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### Tracing, Making and Locating Cultural Sociology

**Citation for published version:**

Prior, N, Darmon, I & McCormick, L 2017, 'Tracing, Making and Locating Cultural Sociology' *Cultural Sociology*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 3-10. DOI: 10.1177/1749975516687486

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1177/1749975516687486](https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975516687486)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

*Cultural Sociology*

**Publisher Rights Statement:**

Editorial Statement: Tracing, Making and Locating Cultural Sociology, Nick Prior, Isabelle Darmon, Lisa McCormick, *Cultural Sociology*, Vol 11, Issue 1, pp. 3 - 10, Published 15 February 2017. Reprinted by permission of SAGE Publications

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## **Editorial Statement: Tracing, Making and Locating *Cultural Sociology***

An academic journal is a lot like an art work. It is the product of collective activity, and the cooperation between participants is organised through joint knowledge of the conventional way of doing things. Editors, as core personnel, are expected to bring more than the technical skills required to assemble issue after issue; this status demands that they also have creative abilities and a vision that will lend the journal a distinctive character. The convention in the publishing world is for this vision to be articulated in the inaugural editorial statement, and depending on whether the editors see themselves as “integrated professionals” or “mavericks” (Becker 1982), they also indicate the standards of taste to be upheld or introduced.

While we will not deviate from this convention, we also see the editorial statement as a deeply symbolic act. It is the ritual equivalent in publishing to the handing over of keys, the changing of the guard, or the swearing in of new office holders. It is the editors’ first opportunity for social performance, where they can “display for others the meaning of their social situation” (Alexander 2004:529), and their unwavering commitment to that which is held sacred in their scholarly community. Editorial statements by incoming editors capture a liminal moment in the life of the journal when it is betwixt and between the stewardship of old and new guardians. But in our case, the transition is laden with more significance, not just because it is the first handover in the journal’s history, but also because it aligned with its 10th anniversary volume. Milestones might be arbitrary temporal boundaries, but crossing into the journal’s second decade is experienced as a “mental quantum leap” (Zerubavel 1996) that prompts a form of biographical occasion to take stock of the journal’s history.

To that end, we will begin our editorial statement by considering the position and legacy of the journal before placing ourselves in its unfolding narrative by offering our interpretation of the current state of the field. This sets the scene for the next section, where we reflect on what it means for the journal to serve as an “organ of self-consciousness” (Inglis et al 2007:7) in cultural sociology today. In the final section, we identify some of the hot topics and critical conversations we would like to encourage in the journal, as well as our hopes for strengthening and widening the journal’s visibility.

### ***Cultural Sociology in and of the Field***

We certainly feel the weight of the ritualistic markers of transition as we look backwards to the journal’s inauguration and forwards to what it might become. One of the key questions we had to consider in taking up our position was: what kind of journal is *Cultural Sociology*? Where and how is it positioned in a structured, hierarchical and competitive academic field that is neither purely autonomous (not least because of its links to a highly marketised higher education system and a mature publishing sector) nor entirely reducible to those forces? What kind of space does the journal sit in and how can it build on the intellectual contribution it has made so far? The receiving of the baton implied that we were inheriting the journal’s legacy, albeit as temporary guardians. But what kind of legacy was this and, by implication, where was cultural sociology *at*?

We were helped a great deal, here, by referring back to the journal’s first editorial statement, penned by founding editors David Inglis, Andrew Blaikie and Robin

Wagner-Pacifici, which set out the journal's guiding motivations. We were struck by its spirit of intellectual generosity, openness and curiosity. While the statement made a strong case for placing the "social" at or near the centre of analysis, it also recognised the value of exploring the forms it takes in different times, spaces and social groupings. It recognised certain familial patterns and affinities that shaped sociological ways of thinking, including a relatively common set of paradigms, but was not interested in policing those ways of thinking. It understood that intellectual fads and fashions were part of the currency of academic life, but did not see its role as defending any particular approach to the exclusion of others. It aimed to provide a conceptual home within sociology, but one that welcomed work from close disciplines that spoke to sociologists. In other words, the journal was founded on the idea that cultural sociology is a living, breathing enterprise that emerges as a direct result of diverse and on-going intellectual exchanges, rather than a mouthpiece for any particular position or set of precepts: less speaking *for* a tradition than speaking across, alongside and *with* a range of interesting and interested voices. Indeed, it is testament to David Inglis' foundational work and stewardship that these characteristics remain at the heart of the journal to this day, making *Cultural Sociology* the rich and variegated journal it is. Our grateful thanks, then, to David for guiding the journal to these fertile grounds.

The intellectual landscape has undoubtedly changed since 2007 and journals often do (despite best intentions) become spiced with certain dominant intellectual flavours. It is clear to us that some of the journal's reputation and initial impetus, for instance, related to the burgeoning interest in cultural forms, forces and processes associated with a Bourdieusian "turn": for instance, debates around cultural omnivores, the

distinct logics of cultural fields, the shaping of music tastes and classed/gendered habituses. This reflected broader currents in British, European and global sociology, where Bourdieu was achieving something akin to academic celebrity status. For us, it also demonstrated sociology's tenacity to get to grips with stratification, ideological formations and inequalities, particularly in the U.K. where Bourdieu's reception has been mediated by both the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham (with its concern to reveal hegemonic processes in the domain of culture) and empirical traditions seeking to understand links between social stratification, education and capitalism. This is quite different to how he has been interpreted elsewhere, such as in the U.S., which tends to define cultural sociology as a relatively distinct "sub-field" and where Bourdieu's presence is most visible in studies of consumption (Savage, 2014). Indeed, as Inglis notes, while the Bourdieu "industry" illustrates how ideas travel, it also shows how different national sociologies have "indigenised and reworked" his ideas to meet local requirements. Hence, there appears to be "a 'British Bourdieu', an 'American Bourdieu', a 'German Bourdieu', and so on" (Inglis, 2016: 3).

Notwithstanding the continued presence of important work in the Bourdieusian tradition, we sense, today, the genesis of a more open and diverse field encompassing a range of empirically engaged and theoretically innovative approaches with broadly defined cultural phenomena. We believe that the journal is well positioned to reflect and take the lead in representing the highest quality work in this "post-Bourdiesian" space (Prior, 2011), driving forward a distinctly sociological agenda that continues to shape our understandings of culture and society.

The “cultural” emphasis in cultural sociology makes it particularly alert and responsive to developments in bordering disciplines. This opens up the possibility for fruitful exchange and dialogue, cross-fertilization and a renewed understanding of the specificity of our discipline. The recent turn to materialities, as well as an interest in digital technologies and a renewed focus on inequalities is, after all, partly the result of the ongoing dialogue with a range of disciplines, including science and technology studies, human geography, social anthropology, architecture, economics and aesthetics. We see the intellectual space in which the journal sits to be more diverse, despite the prominence of some recent currents, most notably Actor Network Theory. But here we believe that the journal is ideally positioned as a platform for the exploration and refinement of possible ways forward for the renewed sociological conceptualization of cultural forms and processes. Given their more divergent trajectories in recent times, the journal does not necessarily have to define itself against cultural studies any longer; nor does it have to shy away from engaging with and exploring a broader range of cognate disciplines. Indeed, the journal’s Bourdieusian inclinations have certainly not prevented it from seeking contributions from a range of approaches, including ANT, neo-Marxian, neo-Durkheimian and other forms of critical re-engagement with the “classics”, practice-based approaches, new perspectives on norms and conventions, work in the ethnomethodological tradition, and so on, and we see this as a sign of confidence.

### **Perspectival Reflections**

The founding editors of *Cultural Sociology* conceived of the journal as an “organ of self-consciousness”. So, how might we reflect on what this means, ten years on? Taking inspiration from just three of the distinctive voices which have sounded out in

the journal, namely those associated with Bourdieu, Actor Network Theory and historical sociology, we turn now to an assessment of the position of the journal in the field, as well as of the work of journal making and its multiple agencies. We explore, from other perspectives, the tensions, structural barriers and dynamics at play in the journal and highlight some of the challenges we would like to take on as editors, including our proposals for the years ahead.

We are certainly aware that the journal is not a disinterested actor, neutrally reflecting or serving a pre-existing field. If we turn the Bourdieusian lens on ourselves – that is, if we objectify the academic object - we understand the journal to be an agent with a history that shapes that field (Bourdieu, 1990). It is part of the academic games, the semi-conscious practices that include book reviews, doctoral theses, research evaluation processes, chair appointments, promotion rounds, and so on, that demarcate the academic cosmology with its beliefs, strategies and forces. It is a space in which the intellectual position-takings of the species we know as *Homo Academicus* are enacted, and where neo-liberal market logics are increasingly shaping how status and prestige are measured. We are aware that there are stakes and investments, here, (including our own of course), entry costs and reputational credits, career moves and serious game playing.

By inscribing certain scholastic presuppositions, such as the pursuit of “pure” knowledge, the journal legitimises the right to theorise and intellectualise. But that right is intimately connected to the development of the powerful apparatus of the university system - a system defined by trenchant hierarchies around reputational and economic evaluations. And, of course, the journal stores and allocates academic

capital in myriad acts of selection, classification and distribution: most notably in the consecrated unit of the “publication”, that luminous unit of academic life that acts as a currency for career progression, citation rates and CV points - obligations around which are so heavily incorporated into the academic *habitus*. In short, the journal is “interested” precisely because it holds a gatekeeping position in a structured space in which reputational goods are produced, circulated and consumed.

There are other considerations, too. As incumbent editors, we have had to become acquainted with the “work of making” the journal (Bennett 2007). In that process *Cultural Sociology* appeared to us as an open, multi-scalar and hybrid network of forces in movement rather than as a static entity. We had to acknowledge the never quite set connections between the “humans” and “non humans” involved. ScholarOne, the “workflow management system” for journals, emerged as the central node, connecting authors and reviewers across the world, the editors in Edinburgh, book review editors in Salford and Paris, the advisory editor in Exeter, the social media editor in Liverpool, the editorial board, and occasional special issue editors, and the Sage team in London and New Dehli. But we also quickly realised that parallel work was maintained on email – anticipating, supplementing, and at times undoing the “system”. The multiple connections thus not only point to movement, but to the tensions in which the craft of “making *Cultural Sociology*” takes place.

Following the transformations of the manuscript from the “accepted version”, to the proofs, and finally the online first and printed versions, takes us from ScholarOne to the production staff and systems at Sage back to the authors and editors, and on to the printers (Henry Ling limited in Dorchester). On becoming part of a ToC (table of



contents), the title of the paper also materialises as an item on the next email campaign by the BSA publication and marketing officers in Durham, and possibly as a tweet by the social media editor. After “following the thing”, we are presented with the “cultural assemblage” of the journal, thousands of printed pages, an online pdf, but also, after 12 months, the “accepted version” in a repository in the author’s institution and further open access platforms of the author’s choosing (and, from the optimistic author’s and editors’ perspectives, a hope, for at least one citation). Thus “editorial practices” (Stanley, Salter and Dampier 2013), among the many other practices involved in the making of the journal, delineate the contours of the “*Cultural Sociology* assemblage”. They leave out and take in, they solicit expertise, they specify formats, they hierarchise and order, they publicise.

Manuscripts frequently elicit clear, cogent, supportive reviews, which not only do a service to the author and the journal but contribute to sharpening the understandings of cultural sociology and of its problem matters for all those involved in the particular “network” attached to the paper concerned. In such moments, the practical work of making *Cultural Sociology* is also directly about the making of cultural sociology. Indeed, we were tempted to present these “documents” as part of public spotlights on the fabrication process of *Cultural Sociology*, but showing the backstage might be construed as somewhat misplaced democratism. So, the traces of the process can be left as traces, light marks on the published article and issue.

Coming back to the non-human part of the network, however, unsettles this somewhat generous conception of our own autonomous agency. The many systems and technologies involved (from workflow management to printing, from accreditations

such as the Forest Stewardship Council accreditation of the printers to marketing and tweeting, from exclusive or partial licensing to bundling) can be seen as “actants” that fold into and co-evolve with other “actants” – including, the performative agency of the journal’s “impact factor”, of course. On the other hand, technologies can be seen as devices inscribing the “cultural assemblage” of the journal into the flows of academic communication and the metrics and transactions of the academic publishing market. Technologies also intervene upstream, particularly those technologies of publication-based evaluation, such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the U.K., and the rankings to which they give rise. The flow of submissions to the journal can, in part, be understood in connection with the dreaded “pressure to publish”. For news making (Undurraga 2017), technologies thus inscribe the market pressures at the heart of the “work of *Cultural Sociology* making” – and the “editorial practices” also include “the tricks of the (business) trade”. Should this “work”, then, be re-articulated to a renewed political economy of academic production? Should we find leverage for this critique in the “poetics of an academic commons” (after Stevenson 2017)?

We are very aware that the conventions of academic journal writing, not specific to *Cultural Sociology*, play their part in decisions as to what “counts” as journal material and what does not. Manuscripts submitted by authors not “in the know” are less likely to be sent for review, and this not only deprives authors from opportunities to publish, but also journal readers from being exposed to “dissonant” work, i.e. work not necessarily fitting in the shared space of agreements and disagreements referred to above. Here, “circulation” is definitely hinging on convention. Indeed, we might want to ask ourselves whether the selection and review process in academic journals such

as ours does not constitute a particular (practical) declension of the “colonialism of method” explored by Gennardo Ascione (2016) in his own contribution to the *Cultural Sociology* special issue he recently edited. This could, indeed, be a fruitful line of inquiry, with the proviso that the “method” be critically assessed, also, for what it does to those it includes.

What shall be done? How can the editing team help reduce such structural barriers? Can *Cultural Sociology* contribute, in its own rather modest and necessarily practical way, to this endeavour for “reconnected sociologies” called for by Gurinder Bhambra (2016)? In keeping with the resolutely international orientation of the journal since its beginnings, we propose to expose ourselves, contributors and readers of the journal, to the discovery of works as of yet not translated into English, and more broadly of other cultural sociological fields, scenes, or worlds - for example, by featuring “regional spotlight” essays. By offering reviews of key debates and recent publications in a country or region, it is hoped that the journal will not only inform readers about other premises, approaches and objects, but also position the journal more firmly in these linguistic areas, and potentially attract new authors, reviewers and readers.

### **Looking ahead**

As suggested by the three styles of our brief exercise in self-consciousness, we see the cultural sociological field evolving from the “vertical”, broadly structuralist, approaches it once favoured, towards an emergence of “horizontal” approaches concerned with networks, assemblages, and rhizomes. Whilst remaining open to both, we also seek to provide space for what could be called “diagonal” approaches,

deriving these either from historical perspectives - and in that sense we would want to encourage a non-“presentist” engagement with the present (Inglis 2014) - or from other forms of multiscalar, dynamic analyses that maintain focus on economic processes, socio-cultural inequalities, and power relations.

One of the journal’s great strengths has been the inclusive approach to its subject matter, publishing work on heterogeneous cultural phenomena (from Indian art markets and tattooing to stand-up comedy and Dutch literary textbooks), while ensuring the sociological dimensions are front and centre. We are committed to continuing this policy but at the same time remain receptive to work in some of the newest and most exciting areas of interest, including digital culture and new media; the sociology of materiality and material culture; global cultural divisions and cosmopolitanism; innovative research methodologies; the creative industries; crisis, precarity and the ethics of cultural participation; the sociology of food consumption and environmental cultures; affect and emotion; literature and fictions; fashion and celebrity; intersectionality and cultural inequalities. We are equally enthusiastic about work in areas of longstanding interest in sociology, such as medicine, health and illness, where new insights can be yielded through an approach that foregrounds cultural themes and problematics. In addition, we will encourage cultural sociological interventions in new debates where they are urgently needed. An obvious example is the debate around the notion of the Anthropocene and the suggestion that the Earth itself is “performed” by human agency and that the cultural forms we should be investigating emerge from “earth-society assemblages” (Hamilton et al 2015:6). Cultural sociological interventions, here, could contribute a much needed reflection on the kind of field and practices producing such “techno-natural hybrids” and a

historicization thereof. More generally, the socio-cultural production and practices of the “environment”, beyond the consumption side, constitute a new domain which we would be keen to stimulate from a sociological perspective.

In closing, then, we would like to state that *Cultural Sociology* seeks to foster critical, open and diverse conversations by publishing new and exciting ideas in the heterogeneous domain of cultural sociology. It is dedicated to examining the precise ways cultural forms, processes and practices function within and articulate with broader contextual forces and social formations. The journal is not committed to any single theoretical position, neither is it interested in defending absolute boundaries between the social and cultural (or the political, economic, historical, aesthetic and geographical, for that matter), but is dedicated to publishing work on cultural issues informed and driven by sociological ideas, theories and methods. It will also continue to operate with a broad definition of what “sociological” means. We believe that cultural sociology is most vibrant when it is critically engaged with matters that are pressing and urgent in the social world; and the journal seeks to provide a better understanding of where we are in that world. We hope to encourage significant intellectual experimentation and dialogue within a range of spaces (conferences, symposia, social media, the journal pages) and to bring together diverse scholarly voices within those spaces. Wherever possible, we intend to represent the truly international nature of contemporary scholarship, without ignoring the differences that emerge from localized settings.

Finally, if a journal is like a work of art, then it is “fundamentally indeterminate” (Becker 2006). While the editors might have a say in what constitutes the “final cut”

of a particular issue, the “journal itself” remains unfinished because it is continually emerging and evolving through the on-going efforts of multiple individuals, groups and agents who choose to contribute their professional and creative labour, submissions and reviews, engagements and dialogues, to make the journal happen. The field of cultural sociology is maturing, and so its conventions are still being established; the conditions are ripe for improvisation, experimentation and invention as we raise the curtain on the next act.

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