

# Rethinking comparative cultural sociology

*Repertoires of evaluation in France and the  
United States*

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*Edited by*

Michèle Lamont and Laurent Thévenot



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK <http://www.cup.cam.ac.uk>  
40 West 20th Street, New York NY 10011-4211, USA <http://www.cup.org>  
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia  
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain

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This book is jointly published by the Cambridge University Press and the Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, as part of the joint publishing agreement established in 1977 between the Fondation de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme and the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press.

Cette publication est publiée co-édition par Cambridge University Press et les Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme. Elle s'intègre dans le programme de co-édition établi en 1977 par la Fondation de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme et les Syndics de Cambridge University Press.

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First published 2000

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*Typeface* Plantin 10/12 *System* QuarkXPress™ [SE]

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Rethinking comparative cultural sociology: repertoires of evaluation in France and the United States / edited by Michèle Lamont and Laurent Thévenot.

p. cm. – (Cambridge cultural social studies)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 78263 5 (hardback) – ISBN 0 521 78794 7 (paperback)

1. Sociology – Comparative method – Case studies. 2. Evaluation – Cross-cultural studies. 3. Evaluation – France – Case studies. 4. Evaluation – United States – Case studies. 5. Cognition and culture – France – Case studies. 6. Cognition and culture – United States – Case studies. I. Lamont, Michèle, 1957– . II. Thévenot, Laurent. III. Series.

HM585.R45 2000

301'.07'23–dc21 00-462248

ISBN 0 521 78263 5 hardback

ISBN 0 521 78794 7 paperback

ISBN 2-7351-0867-8 (France only)

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# 1 Introduction: toward a renewed comparative cultural sociology

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*Michèle Lamont and Laurent Thévenot*

This volume's first objective is to propose a theoretical approach for comparative cultural sociology to analyze national cultural differences while avoiding the traditional essentialist pitfalls of culturalism: in particular, we develop the concept of national cultural repertoires of evaluation to point to cultural tools that are unevenly available across situations and national contexts. Our second objective is empirical: we document the extent to which different criteria of evaluation are salient in the French and American national cultural repertoires and the rules that people follow in justifying their use. These criteria have to do with market performance, the defense of the public interest, human solidarity, morality, aesthetics, and so forth.

The analysis draws on eight case studies conducted by eleven French and American researchers who have worked together over a period of four years toward developing systematic comparisons. The cases bear on issues as varied as the value of contemporary art, what constitutes sexual harassment, the legitimacy of interests in environmental conflicts, and whether racial groups are morally equal. Most are "hot" areas generating intense passion or disagreement, which we study through participant observation. Alternatively, through interviews, we push actors involved in these hot areas to make explicit the criteria of evaluation they use when they confront others with whom they disagree.<sup>1</sup>

The case studies were conducted either by a bi-national team of French and American researchers collaborating on all the phases of an integrated comparative research project, or by a single researcher responsible for fieldwork on each side of the Atlantic. The two collective projects focused respectively on the range of criteria used by participants in environmental conflicts in California and the South of France to define their positions and evaluate those of others (Lafaye, Moody, and Thévenot) and on the ways in which journalists (including Communists in France and the Religious Right in the United States) evaluate the legitimate boundary between personal commitments and professional roles (Lemieux and Schmalzbauer). The *solo* projects deal with how

French and American workers assess racial inequality (Lamont), how French and American activists and intellectuals appraise what constitutes sexual harassment (Saguy), how identity politics shape what is valued in literary studies in French and American academia (Duell), how publishers in Paris and New York understand the market and literary value of books (Weber), what kind of rhetoric the French and American publics use to evaluate contemporary art (Heinich), and how French and American Rotary Club members understand their voluntary activity in terms of particular professional self-interest and universal humanitarian purposes (Camus-Vigué). The presentation of these case studies is organized around three areas. The chapters presented in Part I examine evaluation as it articulates with aspects of identity, namely race, gender, and multiculturalism. Part II concerns evaluation in cultural institutions, namely in publishing, journalism, and the arts. Part III concerns politics and the public sphere. It focuses on the articulation of private and common interests in evaluation within philanthropic associations and environmental conflicts.

By making our case studies as diverse as possible, we aim to tap the full range of principles of evaluation used in each national context. Hence, each case study was chosen because it could teach us something particular about how different principles of evaluation coexist. For instance, the study of public rejection of contemporary art tells us about the relative importance social actors attach to aesthetic criteria in contrast to criteria having to do with morality, the market, or the democratic process. The publishing industry is a particularly relevant terrain to examine how social actors understand the importance of high culture in its relationship to the profit motive. Finally, environmental disputes are an appropriate site for the study of conflicting interpretations of what constitutes the public interest. By juxtaposing results from a range of cases, we are able to identify repeated taken-for-granted cultural differences across societies and to produce an understanding that is more qualitatively nuanced than is generally achieved from comparative survey research.<sup>2</sup>

These case studies reveal important similarities and differences in the cultural repertoires of evaluation used in France and the United States. In a nutshell, and we now greatly simplify for heuristic purpose, we show that evaluations based on market performance are much more frequent in the United States than in France, while evaluations based on civic solidarity are more salient in France. Furthermore, moral and aesthetic evaluations are often subsumed to market evaluations in the two national contexts, whereas aesthetic objects are also more often evaluated through moral standards in the United States than in France. Finally, we find that the rules of democratic life shape very differently, in the two countries,

individual attempts to show that one speaks to collective interests. More details will be provided below.

While the comparative literature on France and the United States is sizable, it is not yet integrated. It underscores some of the findings that emerge from our case studies – concerning the more important role played by market criteria of evaluation in the United States than in France, for instance. One of the advantages of our research strategy is that by bringing together several integrated case studies (to the extent that this can be achieved), we can submit specific cross-national similarities and differences noted in the literature to empirically rigorous exploration across many contexts and subject areas.<sup>3</sup> Another advantage is to add a comparative dimension to the literature on French and American national identity.<sup>4</sup>

France and the United States offer especially fruitful cases for sociological comparison. Because the relationship between the public and the private; between the political, the moral, and the religious; or between the individual and the collective, are so different in the French and American contexts, a close examination of these contrasts might be theoretically profitable. Furthermore, the two countries have historically defined themselves as having privileged missions toward humanity in that, through their revolutions (Higonnet 1988), they carried values for which universality is claimed: modernity, progress, rationality, liberty, democracy, human rights, and equality (also Lacorne 1991). Yet, these competing cultural models with hegemonic pretensions are partly defined in opposition to one another, and hence make for an especially rich contrast (on this topic, see also Lacorne, Rupnik, and Toinet 1990).

The next section presents the intellectual tools mobilized in our comparative project to capture the different repertoires of evaluation used by American and French actors. We focus on the notions of symbolic boundaries and orders of justification, which are anchored in recent developments in American and French sociology. The third section discusses the potential contribution of the concept of cultural repertoire to the literature in comparative cultural sociology. The fourth section describes each chapter and its main contributions, while the fifth section provides a selected overview of key findings concerning differences between French and American national cultural repertoires. We conclude with a brief reflection on the nature of our collective comparative experiment.

The final chapter in the volume draws the implications of our findings for understanding social integration in a context where many criteria of evaluation coexist and potentially conflict. Turning toward issues having to do with the nature of the polity and the public sphere, we provide

exploratory elements of analysis concerning (1) what kind of community boundaries are presumed by different types of criteria (closed or open); (2) how the polity is defined in civic terms; (3) the place of private ties in the public space and the boundary between the public and the private; (4) the political grammars used in a democratic and pluralist polity.

### **Tools for a new comparative sociology: boundaries and orders of justification**

Our research agenda is not built *ex nihilo*. Indeed, in recent years, comparativists have produced several innovative studies that point to the institutionalization of cultural categories cross-nationally. An important current has focused attention on the international standardization of the notion of personhood through the diffusion of rights as a taken-for-granted feature of citizenship (Meyer et al. 1997; Thomas et al. 1987; Soysal 1993). Others have identified cultural variations in models of policy-making, in the legitimate role given to the market, the state, and individuals as engines of social organization, for instance (Dobbin 1994). Cultural models are also central foci in the dynamic field of comparative immigration and racial and ethnic studies (Brubaker 1992; Noiriel 1996), although the concept of “model” itself has come under serious attack (Kastoryano 1996). Finally, an important current in political science is focusing attention on the importance of ideas and culture in shaping political outcomes and on shifts in how actors understand their interests (Berman 1998; Hall 1993; Katzenstein 1996; McNamara 1998; Putnam 1993a; Ross 1997), partly as a reaction to the new hegemony of rational choice theorists. These studies all point to the importance of institutionalized cultural models and practices, and on how they converge or vary cross-nationally. However, while this work tends to emphasize macro-institutional and political levels, we are concerned more exclusively with grammars of available cultural positions that are not centered around political institutions. In order to help the reader understand the nature of our intellectual agenda, we turn to the intellectual tools that we bring together.

In recent years, two lines of work have converged in their programmatic emphasis on the importance of analyzing the relationship between different criteria of evaluation. In the United States, researchers drawing on the Durkheimian tradition have focused on the content of symbolic boundaries defined as (1) group boundaries that demarcate the limits of groups – or outsiders from insiders – who share common values or common definitions of the sacred, of stigma, or of exclusion; and (2) cognitive boundaries organizing mental maps on the basis of symbolic distinctions.<sup>5</sup> Their

empirical studies have centered on symbolic classifications, symbolic codes, mental maps and their relationships with group structures.<sup>6</sup> Within this literature, Lamont (1992, chap. 7) has shown the importance of documenting empirically and inductively the plurality of criteria of evaluation that individuals use, after critiquing Bourdieu's work for defining the content of boundaries *a priori* through the concepts of cultural capital and fields<sup>7</sup> (also Lamont and Lareau 1988; Hall 1992). While drawing on interviews with professionals, she shows that the relationship between criteria of evaluation varies across time and space. For instance, moral and cultural criteria of evaluation are more readily subsumed to economic criteria in the United States than they are in France, and these criteria are unequally salient across national settings. Her more recent work (Lamont 1998, 2000) centers on the relationship between moral criteria of evaluation and the relative salience of distinctions based on race, citizenship status, and class in the definition of national communities across national settings.<sup>8</sup>

Simultaneously in France, Boltanski and Thévenot (1987, 1991)<sup>9</sup> have proposed an analysis of orders of justification that people deploy to assess whether an action benefits the common good.<sup>10</sup> Their framework is designed to illuminate the most legitimate types of arguments, which are those agents use when debating public issues to appeal to common interest. Focusing on the different ways actors can make their claims general and legitimate, contrary to Bourdieu (1976), these authors do not regard actors' universalistic claims as hiding particular interests. Drawing both on fieldwork observations of disputes and critiques and on a reading of the classical literature in political philosophy, they distinguish a plurality of "grammars of worth." In a nutshell, these refer to the following forms of evaluation: "market" performance; "industrial" efficiency based on technical competence and long-term planning; "civic" equality and solidarity; "domestic" and traditional trustworthiness entrenched in local and personal ties; "inspiration" expressed in creativity, emotion, or religious grace; and "renown" based on public opinion and fame. They suggest that each kind of worth is a way to raise persons and things to "commonness."<sup>11</sup> The various worths encompass economic, political, technical as well as moral criteria of evaluation.<sup>12</sup> These are analyzed in the context of a broader research agenda designed to study political and moral commitments through different modes of practical engagement, and to scrutinize the place of material arrangements in such engagements.<sup>13</sup>

Building on these lines of work, we focus on repertoires of evaluation as they appear in France and the United States.<sup>14</sup> We regard them as elementary grammars that can be available across situations and that pre-exist individuals, although they are transformed and made salient by

individuals. We are concerned with documenting how these schemas are unevenly present across national cultural repertoires. Hence, the following chapters focus specifically on (a) the content of criteria or orders of justification used to draw boundaries between the more and the less valuable; (b) whether and how different criteria compete with one another and are used in conjunction with one another. For instance, are moral boundaries less readily subordinated to aesthetic boundaries in the United States than in France? Does civic solidarity more often prevail over market performance as a principle of evaluation in France than in the United States?

There is a literature on the plurality of criteria of evaluation and how they compete with one another. This includes Max Weber's (1978) *Economy and Society*, which points to a plurality of types of legitimacy (charismatic, authoritarian, and rational legal) and a plurality of types of social relations, including market and status relations. Weber wrote about claims for legitimacy grounded in domination, and about how class and status hierarchies compete. But Weber did not clarify why some criteria of evaluation are more legitimate than others. This topic is of great interest to us. More recently, Michael Walzer (1983) described a plurality of spheres of justice, each dedicated to the distribution of a specific social good. Instead of focusing on how actors propose justifications, put them to a test, and shift from one order of justification to another, he associates each order with specific institutions and a community of shared understanding.<sup>15</sup> Along similar lines, in a theoretical piece, Friedland and Alford (1991) point to the relative autonomy of potentially competing institutional logics, while Elster (1995) empirically studies allocation criteria across such critical areas as college admissions, kidney transplants, employee layoffs, and legalized immigration. He focuses on contradictory criteria of justice such as need and merit (see also along these lines the comparative work of Engelstad (1997).

Note that by examining the dynamic between moral principles of evaluation and other principles, we hope to make a contribution to the sociology of morality as it is practiced in France and the United States. In France, this area has been neglected for a long time because of the profound influence of Weber, Marx and Nietzsche in sociology, which has generated moral skepticism and relativism. This has led contemporary sociologists to bracket or ignore moral issues, or to suggest that they hide "real" interests.<sup>16</sup> Recent philosophical debates on justice and ethics have questioned these positions and several research groups are presently working on these issues.<sup>17</sup> Boltanski and Thévenot have studied a range of conceptions of common good involved in practical engagements. In the United States, morality has been the object of important and sophisti-

cated sociological writings drawing on the Durkheimian and Parsonian traditions (e.g. Bellah et al. 1985; Wuthnow 1996). The comparative perspective we supply complements this literature by showing how definitions of morality vary across populations.

This volume addresses another set of issues relating to the legitimacy of arguments within the democratic polity. The literature in political sociology has traditionally been concerned with showing how individuals “frame” their personal interests as compatible with group interest (Lukes 1974; Snow et al. 1986). We go further than this literature by analyzing the characteristic requirements of the most legitimate forms of evaluation that ground criticism of injustice and the abuse of power.<sup>18</sup> One privileged issue is how actors mobilize the notion of common human dignity to assess standards of evaluation. This analysis of modes of justifications draws on a pragmatist approach to the public space and can be compared with other approaches to public debates focusing on different types of rhetoric (Jasper 1992, 1997), the underlying patterns of civil society and democratic civility (Alexander 1992; Alexander and Smith 1993), or public communicative action (Habermas 1984).

Finally, we are also concerned with how actors demonstrate the situational appropriateness of their criteria of evaluation, and with “investments of forms” processes by which people and things are defined as belonging to similar classes across contexts (Thévenot 1984).<sup>19</sup> Unlike political and moral philosophers, we approach this issue by analyzing how people put their arguments to the test, i.e. how they find material proof that their arguments are grounded. Here we draw on the writings of Latour (1983, 1987) and Callon (1986b) on how scientists find support for their statements by aligning non-human beings with human beings in actor-networks. However, we focus on the plurality of ways human beings and other entities can “qualify” for such “alignments.”<sup>20</sup> For instance, the treatment of persons (as customers) and things (as merchandise) that is required for market evaluation is quite different from their treatment as experts and techniques that is required for an evaluation in terms of efficiency. This plurality of ways that persons and things are arranged in congruent orders raises critical tensions.<sup>21</sup> Actor-network theorizing usually cannot account for conflicts between competing criteria of evaluation.<sup>22</sup>

By focusing on national cultural repertoires, we address the conditions under which different types of evaluation prevail and discuss their relative availability in France and the United States. This moves us toward a more structured understanding of the context in which individuals draw boundaries, allowing us to develop a more sophisticated approach to the concept of context, which often remains an unproblematized black box in

contemporary sociological literature. Finally, we offer elements of explanations of differences in the salience of different types of criteria across national cultural repertoires, and refer to the structural conditions that prompt actors to draw on some aspects of repertoires rather than others (see below, note 25). However, we do not bring together in a systematic fashion all elements of explanation – although our analytical description of course includes many explanatory elements.

### **Repertoires and comparative cultural sociology**

The United States has produced a growing literature on forms of symbolic boundaries and the relationship between different criteria of evaluation.<sup>23</sup> This literature points to the creation of group boundaries, for instance at the level of the creation of imagined communities (Anderson 1991; for reviews, see Berezin 1997 and Calhoun 1994) and the definition of citizenship (Brubaker 1992; Kastoryano 1997; Somers 1995; Zolberg and Long Litt Woon 1998). It is often concerned with comparative issues similar to those that are at the center of our research agenda.

Recent developments in American cultural sociology have been concerned in part with the relationship between repertoires and networks (Emirbayer 1997; Erickson 1996; Tilly 1993), and repertoires and agency, following a seminal article by Ann Swidler (1986).<sup>24</sup> This piece proposed an important correction to the Durkheimian/Parsonian unified “values” model by pointing to the fact that individuals use the cultural tools they have at their disposal. This practice-focused approach emphasizes not the determination of representations by group position and structure, so much as agency in the use of cultural tool-kits. It made it possible to better account for individual variations in cultural practices.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the study of available cultural repertoires was seen as a necessary complement to the literature concerned with the embeddedness of identities in networks (Gould 1995; Tilly 1997), which stresses the role of interpersonal interaction in the definition of identity and pays less attention to the role of cultural institutions in diffusing cultural models.

It is in this context that we turn our attention to schemas of evaluation mobilized at the discursive or interactional level (examples also include Lichterman 1992 and Spillman 1997).<sup>26</sup> We identify and analyze the relative presence of such schemas across countries – what we might call national cultural or historical repertoires (Corse 1997, p. 159; Lamont 1992, p. 136). These are defined as relatively stable schemas of evaluation that are used in varying proportion across national contexts.<sup>27</sup> Each nation makes more readily available to its members specific sets of tools through historical and institutional channels (e.g. Griswold 1992), which

means that members of different national communities are not equally likely to draw on the same cultural tools to construct and assess the world that surrounds them. Indeed, socially available meaning systems privilege the importance and symbolic weight of some distinctions over others (Griswold 1981, 1992). These unevenly available distinctions, which can also be referred to as national boundary patterns (Lamont 1995) or orders of justification (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991), are the common objects of the chapters assembled here. Again, we are concerned with their content and use in France and the United States. We are also concerned with the role they play in the delimitation of social and political communities, i.e. of group boundaries and the types of bonds that link their members.

As it is practiced today, comparative sociology has tended to focus on macro-economic, political, and institutional differences. Recent methodological debates center on the relative advantages and disadvantages of comparing a smaller or larger number of countries and of using quantitative or qualitative data (Engelstad and Mjoset 1997; Ragin 1994). As cultural sociologists and social theorists, we labor toward tipping the discussion in another direction, i.e. toward the study of national cultural repertoires which can be illuminated through comparative analysis. By using theoretical tools developed by cultural sociologists over the last ten years, we hope to move beyond the psychologism, naturalism, and essentialism that characterized much of the comparative cultural analysis of the 1960s – including studies of “modal personalities” and “national character” (e.g. Inkeles 1979).

For the purpose of our analysis, we are primarily concerned with national differences, although we refer to intra-national variation at times. However, one of the advantages of our approach is to downplay the contrast between national and intra-national differences. We take elements of repertoires to be present across geographical units such as nations or regions, but in varying proportions. Concretely, for instance, instead of simply contrasting the importance of the market or civic solidarity in France and the United States, we suggest that cultural repertoires prevailing in the United States make market references more readily available to Americans and enable them to resort to such references in a wide range of situations, whereas the French repertoires make principles of civic solidarity more salient and enable a larger number of French people to resort to them across situations, and often precisely in situations in which Americans would resort to market principles. However, this does not mean that market criteria of evaluation are absent from the French repertoires, but only that they are used in a small number of situations by a smaller number of people (Lamont 1992, chap. 3). As is often argued in

the comparative literature, generalizations concerning national differences can be dangerous as they are bound to lead one to overlook variations and the specificity of structured contexts in which people use principles of evaluation. They can also lead one to confirm a view of differences as national character traits attributed to almost all the citizens of a country and expressed in an heterogeneous range of situations.<sup>28</sup> We believe that our approach allows us to avoid these pitfalls.<sup>29</sup>

### **Content of the volume**

These various concerns are present throughout the chapters included in this volume. As mentioned above, the chapters in Part I examine evaluation as it articulates with aspects of identity, namely race (the rhetoric of racism and anti-racism), gender (conflicts surrounding the definition of sexual harassment), and other aspects of identity (in academic evaluations). Part II concerns evaluation in cultural institutions, namely in publishing (the nature of literary judgments), journalism (the issue of objectivity and personal commitment), and the arts (criteria for rejecting contemporary art). Part III concerns politics and the public sphere; more specifically, it focuses on the articulation of private and common interests in evaluation within philanthropic associations and environmental conflicts.

#### *Part I Identity: race, gender, and multiculturalism*

In “The rhetorics of racism and anti-racism in France and the United States,” Michèle Lamont draws on in-depth interviews conducted with blue-collar workers and low-status white-collar workers residing in the suburbs of Paris and New York to analyze the criteria majority groups and victims of racism in both countries use to demonstrate and explain the equality or inequality of racial groups. In the two countries, this is accomplished primarily via moral arguments. However, in the United States, blacks and whites also point to socio-economic success and to market criteria as well as to differences in intelligence. The French are more likely to point to fundamental cultural and religious differences. Furthermore, the French rhetoric of anti-racism mobilizes themes of solidarity and egalitarianism more than its American counterpart. Finally, majority groups are more likely to use universalistic arguments, drawing moral and racial boundaries simultaneously. In contrast, African Americans and North African immigrants to France more frequently resort to particularistic arguments, pointing to the superiority of their own culture.

In “Sexual harassment in France and the United States: activists and public figures defend their definitions,” Abigail C. Saguy analyzes how

sexual harassment is legally defined, and how activists opposing sexual harassment and public intellectuals who have taken positions on the issue conceptualize it. She finds that the American respondents are more likely than the French to talk about group-based discrimination and to use market and professional logic to denounce sexual harassment. Similarly, American law condemns sexual harassment because it constitutes a form of employment discrimination that limits equal access to the labor market and that harms a specific group. In contrast, the French respondents are more likely than Americans to conceptualize sexual harassment as a form of interpersonal violence than as group-based discrimination in employment. Likewise, French law condemns sexual harassment as a form of interpersonal sexual violence. This approach emphasizes the abuse of “official authority” without explicitly recognizing how sexual harassment is enabled by and perpetuates gender inequality. Finally, Saguy shows that French feminists draw on American, European, and Canadian cultural and material resources in defending their definition of sexual harassment, while those who oppose this idea do so by denouncing perceived American cultural imperialism and insisting on the specificity of French culture.

In “Assessing the literary: intellectual boundaries in French and American literary studies,” Jason Duell draws on interviews conducted with French and American literature professors to show that they use very different standards to define what constitutes good work. In the United States, the focus is increasingly put on non-traditional subject matters, and critical approaches are often politically charged and/or related to group identity (gender, race, etc.). Standards for good work, and the institutional stability of the discipline in general, are described as in flux both by those opposed to and those in favor of these developments. In contrast, French literary scholars describe their field as being in a period of return to traditional forms of scholarship, and report much lower levels of contention and change in their discipline. These cross-national differences are explained by the status of literary intellectuals, differences in broader national repertoires for group representation, and the differing “disciplinary ecologies” in the two countries. The reasons for (and future prospects of) the influential practice of importing French theory into American literary studies is also examined in light of these factors.

*Part II Cultural institutions: the publishing industry, journalism,  
and the arts*

In “Culture or commerce: literary judgment among French and American book publishers,” Daniel Weber analyzes how the transformation of the publishing industry in the two countries is affecting the ways

professionals make judgments about the quality of books, authors, and literary genres. In France, even commercial publishers who are oriented toward a popular audience use a grammar of evaluation which refers to the collective conventions that maintain a vertical division between what might be called “sacred” literature and “profane” entertainment. American publishers divide the book world into such categories as “high brow” and “low brow”, or “trash” and “quality.” But most interviewees, whether employed by literary or commercial houses, classify books in a very utilitarian fashion, i.e. on the basis of whether they are part of a particular editorial strategy, correspond to a social or intellectual trend, or (most commonly) fit a specific category used by book marketing specialists.

In “Involvement and detachment among French and American journalists: to be or not to be a ‘real’ professional,” Cyril Lemieux and John Schmalzbauer look at how journalists on both sides of the Atlantic talk about professional norms of objectivity, fairness, and balance. Drawing on interviews with twenty-four journalists from across the political spectrum, this chapter shows that French and American reporters make use of different modes of evaluation to justify the inclusion or exclusion of personal political opinions from professional life. At the same time, Lemieux and Schmalzbauer challenge the widespread assumption that American journalists are more committed to the ideal of professional detachment than their more “ideological” European counterparts. They argue that journalistic professionalism is best conceptualized as a complex set of rules governing the boundary between the public and the private domains.

In “From the rejection of contemporary art to culture war: Paris, New York and back,” Nathalie Heinich explores hostile reactions to visual arts from the public, focusing on moral and aesthetic rejections. She finds that issues of artistic authenticity are more present in France, particularly in establishing the boundary between art and non-art. In the United States, conflicts are articulated around free speech and the defense of moral values. Hence, conflicts about contemporary art raise political issues that are of relevance not only to the artistic realm, but to American society at large.

*Part III Politics and the public sphere: interests, community and the common good*

In “Community and civic culture: the Rotary Club in France and the United States,” Agnès Camus-Vigué analyzes the importation to France of an American association. Drawing on participant observation and

interviews with Rotary Clubs in Normandy and Vermont, she shows that the relationships between common and private interests, or between solidarity, philanthropy and business interests, are construed differently in the two countries. In the United States, the combination is made possible by the construction of a polity based on a local community of citizens. By contrast, in France, the civic dimension of the locality has been defined in opposition to the personal bonds that sustain a local community. In this context, the business groups that are associated with the Rotary Club are construed as being unable to carry solidaristic civic actions, because business interests are understood to be incompatible with the general interest, both on political and moral grounds.

The last case study draws on a comparative survey of two environmental conflicts in France and the United States conducted by Laurent Thévenot, Michael Moody and Claudette Lafaye. This is presented in two chapters that are intended to be read together. Chapter 9, "Forms of valuing nature: arguments and modes of justification in French and American environmental disputes," starts with a general introduction to environmental disputes in the two countries and outlines the case studies, one French and one American, that provide the empirical data for the analysis presented in Chapters 9 and 10. It then goes on to compare how actors in the two conflicts justify certain actions as valuable and legitimate, while questioning the validity of other logics of justification. In the United States, actors often draw support for their position in environmental conflicts by appealing to public opinion, to the legitimacy of the market logic, and to the equal rights of all citizens to have access to natural resources. There is also tension between those who promote efficacy ("the wise use of natural resources") and those who defend "wilderness," the latter group arguing that their claim is more powerful because it is grounded in a pre-human world. In France, such deep ecological arguments are not found, and are replaced by claims pointing to the defense of a "domesticated" nature and the protection of a historical landscape to which residents are attached. Emotional attachment to the landscape is used to criticize arguments having to do with market competition or technical efficacy.

The case studies presented in Chapter 9 are analyzed further in the next chapter, "Comparing models of strategy, interests, and the public good in French and American environmental disputes." Chapter 10 suggests that the traditional opposition between an American political culture that centers on individual interest and a French political culture where the state would defend the common good is too simple. "Special interests" are commonly denounced in both countries. However, while in the United States, the legitimacy of specific positions as aiming for the

public good is more often defined in terms of a “coalition of interests”; in France substantive models of the public good that exclude all particular interests are more frequently mobilized. Moreover, when used in the United States, arguments about the public good are frequently made on the basis of a strategic division of rhetorical work between associations dealing with different types of logic (profit maximization, public opinion, ecology). In contrast, French *collectifs* or *comités locaux* make claims that are defined in terms of the common good of a community.

### **The relative salience of some criteria of evaluation and how they are brought together**

In this section, we describe the key findings of our collective endeavor by discussing the relative salience of specific criteria of evaluation across cases, how criteria combine, and which criteria tend to predominate when they are combined. We also point to the frequency with which different criteria of evaluation are used and how they are combined within the two national cultural repertoires. This section draws on information that is presented elsewhere in this book.

One of the unsurprising findings of our collective project is that market-based arguments are more often used in the United States than in France. This is evident in the rhetoric of racism and anti-racism studied by Lamont. Drawing on interviews, she demonstrates that American racists and non-racists alike often draw on market performance to show that racial groups are unequal or equal. The centrality of market arguments is also evident in other chapters. For instance, when Saguy interviews French and American feminists to document their attitudes toward sexual harassment, she finds that American feminists are more likely to denounce it because it affects women’s equal access to the labor market. In fact, in all of the case studies we conducted, arguments pointing to actors’ relationship with the market (as producers or consumers) were used more often by Americans than by the French.

Another finding concerns the importance of civic criteria of evaluation in the two countries. Civic criteria evaluate action on the basis of whether it is designed to reduce inequality in the name of human solidarity.<sup>30</sup> This criterion is more often used in the French than in the American context. For instance, in the study of the French and American environmental conflicts conducted by Thévenot, Moody, and Lafaye, the French readily engage in large-scale public demonstrations to ask for policies that would reduce inequality (in this case they denounce the lobby of long-distance transportation corporations who are pushing for the construction of a highway that will destroy the quality of life of powerless local residents).

Similarly, in their interviews with French and American journalists, Lemieux and Schmalzbauer find that French journalists on the Left define civic solidarity in terms of social solidarity and stress the importance of working toward the reduction of inequality more than their American counterparts. The relative salience of this criterion of evaluation is sustained in French society and in Europe more generally by the Left, as well as by a Catholic tradition, which has traditionally promoted moral obligation toward the oppressed and the marginal (particularly the homeless and the unemployed.)<sup>31</sup>

This comparative preponderance of market and civic types of arguments in the two countries is reflected in their relationships when they are combined in France and the United States. Indeed, unsurprisingly, market arguments more often triumph over civic solidarity in the United States than in France. It is notably the case in the discourse elaborated by American as compared to French activists involved in environmental disputes: American citizens involved in the conflict put more importance on market arguments concerning the price of deregulated electricity than on universal access to public utility (which presumes civic solidarity). Similarly, Camus-Vigué's study of French and American chapters of the Rotary Club shows that philanthropic gestures typical of American members of this club, when made by French businessmen, were rapidly denounced by their recipients as economically motivated, and hence illegitimate in part because not generated by genuine civic solidarity.

The same trend appears across our case studies bearing on evaluation based on aesthetic or cultural value: the latter are more often assessed on the basis of market performance in the United States than in France. As shown by Daniel Weber in his study of the publishing industry in Paris and New York, American publishers more frequently refer to market performance to evaluate literary work than do their French counterparts. Similarly, in Heinich's comparative study of forms of denunciation of contemporary art, French artists are less likely than their American counterparts to judge the value of art by the demand for it. Hence, high culture more readily functions as a basis for distinction in France (Bourdieu 1984; Lamont 1992).

Finally, our case studies, and particularly Heinich's study, reveal that cultural excellence is more frequently evaluated through moral lenses in the United States than in France. For instance, Heinich finds that rejection of contemporary art is more often legitimized by a defense of traditional morality in the United States than in France – the Mapplethorpe case is illustrative of this. Especially moral is the Helms Amendment which, since 1989, has subordinated public financial assistance for the arts to moral criteria.<sup>32</sup> An amoral aesthetic (or one that is anti-moral, cf.

Boltanski 1993) is not part of the cultural repertoires available to Americans when they want to protect art objects from moral or political judgment, with the consequence that aesthetic criteria of evaluation are more frequently subordinated to moral ones than is the case in France.<sup>33</sup>

### A comparative experiment

We conclude this introduction with a short reflection on our interactions as a group and their impact on our intellectual project.<sup>34</sup> On the one hand, the bi-national research subgroups worked in a highly coordinated fashion and in a sustained dialogue on their joint projects. On the other hand, all the participants met as a whole on several occasions for a few days, with the support of grants from the National Science Foundation and the Centre National de Recherche Scientifique. The purposes of these joint meetings were (1) to discuss each of the projects as they were being conducted; (2) to identify common theoretical questions and common findings concerning how evaluation is performed across national contexts; (3) to use the “other” national group of researchers as a testing ground or sounding board for interpretations and analyses. Through this joint process, a common vocabulary and set of intellectual practices emerged and were used to write each of the chapters with the hope of producing an intellectually integrated volume. Hence, the project is better described as a collective construction than as the aggregation of individual chapters, precisely because these meetings formed an integral part of the research process. *A posteriori*, we might even think of each study as a collective breaching experiment where taken-for-granted meanings were made salient by intense discussion. By asking one another questions, we were forced to foreground and make concrete and explicit individual and collective/national assumptions.

Two examples will help the reader understand the nature of our collective endeavor. At our last meeting, acting as a native informant, Michael Moody, a Midwesterner, explained to the French colleagues his understanding of the articulation between individual sovereignty and standards of interpersonal interaction. He made the point that in his view, narcissism, as manifested in the act of monopolizing a discussion, is incompatible with democratic culture and with “being considerate,” a virtue that he claimed is cardinal in middle class American society. This led to a broader exchange contrasting the taken-for-granted codes of interpersonal interaction which result from the meanings given to individualism in French and American society. At that same meeting, it transpired that all the French collaborators believed that cultural patrimony can be of universal value, i.e. be of significance for all human beings (for instance, *patrimoine*

*de l'humanité* as it is defined by UNESCO). In contrast, all the American collaborators believed that patrimony tends to be national (or associated with Western high culture) and questioned whether it can truly reflect a universal value.

These examples are telling not because of their anecdotal relevance, but because they point to the true originality of our collective research endeavor, which forced reflection on our respective cultural assumptions. It required “talking things through” in a kind of therapeutic process. Abstract differences became very concrete as researchers deeply committed to them (as, for instance, “progressive” Americans opposing narrow and archaic French definitions of sexual harassment or as “enlightened” French people critical of a merciless market logic) attempted to make their colleagues understand the inner logic of their thinking. Interestingly enough, this aspect of our collaboration had not been anticipated and turned our collective meetings into a true laboratory. By reflecting on the social and intellectual conditions of our work, we attempted to use these sessions to increase our intellectual leverage for capturing national repertoires of evaluation. Indeed, we viewed our justifications and claims in these sessions as templates of positions available in national repertoires. Simultaneously, we remained wary of the pitfalls of culturalism (in terms of the naturalization of differences) and made a systematic effort to search for basic schemas that are behind emotional commitment. Hence, our repeated interactions played a crucial role in shaping our collective intellectual output.

### Notes

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of colleagues who took the time to react to this introduction: Jeffrey Alexander, Thomas Bénatouïl, Luc Boltanski, Frank Dobbin, Fredrick Engelstadt, Eric Fassin, James M. Jasper, Riva Kastoryano, Denis Lacorne, Paul Lichterman, Peter Meyers, and Renaud Seligman. Among the contributors to the volume, Cyril Lemieux, Michael Moody, and Abigail Saguy, also provided us with detailed feedback.

- 1 The privileged use of these data-gathering techniques leads us to collect snapshots of reality instead of information on process or historical change. This leaves room for future studies on how cultural repertoires vary across contexts (other than national) and over time. While we often focus on the situationality of judgment, we also consider the role played in judgments by historical, material, and organizational arrangements.
- 2 Within our methodological choices, what is gained in precision is lost in generalizability.

- 3 It includes on immigration Benson 1996, Body-Gendrot 1995, Body-Gendrot and Schain 1992, Hein 1993a, Horowitz 1992, and Weil 1991; on poverty, Silver 1993 and Wacquant 1994; on race and racism, Fassin 1997b; Hein 1993b; Jackson with Kirby, Barnes and Shepard 1992; and Weir 1995; on gender, Fassin 1993 and Saguy forthcoming [a]; on the state and politics, Dalton 1988, Dobbin 1994, Jasper 1990, Klaus 1993, and Esping-Anderson 1990; on culture, Lamont 1992; on class, Hamilton 1967 and 1972, and Crawford 1989 and Zussman 1985; on intellectuals, Clark 1979 and Lamont 1987b, and Mathy 1995. There is also of course a large comparative survey literature that includes France and the United States among other cases. See, for instance, Inglehart 1990; Langlois with Caplow, Mendras, and Glatzer 1994, and Stoetzel 1983. Finally, there are studies on France and on the United States that take the other country as implicit comparative reference points. These include Kastoryano 1996, Lacorne 1997, and Lipset 1977.
- 4 On French national identity, see in particular Kuisel 1993; Noiriel 1996; Nora 1984 and 1986; Rodgers 1991; Sahlins 1989; and Weber 1976.
- 5 Durkheim (1965, chaps. 6 and 7) discusses the articulation between collective representations and group membership. This conceptualization posits a direct correspondence between group structures and cognitive structures as group boundaries are defined by the sharing of mental maps. Traces of this seminal work are found in key contemporary cultural theorists including Mary Douglas (1966), Howard Becker (1963), and Erving Goffman (1963).
- 6 This literature includes (but is not limited to) Alexander 1992; Cerulo 1995; DiMaggio 1987; Lamont 1992; Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991; Wuthnow 1987; Zelizer 1994; Zerubavel 1991; for a review, see Swidler and Arditi 1994. Especially of interest is the interaction between classification and inequality, as illustrated by the essays presented in Lamont and Fournier 1992. See in particular Collins 1992, Hall 1992, and Epstein 1992 on gender; Beisel 1992 and Gusfield 1992 on morality; and DiMaggio 1992, Halle 1992, and Peterson and Simkus 1992 on arts and musical tastes. For a discussion of the influence of Durkheimian sociology on cultural sociology, see Lamont and Fournier 1992; and Alexander (ed.) 1988.
- 7 While in *Distinction* (1984), Bourdieu predefines familiarity with high culture (i.e. cultural boundaries) and the maximization of social position (i.e. socio-economic boundaries) as the stakes of social life, his theory of fields posits that individuals attempt to maximize their social position based on the stake most valued in the field (e.g. Bourdieu 1976). Although stakes vary across fields, the requirement to improve one's social position is posited in the very concept of "field."
- 8 She has also analyzed the salience of criteria of evaluation across academic disciplines and in academic definitions of excellence. See in particular Tsay, Abbott and Lamont (under review) and Lamont, Kaufman, and Moody (forthcoming).
- 9 To be published in English by Harvard University Press.
- 10 This research program also drew initially on the cognitive sociology of Durkheim-Mauss, with a series of experiments on social and statistical classifications that shed light on the operations and techniques through which human beings are "made similar" (Boltanski and Thévenot 1983; Boltanski

1987; Desrosières and Thévenot 1988; Desrosières 1993; Thévenot 1990b). The process of categorization was studied both in history and practice and includes: (a) an historical genesis of socio-occupational classifications showing the links with the French state and labor laws; (b) empirical surveys focusing on the cognitive operation that are required for effective construction of equivalence between persons, and that are supported by occupational titles, coders' practices and spokespersons of professions making claims based on different criteria of equivalence.

- 11 For instance, the efficiency worth of an engineer, of a technique or method, make them more "collective" than unskilled persons or practices, as suggested by Weber's (1978) analysis of rationalization. Similarly a celebrity embodies more collectiveness than a "nobody" because he/she potentially facilitates the coordination of other actors' actions if they share a common recognition of this fame. Thus this framework analyzes a wide range of forms of collectiveness, beyond the classical notion of "social group."
- 12 For a short presentation of the research agenda and of its background, see Thévenot 1995c, Boltanski and Thévenot 1999. Available English-language discussions of the framework are Dodier 1993a; Dosse 1998; Wagner 1994a, 1999. Bénatouil 1999a and 1999b compares the framework to Latour's and Callon's actor-network theory and contrasts it with Bourdieu's social theory. Finally, for a discussion of the influence of the framework on institutional economics and so-called "economics of conventions", see *Revue économique*, 1989; in English, see Storper and Salais 1997 and, for a review of this literature, see Wilkinson 1997.
- 13 This larger research agenda discusses the actors' competencies to shift among a plurality of regimes of action and engagement that do not always encompass a reference to the common good. It is notably the case for the regime of love as *agapè* (Boltanski 1990), the regime governing planned agency and the functional treatment of the environment (Thévenot 1990b, 1995b), and the regime shaped by familiar acquaintance with a customized human and material environment (Thévenot 1994, 1996c). This agenda of "*sociologie pragmatique*" (Thévenot 1998, forthcoming) converges on some points with that offered by American pragmatism (Joas 1993), while opening the investigation to a broader range of pragmatic regimes and building on advances in the sociology and phenomenology of practice.
- 14 While some of us are skeptical toward the post-modern stance according to which cultural orientations are essentially contextual (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994), as explained below, we share an interest in assessing the relative availability of ideas or regimes of action across settings (Lamont 1995; Thévenot 1990b).
- 15 See Paul Ricoeur's (1995) comparison between Walzer (1983) and Boltanski and Thévenot (1991).
- 16 For a remarkable analysis of the flaws of this position, including Weberien examination of "values," see Manent 1994, chap. 2.
- 17 These include the Groupe de Sociologie de l'Éthique (CNRS) which was founded in 1978 by Isambert, became the Centre de Recherche Sens, Éthique, Société and is presently directed by Pharo (1996), and the Groupe de Sociologie Politique et Morale (EHESS-CNRS) which was founded by

Boltanski in 1984 and is presently directed by Thévenot. For recent special issues of journals having a non-academic audience, see the issues of *Magazine Littéraire*, “Les nouvelles morales. Ethique et philosophie” (1998), and of *Sciences Humaines*, “Les valeurs en question” (1998).

- 18 This analysis might also be fruitfully compared to the identification of principles governing a theory of justice (for a parallel with Rawls’s second principle, see Thévenot 1992b, 1996a).
- 19 Statistical categories, job evaluation scales, standards of competence or customary practices build equivalences among human beings. Also, norms of measurements, standards or conventional properties make things similar. On the “cognitive mastery over society” and the “conventionalization from above” which characterizes organized modernity, see Wagner 1994c.
- 20 On the relations between this “qualifying” process in everyday evaluations and legal processes, with concrete illustrations drawn from the present comparative project, see Thévenot 2000b.
- 21 The articulation between modes of evaluation and material arrangements [*dispositifs*] turns orders of worth into a useful tool for analyzing: organizational dynamics, modes of coordination of actions and conflicts surrounding them (Boltanski and Thévenot 1989, Eymard-Duvernay 1986, 1989; Thévenot 1986, 1989); labor laws and workplace practices (Chateauraynaud 1989, 1991; Dodier 1989, 1993b); banking (Wissler 1989a, 1989b); public services and local government (Lafaye 1989, 1990; Corcuff 1993; Camus, Corcuff, and Lafaye 1993); education (Derouet 1992; Normand 1999); health care (Dodier 1993a, Dodier and Camus 1997); arts (Heinich 1991, 1993a); associations (Camus 1991, Marchal 1992).
- 22 For an exception and a distinction of “modes of ordering” within an actor-network perspective, see Law 1994.
- 23 While some have taken on the task of documenting the flexible content of moral boundaries (e.g. Beisel 1997; Gusfield 1992; and Rieder 1985), others have focused on the content of cultural and aesthetic boundaries (Olivier 1997; Halle 1993), and on how different types of boundaries or principles of evaluation are brought together: moral and aesthetic/cultural boundaries (Beisel 1993; Blau 1996); moral and economic boundaries (Illouz 1997); moral and gender/sexual boundaries (Epstein 1992; Gamson 1997; Lichterman forthcoming; Quadagno and Fobes 1995); moral and racial boundaries (Bryson 1999; Halle 1984; Lamont 1997); moral and class/professional boundaries (Waller 1999; Schmalzbauer 1996); and cultural and class boundaries (Bryson 1996; DiMaggio 1987; Peterson and Simkus 1992; Zolberg 1992).
- 24 “The concept of repertoire is also used by students of social movements interested in “repertoires of contention.” See in particular Tarrow 1995 and Tilly 1997. On the use of this concept in a historical context, see also Tarrow 1993.
- 25 Swidler’s contribution was criticized for focusing on the supply side of ideas and downplaying the factors that push individuals to select certain tools rather than others (Lamont 1992, chap. 5; Berger 1995). Instead, it was proposed that to understand factors affecting the probability that actors use some boundaries rather than others, it is necessary to consider national cultural traditions, the relative influence of various institutions of cultural diffusion (reli-

- gious organization, mass media, educational systems, etc.), and structural features of societies. The relationship between models of evaluation (or symbolic boundaries) and broader cultural and structural features of societies are explored in a multi-dimensional causal model sketched in Lamont 1992.
- 26 On the concept of schemas and other devices that social psychologists have developed to capture the generalizability of information and knowledge across contexts, see DiMaggio 1997.
  - 27 They are also defined as “cultural environment(s) and the material contained therein . . . the socially constructed, readily available cultural materials of a society – the archetypes, the myths, the epigrams and adages, the morals, the means-end chains, the evaluation criteria, the categorization schemas, all of the materials of shared ‘tool-kits’” (Corse 1997, p. 156).
  - 28 We greatly benefited from the comments of Thomas Bénatouïl on these points.
  - 29 American symbolic anthropologists are now questioning the notion that the world is made up of societies with different cultures (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Our work is complementary to this line of work, as we also understand the apparent boundedness of cultures as something made rather than found (ibid. p. 20). However, we are not concerned with the process of making space into places, i.e. the process of formation of meaning associated with location, which is the object of the literature on national identity, for instance.
  - 30 This specific definition of “civic” is chosen for heuristic purpose from a large pool of definitions inherited from the French and American traditions of political theory.
  - 31 Civic solidarity is also present in our American case studies. For instance, the chapter by Lemieux and Schmalzbauer on French and American journalists shows that American Left-wing journalists consider journalism as a form of “social criticism” and describe themselves as advocates of the working class, the “marginalized,” and the “voiceless,” whom they define as victims of economic and political oppression. However, across our various case studies we find evidence that civic solidarity is less present in the United States than in France. For instance, while altruism is prevalent in the United States (Wuthnow 1991), it tends to be framed not in terms of an obligation to sustain human solidarity by reducing inequality, but in terms of philanthropic giving most often based on individualistic or religious beliefs (see also the chapter by Camus-Vigué that compares the role of altruism in French and American chapters of the Rotary Club; on this general point, see also Lamont 2000. Wuthnow (1991) and Ostrower (1996) provide detailed analyses of the individualistic rationales developed by ordinary and wealthy citizens for giving or engaging in institutionalized philanthropic activities; the evidence they present also suggests that the discourse on civic solidarity is marginal among available American representations of the meaning of giving. Note that Americans are considerably less willing to give welfare benefits to unemployed able-bodied adults than to children and the handicapped (Cook 1979). The interest raised by Putnam’s (1993b) argument – that American democracy is imperiled by the decline of civic associations and indicates the increasing marginality of “social trust” – also points to the relative marginality of civic solidarity (as we narrowly define it) in the American context.

- 32 Nathalie Heinrich argues that the forms of rejection are far more public in the United States (scandals, trials, petitions, demonstrations) and rely on the legal, political and constitutional resources available to the citizen.
- 33 This argument is also made in Lamont 1992, chap. 4.
- 34 The group includes six American and five French participants. It is diverse in terms of level of academic experience: While the project was in progress, it comprised two senior faculty members, one senior researcher, one junior faculty member, one junior researcher working in the non-profit sector, and six graduate students. Finally, three of the participants have intimate knowledge of both French and American societies because they have lived in the two countries for several years.