Book Review/Compte rendu

Mohr, John W., Bail, Christopher A., Frye, Margaret, Lena, Jennifer C., Lizardo, Omar, McDonnell, Terence E., Mische, Ann, Tavory, Iddo and Wherry, Frederick F. *Measuring Culture*, New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2020, pp. 256, $ 26 paper (9780231180290).

"*Measuring Culture*" provides an overview of how culture has been studied from different perspectives in the history of sociology and synthesizes the state of the art of empirical research in the sociology of culture. The book grew out of a series of "Measuring Culture" meetings and conferences initiated by John Mohr and Amin Ghaziani and assembles some of the leading sociologists in the field. It is a programmatic statement and an attempt "to repair the deep disconnections among cultural sociologists who so rarely engage in conversations about how to measure culture" (p. ix). The book consists of four substantive chapters, each covering research in different areas: people, objects, and social relationships. Each chapter provides a brief, topic-specific history of measurement, challenges to measurement, and examples of empirical studies where researchers have addressed and overcome these challenges.

The introduction clarifies the authors' understanding of culture and their take on the methodological problem of the duality of interpretation and measurement. The tension between formalization and interpretation, between hermeneutic immersion into and distant abstraction and quantification from the social environments that make up peoples' life-worlds is a recurring theme throughout the book. They answer this question pragmatically and empirically by providing a wide range of examples from different thematic areas, covering different empirical approaches, and spanning different measurement levels. The term "measurement" is used loosely here to denote a wide range of research practices and includes both quantitative techniques and qualitative approaches such as ethnography, participant observation, interviews, and focus groups.

The first chapter reviews how researchers measure culture in peoples' thoughts, talk, and actions. The chapter introduces the critical distinction between non-deliberative and deliberative thinking, which can be

broadly characterized as reflexive vs. non-reflexive or spontaneous vs. premeditated modes of thought. The authors relate this distinction to the insight from social psychology about different modes of cognition that people use to go about their everyday lives, formalized in so-called "dual process models". Talk, i.e., what people say, is presented as ideal for capturing peoples' aims, aspirations, and stories, which can be used to study shared ideas and collective narratives as expressions of meaning in speech. Relying on practice theory, the discussion of action focused on measuring what people do and the acquisition of new practices that might best be studied using participant observation.

In the second chapter, the authors aim at measuring culture through the objects that make up the material part of culture, such as texts or statues. They focus on the materiality of objects and how this provides a basis for meaning-making. They also discuss research into the production and consumption of objects, and, amongst others, the challenges to measuring novelty and innovation in cultural production and the identity of consumers of cultural objects. While the chapter's theoretical stance seems to be influenced by Bruno Latour's theoretical approach, treating objects as actants in their own right, the reader, fortunately, does not need to subscribe to this specific theoretical view to enjoy reading the chapter and gain from it intellectually. After all, it is not the pure objects themselves that make them culturally significant artifacts, but rather the different ways social beings perceive them.

Chapter three about social relationships outlines what measurement may mean concerning interactions, networks, and social fields. The discussion of social interactions highlights the role of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. Regarding network analytic tools, the authors describe three ways they can be useful: to explain (1) causal relationships between culture (such as opinions or tastes) and extra-cultural networks, (2) relationships between cultural artifacts such as statements in autobiographical narratives, and (3) the interaction of cultural and network elements to study their co-constitution, for example between socio-structural positions and discursive practices. As even broader social arenas, social fields encompass interactions, institutions, and networks and regulate their relationships. Unsurprisingly, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of capital and use of correspondence analysis feature prominently here. The chapter argues for a relational understanding of culture and the social world, and field theory is presented as an alternative to individualistic explanations of social causation. Empirically, this leads to criticisms of purely variable or attribute-based, "substantialist" modes of analysis. However, the authors also argue, importantly, that "attributes are often shorthand terms for relationships" (p. 127).

Chapter four represents a small study of scientific conduct in its own right, as it lays out the development of three exemplary research projects based on the respective publications, supplemented by interviews with the main researchers and investigators. For example, the research project by Wagner-Pacifici, Mohr, and Breiger measured political discourse, bringing together computational text analysis, network analysis, and classical hermeneutic reading and understanding of texts by human subjects. This combination of methods allowed for a more in-depth and broader understanding of text corpora than what would be possible with each technique alone. It is an excellent example of how computational techniques of text analysis and in-depth, hermeneutical readings of texts may not exclude but rather complement each other. All three projects exemplify how it is possible to enrich cultural and sociological analysis by pivoting between different modes of measurement and study elements.

In the concluding chapter, the authors review the future of measuring culture and outline some conceptual challenges and future research areas. They also critically assess the potential of computational social sciences for studying culture, tapping the vast amounts of textual, audiovisual, and other kinds of data available today. Together with quickly developing tools and computing power, those data offer new opportunities for cultural sociologists. However, the authors argue that, even when computational methods become more widespread, the role of hermeneutical readings and interpretations of texts and cultural artifacts remain an indispensable element of inquiry. At the same time, they warn against a rift that could appear "between the more interpretative among us and those who use quantitative methods and computational approaches" (p. 173).

Measuring Culture is an insightful and well-written guide through the field of empirical investigations in cultural sociology. The book convincingly argues that we need both interpretative, context-dependent, and more formalistic, abstract ways to capture cultural phenomena. Both approaches are ideally used in conjunction, strengthening and amplifying each other. The best practice examples where researchers have overcome challenges to measuring culture in people, objects, or social relationships serve as important points of reference for fellow researchers and sociology students on how to tackle measurement problems when researching culture.

It is clear that every attempt to provide an overview of the field will necessarily have to make choices about what can be and what cannot be covered and discussed. For example, the British tradition of cultural studies, pioneered by Stuart Hall, could have been mentioned as a vital

part of the field's history. Methodologically, structural equation modeling of latent variables could have featured more prominently, as this technique is well suited, for example, for cross-cultural comparison of value structures. Cross-cultural comparisons are missing almost entirely from the book. On the conceptual level, the inclusion of concepts such as performativity, speech acts, and linguistic pragmatics could have enriched the discussion, as they help to illuminate the interlinkages between meaning, actions, and interactional contexts.

These minor criticisms notwithstanding, the book is an impressive achievement and is likely to provide guidance on empirical research in the sociology of culture for a long time to come. While situated in cultural sociology, *"Measuring Culture"* tackles questions of great importance to the discipline overall and will benefit readers from other sociology areas too.

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Dr. Michael Weinhardt is a sociologist with a strong interest in sociological research methods and the combination of different data types. In his dissertation, he investigated the role of value orientations in the intergenerational transmission of social inequalities as an example of the intertwining of society's cultural and socio-structural reproduction. More recently, he has worked on research ethics in computational social science, the possibilities of citizen social science and administrative data to study entrepreneurial groups.

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