



Methods of Analysis **Cultural and Social Analysis**

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Cultural analysis and social analysis derive from the development of anthropology and sociology in the mid nineteenth century. At that point, cultural analysis was synonymous with anthropological and ethnological analysis and social analysis with sociological analysis. One implies the analysis of signification and the other an analysis of association, human and nonhuman. Does the analysis of culture imply analysis of society, and *vice versa*?

Obviously, there are overlaps between cultural analysis and social analysis and the two are often used interchangeably (e.g., Rosaldo, 1993). Social anthropology, cultural sociology, cultural studies, and social studies emphasize these overlaps. Phrases such as “social culture” and “cultural society” further reiterate the interdependence of cultural and social analysis.

Cultural analysis commonly refers to three methods: 1) As Geertz (1973) clarifies, “analysis, then, is sorting out the structures of signification... and determining their social ground and import.... Rather than following a rising curve of cumulative findings, cultural analysis breaks up into a disconnected yet coherent sequence of bolder and bolder sorties [i.e., descriptions that *sort* significations] (pp. 9, 25); 2) Using aspects of culture (e.g., multiculturalism, youth culture, etc.) to dissociate data; and 3) Establishing the cultural bases of curriculum or aligning curriculum with culture. Similarly, social analysis refers to three methods: 1) “Break[ing] down’ social reality” (Holland & Henriot, 1983, pp. 14-15); 2) Using aspects of social life (e.g., accommodation, partiality) to dissociate data; and 3) Establishing the social bases of curriculum or aligning curriculum with society.

Sensing conflation and confusion between the two adjectives, cultural and social, Latour (2005) observes: “The social seems to be diluted everywhere and yet nowhere in particular” (p. 2). Yet he overlooks the symmetrical, whereas one might observe: ‘The cultural seems to be diluted everywhere and yet nowhere in particular.’ I’ve documented 275 academic uses of the adjective “cultural” and could do the same for the adjective “social.” Parasitically, each adjective could logically be used to qualify nearly every noun and verb in the English language! Confusion is added in attempts to cover any holes with phrases such as “*cultural and social change*” and “*social and cultural institutions*.” This has been longstanding, as one analyst concluded in 1952: “the adjectives ‘cultural’ and ‘social’ are used as loosely by social scientists as by society ladies [and gents] at tea-tables” (Desai, quoted in Mukherjee, 1986, p. 167).

What is the difference between culture and society or between the adjectives cultural and social? Short of divine intervention, “social life is a *sine qua non* for cultural development and transmission” (Stern, 1929, p. 267). “Conflict and accommodation, leadership, rivalry, subordination, control, cooperation, parasitism and other aspects of social life are manifested among” humans and nonhumans without an obvious presence of culture (p. 266). As Kroeber (1917) famously reasoned, “social the ant is, in the sense that she associates; but she is so far from being social in the sense of possessing civilization [i.e., culture], of being influenced by non-organic forces, that she [he or they] would better be known as the antisocial animal” (pp.

176-177). Cultural aspects may make conflict and cooperation more dangerous or fun, but these and other social aspects can manifest without culture. If association is a *sine qua non* for culture, Latour (2005) counters that “‘social’ is not some glue that could fix everything including what the other glues cannot fix; it is *what* is glued together by many *other* types of connectors,” such as material culture (p. 5). Hence, society is defined as associations bonded, and if articulate language is a threshold, bonded by significations or culture over the past 15,000 years. With that, Latour and ANT define cultural and social analysis as “tracing associations” (pp. 1, 5).

Within the second methods defined above, analysts are challenged to identify cultural and social aspects that are more solvent than glue. Titles such as ‘Cultural Studies of...’, ‘A Social Study of...’, and ‘A Critical Analysis of...’ suggest a use of one or another cultural or social solvent to transform the data at hand. For instance, a “cultural analysis of capitalism” suggests an identification of aspects of culture that can open cracks in data amassed on the problem (Macekura et al., 2016, p. 155). Latour (2005, pp. 166-167, 178) cautions that a conclusion such as “capitalism is detrimental to the well-being of society” is better stated as a thesis begging details of what bonds society together and makes capital itself such a potent solvent (Waddell, 2017, p. 654).

In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and economic crisis, one can amass a volume of data on corporate bailouts. For example, on 16 March 2020, airline capitalists asked the US government for a \$50b bailout. US President Trump (2020) then promised, “we’re going to back the airlines 100%,” guaranteeing executive salaries (e.g., Delta’s CEO receives \$15m per year). Sure enough, on 25 March 2020 the US Senate approved a \$58b bailout for the industry. Prior to the politicians’ gross generosity, critics appealed that airlines be held accountable for their own mess. “In the past decade the airlines have raked in \$96 billion in profits on the backs of consumers,” the Executive Director (ED) of the National Consumers League pointed out, “with the implicit assurance that taxpayers would bail them out in the event of a major market disruption” (Greenberg, 2020). “The last investment taxpayers made in the airline industry during a time of crisis,” the ED of Travel Fairness Now reminded Congress, “was followed by record profits on the backs of consumers through less competition, transparency, passenger comfort and a proliferation of fees” (Ebenhoch, 2020). With a global economy precariously balanced “on the backs of consumers” since about 1980, collapse was inevitable.

A cultural or social analysis of the airline bailout could readily utilize distance or isolation as solvents, so to speak, to help follow the dissociation and reassociation of data, beings, and things. Health regulations for distance and isolation provide immediate experience but less evident is a sense of distance and isolation in capitalistic exchange. If “capitalism alienates, isolates, and separates us from our neighbor,” in these early days of Covid-19, people seem to be getting closer than ever to their neighbors (Shklar, 1987, p. 144). This is predictable within a break of life without two thirds of capitalism: the world’s production facilities are nearly all closed and the consumption burden is lifted from our backs. The remaining third is troubling as we witness the world’s banks and financial systems desperately printing and giving away credit and money like there’s no tomorrow. With all the rhetoric of airlines and technologies spanning great distances, perhaps cultural and social distance are best measured in feet and metres, not continents. That said, do cultural and social isolation wake us to a fact that federal banks could just keep printing money and give it back over to hunger, grief, and poverty stricken people?

1. What is Analysis?
 - a. Geertz (1973, p. 9): analysis, then, is sorting out the structures of signification... and determining their social ground and import.
 - b. Luepnitz (2009, p. 974): The word 'analysis' comes from the Greek verb *ἀνάλωειν* [*analyein*], meaning to loosen or untie. Lacan writes: "Psychoanalysis alone recognizes this knot of Imaginary servitude that love must always undo again or sever" (1949, p. 7). For Winnicott, analysis may untie or free the True Self from its moorings in compliance. For Alvareth Stein, psychoanalysis began to "loosen the bars" in a way that speaks both to the development of the self and to the transformation of subjectivity.
2. What is Cultural?
 - a. Tyler (1889, p. 3): Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [hu]man[s] as a member of society.
 - b. Wallis (1927, p. 158): Culture may be defined as all those artificial objects, institutions, modes of life or of thought which are not peculiarly individual but which characterize a group and have both spatial and temporal contiguity.
 - c. Geertz (1973, p. 4): Believing, with Max Weber, that [a hu]man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself [or she herself or they themselves] has spun, I take culture to be those webs.
 - d. Wuthnow, Hunter, Bergesen, & Kurzweil (1984/1987, pp. 2-3): the symbolic-expressive aspect of human behavior. This definition is sufficiently broad to take account of the verbal utterances, gestures, ceremonial behavior, ideologies, religions, and philosophical systems that are generally associated with the term culture... theorists of culture remain sorely divided on how best to define culture and what aspects of it to emphasize.
 - e. Swindler (1986, p. 273): toolkit of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct strategies of action.
3. What is Social?
 - a. Stern (1929, pp. 166-167): Social life precedes culture and is distinct from it. Anecdotal anthropomorphisms still persist in ascribing to the lower animals, especially to the social insects, cultural behavior.... All the mechanisms of social behavior are present in the social insects and other sub-human species without culture being present. Conflict and accommodation, leadership, rivalry, subordination, control, cooperation, parasitism and other aspects of social life are manifested among them as among [humans].... The cultural life of [hu]man[s] as distinguished from the social life of sub-human groups is dependent on articulate language. Animals not possessing articulate language manifest all the social processes observable in human society, indicating that it is not indispensable to social life. Once present, however, it accelerates and heightens communication which facilitates individual and group interrelations. Substituting sign words for highly complex images or association of images, speech enormously facilitates the formation of those associations which are the basis of cultural life. The most important influence of language on social life is derived through its making possible the accumulation and transmission of culture.... Cultural phenomena do, therefore, not create man's social behavior but presuppose [hu]man's organic potentialities for social life. Social life is a *sine qua non* for cultural development and transmission. But culture traits once established have their own history and causal relations apart from the individuals or groups that initiate and perpetuate them.
 - b. Latour (2005, p. 2): It is no longer clear whether there exists relations that are specific enough to be called 'social' and that could be grouped together in making up a special domain that could function as 'a society'. The social seems to be diluted everywhere and yet nowhere in particular.
4. Cultural v Social

- a. Desai, *The Craft of Sociology and Other Essays* (1952/1981, p. 5): it is necessary to emphasise the distinction between culture and society, because, the adjectives 'cultural' and 'social' are used as loosely by social scientists as by society ladies [and gents] at tea-tables.
 - b. Wuthnow, Hunter, Bergesen, & Kurzweil (1984/1987, pp. 3-4): From Parsons one learns to separate the 'cultural system' from the 'social system', the one seemingly comprised of little more than the social scientists' assertions about collective values, while the other represents the actual realm of human interaction.... In standard social scientific discussions of culture the human world is divided in two, objective social structure on the one hand, subjective thoughts and perceptions on the other, and the cultural part is defined as the most fluid, unconstrained, and least observable category of non-behavior.
5. What is Cultural Analysis?
- a. Geertz (1973, pp. 9, 25): Analysis, then, is sorting out the structures of signification— what Ryle called established codes, a somewhat misleading expression, for it makes the enterprise sound too much like that of the cipher clerk when it is much more like that of the literary critic— and determining their social ground and import.... Rather than following a rising curve of cumulative findings, cultural analysis breaks up into a disconnected yet coherent sequence of bolder and bolder sorties [i.e., descriptions that sort out significations]. Studies do build on other studies, not in the sense that they take up where the others leave off, but in the sense that, better informed and better conceptualized, they plunge more deeply into the same things. Every serious cultural analysis starts from a sheer beginning and ends where it manages to get before exhausting its intellectual impulse. Previously discovered facts are mobilized, previously developed concepts used, previously formulated hypotheses tried out; but the movement is not from already proven theorems to newly proven ones, it is from an awkward fumbling for the most elementary understanding to a supported claim that one has achieved that and surpassed it. A study is an advance if it is more incisive— whatever that may mean— than those that preceded it; but it less stands on their shoulders than, challenged and challenging, runs by their side.
 - b. Wuthnow, Hunter, Bergesen, & Kurzweil (1984/1987, p. 7): Over the past quarter century, four approaches to the study of culture have been pursued with growing interest and with some success. Largely outside the mainstream of social science, these approaches have been oriented primarily toward the realms of meaning, symbolism, language, and discourse. Each is rooted in deeper philosophical traditions themselves quite distinct and in significant ways alien to the so-called 'positivist' tradition of contemporary social science. The first, and perhaps most familiar of these, is phenomenology; the second, cultural anthropology; the third, structuralism; and the fourth, critical theory.
 - c. Wuthnow, Hunter, Bergesen, & Kurzweil (1984/1987, p. 259): cultural analysis may be defined as the study of the symbolic-expressive dimension of social life. As such, one of its chief aims is to identify empirical regularities or patterns in this dimension of reality and from these regularities to specify the rules, mechanisms, and relations which must be present for any particular symbolic act to be meaningful.
 - d. Lemert (2019): Broadly defined, cultural analysis is the study of the production and distribution of culture (including popular culture). <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences-and-law/sociology-and-social-reform/sociology-general-terms-and-concepts/social-problems>
 - e. Curricular Cultural Analysis
 - i. Sarr (2018, p. 24): Cultural analysis, according to Lawton, is the process by which a selection is made from the culture. The cultural analysis model when applied to curriculum planning would ask these questions: (1) What kind of society already exists? (2) In what ways is it developing? (3) How do its members appear to want it to develop? (4) What kind of values and principles will be involved in deciding on Question 3 and on the educational means of achieving Question 3? The cultural

analysis approach (Figure 4) attempts to match the needs of individual youth within a specific society by carefully planning curricula. The election from the culture is made by analyzing the society that exists, how it got that way, where it is going, and then mapping out the kinds of knowledge and experience that are most appropriate. This process requires five kinds/stages of classification: (1) all the aspects that human societies have in common, such as social, economic, moral and other systems—the major parameters or cultural invariants, (2) the methods of analysis that can be used on a given society using the major parameters, or analyzing the differences between cultures in each of the systems-cultural variables, (3) classifying the educationally desirable knowledge and experiences—selection from culture, (4) consideration of the psychological theories and questions that are crucial for any curriculum development (this stage does not continue directly from the previous stages) and, (5) planning of the curriculum on the basis of the cultural analysis undertaken in the preceding stages taking into consideration the psychological theories and questions that operate on teaching and learning—curriculum organization.

6. What is Social Analysis?

- a. Holland & Henriot (1983, p. 14): Social analysis can be defined as the effort to obtain a more complete picture of a social situation by exploring its *historical and structural relationships*. Social analysis serves as a tool that permits us to grasp the reality with which we are dealing— "*la realidad*" so often referred to in Latin America. Social analysis explores reality in a variety of dimensions. Sometimes it focuses on isolated *issues*, such as unemployment, inflation, or hunger. At other times, it focuses on the *policies* that address these issues, such as job training, monetary control, or food aid programs. Using social analysis, one might further investigate the broad *structures* of our economic, political, social, and cultural institutions, from whence such issues arise and to which policies are addressed. Reaching beyond issues, policies, and structures, social analysis ultimately focuses on *systems*.
- b. Holland & Henriot (1983, p. 15): Although social analysis is used to "break down" social reality, that reality is considerably more complex than any picture painted by the analytic process. No social system ever fits a pure or ideal model. Capitalism, for example, exists in many forms, influenced by various cultural, geographic, and national experiences. The goal is not to fit reality into our preconceived analytical boxes, but to let our analysis be shaped by the richness of the reality.
- c. Latour and ANT
 - i. Latour (2005, p. 4): The social sciences have disseminated their definition of society as effectively as utility companies deliver electricity and telephone services. Offering comments about the inevitable 'social dimension' of what we and others are doing 'in society' has become as familiar to us as using a mobile phone, ordering a beer, or invoking the Oedipus complex— at least in the developed world.
 - ii. Latour (2005, p. 5): On the face of it, they [i.e., conventional sociology and ANT's sociology or associology] should be simply incommensurable, since the second position takes as the major puzzle to be solved what the first takes as its solution, namely the existence of specific social ties revealing the hidden presence of some specific social forces. In the alternative view, 'social' is not some glue that could fix everything including what the other glues cannot fix; it is *what* is glued together by many *other* types of connectors. Whereas sociologists (or socio-economists, socio-linguists, social psychologists, etc.) take social aggregates as the given that could shed some light on residual aspects of economics, linguistics, psychology, management, and so on, these other scholars, on the contrary, consider social aggregates as what should be explained by the specific *associations* provided by economics, linguistics, psychology, law, management, etc.

- iii. Latour (2005, p. 5): Even though most social scientists would prefer to call ‘social’ a homogeneous thing, it’s perfectly acceptable to designate by the same word a trail of *associations* between heterogeneous elements. Since in both cases the word retains the same origin—from the Latin root *socius*— it is possible to remain faithful to the original intuitions of the social sciences by redefining sociology not as the ‘science of the social’, but as the *tracing of associations*. In this meaning of the adjective, social does not designate a thing among other things, like a black sheep among other white sheep, but a *type of connection* between things that are not themselves social.
- iv. Berliner (2013, p. 442): Latour has thus de-centred social analysis from the thinking subject (the social actor) and incorporated in it many nonhumans, so as to ponder their agency on humans. Repopulating the world emptied by the Moderns and thus repopulating the social sciences (Thiery and Houdart 2011), Latour and his followers have carved out a space in the social sciences for studying viruses, peptides, clouds, baboons, spirits and fungus spores as active mediations. They take in even the most humble of actants such as a key, a door, a fence, a seatbelt, a speaking grill at the post office, pigeon-holes in administrative structures, receipts and tickets, ink and so forth.