

Cultural Sociology TASA Thematic Group Report 2007-2008

Since its inception the TASA Cultural Sociology Group has become internationally recognised as an established national research committee. The Group maintains the web address www.culturalsociology.org that profiles research by its members and activity of the Group. Averaging over 3500 hits per month the site has proven an effective vehicle in promoting Australian cultural sociology.

Visits and Events

The Cultural Sociology Group is constituted by TASA members and their postgraduate students as well as a network of international fellows who are encouraged to visit Australian institutions and collaborate with members. The Group has welcomed several new scholars in the last twelve months and now constituted by 48 members as well as various pre-doctoral fellows.

On September 26, 2007 the Cultural Sociology Group held a research forum at Griffith University. This coincided with the TASA Public Lecture by Professor Andy Bennett, a core member of the Group. The meeting provided indepth intellectual debate around cultural issues as they relate to Australia and it also allowed the Group to discuss its current status and future trajectory. As well as various members it was attended by the distinguished academic Richard Peterson, Emeritus Professor of Sociology at Vanderbilt University. Funded by TASA, postgraduate scholarships were awarded to two postgraduates to attend and participate in the Forum. The successful applicants were John Budarick (Monash) and Kirsten Gladigau (Flinders).

The Group also provided a supportive administrative entity for the Music, Culture and Society Conference, March 6-8, 2008 at the Monash Conference Centre Melbourne. Co-convenor of the Group, Eduardo de la Fuente organised the conference which engaged with the growing recognition that music is culturally formed and serves diverse social purposes. Presenters addressed the socio-cultural role of music through diverse genres and styles – from pop to classical, experimental to conventional - and from various disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. Keynote speakers included Dr Michael Bull from the University of Sussex and Professor Agnes Heller, Emeritus Professor, New School for Social Research.

As outlined below the Group has also been active in arranging special panel and thematic sessions for the 2008 TASA conference. The Group envisions the annual conference as an increasingly important point for Group members and for the debating cultural issue in sociology.

Panel 1: La Trobe Seminar on the Sociology of Culture and the Conversazioni on Culture and Society

Participants: Professor John Carroll, Sociology, La Trobe University; Professor David Kemp, Professorial Fellow, Politics, University of Melbourne; Professor Barry Jones, Professorial Fellow, Education, University of Melbourne; Dr John Hirst, Emeritus Scholar, History, La Trobe University.

Respondent: Professor Claudio Véliz, Emeritus University Professor and Emeritus Professor, History, Boston University, and Emeritus Professor, Sociology, La Trobe University.

Chair: Dr Eduardo de la Fuente, Communications, Monash University.

Panel 2: Theology and Social Theory: A Roundtable with John Carroll on 'The Existential Jesus'

Participants: Professor Gary Bouma, Emeritus Professor, Sociology, Monash University; Mr Stephen Crittenden, Australian Broadcasting Corporation; Dr Markus Locker, Theology, Ateneo de Manila University and Communications, Monash; Associate Professor Peter Murphy, Communications, Monash University; Associate Professor David Tacey, English, La Trobe University.

Respondent: Professor John Carroll, Sociology, La Trobe University.

Chair: Associate Professor Peter Murphy, Communications, Monash University.

Session 1: Performative Approaches to Social Life: "Sorry Day" and Torture as Forms of Dramaturgy

This session examines the role of performance theory and dramaturgy in contemporary cultural sociology. From Erving Goffman and Victor Turner through to Judith Butler and Jeff Alexander, concepts drawn from the theatre have been used to highlight different aspects of social life, including identity-construction and collective experience. But what advantages do performative approaches offer other competing paradigms in cultural sociology? And have social scientists sufficiently understood the concepts that they are borrowing from the fields of performance and theatre studies?

Session 2: New Directions in the Socio-Cultural Study of the Arts

The sociology and cultural study of the arts has made a significant comeback in the last decade or so. Contemporary social scientists are less allergic to studying aesthetic phenomena. But what should be the proper emphasis of socio-cultural studies of art? The production or reception of art? The meaning of works? How is the contemporary sociology of the arts posing the question of art's materiality? Do artworks have agency? And what can art and aesthetic approaches tell us about social life itself?

Session 3: New Directions in the Socio-Cultural Study of Music: Joint session of The Australian Musicological Association and The Australian Sociological Association

This session will highlight recent developments in the sociology of music, cultural studies of music and ethnomusicology, and pose the question of how scholars are approaching the socio-cultural study of music. The presenters come from different disciplinary backgrounds and specialize in distinct music cultures and practices. Their concern in this session will be to open a dialogue between fields such as cultural sociology and musicology, and to show how these intersections are already taking place in their own work.

Session 4: Cultural Sociology and Materiality

Objects, and the world they populate and mediate, are vital for constituting social relations. Canonical writers such as Simmel, Durkheim and Goffman understood the way objects can speak for people and cultural values. Further, a range of recent literatures have demonstrated that sociologists must take into account materiality and objectualisation in developing an adequate conception of social relations. This includes work in science and technology studies, consumption studies and the sociology of aesthetics. Papers - theoretical or empirical, from a variety of perspectives - which address questions of materiality and objectualisation in cultural sociology are sought for this session.

Publications

Many members have also been busy in the production of publications on behalf of the Group. Brad West edited the September edition of *Nexus* titled Rethinking Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism: New Cultural Sociological Approaches. *The 2008 special issue of Journal of Sociology was also awarded to the Group.* The theme of the special issue was *Cultural Sociology in the Australian Context.*

The editors of the journal, Eduardo de la Fuente and Brad West, would in particular like to thank the contributors to the issue and the anonymous reviews of papers submitted. The authors represent a healthy mix of established scholars and those earlier in their careers:

'Theorising Therapeutic Culture: Past Influences, Future Directions'
Katie Wright, The University of Melbourne

'Collective Memory and the Narration of Crisis: The 2002 Bali Bombing: National Heroic Archetypes and the Construction of Cosmopolitan Nationalism'

Brad West, Flinders University

‘Framing ideology in the Niche Media: The Koori Mail’s Construction of the Redfern Riots’

John Budarick, Monash University and Debra King, Flinders University

‘Busrangers: Ned Kelly and Australian Identity’

Bruce Tranter and Jed Donoghue, University of Tasmania

‘Cosmopolitan Beliefs and Cosmopolitan Practices: An Empirical Investigation’

Phil Smith, Yale University and Tim Philips, University of Tasmania

‘Cosmopolitanism, the Nation-State and Imaginative Realism’

Gavin Kendall, QUT, Zlatko Skribs, University of Queensland and Ian Woodward, Griffith University

‘Towards a Cultural Sociology of Popular Music’

Andy Bennett, Griffith University

Brad West and Eduardo de la Fuente
(Co-convenors of the Cultural Sociology Group).