing Western ideas of a God-ordained order among the souls of individuals and their institutional creations with the Confucian idea of harmony of the universe, which provided comprehensive orientation, but emphasized obedience to higher worldly authority. The revival of Confucian philosophy in the China of the last few decades reveals, I believe, a great deal about the self-confident and rarely challenged authority of China's leadership. Conceptions of ultimate reality include the Western belief in the Creator God with His concern, in most versions, for the well-being of humankind in an ultimately good world. Radically different is the classical Buddhist conception of a world permeated by ethical dangers and suffering, hence, a need to escape worldly entanglements. It is such framing beliefs that provide the nexus of meaning for all elements of a religious culture.

Is There Common Culture?

We have outlined sixteen elements of particular formations of culture. Each of the complexes of four exists in many variants within a comprehensive cultural system. Think of all the sciences and scholarly disciplines, all of the arts, including the popular arts, all of the moral-ethical-ideological orientations, conservative and liberal, some highly general, others focused on narrow issues, and the varieties of religion we have in Western nations, mostly Christian, but in many varieties, and with enclaves of Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

The distinctions among the four domains of culture are analytical. In concrete reality, there are overlaps between and combinations of elements across the four domains, for example, works of art designed to express ideological views or advance commercial interests, political ideologies that cite scientific (or pseudo-scientific) knowledge in support, as in ideologies opposed to climate change, and religious orientations tied to particular political-ideological stances.

The historical depth of our culture is also important. The religious thought of such ancient prophets as Jeremiah or Isaiah, such ancient philosophers as Socrates and Aristotle, the artists of Renaissance Venice, and 18th century moral philoso-

phers, from Adam Smith, to Condorcet, to Kant, all remain vital to us. Their contributions come from historical epochs deep in the past and yet they remain active parts of our culture.

Elements of culture do not necessarily line up with specific nations or societies. Culture upheld in Austria or the United States is not necessarily Austrian or American. Many elements of our cultures – in all four domains – are widely shared across Western civilization. Some are shared among nearly all of the "higher" civilizations. Chinese scientists contribute mainly to the same sciences as European scientists. Chinese ideologists share aspects of Marxian thought with European Marxists; Indians share aspects of parliamentary culture with Great Britain. Japanese art collectors value works of French Impressionism. My wife and I admire 18th and 19th century Japanese woodblock prints. One day several years ago, I exchanged by email thoughts on sociological theory with colleagues in Germany, Japan, China, and Brazil.

These considerations underscore the vastness of the culture of Western civilization. Cultural sociology must be oriented to the interesting, if difficult to analyze, *wholeness* of the culture. Studies of particular formations should attend to their *contexts* within the culture as a whole, even if in some domains it is a loosely integrated whole. Unfortunately, attention to context within the whole is a problem not addressed in the "strong program" of Alexander and Smith.

Considering these facts, what ought we to make of the oft-used term, common culture? It derives primarily from anthropological studies of elementary societies in the early 20th century. Those studies often portrayed members of small communities as sharing practically all of their cultures, with the modest exceptions of "secret" rituals for initiates of male age-grades or those by which shamans gained healing powers. When we examine modern cultures, it is clear that most citizens participate only in select cultural formations. Scientists tend to engage only with highly specialized domains of science, relating to other domains largely as lay people. Most lay people know science only in simplified accounts of its salience to everyday life, and they may even reject it, as, in the U.S., many "Evangelical" Protestants reject Darwinian evolution. With respect to the arts, most citizens engage with only small sectors of what is widely available, whether through museums, public performances, television, or the Internet. Bourdieu's

Distinction[9] has become the classic study of the social patterns underlying selective engagement with the arts and expressive symbolism. In the domain of moral-evaluative culture, there are elements that, in contemporary Western societies, are widely shared, especially concerning law and norms of personal conduct, but engagement is highly selective for ideologies of public policy. Even with respect to religious culture, there is differential participation not only across confessional groups, but within given confessions, aligning with social differences of education, social class, urban or rural settings, age, gender, and family status. Thus, instead of common culture, cultural involvement appears to be an aspect of the pluralism of modern life.

Parsons suggested that cutting across selective participation in cultural formations there may be unity in underlying *patterns* of cultural orientation. Writing about American society circa 1960, he argued that a pattern of "instrumental activism" – an inner-worldly ascetic activism encouraging improvement in the practical conditions of life – might unify practically all of the culture, the sciences, expressive patterns of valued motivation, moral thought, and especially religious beliefs. In his analysis, citizens could have confidence that elements of culture with which they were not engaged contributed to the same pattern of social life as elements they supported. One qualification to this understanding emerged in the 1970s when Jesse Pitts[10] published papers on "Hippie" culture showing it carried a meaning of "consummatory passivism", a dialogic opposite of the predominant "instrumental activism".

Contemporary American culture probably has a range of such dialogic oppositions. Recent politics highlight tense oppositions between universal civil rights and "White Nationalism", for example, themes that resonate in parts of Europe as well. Thus, we need to pay close attention to the problem of what is common and what is diverse in contemporary culture.

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9   Op cit.
10 Jesse R. Pitts, "The Hippie Movement as a Socialization Agency" in Explorations in the Theory of Action, vol. one, ed. By Jan J. Loubser, Rainer C. Baum, Andrew Effrat, and Victor Meyer Lidz (New York: Free Press, 1976), pp. 391-406.

Methods of Studying Culture

The "strong program" of Alexander and Smith adhered to the model of Clifford Geertz in conducting studies of culture: first, in regarding socio-cultural discourse as a "text" that can be studied hermeneutically; and, second, in undertaking "thick description" as Geertz did in his study of the Balinese cockfight.

The differences among the four subsystems of culture suggest that unified research methods may not be viable in cultural sociology. Consider the study of scientific cultures: hermeneutic methods may reveal the content of a body of scientific knowledge, but truly understanding it requires assessing its empirical power and validity. Similarly, understanding an ideology requires not only interpreting its ideas, but also understanding the changes to practical social life and institutions for which it advocates. For the arts, it is necessary to capture the expressive/motivational qualities of their meanings. Hermeneutics may do so for stories and novels, but not for the visual arts. There is no hermeneutics to grasp Rembrandt's self-portraits in the ways they move the reflective viewer and, similarly, for Beethoven's late quartets or the performances of famous rock music groups. To be sure, hermeneutics is useful in studying the literature of assessment and criticism that plays a part in creating, appreciating, establishing, and changing style and form. In the religious domain, we should remember that hermeneutics originated in Schleiermacher's studies of his forebears and that it remains a method of innovation in theology. I am skeptical that it suffices for understanding the cultural powers of ritual and how they affect participants, which is very different in the Catholic mass, in Quaker meeting, in Evangelical hymn singing, to say nothing of Hindu or Buddhist ceremonies. Hermeneutics is a valuable method, but its fruits are limited for many aspects of culture. Basically, much of culture is *not* reducible to text.

Geertz's "thick description" of the Balinese cockfight was based on classic anthropological participant observation fieldwork and was not conducted as isolated research. Geertz eschewed the type of "armchair anthropology" that some of his followers in sociology advocate in works they claim as "thick description". The essay on the cockfight was written largely as a way of apprehending what Geertz presented as a basic *pattern* of meaning in Balinese culture. The insight that the

cockfight illustrates themes in Balinese culture generally required broadly conceived research conducted over years.

Our examination of elements of culture highlights an additional point. Study of collective representations, as in the "symbolic realism" that Robert N. Bellah advocated in mid-career[11] and that Alexander and Smith advocate, is never enough. Collective representations are only *means* of gaining access to deeper elements in the organization of cultural formations. Nor does analysis of sets or structures of opposing symbols in the manner of French structuralism give access to the deeper elements of cultural complexes, to theory and frame of reference in science, style and form in the arts, moral-ethical principles and frames of relevance, or religious conceptions of order and ultimate reality. For example, Alexander's analysis of key symbols in American civil culture *circa* the Watergate crisis of 1972 in terms of oppositions between series of Evil and Good symbols – communism/fascism versus Democracy, Shadowy enemies versus White House and Americanism, Crime versus Law, Corruption versus Honesty, Personalism versus Honesty, Bad Presidents versus Great Presidents, and Great Scandals versus Honest Reformers – may lead us to pregnant issues, but does not explicate the underlying moral frames and theorems that were guiding American political life at the time.[12] We will not gain "strong" understanding of the deeper meanings of culture unless we engage those elements more directly.

Finally, Parsons' conception of subsystems of culture frames an analytical problem essential to understanding all of modern civilization: how did the subsystems come to be differentiated from one another with a depth and forcefulness not experienced in previous civilizations? From over a century of social scientific research, we understand that the differentiation of major institutional complexes in society, for example, economic enterprises from government institutions, universities from religious life, law from politics, and so forth are essential to "modernity". However, the cultural differentiations may be equally fundamental or perhaps even more so. How, in the Renaissance, did the arts and sciences begin

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11 Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).
12 Compare, Jeffery C. Alexander, "Watergate as Democratic Ritual" in Alexander, *The Meanings of Social Life*, op. cit., p. 159

to gain autonomy from prescriptions of the Church? Partly through the recovery of the thought and culture of Greek antiquity, but also through, as Galileo and Copernicus both experienced, tense conflicts. How, in the Enlightenment, did frames of moral philosophy produce ideologies concerning the organization of secular society independent of religious ethics and challenging, somewhat differently across Europe, firmly established aristocratic orders? In large part, through the elevation of patterns of Reason, of *Zweckrationalitaet*, as a new frame of moral culture that also served as a solvent of previous thought about secular society. However, I do not have very complete answers to these fundamental questions. Answering them more fully is the main task I have set for my future research. What I want to emphasize today is that the conception of subsystems of culture raises and frames these important questions in ways that a "strong program" that fails to address cultural subsystems cannot raise.

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Victor Meyer Lidz is today's most eminent scholar in the field of action theory in the tradition of the work of Talcott Parsons. His presence at our university as a teacher and collegial research collaborator has significantly contributed to the international visibility and reputation of our Faculty of Social and Political Sciences as a center for social theory. In 2017, he was awarded an honorary doctorate of our university. The volume contains the speech he delivered, the *laudatio* held by Prof. Jeremy Tanner, University College London, and a comprehensive bibliography of the publications of Victor M. Lidz.