

Specific gravity:
A brief outline of an alternative specification of culture

For all those who suffered from H303 and were never cured

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Abstract

This paper is called 'Specific gravity' because it wants to suggest that there is a deep import, a weight, a gravitas to the specific details of ordinary cultural practices. It is in four sections.

The first opens up the perennial question 'What is culture?'. It considers this question in terms of how it may or may not be answered, drawing on Wittgenstein's remarks against essentialism, and on (as with Wittgenstein) anecdotes from everyday experiences and their logical consequences. Some comparisons between this outline and two recent contributions to cultural history are then made to set the scene for the promised alternative.

The second section deals with sheer ordinariness as an analytically complex phenomenon. It draws on the work of Alfred Schütz and Harvey Sacks to show how the often-missed ordinariness of everyday affairs may be the key topic for understanding and analysing culture.

The next section goes a little further into this same — routinely overlooked, perhaps because so obvious — territory by rehearsing an example from one of Sacks's lectures on the everyday cultural practice of 'tearing down'. It attempts to draw a distinction between lay and professional analysis that could give cultural analysis a disciplinary footing without resorting to 'positivism' and/or the view that lay reasoning is inferior to its scientific counterparts.

Finally, in the fourth section, I deal with a collection of textual materials, all of which mobilise the term 'culture' and the concept of culture for specific moral purposes. The paper concludes with some hypotheses about ordinary, everyday uses of the idea of culture and how they might be worked with (or on) to form the basis of an alternative specification of culture.

1. Asking the question

‘What, after all that then, is culture?’ This is a question that was routinely put to me by one or more students at the end of a course I taught for many years until quite recently. The course was H303 Cultural History (earlier, Cultural Theory) and, in its various guises, it took students through a brief genealogy of the concept of culture as it emerges in modernity: starting with its ur-forms in Hobbes and Vico, running through the enlightenment and reactions to it in the works of Herder and the post-Kantian Romantics; eventually arriving, via Comte, at the 20th century and the emergence of cultural studies itself. So many different positions, so many answers to the question.¹ In this paper, I want to try to work out how we might think about the question — what is culture? — in some non-mainstream ways, and then to suggest and illustrate a kind of analytic method.

Questions of the ‘what is...’ variety do, it is true, have a tendency to become the province of philosophy. Still our question — what is culture? — need not be philosophical, at least not in any card-carrying sense. It could even be a quite banal question — the sort of thing that could be talked about by pretty much anyone over a cup of tea perhaps, or a glass of beer. The question of culture, we might say, could be a popular question: a ‘popular cultural’ question even. But if it were, we might be begging the question again. So is there a way that the ‘culturalness’ of the concept of culture could be raised as a serious question, avoiding vicious circles and embracing virtuous spirals? I think there may be and we could begin to see this by reflecting on an ordinary everyday event.

Just popped down to the bottle shop (off-licence, liquor store ... take your culturally-specific pick) and, knowing Mick the proprietor well — after all I probably put his kids through private school — asked him straight out: what’s

culture? He paused a while for thought. Then his offsider came in to tell him the weeks a certain band would be playing at their pub (every Tuesday and every other Wednesday, as it happens). He jotted this down, matter-of-factly, found me a couple of bottles of Cooper's Stout, and asked me to ask the question again. 'What's culture', I asked again, 'what sort of thing is culture?' More pausing, checking the computer for, he said, a big sale last week. Then a headshake. Then: 'Bugged if I know, Al. Probably, um, ballet and opera and art galleries and other shit they subsidise out of my taxes'.

I was pushing the limits of my welcome — after all two 750ml bottles of Cooper's only comes to about \$11 — but went on: so what would a culture be? 'That's easy', he said, no pause, snapping straight back, 'Italian, Greek, Portuguese ... they're all cultures. Different languages, card games, food, wine ... that stuff'. I nodded. He went on. 'You wanna see what they ask for some nights: Lambrusco, Grappa, some grandmother's drink they mix with milk I forgot the name of. Shit, I gotta keep everything. Imports: now there's a problem with the stock...'. Mick continued in this vein for quite a while.

So the question of what culture is can indeed be quite ordinary. And, in the case of the reported conversation, it was. But, even though it was ordinary, it wasn't without difficulty. Difficulty can be ordinary, and ordinariness can be difficult. To get ahead of ourselves: ordinariness can take some seriously complex 'doing being'.²

On reflection, I realised why my question to Mick was, in effect, two questions. When I asked him about culture, he had no idea at first, then came up with some concrete instances: ballet, opera and art galleries. When I asked him about a culture (or cultures), he had no hesitation. So let's put a heuristic in place as I ask you to think along with me: 'Culture' (with a cap.) will be the

topic of my first question, while 'culture(s)' (with a small-c) will be what I was asking about in the second question. The latter, to be sure, is much more specific; though perhaps, as we shall see, nowhere near specific enough for our eventual needs.

If our everyday experience at the bottle shop is anything to go by, it seems we're dealing with two different but related things. As it happens, basic linguistics has a way of making the distinction. The distinction is between mass and count nouns and it's critically important to sense-making in quite a few European languages. A way of telling the difference between the two in English is to ask whether the noun in question takes 'many' or 'much' as its qualifier. 'Motorbike' is a count noun because we say 'many motorbikes' and not 'much motorbike'. 'Cement' is a mass noun because we say 'much cement' and not (or rarely) 'many cements'. The obverse test is the dwindling distinction between 'less' and 'fewer'; dwindling because we now hear such things as 'there are less motorbikes on the road than there used to be'.

However, the noun 'culture' can be found on both sides of the mass/count divide. Much culture? Many cultures? Less culture? Fewer cultures?: they're all grammatical. But the same could be said of another popular cultured product: cheese. Some nouns like 'cheese' and 'culture' can swivel between mass and count. Much cheese. Many cheeses. Less cheese. Fewer cheeses.

'Much cheese' makes no distinction between Edam and Camembert. There's just a lot of it — a mass of humanly cultivated bovine abjection. 'Many cheeses' makes a definite distinction: a specific sample is either Cheddar or it's Brie ... or something else entirely. I suspect it is this distinction, or lack of it, that is leading us, at least in part, into difficulty and, as is often the case, a return to ordinary language might lead us out of it.

So why might an ordinary speaker of the language — like Mick in our example — have a partial problem with Culture (mass) and no such problem with culture/cultures/a culture (count)? The same problem arises in another context: Wittgenstein's (1958: § 89) response to abstraction and essentialism. He wonders why philosophers ask questions like 'What is time?' If you don't ask me, I know perfectly well. As soon as you do ask me, I'm stumped.³ We could also add that there is no such problem with a question like 'What's the time?' or with Wittgenstein's own example: 'What is the specific gravity of hydrogen?' But as soon as we ask 'What is...?' in the sense of 'What is ... essentially?' or 'What is ... in general' we can get into deep water. And this seems to be especially true for those abstract concepts that are routinely expressed as mass nouns.⁴ And yet there need be no problem of essentialism vis-à-vis a question like 'What is culture?', providing we don't ask the question in quite this way: expecting, perhaps, an answer in the form of a definition reaching to the 'essence' of culture 'in general'. This might be a first way of responding to our H303 student, then: yes, the question is okay so long as it doesn't send us on a wild-goose chase towards non-existent essences.

That is, we might go back and ask what sort of thing Wittgenstein knows when he says that he knows what time is (if he is not specifically asked about it). From the rest of his later work, we might infer that what he knows is not a species of 'knowing that' (which steers us towards the essence of a thing) but of 'knowing how' (which turns us instead to the question of what it is possible for someone to do).⁵ The ordinary person (as opposed, perhaps, to some kinds of philosophers) knows what time is because he or she operates with time in pretty much the same way as everyone else. Time is an operational sort of a thing; we have certain practices with time such as telling the time, timing an egg boiling, setting a clock, making an appointment for Friday week and so

forth.

Mick and his offsider have no problems with the idea that the band will play in their pub every Tuesday and every other Wednesday at 7:30. They know what time is in the sense that they know how to operate with matters like 'every Tuesday', 'every other Wednesday' and 'at 7:30'. And the test (should we require one) of their knowledge is not to ask them 'What is time?' and record their answers. Rather, the test is to see whether or not, for example, they set up the stage and the PA on the right evenings so that the band can come on at 7:30.

The same applies, though perhaps in a slightly more peculiar way, to the concept of culture. I say 'in a peculiar way' because another way of putting the question of time would be to say that, as a practical operational matter, time is cultural. By analogy, then, it may not be completely absurd to say that the problem with the question 'What is culture?' is that culture, like time, is cultural. Indeed, we know perfectly well that the concept of culture itself varies between one 'culture' and another; even to the point where there may well be folks in the world that we (who have this concept) call 'cultures' who do not, endogenously, have such a concept. One example of such a thing would be most European 'cultures' before the Renaissance which marked not only a flowering of cultural things (such as art, science and literature) but also an initial seeding of the concept of culture itself which would come into full blossom only as late as the eighteenth century. Hence it is a gross anachronism — as Heidegger reminds us — to refer to such things as 'ancient Greek culture'.⁶

So, at least today and in some parts of the world (but not all), to operate with the concept of culture is a decidedly cultural matter. And if we happen to be

interested in culture, for whatever reasons, it might even be the cultural matter. (Which is why I began with the view that the question ‘What is culture?’ may be a perfectly ordinary question rather than a purely, or even an impurely, philosophical question.) Yet this statement, in another sense, appears to take our investigation no further. It looks on the surface like a definition containing reference to what is to be defined: again the question seems to be begged. But do we have to read it this way? Do we have to read it as a definition at all? For, have we not already seen that the question may not be one of the sort that calls for a definition — for example, of the ‘essence’ of a ‘thing’? On another model, the statement that culture is cultural may be perfectly meaningful, non-circular and far from tautological. Allow me to illustrate with another everyday experience.

Some time ago, I was at a ‘popular theatre’ event; though I have reservations about using the word ‘drama’ in this context. It was held in a room in a pub and it was supposed to depict pub life from the perspective of a landlord, landlady and their customers (all of whom were played by the same two actors). There is nothing circular or tautological here in saying that pub life could be seen in the pub. And an incident just prior to the performance illustrates this just as well.

The room in which the play was to be performed was (strangely enough) filling up to capacity — maybe our two actors had large families? — and yet there were still people outside holding tickets. One such refusé complained to the front-of-house staff that ‘There’s no room in the room’. The utterance is perfectly straightforward. No one could possibly have a problem understanding it. The first ‘room’ is a mass noun; the second is count. And the same goes for ‘pub life’ and ‘the pub’.

Ditto ‘culture is a cultural matter’. We can be, on this account, actually informed in a practical way about the sort of matter we are dealing with vis-à-vis culture. The statement is, then, not a definition in the form of an analytic proposition (like ‘All bachelors are unmarried’) but rather a fragment of historically-specific information in the form of a synthetic proposition (like ‘Wittgenstein was a bachelor’). So how can we unpack this statement — one whose apparent obviousness may conceal important information — so as to bring out its significance for anyone who might want to understand and analyse culture?

Before we can get to our first approximation, it needs to be said that our transformed question — why is the culturality of culture an important step on the way to understanding what culture is? — is by no means a new one. Although Vico in the early 18th century did not have a concept of culture as such (indeed, this was not to arrive in its modern sense until Herder, much later in the same century), he knew fully well that what he then called ‘institution building wisdom’ (knowledge of how to make what we might now call cultural objects) was itself a cultural matter. Although the origin of this ‘wisdom’ lay in divine Providence — God had designed us as self-designing entities — it took on different manifestations in different locations. The many different and distinct human languages (invented by human beings but still based on the Providentially-given ground of a universal lingua mentalis) provide Vico with just one example. Other examples were laws, and customs such as religion, marriage and burial. Hence Vico’s early slogan for the culturality of culture itself, verum ipsum factum: we may only truly know what we ourselves have made.

Without examining each stage of this idea along its (sometimes continuous, sometimes discontinuous) path to our own times, we can simply note that it is

very much with us today in the work of late modern cultural historians. For the sake of comparison and contrast with what I'm proposing here (in terms of culture's own culturality), I will briefly mention two examples.

The first is what might be called the weak (or social constructionist) thesis and the example I have in mind is Thomas Laqueur's Making Sex, subtitled Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud (1990). It marks, in some ways, what is radically different between Vico's doctrine (or 'study principle' as he called it) and its late modern incarnation in social constructionism. For while Vico's verum ipsum factum meant that only humanly constructed ('synthetic' or 'man-made') objects could be the true objects of a science (scienza) — such that, for example, cultural history would be a genuine science while biology would be mere speculation (coscienza) about God's own creation — Laqueur wants to extend the doctrine precisely to the latter: biology and, in particular, the biology of the sexed body. In effect, what the human body is (for example, a one-sexed body for some cultures and times, a two-sexed body for others) becomes an effect of the available cultural discourses on it or about it. From ancient Greece to the Renaissance, the idea of the one-sexed body — the view that male and female genitalia were essentially identical, if differently placed — was common but did not derive from anatomical observation. Rather it arose from particular cultural needs and requirements: especially concerning the political utility of regarding woman as a mere (and sometimes inferior) variation on man. And, not surprisingly, Laqueur makes a similar argument for the later (modern) two-sex model. What is behind all this is not scientific observation, rather it is 'cultural work' (1990: 151), at all times and places.

It is not hard to see how this may well be an example of the culturality of culture thesis being set to work weakly or tautologically — the very thing, we saw above, any such theory must try to avoid. The biological body is assumed

from the outset to be cultural (that is, 'socially constructed') — rather than natural, and therefore not subject to strict scientific analysis (in the modern rather than Vichian sense). Accordingly, whatever a Galen or a Freud may have to say about it must necessarily be the effect of 'cultural work' rather than strict scientific investigation. The vicious circle is not hard to discern.⁷

By contrast, Mary Poovey's A History of the Modern Fact, subtitled Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society (1998) takes a much more measured position on the culturality of culture. Poovey has no doubt that there are social scientific facts, however they may be derived. There are, among other things, hard numbers out there mapping on (as best as possible) to real states of affairs. Unlike Laqueur, Poovey has no interest in showing that, with the wisdom of late-modern hindsight, past thinkers can be shown (in fact?) to have been, all along, serving cultural-political demands rather than contributing to exact human sciences. It is no surprise, pace Laqueur, that facts are made: the very word 'fact' itself derives from facere, to do or to make; a fact just is a making or a deed.

So Poovey's question is a much more archaeological one: what was to be done with facts; what was their utility; how were they deployed; what social and cultural status did they have? Facts can stand alone, like bald assertions of putative empirical truths; Poovey calls them 'epistemological units'. But they are also collected together into ensembles (and occasionally theories). Here they become 'cultural configurations', as they are pressed into service towards particular social, cultural and political ends. And, indeed, an important part of Poovey's argument is that the history of the modern fact is a history of attempts to resolve this dual status of the fact — as stand-alone unit or as contributor to a more general configuration.

So to take, for example, facts as cultural objects — and there are many things besides facts that might be so treated — need not involve the circularity of social constructionism. It is not at odds with empirical, archaeological investigations of cultural utility: with the analysis and understanding of how things get done on a day-by-day, event-by-event basis. Yet can we see, as it were, the work of this fact production in everyday bits of live cultural practice, here and now, and not just in the deep past?⁸ And can we see it in how the idea of (a) culture is mobilised in our own times?

2. The most ordinary thing in the world

A perhaps neglected figure who broached this question in phenomenological terms was Alfred Schütz who made an important distinction between first and second order constructs (1962: 34-47). If we follow Schütz, we find that the idea of culture being cultural means, among other things, that culture is necessarily a second, not a first, order construct. Schütz noticed that natural scientists deal with constructs of the first order of interpretation. The objects that the natural scientist has before her have not been interpreted until she herself — whoever — shows up on the scene. Atoms, planets and cyclones do not interpret themselves. (And, again pace Laqueur, neither do penises or clitorises as such.)⁹ However, as soon as we come to deal with human individuals or collectivities, we're in a different situation entirely. These 'objects of knowledge' have interpreted themselves before any investigator comes on the scene. They are therefore 'objects' of the second order of interpretation. They come pre-interpreted — and so the job of anyone wanting to study culture is to interpret the interpretations that people have already made of themselves. Where complete human beings are concerned (as opposed to rats, atoms or penises), the investigator is always investigating 'second order' matters. It is a

fundamental category mistake, then, to treat humanly-produced things as 'natural' data; they are not data (givens) but capta (takens). (And, equally, it is a mistake to treat non-humanly-produced things as in any sense pre-interpreted.)

When we presume to understand or analyse a cultural thing, we must realise that what the 'folk' (ἔθνος, ethnos) have already done with it (or 'as' it) is not stupid; it is not mere 'folk knowledge' as opposed, perhaps to hard social science. Actual persons have interpreted it, worked on it in methodical fashion. Stuart Hall is supposed to have been the first to insist that (against the much-maligned 'positivist' social sciences) everyday actors are not 'cultural dopes'. But the critique of cultural-dopery originated with Garfinkel in Studies in Ethnomethodology (1967). Indeed, Garfinkel had (and still has) many things to say about how such an apparently gross thing as 'culture' might operate. And he's not a million miles away from Schütz's distinction between first and second order constructs when he does so.

Accordingly, there's a pretty obvious mistake that Schütz's distinction can lead to. Let's call it the mistake of positivism — while acknowledging that this is a terrible disservice to the actual, historical, popular, cultural and religious movement of Positivism itself.¹⁰ The mistake is to think that second order constructs can be examined just as first order constructs can. We confuse the cultural analysis of fairs and furs with the analysis of (natural) firs: synthetic stuff comes to look just like natural stuff. The basic injunction is: don't give in to physics envy! But there's a second mistake that Schütz's distinction can equally lead to: unless you accept that what you are ultimately doing is trying to get a description of actual cultural members' interpretive practices, you will end up simply repeating those practices. There has to be some distinction between the analysis of cultural practice and its mere repetition: though the

distinction, after Schütz and Garfinkel, cannot be a distinction between putatively (weak) folk-knowledge and (strong) formal scientific analysis. The cultural disciplines, in order to be disciplines at all, need a different distinction between their topics (cultural objects) and their resources (methods of analysis and understanding). How can we unearth such a thing?

Harvey Sacks departs from Schütz when he replaces 'interpretation' with 'analysis'. It's a bold move and it could even be a logical extension of the anti-cultural-dope position that Hall borrowed from Garfinkel. Still, the radical idea is that members (e.g., Springsteen-, Pacino- or Buffy-fans) don't merely consume records, films or TV programs as commodities; rather they are analysts of them in their own right. And their analyses are not only important (for understanding what culture is) but more-or-less unrecorded. To get to an analytics that opened up this seen-but-unnoticed cultural stratum, Sacks proposed to collect ordinary everyday events (particularly conversations) and see if they could be understood as instances of members' own methodical analyses. Sacks's objective was to get a good description of the analytic 'machinery' members themselves use in doing ordinary things; like making a phone call, walking down the street, or cooking dinner. This distinguishes cultural analysis from cultural practice, to be sure, but, in line with Schütz's distinction, it also leaves intact the integrity of members' interpretations and/or analyses as such.

So the upshot of Schütz and Sacks's considerations is that we should not begin to move on cultural questions until we have a decent description of how they are, as it were, on the ground, for those on the ground themselves. What we are analysing (professionally) has already been analysed by those (laypersons, members) whose domain we are (as analysts) effectively trespassing on. And we can't fudge the distinction by claiming to be a member-analysts or

participant-observers. That's just a basic abrogation of ethics. They read/interpret/analyse the music as a performance. We come on the scene later. We are late. There's no room in the room as we try to come in. So we have to have respect for what those members do; and take it that our job is to describe it — as best we can and with humility — as those who are already late. We have to look out in particular for members' analytic methods, if we can see them at all. We have to see what we see there and describe them. Then we might have started to see and describe ethno (folk/cultural) methods.

In this way, we can see that the question 'What is culture?' doesn't lead us to a final ground of culture — a kind of Holy Grail of the human sciences since at least Herder (1784)¹¹ — but rather to something like the grounds of a way of going about making discrete inquiries about specific kinds of cultural things (cultural members' methods) operating in specific kinds of locations. Again Wittgenstein is instructive: 'Giving grounds ... justifying the evidence, comes to an end; — but the end is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of seeing on our part; it is our acting, which lies at the bottom of the language-game' (Wittgenstein, 1974: §204).¹²

Capital-C Culture can't be seen all at once in some transcendently true proposition (as an answer to the question 'What is culture?'); rather small-c cultural matters can only be grasped piecemeal in actions and their descriptions. In this case, all the analyst has going for her is the still arguable possibility — asserted by Schütz, Garfinkel and Sacks in their different ways — that in acting in certain ways, members display for themselves (that is they 'interpret', 'account' or 'analyse') the methodicalness of their actions as part and parcel of those very actions.¹³ And that methodicalness can be described as the most ordinary thing in the world.

3. Describing local cultures' self-analysability

Let's now look at the upshot of these methodological reflections for how they operate in the analysis and understanding of a particular case. In his 'tearing down' lecture, Sacks (1992: 199-203) is working with a bunch of transcribed materials from a therapy session for 'delinquent' youths in California c. 1965. This is a youth group sent, for all I know, to mandatory counselling for petty criminal activities like drag-racing in the streets, 'acting up', 'being a hood' (as they then called it), 'doing resistance' (as some now say), and showing all this and more in the session itself, perhaps even against the psychiatric establishment itself. For example, they nicely characterise those taping and, possibly, watching the session as nothing more important than 'baby headshrinkers' (Sacks 1992: 142). In fact, the transcript is replete with examples of 'interpreting', 'accounting for' or 'analysing' the specifics of what it is to 'do therapy' right there, in and as, the doing of the therapy session itself. So, for example:

Henry: This is an abnormal session. See we're not together without the broad.

Bob: yeah

Mel: See we gotta have the broad here. Cause she unites us.

Henry: He [the therapist] sorta keeps his mouth shut and writes things down whenever you say something important

[Mel: And if you ask him

[Henry: He's a good guy though

[Mel: to do something then you have to pay him though

Bob: yeah

Henry: Eventually you'll become sane.

Joe: hah. Hey this is the academic counselling center. It's call the family, family circle.

Henry: It's not really an academic counselling center, it's sort of a drive in nut house. ha ha.

Joe: She smokes cigars. That's about all. ha ha.
Mel: They smoke. I chew them.
Joe: He eats it.
Henry: Well chewing them is half the fun – oral gratification. heh
heh

(All selections from Sacks, 1992: 140-141)

These are plainly examples of accounting for what therapy is (for ourselves, the participants) during the course of (official) therapy itself. But in this lecture, Sacks is more interested in an earlier part of the session. Here, Bob has just been introduced as a newcomer to the group and the resident members announce their own upcoming (psycho-?) analytic work on him as follows:

Mel: Now let's see what else can we decide about you [Bob]?
-> Henry: Hey don't tear him down
Joe: I've been torn down for-
Mel: ok
Henry: We got company
Mel: oh ok. Tell us about yourself so we can find something bad
about you.
(Sacks, 1992: 137)

'Tearing down' then, we should note from the start, is not a cultural analyst's category in the first place, but something cultural members (at least in this fragment) refer to themselves as doing. It's a way of analysing a thing that they do — in and as part of 'therapy sessions' — which might itself also be called 'analysing'. And it's interesting to note that, in the strict sense, 'analysis' (as in chemical analysis) means 'tearing down', reducing something to its (ideally further-irreducible) components. So Sacks has, as he often does, hit on a certain territory where professional (for him mostly 'sociological') methods are secondary to — come after — (and, indeed, may be clarified by or thrown into some relief by) laypersons' (members') methods. His project in the lecture is 'to ask whether that procedure which they call "tearing down" has any interesting

relationship to what it is that at least the patient in a therapy situation takes to be going on, at least some of the time' (Sacks 1992: 199). In short: Sacks is asking whether it's possible to treat members as utterly distinct from being 'cultural dopes': do they (pace mainstream sociology) know how to make cultural events work, and also know how to show ('account') that capacity in and as the doing of the event itself?

Sacks treats this instance of referring to 'tearing down' (from within a therapy session on the part of its 'clients') as one case of a possibly more general and widespread (but also materials-based) method by which 'clients' show that they know what goes on in (in this instance) therapy sessions. He parallels it with, for example, a practitioner beginning with 'Tell me about your problem' and the 'client' responding: 'I'm ashamed to. I don't want you to tell me I'm infantile, because I know that' (Sacks, 1992: 200). As it were, the possible words of the therapist are already in the mouth of the client (cf. 'oral gratification. heh heh') before they can be uttered as such. To put this another way, at least this one member's analysis of the utterance 'Tell me about your problem' consists of a prefiguration of a whole range of possible turns that could be its upshot and a plausible reason as to why those turns should not in fact be taken for, as it were, good therapeutic reasons.

So what's being investigated here is not just some isolated tiny fragment ('don't tear him down') but something much richer: something that members appear to be able to do on much the same methodic basis across particular events. And yet, that methodic basis is (analytically) located only in the events themselves: 'Don't tear him down' and 'I don't want you calling me infantile'.¹⁴ This, I think, takes us into a possible (but quite firm) territory beyond the analysis of culture as somehow trickling down historically from the 'great thinkers' to the everyday world (or vice versa). Joe, Henry, Bob and

Mel can be taken every bit as seriously as Galen, Freud, Malthus and Mill.

But, since we are now in the realm of bringing famous professional 'scientific' analysis into comparison with unrecorded lay 'folk' analysis let's mark the fact that, in his lecture, Sacks then takes a sidestep, turning to a third bit of reported talk, to try to get at the 'deep problem' involved. The third instance is, at least initially, counter-intuitive. He cites Ronald Berndt in Excess and Constraint: Social Control Among a New Guinea Mountain People. At this point in the book, Berndt is referring to what he and his co-investigators were taken to be by the 'subjects' of his ethnographic work: 'We were viewed as returning spirits of the dead who had forgotten the tongue of our fathers and wanted to relearn it' (Berndt in Sacks, 1992: 200).

Before proceeding with Sacks's reading of this peculiar passage, let's note that we already have at least three relatively distinct but related binary collections of personae operating to this point:

Cultural analysts : cultural members

Therapeutic analysts : clients

Anthropological analysts : subjects of investigation

Might it then be possible that what Sacks says about the third collection could apply to the first two as well? We shall see.

The connection is roughly this: 'We were viewed as' is perfectly okay; but it delimits what can come next. One such thing is to hear it as framing an upcoming translation from another language: 'Such that, if Berndt stood up at an anthropological convention and said, "I, Ronald Berndt, am a returning spirit from such-and-such", that would be good grounds for them to think he's insane' (Sacks, 1992: 201). The sentence then is 'asemantic', as Sacks says, but only if you can't hear it that the second part ('returning spirits of the dead who

had forgotten the tongue of our fathers and wanted to relearn it') is not in fact Berndt's own professional analytic category for describing himself but a way of him trying to express a members' analytic category (i.e., a category distinct from Western anthropological 'science'). To cut a long story short, the distinction between a members' category and any putative category from outwith one's range of membership is, in itself, some members' distinction.

Or, we (assuming we are not Berndt's New Guinea tribespeople for just one moment) could not do anything with a category like 'returning spirits of the dead who had forgotten the tongue of our fathers and wanted to relearn it'. No language-game we practise could make use of any such move. That would be like being asked to be on the lookout for a checkmate in soccer or a three-no-trump bid in billiards.

Sacks contrasts the category ('returning spirits of the dead who had forgotten the tongue of our fathers and wanted to relearn it') with recently coined terms like 'schizophrenia': weird and almost unusable at first — it came into European languages about 1910 — but now extensible to all sorts of actually encountered cases:

... until the term 'schizophrenia' was invented, it could be said that we lacked that category, and that given it, a body of experience, a set of observations, etc., could now be ordered, and 'schizophrenia' now stand as their name — and be used, furthermore, as other disease names might get used. But what kind of experience this term 'returning spirits ... etc.' orders, and what class it would be part of is, at least to me, quite obscure. (Sacks, 1992: 201)

Put bluntly, 'schizophrenia' supposedly works as a category because it has become — since 1910 — both (a) an accepted way of classing subordinate cases within its scope (individuals with recognisable symptoms) and (b) an accepted member of a recognised class superordinate to it (diseases). 'Returning spirits

of the dead' has managed neither.¹⁵ 'And yet', Sacks continues, 'there's a sense in which we do understand, by some mapping, what sort of thing he [Berndt] is talking about. And that, of course, is an extremely interesting kind of fact' (1992: 201).

It's interesting because it shows that there is translatability across and between lay and professional domains of discourse (language-games) — 'by some mapping' — and yet there also is not. Some things get taken up easily across the domains, some never do. 'H₂O', 'Pluto' and 'tachycardia' took, what?, months, less? 'Hegemony', 'transition-relevance-place' and 'logocentrism' remain asemantic in most lay domains to this day. Other things lie in the vast space in between — waiting, on stand-by in limbo. At best, it can be said that there's an always problematic and contingent relation between the two. Now this is a heightened problem particularly when the categories in question are supposed to help us understand specifically cultural matters. The problem is the study of culture's (or 'the human sciences'') unique burden. And this is because of Schütz's (previously discussed) distinction between first and second order constructs: human-science constructs are always (if they are to be meaningful at all) explicitly constructs of the constructs already endogenous to the various laities they would ideally describe, understand or explain. Hence, Sacks writes:

I introduce this sort of consideration since I want eventually to make the case that one of the core problems for ... the social sciences in general ... concerns the relationship between the categories that those disciplines set up and the categories that members of the society otherwise use. (1992: 201-202)

This is the exact opposite of saying that lay actors are social-scientifically naive and that a main job of the social sciences would be to re-educate them so that they might one day realise their 'real' (scientifically proven) conditions.

Rather, it is saying that we have barely begun to say anything yet about ‘what the structure of lay knowledge is’ (1992: 202). Yet, the main efforts of the social sciences, to date, have been geared towards assuming that that very structure is already known (‘after all, we’re all lay members, aren’t we?’) and needs to be replaced by specialist concepts. Sacks’s news is that any such enterprise is doomed to failure; if only for the simple reason that any such specialist concepts are always prone to becoming (despite professional gate-keeping strategies) just more material for existing lay, ordinary, ethno-methodic practices.

Joe: She smokes cigars. That’s about all. ha ha.
Mel: They smoke. I chew them.
Joe: He eats it.
Henry: Well chewing them is half the fun – oral gratification. heh
 heh
(Sacks, 1992: 140-141)

So at least one part of the problem is that:

somehow members take it that such categories — ‘manic depressive’, etc. — are additions to a list of categories that exist already, and can be used in just the same fashion that old ones are usable. They may be better, but they do not otherwise modify the structure of the class, of which people come to be seen as members. However, the professional constructing these new categories may take it that one major task he has is to somehow build them so they are unusable in the way that the categories he sees them as replacing were usable. That is, the professionals put it as a programmatic task that they would like to have it that the statement ‘You’re a manic depressive’, for example, would be nonsense in ordinary English, i.e., unless said by a therapist. (Sacks 1992: 202; emphasis added)

Sacks’s point is born out by the fact that, as I write — nearly 40 years later — ‘manic depression’ has been given over completely to the laity, while professionals, at least for now, prefer ‘bi-polar depression’. Something else will probably be next — we await the DSM-V with anticipation.¹⁶

But a second part of the problem is perhaps more important for our still elusive question: what is culture? Sacks, that is, tells us that professional terms ‘do not otherwise modify the structure of the class, of which people come to be seen as members’. He is, of course, pointing to members’ own methods of classing or categorising themselves which, on empirical inspection of actual cases, turn out to be extremely complex methods that a rough concept like, for example, ‘ideology’ could never even begin to imagine, let alone describe. To expand this, we might say that no professional conceptualisation can have much effect as far as on-the-ground members’ actional methods are concerned.¹⁷ So, it’s not just that the investigation of culture (whether in sociology, anthropology, literary studies, cultural studies, or whatever) can easily do without a certain philosophy of the human sciences which insists on the central idea that ‘technical findings stand in some position of replacement to lay findings’ (Sacks, 1992: 202). More importantly, this kind of self-importance which has bolstered the relentless search for a final solution to the ‘culture question’ over at least the last two centuries of the human sciences, has been at the expense of and deflected attention from the main concern that has been staring us all in the face to start with: small-c culture(s) as the indefinitely inventive and manifold ordinary methods members use for producing and sustaining local orders of everyday affairs.

4. Empirical examples of ‘culture’ at work

In this final section, and in accord with the speculations above, I want to offer a tentative analysis of a collection of actual empirical fragments. Over the last decade or so, I have been transcribing perspicuous cases of the use of the term ‘culture’ occurring in popular texts. There has been no exact method to the

collection itself; rather, in the spirit of Sacks, I have assumed that if there is order to be found, it is as discoverable in any fragment as it is in some statistically derived 'sample'. (On the sampling versus the 'order-at-all points' view of local cultures, see Sacks 1992: 484.) The whole collection is now quite large but shows some surprisingly methodic properties. Not all of these can be analysed here, but at least the basic flavour of them can be sketched. Here are some of my materials then with the relevant usages in bold:

(1)

Despite typical flat pragmatism from Scully (Gillian Anderson), who sniffs at **a culture obsessed by media and the chance for self-dramatisation**, Mulder persists in seeking a monster he has heard about from locals.

'The case of the monochrome monster', Who Weekly, 9 March 1998: 71. By line: Gerri Sutton.

(2)

In the US, anti-consumerist activists argue that 'branding' (such as Ikea, The Body Shop, Reebok, Starbucks) creates a kind of **fake culture**, one defined by corporations instead of the ups and downs of **real life and culture**.

'Domestic Harmony', The Weekend Australian, 8-9 September 2001: 52. By line: Rosalie Higson.

(3)

Having departed Teesside amid acrimony over claims of **a drinking and gambling culture**, the England midfield player now says Villa manager John Gregory is failing to understand his problems as a recovering alcoholic.

'Merson threat to leave Villa', The Weekend Australian, 16-17 January 1999: 49. By line: Richard Hobson.

(4)

... the Western **cultural pattern** that assigns things masculine to **the cultural** and things feminine to the natural.

Student essay, 2000.

(5)

In **the history of culture** the discovery of zero will always stand out as one of the greatest single achievements of the human race.

'Much ado about nothing', Australian Review of Books, 5(4), May, 2000: 18. By line: Peter Slezak. Slezak is quoting a quotation from Danzig (1930) in Seife (2000: 12).

So, we have to ask, what kind of ordinariness are these instances of 'culture' accomplishing? Let's turn to the first example and think about the expression 'a culture obsessed by media and the chance for self-dramatisation'. The kind of work that 'culture' is doing here appears to be directed towards a highly general, almost miasmic, 'mentality' inhabiting a very broad population: perhaps even as broad as 'the West'. But how it predicates that non-specific population in order to 'get at' its mentality is to suggest that its main point of contact with 'the real' is an equally non-specific institution called 'the media'. Moreover, the goal or end of that 'obsession' is 'the chance for self-dramatisation'. There are several possible readings of this phrase.

On the one hand, we may immediately think of Andy Warhol and the supposed fifteen minutes of fame that anyone might (as it were, accidentally) have. In this case, the 'media obsession' is an actual possibility — realisable in the form of, for example, reality TV. The character of Scully in The X-Files is then seen to be turning away, on her own account, from the possibility of (albeit brief) fame, though acknowledging that her 'subjects' in this episode are seeking after just that form of glory.

On the other hand, we may take 'self-dramatisation' as a more local possibility. On this view of things, mediatisation simply means that we falsely think and act like famous persons (stars) and are, to that extent, engaged in false consciousness. Instead of Warhol's pictures, we now get pictures of a person acting locally but out of character, outside the 'realistic' assessment of others in the same locality. They therefore appear to be 'jumped up', 'putting on airs and graces', and the rest.

There are a number of other readings of this usage of 'culture', but the two we

have for now will suffice to show that 'culture' can (and routinely does) take us into a realm of fantasy — as in non-reality, unscientific thought, delusions of where and what one actually is; and such that the 'actuality' is given by another and more logical and grounded system of thought: 'flat pragmatism'. In this way, it becomes possible for the concept of 'a culture' to do importantly negative moral work, to become something that a pragmatist quite reasonably and rationally 'sniffs at'.

But then we could point to the context of this snatch of discourse: it's a review of a TV program in a popular magazine. In this sense it's an instance of the very moral problem Scully is supposed to be dealing with 'inside' the reviewed episode of The X-Files. Whichever way we turn, then, this version of culture as (non-scientific) illusion comes back to haunt us.

Our second example in some senses reiterates this mobilisation of culture. 'Fake culture' is fairly close to 'a culture obsessed by media and the chance for self-dramatisation'. The moral parallels are easy to draw. The sense of not being true to one's authentic self is not far from the imagination in both cases. The opprobrium of being 'obsessed by media...' and the acceptance of one's own indulgence in 'fake culture' are clearly related. But what of 'real life and culture'? Now culture seems to have been put on to another footing altogether — and by contrast with the 'fake'. The work that 'culture' is doing here is to reinscribe moral authenticity. It brings the thing down to the everyday level, associating it with 'real life'. And that 'real life' has its 'ups and downs', which ('fake') culture presumably does not.

So then we have to ask: how is it that 'culture' can be mobilised in such opposite ways in the same sentence? What kind of thought could permit such distinct usages? And the only possible way through the maze is to say that

‘culture’, culturally, can easily switch values as the ‘thought’ goes along. Rosalie Higson has said/written something that is both utterly illogical and also totally understandable at the same time. The (proto)logic of cultural thinking obviously needs to be worked out as a topic in its own right.

In the third example, we find ‘culture’ being used in a much more localised way. Gone are intimations of the West as a whole and of its mass (false) mentality. But the negative moral possibilities are still with us. This ‘culture’ is now confined to a specific region of the UK, Teesside in the north east, used perhaps as a metonym for Middlesbrough, the main port city and home to Paul Merson’s former football club. The rather nice work that ‘a ... culture’ does here is to distance Merson from personal responsibility for his (then?) notorious indulgences in drinking and gambling. It shifts the locus of the predicates ‘drinking’ and ‘gambling’ away from a person (Merson) and places them more nebulously in the locality that the person happened to inhabit at the time. The possible accounts that could easily run ‘Merson drank’ and ‘Merson gambled’ are now displaced on to a local culture: ‘Teessiders drink and gamble’ — though, to be sure, the generalisation to the region as a whole is mitigated by the word ‘claims’; and the term ‘acrimony’ does put the ball somewhat back into Merson’s own penalty area. With this mitigation in place, the report is then able to make a nicely balanced claim of its own: that Merson, at his new club, Aston Villa, has become — or is he merely saying he has become? — a victim, a recovering alcoholic. If the former, we are asked to find blame with ‘a culture’. If the latter, we make a judgement about the man himself.

‘A culture’, then, can do some quite fine moral work: the work of displacement. Just as a lawyer may defend an accused person on the basis that they were once, in the past, themselves victims of injustices — hence

explaining, if not excusing, their transgressions — so imbrication in ‘a culture’ can become a defence in its own right. The idea of a culture then becomes finely powerful: it can turn one who is otherwise a complete reprobate into a (now) misunderstood and misplaced ‘mere member’ of a larger constituency of wrong-doers. Still, the negative moralisation of anything called ‘a culture’ persists.

In some respects, I’m at a loss to account for our fourth example. When I first read this phrase, as one who had to mark the essay in question, I wondered how anyone could think such a thing. How could the word ‘cultural’ be used in such different ways in, as it were, the same breath. Without thinking? Without noticing the difference? But on reflection, it turns out that this difference is thinkable and that it’s not much different from my own (non-trivial) version of the culturality of culture. At that point, the interpretation is simple: there’s a Western (cultural?) distinction between nature and culture with the former being associated with (assigned to?) the feminine and the latter with the masculine. $N : F :: C : M$? So what is the greater ‘C’ (culture/cultural pattern) that relies on the very equation of $N:F::C:M$ itself? It’s a distinct possibility for the term ‘culture’ without contradiction, but only if we now return (as with our first example) to a generalised culture of the ‘West’ (that is, still without hypothesising a capital-C Culture pertaining to all humankind) and try to argue, as this essay does, that it makes the masculine its preferred norm. (And note that Laqueur depends on a reverse claim: that, in the one-sex system, it is the male body that is the natural template.)

On this version of things, a culture, Western culture, becomes something like a family hierarchy, with patriarchal inheritance values: the passing on of its own ‘pattern’ from father to son, but skipping mothers and daughters. The latter then are relegated to cultural inferiority (possibly even exclusion) by

being 'assigned' to culture's standard opposite, nature.

Again, though — and for all the differences between this and the two previous cases — we need to note how the term 'culture' is being mobilised to accomplish negative moral implications. On the surface of the phrase we have a mere 'pattern' that assigns things of a certain type to one domain, and things of the opposite type to another. It looks like a logical proposition. But it's impossible not to hear the different values being ascribed to such a division. And how we hear this is precisely because of the double use of the term 'cultural'. That is, the student is rehearsing the logical technique sometimes called the 'court of last return'.

To put this simply: if we have a division or dispute between x and y — e.g., between the executive and the judiciary — which of the two has most authority to decide the matter? And the answer depends on whether the division is an x- or a y-based division. Is the division between executive and judiciary an executive or a juridical division? That will tell you where, in the last instance, the dispute should be resolved — by an administrative body or in the courts. The same applies here and the argument goes that the nature/culture division is finally a cultural one; with the secondary implication that the M/F division is a masculine one and, moreover, that it's directly mapped on to the first division. You don't have to agree with this to see the ultimate strength of the argument, or to see the trenchantly moral complaint it makes via the surface form of an apparent tautology (or, more strictly, a pleonasm).

Our fifth example takes us to that version of culture which has so far failed to emerge in our sample: capital-C Culture. Here we have a historian of mathematics pronouncing on something called 'the history of culture' which

is rendered as roughly equivalent to the 'achievements of the human race', no less. What we notice immediately, in this case, is not only the absence of moral opprobrium but its exact inversion. This culture cannot, by contrast with our other cases, be 'obsessed' or 'fake'. It could never be a culture of 'drinking and gambling'. Nor can it be a 'cultural pattern' that is designed for negative outcomes such as privileging one gender over another. Instead, we find in this culture all that is eternal, noble and good: something working disinterestedly (or perhaps in everybody's interests alike), located in the abstract and the global, and moving towards perfectibility rather like the Hegelian Geist. We hear that among its candidate paradigmatic expressions is nothing less than the discovery of zero: the mathematisation of nullity itself.

What we can derive from these examples is a number of initial and highly tentative hypotheses about the ordinary everyday mobilisation of the concept of culture. I want to end by suggesting that the further testing of these hypotheses could form the analytic core of a relatively unique way of understanding and analysing culture. Such a proto-discipline would be highly specific in its orientation to the close analysis of ordinary (non-spectacular) naturally-occurring materials and its central problematic would shift from asking what culture is, to asking what kinds of work culture does, in and as the actual working of the concept, for everyday members accomplishing such work. The five hypotheses would be:

- H1. 'Culture' functions culturally to do moral work of various, indefinitely many, and locally specific kinds.
- H2. It is not itself a moral category as such; rather it works to show that its predicates ('drinking', 'gambling', 'obsessed by media', 'fake', etc.) are to be heard in terms of moral value rather than, say, descriptively.¹⁸
- H3. The predominant case is 'culture' being mobilised to do negative moral work. ('A ... culture', 'A culture of ...', 'The cultural pattern that ...')

- H4. Exceptional predications also exist which can do positive or neutral moral work. ('Culture' = 'Real life'.) But these need to be explicitly marked against the predominant case (H3).
- H5. 'Culture' (as opposed to 'a culture of ...' and the rest), if hearable as a general human capacity — via close contextual equivalences or semi-equivalences ('the ... greatest achievements of the human race') — can achieve highly positive moral work upon its predicates. ('Culture' includes 'the discovery of zero'.)

None of this precludes the possibility that, as an ordinary everyday object, 'culture' can do all sorts of other kinds of work. However, at first blush it looks as if an analytic attention to its various possibilities vis-à-vis specifically moral work (of several kinds) in local sites presents an opening on to a distinctive study of the concept of culture's own unique culturality.

Endnotes

1. As Kendall and Wickham (2001: 2) note in their own excellent argument on behalf of cultural specificity, the 1951 Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences contains no less than 78 definitions of the term 'culture'.
2. See Harvey Sacks on 'doing being ordinary' (1984).
3. Wittgenstein is in fact quoting St Augustine in this paragraph: 'quid est ergo tempus? si nemo ex me quaerat scio; si quaerenti explicares velim, nescio'. (What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know. If asked to explain, I do not know.)
4. I'm insisting here on both abstraction and massification as constituting the problem in combination. 'Cheese' can be, and 'concrete' almost always is, 'mass' — but both are concrete rather than abstract. When I prevaricate over the noun 'concrete', I'm allowing for the possibility of there being highly-skilled tradespeople who routinely distinguish one concrete from another and speak accordingly. That is, they do not resort to count + mass combinations like 'types of concrete', etc. They are concrete buffs, just as there are cheese buffs who must have distinct cheeses — not mere varieties of (mass) cheese.
5. The distinction between knowing how and knowing that can be found in both Heidegger and Ryle. Ryle may have come across it in Heidegger,

having been one of the first English reviewers of Being and Time in the original German.

6. Heidegger (1982: 17) writes: ‘And so as soon as valuative thought emerged, there came — and still comes — the empty talk about the “cultural values” of the Middle Ages and the “spiritual values” of antiquity, even though there was nothing like “culture” in the Middle Ages nor anything like “spirit” and “culture” in ancient times. Only in the modern era have spirit and culture been deliberately experienced as fundamental modes of human comportment, and only in most recent times have “values” been posited as standards for such comportment. It does not follow, of course, that earlier periods were “uncultured” in the sense that they were submerged in barbarism; what follows is that with the schemata “culture” and “lack of culture”, “spirit”, and “value”, we never touch in its essence the history, for example, of the Greeks’. Eagleton (2000: 26) writes more succinctly of the Victorians: ‘It is unlikely that [they] thought of themselves as a “culture”’.

7. Alan Sobel’s (2003) critique of Laqueur’s position is, accordingly, devastating. See in particular his section on Laqueur’s ‘self-referential shot to the foot’.

8. Garfinkel (whose work we will soon encounter) often refers to the wonderfully apt idea of catching the work of fact-production in flight.

9. Again, see Sobel’s (2003: n4) remarkable footnote on Laqueur’s assertion that the clitoris was ‘discovered’!

10. See, for example, Style (1928).

11. Herder, one of the first to use the term ‘culture’ in a way Europeans would easily recognise today, is often thought to be the founder of cultural pluralism (though not quite relativism). What this account sometimes forgets is that, in his Ideas or Reflections (1784), Herder only embraced pluralism as a default: once his ur-anthropological search for cultural universals proved to be a failure. And even at this point Herder argues that cultures are different because of the distinct but relatively fixed material conditions — in the form of landscape, climate, etc. — that ultimately determine them. Herder, that is, has a generalist theory of cultural plurality.

12. The original has: ‘Die Begründung aber, die Rechtfertigung der Evidenz kommt zu einem Ende; — das Ende aber ist nicht daß uns gewisse Sätze unmittelbar als wahr einleuchten, also eine Arte Sehen unsrerseits, sondern unser Handeln, welches an Grunde des Sprachspiels liegt’.

13. For a highly lucid explication of this aspect of everyday sense-making ('reflexivity'), see Sharrock (1995).
14. That such fragments as 'don't tear him down' are part of a 'population' of such utterances, all of which get very much the same work done, is important for two reasons. (1) 'Representative sampling' or statistical aggregation becomes redundant because (2) cultures display 'order at all points' — rather in the way that holographs can be completely reconstructed from tiny fragments of their original contents. On the methodological importance of Sacks's unique fragment-culture position, see McHoul and Rapley (2001).
15. 'Schizophrenia' may be an unfortunate counter-example for Sacks to light upon here. Throughout his lectures he does tend towards an acceptance of psy-complex terms as both scientifically sound and more-or-less absorbed into everyday practice as being the case. Other writers such as Boyle (1990) have quite different accounts and tend to read categories like 'schizophrenic' either as on a par with 'returning spirits of the dead' or as even less comprehensible than it.
16. The promised 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association. The currently effective edition is APA (1994).
17. Gramsci is often reported (perhaps unduly anecdotally) to have become disillusioned with the classical Marxist concept of ideology because it assumed that, if you told people about the real economic conditions of their enslavement to capital, they would, as reasonable beings, rise up against those conditions. Having sold this message for quite some years, he got his result: not a socialist revolution but Mussolini. This is then supposed to have led to a reconsideration of ideology (re-badged as 'hegemony') whereby the famous ideas of the ruling class were now assumed to be so ingrained into 'common sense' as to be outwith the reach of rational calculation. What both concepts fail to encompass is that quotidian occurrences (from boiling eggs to world wars) are not to be grasped via exogenous technical concepts. Rather, they are methodically produced and achieved by the local (endogenous) productional cohorts responsible for them: but such that the actual ('lay') methods in question are a necessarily missing topic for almost every technical (Garfinkel would say 'classical' or 'formal') analysis.
18. 'Predicate' and 'predication' are not used here in their formal logical or grammatical senses. For that to be the case, we would sometimes have to perform certain transformations on the natural-language examples we find in

routine discourse. For example we would have to transform the phrase 'a drinking and gambling culture' into the proposition 'The culture [subject] is one of drinking and gambling [predicate]'. So it's a kind of sub-hypothesis to our projected proto-discipline that culture is primary and that what it acts upon are its predicates.

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