

Kinding Culture¹

Omar Lizardo

Department of Sociology

University of California, Los Angeles

Email: olizardo@soc.ucla.edu

¹ Reserved for acknowledgements.

Abstract

Cultural analysts make many implicit ontic claims about the nature of culture when developing and using various “culture concepts” for explanatory purposes. However, these claims are seldom made explicit, stifling and forestalling productive debate in the field. This paper provides a typological framework to analyze what I call ontic claims about cultural kinds, thus furthering ontological investigation into the nature of cultural things. I distinguish between four basic types of ontic claims analysts may make about cultural kinds: They can make claims about their composition, location, properties, and etiology. I show how various “culture concepts” in classical and contemporary cultural theory resolve into bundles of different types of ontic claims, yielding more or less defensible (e.g., with respect to such desiderata as coherence and compatibility with a physicalist ontology) renderings of culture. I close by arguing that etiological coupled with location claims are best at demarcating cultural kinds from other kinds studied in the special sciences, and that generally it is useful to distinguish between two broad families of cultural kinds, which I call cognitive and artifactual kinds.

What Kinds of Things are Cultural Things?

A relatively neglected task in cultural analysis is to specify the expected properties and typical characteristics of the sorts of entities labeled as cultural. That is, cultural analysts seldom stop to ask themselves the (ontological) question, most succinctly phrased by the anthropologist Dan Sperber (1996, p. 9), “what kinds of things are...cultural things?” More charitably, all serious cultural theorists ask themselves this question, if only implicitly because all make ontic assumptions about what they study; the problem is that they seldom note that this, namely, making *ontic claims* about the nature of cultural things, is what they are doing. The pervasiveness of this cognitive habit is why it is refreshing when a cultural theorist such as Margaret Archer just comes right out and says something like “a Cultural System *is constituted by the corpus of existing intelligibilia*—by all things capable of being grasped, deciphered, understood or known by someone...by definition the cultural intelligibilia *form a system, for all items must be expressed in a common language*” (1996, p. 104 italics added).

In this—admittedly rare—case the cultural theorist makes several explicit ontological claims as to what they think culture is, how the different “components” of culture fit together, and what properties they expect them to have. For instance, we learn that the Cultural System (CS) is made up of *intelligible* things. These things have the property of linking together to create larger clumps of intelligible things, that the nature of these intelligible things is language-like, and so on. Archer’s explicit ontic claims about culture are welcome because even if you disagree with them, at least you know what you are disagreeing with. This approach addresses one of the critical weaknesses of cultural analysis. Namely, as the sociologist Stephen Vaisey (2019) points out,² the lack of precise points and targets of agreement and disagreement among different proposals (G. Adams & Markus, 2004; Schaller et al., 2003).

² Personal communication.

Cultural Kinds

In this paper, I make headway on the issue of specifying the debate on the nature of culture by coming up with a more or less systematic catalog of ontic claims one can make about what I will refer from now on *cultural kinds*. The notion of cultural kinds is meant to be maximal regarding reference. It points to all the entities, simple or complex, that have historically figured as core explanatory factors in cultural analysis in sociology, anthropology, psychology, communication, linguistics, and related fields. In this respect, cultural kinds are the subject matter of a loose (and shifting) confederacy of disciplinary projects concerned with the study of culture. Just like the study of physical kinds is the primary interest of physical scientists (Millikan, 1999), biological kinds are the things biological scientists study (Wilson et al., 2007), cognitive kinds are the things that play core explanatory roles in psychology and cognitive science more generally (Samuels, 2009; Wheeler, 2015), and social kinds are the main things that social scientists are concerned with (Haslanger & Saul, 2006; Khalidi, 2013).

Culture

The compound idea of “cultural kinds” is composed of two (essentially contested) notions, that of “culture” and “kind.”³ I will not provide a strict definition of “culture” here, as it is unnecessary to establish some of the main points of the discussion. A key implication of the cultural kind approach is that coming up with unitary definitions of culture (or “the” culture concept) is a particularly futile endeavor since cultural kinds are a motley crew (Driscoll, 2017; Sperber, 1996, p. 14). They split into distinct subkinds (or “kinds of cultural kinds”) with overlapping, and possibly disjoint, sets of properties. The “culture concept(s)” of classical anthropological theory (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952), rather than being the primary subject

³ According to Gallie’s (1955, p. 171ff) classic treatment, all essentially contested concepts have a family resemblance partially due to the fact that they refer to internally complex, and contextually variable states of affairs. They are thus liable to partial characterization by different interested parties, in this way generating “contestation” in their use. The “motley” internally variegated, and historically changing debate on the nature of both culture and kindhood fit this portrayal well.

matter of cultural analysis, are best thought of as (provisional and always defeasible) clusters or *packages of ontic claims* about cultural kinds (with the notion of “ontic claim” to be further clarified later). The main job of cultural theorizing is not to provide unitary (and ultimately unnecessarily restrictive) definitions of “culture,” or a “culture concept” (pace Smith, 2016). Instead, culture theory should catalog and specify the nature of cultural kinds in all their empirical variety, the systematic interrelations between them, the most coherent set of claims we can make about them (Driscoll, 2017; Love & Wimsatt, 2019), and their relation to other kinds (social, cognitive, biological, physical) studied in the special sciences.

Kindhood

The other component notion of the compound “cultural kind,” is “kindhood.” The claim that there are such things as cultural kinds is meant to establish what I take to be a broad *realist* stance in prosecuting cultural analysis. Thinking of culture as a kind of thing is less common, so it is important to clarify what this claim entails. The first entailment of the claim that culture is a kind is that cultural kinds are things that exist in the world, and are the core subject matter of study of the various disciplinary projects dealing with culture and cultural processes (Sperber, 2011). Importantly, this does not imply that cultural kinds are empirically isolated or sealed off from the kinds dealt with in the other natural and special sciences. On the contrary, cultural kinds participate in a wide variety of relations (coupling, causal, dependence, constitutive, identity, supervenience, etc.), synchronic and diachronic, with biological, cognitive, social, and physical kinds.

The philosophical discussion on the notion of “kindhood” ranges across the cognitive, physical, biological, and social domains (Boyd, 1999; Haslanger, 2005; Khalidi, 2013, 2016; Millikan, 1999; Wheeler, 2015). This is a vast literature and different analysts propose different variations of what constitutes a “kind.” For our purposes, it is sufficient to adopt the relatively pragmatic and broad approach taken by the philosopher Daniel Weiskopf (2008, p. 147), who defines kinds as “groupings of entities that participate in a body of empirically discovered

reliable generalizations, and which participate in those generalizations due to some set of properties they have in common.” Weiskopf’s definition is sufficiently noncommittal as to the particular methods of inquiry used to make statements or discover generalizations about cultural kinds (e.g., hermeneutic, interpretative, computational, experimental, content-analytic, ethnographic, statistical, interview-based, etc.). It is also neutral concerning how delimited, qualified, or restricted to time, place, and historical context the relevant generalizations or statements about cultural kinds are, and what particular properties we take as most important in carving out the nature of cultural kinds, or serving as a “mark of the cultural.”

To claim that a given set of entities constitute a “kind” is both an ontic statement and a meta-methodological one. This last is what the philosopher Catherine Kendig (2015, p. 5ff) calls “natural kinding practices.” The basic idea is that explanatory activity in different scientific domains imply some partitioning of the world such that entities and processes under scrutiny stand apart from other things in specific causal roles (Glennan, 2017). A crucial part of what makes a given explanatory effort “cultural” (and not physical or biological) is that it invokes the operation of cultural kinds as one of the central cogs in the explanation. Insofar as cultural analysts point to cultural entities, activities, and processes as central to their explanatory projects, then they are engaging in such cultural kinding practices (except, as we will see, when a relation of identity or constitution holds between cultural kinds and other kinds), and at least implicitly acknowledging the existence and causal efficacy of cultural kinds (Sperber, 2011).

The Nature of Cultural Kinds

Ontic versus Epistemic Claims

In this section, I provide a typology of the types of ontic claims scholars typically make about cultural kinds. A principal aim of these considerations is to help cultural analysts be

more explicit about the claims they make about cultural kinds, thus allowing us to flag those we are most centrally committed to explicitly, allowing us to stake out a more precise position. Another aim is to spur the type of productive disagreement lacking in the field concerning the nature and expected properties of the cultural kinds we study and build our explanatory projects.

I draw on conceptual resources from a spate of related debates that have been happening in cognitive science for the better part of the previous two decades concerning the nature of the “cognitive,” centering on types of claims analysts can make about cognitive kinds (F. Adams & Aizawa, 2010; Rowlands, 2010; Wheeler, 2015). During the course of these debates, cognitive scientists have made some valuable distinctions between types of claims one may make about kinds studied in the special sciences that can help clarify analogous debates in cultural analysis. One such important differentiation, borrowing from the philosopher and cognitive scientist Mark Rowlands (2010, pp. 55–59), is between *epistemic* and *ontic* claims about a given kind.

In cultural analysis, epistemic claims tell us the best way to learn about the nature and properties of cultural kinds or their causal import. These claims can be positive (“the best way to learn about culture is by doing x”). But they can also be negative (“it is not possible to gain adequate knowledge about culture by doing x”) where x is (usually) some established method of inquiry in the social or human sciences (Mohr et al., 2020, p. chap. 1). Accordingly, when sociologists Colin Jerolmack and Shamus Khan (2014) argue that the best way to gain knowledge about situated practices is via direct ethnographic observation and not via interviews, they are making both a positive and a negative (respectively) epistemic claim about situated practices as a cultural kind. A lot of recent (productive) disagreement in cultural analysis in sociology has been about epistemic claims, of both the positive and negative variety, concerning the best method to use to learn about particular cultural kinds, such as beliefs, narratives, or values (e.g., Pugh, 2013; Swidler, 2008; Vaisey, 2009).

On the other hand, Ontic claims are about the nature or makeup of a given cultural kind and its expected properties. Thus, in the quote discussed earlier, Archer makes an ontic claim about the “Cultural System” when she tells us that it is “constituted by the corpus of existing *intelligibilia*.” This last is not a claim about the best way to study the Cultural System but about the sort of entities (and their properties) that make it up. Sometimes, analysts are not interested in cultural kinds per se but in a host of processes or activities (e.g., “social mechanisms” or “social-cognitive causal chains”) in which such kinds participate (Gross, 2018; Sperber, 2011). These can be processes involved in generating and sustaining substantively relevant social phenomena, such as symbolic boundary drawing (Lamont & Molnar, 2002), ethnic boundary formation, expansion, or contraction (Brubaker et al., 2004; Wimmer, 2008), institutional racism (Jung, 2015), and the like. In all cases, analysts make ontic claims, either explicitly or implicitly, about the nature of the cultural kinds (frames, schemas, beliefs, narratives, etc.) participating in the process in question. Surprisingly, even though ontic claims are usually more controversial than epistemic ones, there has been less productive disagreement about them in recent scholarship on culture in sociology, anthropology, and related fields compared to epistemic debate.

We have thus reached our first lesson: Debates about the nature of cultural kinds (ontic ones) should be kept distinct from claims about the best way to study them (epistemic ones). This is because epistemic claims about culture may have no necessary ontic implications. For instance, Jerolmack and Khan (2014) tell us that “talk is cheap” and that direct ethnographic observation is the only way to access situated practices. However, they do not tell us much about the nature of those situated practices, what makes them different from other cultural kinds, or how those practices enter into causal relations with other cultural (and non-cultural) kinds. While epistemic claims usually retain such neutrality concerning ontic claims, the reverse is not always the case. Ontic claims about cultural kinds can have profound consequences for the range of epistemic claims we make. For instance,

cultural analysts in sociology commonly make arguments to the effect that because culture has such and such properties or is this particular type of thing, then the best way to learn about it is via a specific method of inquiry (e.g., Alexander, 2003; Geertz, 1973; Reed, 2011; Vaisey, 2009; Wuthnow, 1989). Given the centrality of ontic claims for cultural analysis, it is surprising that a compendium of the range of ontic claims that we can make is still lacking. To address this, the following section proposes a workable typology of ontic claims about cultural kinds.

Four Types of Ontic Claims

There are four main types of ontic claims one make about cultural kinds:

1. First, ontic claims about the stuff of cultural kinds are made of, how many distinct types there are, or what I will refer to as *compositional* claims.
2. Ontic claims about the location of cultural kinds or the specific worldly sites we encounter them in, or what I will refer to as *locational* claims.
3. Ontic claims about the core features that make cultural kinds the things they are, what I refer to as *property* claims.
4. Ontic claims about the provenance of cultural kinds distinguishing them from non-cultural ones (e.g., physical, biological), or I will refer to as *etiological* claims.

The first type of ontic claim tells us about the underlying nature of cultural kinds; the second type of claim tells us where we should find cultural kinds when we look for them in the world; the third is concerned with the typical or criterial properties exhibited by cultural kinds, while the fourth focuses on the genetic processes that yield cultural kinds. A key conclusion of the discussion that follows is that debate in cultural analysis regarding the nature of cultural kinds would be much improved if analysts distinguished between these different types of ontic claims when building and proposing “culture concepts.”

Composition

What is Culture Made Out Of?

Let us begin with the first type of ontic claim. When it comes to a given kind, compositional ontic claims answer the question: “what is this thing (at least partially) made out of?” (a more general way, and therefore less useful, way of asking this is to say “what is the nature of this thing?”). Compositional claims also partially answer the question of the typical locations and properties of things, since they specify that because something is made out of stuff x , then it is expected to have properties $\{a, b, c, d\}$. However, ontic compositional and property claims are analytically distinct; for instance, two analysts can agree on a given ontic compositional claim, such as culture being made out of “ideas” or “propositions,” but disagree on the typical properties or locations exhibited by ideas or propositions (e.g., whether they naturally form systems or are primarily located in people’s minds).

Concerning cultural kinds, a compositional claim would tell us *what* they are made of and the nature of these or those parts or components. So, in the quote we considered earlier Margaret Archer says that culture is composed of entities she refers to as “intelligibilia” and that it is the nature of these entities to be “capable of being grasped, deciphered, understood or known by someone.” Archer also tells us that a property of cultural kinds is their ability to link up to one another via logical implicational chains to form “systems.” While Archer’s (1996) approach, following the philosopher Karl Popper (1978), is asking us to be a realist about seemingly non-material entities such as propositions and the abstract meaning of sentences (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. chap. 3), not all ontic compositional claims need to be highly controversial proposals. Some can be quite mundane. For instance, when it comes to what archeologists and anthropologists have traditionally called *material culture* (objects, artifacts, and so on that came about by way of human ingenuity and intervention), the ontic compositional question both straightforward and relatively uncontroversial: Material culture is made out of matter or “physical stuff.” This non-controversial compositional claim example is important, because a critical point of debate in cultural theory since the introduction of various “culture concepts” in

early and mid-20th-century anthropology revolved around more controversial, “metaphysical” issues regarding the very stuff of culture (Bidney 1968).

Idealism, Realism, and Empiricism in Cultural Theory

Compositional claims about the “stuff” of cultural kinds in classic anthropological theory helps us differentiate between two broad traditions of cultural analysis. Bidney (1968, p. 24) refers to these as the “realist-empirical” versus the “realist-idealist” conceptions (Risjord, 2012).⁴ Alfred Kroeber’s (1917) definition of culture as an ideational “superorganic” (but still real) entity was the most influential realist-idealist rendering in early anthropological theory. According to Bidney (1968, p. 51) Kroeber,

[C]ame to regard the abstract mental products of society, which he called culture, or civilization, as a reality *sui generis*, subject to autonomous historical processes of development which were independent of psychological experience and actual social behavior. He thereby converted an epistemic, or methodological abstraction into a distinct ontological entity, which he understood as an independent level of reality.

The Kroeberian idealist mantle was later taken by the functionalist theory of culture as a system of symbolic patterns developed by Talcott Parsons in the 1950s (Kuper, 2009), and developed (in post-functionalist directions) by students trained in the Harvard department of social relations such as Clifford Geertz and David Schneider (Keesing, 1974, p. 79ff). From this perspective culture was a kind of symbolic or informational pattern, ontologically distinct from the physical, material, or biological worlds of objects and people.

Another set of idealist approaches see cultural kinds as being coextensive with what are called cognitive kinds in the contemporary cognitive neurosciences. From this perspective, culture is a primarily mental or cognitive phenomenon. This is best exemplified in the work of

⁴ The “realist” label is misleading, especially given the wide variety of connotations that the term “realism” has acquired in philosophy of social science and social theory (Archer, 1996; Devitt, 1997; Elder-Vass, 2012). It is possible, for instance, to be a realist about ideas (a Platonic idealism or Popperian propositional realism), like Margaret Archer, and therefore to consider culture to be both real and ideal. So, the analyst’s stance regarding whether culture is “real,” needs to be decoupled from the more basic ontic claim, which is about what the stuff of culture is. Obviously, being a non-realist or fictionalist about culture as a kind is a (limiting) negative ontic claim, essentially saying that the term culture fails to refer to anything at all.

Ward Goodenough (2003), and the school of “cognitive anthropology” (R. G. D’Andrade, 1995) in the United States and the tremendously influential work of the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and the “structuralist” school (Leach, 1976; Rossi, 1974). Both perspectives make the ontic claim that culture is mainly composed of ideas, representations, schemas, cognitive models, and the like. From this perspective, the idea that culture can be non-mental (e.g., material, physical or artifactual) becomes problematic.

Specifying idealism and cognitivism in cultural theory as ontic claims about the underlying composition of cultural kinds clarifies the stakes that are involved in defending these positions. For instance, if an idealist cultural theorist postulates the existence of a cultural kind with no presumed material basis or physical realization they are making an ontic claim that has to be cashed in somehow. For instance, such a theorist, if they also countenance the existence of (in their terms non-cultural) physical kinds, will be forced to defend some type of metaphysical “substance” dualism, of the type René Descartes ultimately was committed to (Rowlands, 2010, p. 12). Here, in addition to objects with material substance existing, there also exist non-material (or spatially non-extended) objects, with perhaps the human mind being the most important of these, but perhaps including non-material “cultural objects” subsisting in their specific non-material realm, like Archer (1996), Popper (1978), and theorists in the idealist tradition of anthropological and cultural theory proposed.⁵

The problems with this type of substance dualism for cultural kinds are many and have been replayed in the history of anthropological and sociological theory since the inception of the “analytic” culture concept (Bidney, 1968; Kroeber, 1917). For instance, just like a Cartesian mind-matter dualist, and idealist cultural dualist would have to answer the question of “world₁ to world₂” interaction; that is how is it that entities from the “ideal” world come to causally affect entities and processes in the “non-ideal” (physical) world? By what

⁵ Another option is the idea that there are no such things as material kinds, and that all objects are made out of the same (cultural or mental) “stuff”; a subjective-idealist position most notably defended by Bishop Berkeley (Bidney, 1968, p. 25).

mechanisms or conduits do these interactions take place? One approach would be to expand or relax conceptions of causation, so that instead of talking about vanilla (efficient) causation, ideal cultural things exercise other forms, perhaps acting as “formal” or “final” causes (Reed, 2011). This would imply a circumscribed causal role for cultural kinds, making them distinct from the other special science (biological, cognitive, or social) kinds in the ways they operate.

One way to deal with these issues, and the approach recommended by Kroeber himself, is simply to deny that cultural kinds have any causal role outside their own “ideal” domain (an early version of the “cultural autonomy” thesis later developed by sociologist Jeffrey Alexander). In this case, cultural analysis reduces to the study of the “pure” superorganic cultural realm, in which ideal cultural elements affect other ideal elements locked in a high-level ether, floating above the world of biological, physical, and social kinds (White, 1959, p. 239ff). Cultural kinds may exercise efficient causation but only “endogenously” by affecting other cultural things (Kaufman, 2004). This approach solves the world-world interaction problem, but at the cost of rendering cultural analysis an isolated, hermetically sealed pursuit, making the study of cultural kinds completely disjunctive from the study of other kinds in the special sciences.

Given the rather intractable issues brought up by non-naturalistic, insubstantial conceptions of cultural kinds, analysts may want to forgo making ontic claims committing them to the postulation of such “real” but non-physical entities. Elimination of metaphysically suspect entities and substances and their replacement by respectable naturalistic equivalents has been the historical trend across all scientific disciplines over time (Lizardo et al., 2019; Thagard, 2014). This is less problematic for ideational cultural theories that take the fundamental realization of ideal elements to be located in human cognitive systems and the brain, such as Goodenough’s (1957) cognitive anthropology, the tradition of schema theory it spawned (R. G. D’Andrade, 1995), Lévi-Strauss’s (1963) structuralism, or Dan Sperber’s (1996) naturalistic approach to the study of cultural-cognitive systems. It is more problematic for

functionalist and post-functionalist “symbolist” theories of culture, such as Schneider’s or Geertz’s, that see it as primarily located outside the minds of people or in their public performances and activities. Without providing a well-developed account of the naturalistic foundations of public symbols, or even a plausible story of how internalized symbols are realized in the human cognitive system, public symbols theory remain in an ontological limbo (Bloch, 2012; Sperber, 1996; M. Turner, 2001), making strong ontic claims (e.g., symbols as the furniture of the world) only a surreptitious, unclear manner.

Material Culture versus Culture as Practices

What Bidney (1968) calls “empirical realism” in cultural ontology is based first on saying that culture is “not ideal” (an ontic compositional claim), and thus has a concrete (observable) empirical reality (of course question-begging on whether something like “ideas” can themselves have empirically verifiable realizations). But what are the more specific ontic claims made by those who consider culture to be non-ideal and therefore “empirical”? There are two broad perspectives here. We can differentiate those who make the ontic claim that culture is a set of material entities and artifacts (and thus consider culture to be material culture), from those who see culture as behavioral or practical activities, and thus inherently composed of human activities and behavior (Driscoll, 2017).

Culture as empirical can manifest itself as artifacts or as the sum total of acquired “customs, habits, and institutions” of a people (Bidney, 1968, p. 24). Definitions of culture pointing to customs, tradition, the “social heritage” and the like (such as Boas’s classic rendering of the culture concept (Stocking, 1984)) belong to Bidney’s empirical tradition (combining artifactual and behavioral conceptions). Keesing (1974: 75) points to later “cultural adaptationist” views of culture taking the realist mantle, noting that for these theorists, “cultures are viewed broadly as behavior systems characteristic of populations, extending and permuting somatic givens, whether we consider them to be patterns of or patterns for behavior is a secondary question.” Note that “behavioral” conceptions of culture as

distributions of activities and practices in human populations (Bagby, 1953), also make implicit ontic claims about the nature of cultural kinds. However, these are less problematic than those made in idealist theories because they do not entail substance dualism or subjective idealism. This is because practices and enacted behaviors have a more or less non-controversial grounding in the human body and social situations and are readily observable.⁶ Thus, the ontic claim here is that culture is composed of behavioral units or linked systems of such units (along with the material or artifactual complements of those practices).⁷

Location

Where are Cultural Kinds?

Locational claims are the type of ontic claims answering the question, “where is culture?” Everybody who makes an ontic claim about cultural kinds makes an implicit locational claim because entities, even non-material or non-extended ones, as Descartes pointed out, have to have a location (Rowlands, 2010, pp. 11–13). An entity’s nature usually determines its typical locations (e.g., standard material objects are located in physical space). For instance, Margaret Archer, in the passage quoted earlier, specifies that, since the Cultural System is made up of *intelligibilia*, then it is necessarily located in what Karl Popper (1978) referred to as World 3. This is similar to Descartes’ claim that even though the mind had no physical extension, it had a location near the pineal gland. In this respect, ontic locational claims are analytically distinct from ontic compositional claims.

⁶ This is of course unless analysts make the move, pioneered by Kluckhohn (and partially endorsed by Parsons), to say that culture is not the actual empirical behaviors, but the unobserved latent *pattern* standing behind them (Bidney, 1968).

⁷ A more restrictive version of this behavioral practice approach would make the ontic claim that culture is actually composed of distributions of procedural knowledge (Cohen & Bacdayan, 1994), in which case culture would also have to be grounded in patterns of connectivity and activation in the (e.g., motor) neurons in the human brain (partly) responsible for the generation of those practices (Lizardo, 2007).

Dual versus Single Location Claims

In less extreme versions of cultural theory, it is now commonplace to distinguish culture that is mainly located in the world outside of people versus that which is found internalized “in” people (Strauss & Quinn, 1997). For instance, the anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (1992, pp. 3–4) (quoted in Strauss, 2018, p. 109) isolates locational claims as one of the most basic ontic statements one can make about cultural kinds, separating the personal and public realms:

[C]ulture has two kinds of loci, and the cultural process takes place in their ongoing interrelations. On the one hand, culture resides in a set of public meaningful forms, which can most often be seen or heard, or are somewhat less frequently known through touch, smell, or taste, if not through some combination of senses. On the other hand, these overt forms are only rendered meaningful because human minds contain the instruments for their interpretation. The cultural flow thus consists of the externalizations of meaning which individuals produce through arrangements of overt forms, and the interpretations which individuals make of such displays.

The anthropologist Ward Goodenough was an anti-dualist theorist who proposed a single location claim for cultural kinds (which he equated with cognitive kinds). Goodenough defined culture as “whatever it is one has to know or believe...to operate in a manner acceptable to its members and do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves” (Goodenough, 1957, p. 167). Under this definition, only internalized concepts, ideas, and understandings count as culture. Not surprisingly, this proposal comes packaged with an ontic location claim because “what is learned must be located in people’s...minds and bodies” (Goodenough, 2003, p. 6 italics added). Insofar as it is people who learn and internalize culture, then “its ultimate locus must be in individuals rather than in groups.”

Single location claims have several implications, most of which are seldom made explicit by the theorist. For instance, as recently noted by Bender et al. (2010, p. 375), Goodenovian single-location claims “puts culture in the head rather than in the world,” this makes “the social and material worlds into things that people think about, but not things that people think with.” Recent work on the extended mind calls this implication into question,

showing that people can use culture in the world (e.g., external artifacts) to think with and not just to think about (Menary, 2010; Norton, 2020). Similarly, single-location claims link up to other ontic claims such as sharedness. This is because for analysts who locate culture exclusively in people (instead of a non-material cultural realm), the property of sharing does not come free. Instead, “[c]ultural theory must explain in what sense we can speak of culture as being shared or as the property of groups...and what the processes are by which such sharing arises” (Goodenough, 1981, p. 20).

The debate between dual and single location theorists exemplifies how we can sharpen and foster productive disagreements in cultural analysis by being specific about our ontic claims. For instance, key distinctions among different kinds of cultural kinds, such as the differentiation between “public culture” and “culture in persons,” or “external” and “internal” culture, first fully developed in cognitive and psychological anthropology (Bender et al., 2010; Strauss, 2018; Strauss & Quinn, 1997), are primarily of a locational type. We know that personal culture is “in” people, while public culture is “in” the world, and this is an important analytic point to make. We can make these claims even if the more controversial ontic claims about composition have yet to be worked out. We don’t have to agree about the underlying nature of culture in the world, but we can agree that it is *in* the world. The same thing goes with culture in persons; we do not have to agree about the way cultural kinds are internalized by people and the underlying form it takes in this state (e.g., cognitive, neural, ideational, conceptual, affective, etc.). However, we can agree they do get internalized by people, even if we have yet to work out a full theory of how this internalization happens (Quinn et al., 2018). A locational ontic claim would entail, for instance, that a person can carry cultural knowledge when they move around in the world, and this is different from the type of cultural knowledge embedded in material objects, artifacts, and other recording technologies (inclusive of

Archer's ontologically ambiguous "intelligibilia").⁸

Properties

What is Culture Like?

There is a third type of ontic claim one can make about cultural kinds. Here, what makes something culture is not necessarily the "stuff" it is made of (e.g., idea, artifact, or practice) or where it can be found (e.g., internalized by people or externalized in the world). Instead, possessing a set of criterial properties is necessary (or in some stronger arguments sufficient) to make a thing (or a complex configuration of things) culture. I refer to these claims as ontic *property* claims. These claims are of the form: "to count as members of the kind, cultural kinds must have or exhibit Z," where Z is either an intrinsic or relational property. For instance, an analyst might say something like, "to count as culture, X must possess property Z," where X is a candidate cultural kind. Alternatively, they might make those claims in a negative mode, as in "if X lacks property W (e.g., being shared, being systematic, and the like), then it does not count as culture."

Typically, ontic property claims are not made in isolation. Instead, analysts make linked *packages* of ontic claims yoking together property, compositional, and locational claims (e.g., Norton, 2019). For instance, analysts say things like "culture as internalized by people necessarily has such and such properties" (e.g., lack of coherent organization, inherent motivational powers). Alternatively, they might say things like "culture, externalized in the form of public symbols and performances, necessarily has such and such properties" (e.g., interpretability, normativity, systematicity, and the like). Even so, as I will argue in what follows, ontic property claims about cultural kinds are analytically and empirically separable from both composition and location claims.

⁸ Note that even anti-cognitive cultural analysts who say that there is no such thing as personal culture (because all culture is "outside the head" (Wuthnow, 1989)) are making a (negative or eliminationist) ontic claim in this respect.

Sharedness

One of the most common ontic claims in cultural theory focuses on sharedness as the focal property that differentiates cultural from other kinds. For instance, Elder-Vass (2012, p. 39) tells us that “the most fundamental feature of culture” is that it is

[A] *shared* set of practices and understandings. If each of us made an entirely unconstrained individual choice of what practices to perform, there would be no such thing as culture. Unless our practices are shared they are not culture, and they can only be shared if we are all somehow influenced by common practices...A *purely* subjectivist account of culture would thus be incoherent; it would lack the means to explain how culture can acquire the shared quality that makes it culture (italics in the original).

This statement is as straightforward an ontic property claim about culture as we will find. According to Elder-Vass, sharedness is an inherent property (“feature,” “quality”) of culture; things that are not shared are therefore not culture. Thus, under this ontic property claim, cultural kinds are necessarily (not contingently) shared, distributed, or diffused across multiple people; “not-culture” is, in contrast, unique to the individual, regardless of composition (Elder-Vass, 2012; Morin, 2016).

Note that Elder-Vass equivocates on this issue because he conflates the category of “individual” and that of “subjective” (these are distinct), seemingly yoking a compositional claim to a location claim (e.g., things that are “in” the individual or which depend on subjectivity are inherently not shared and therefore are not culture). Regardless, from this perspective, something is culture insofar as it is not a unique individual entity, but when it is instead shared or replicated across people (Sperber, 1996). The property ontic claim is analytically distinct from the “typical stuff” ontic claim and can crosscut it. Thus, we can have shared ideas, shared artifacts, shared behaviors, shared practices, and the like, all of which count as culture because they are shared. “Sharedness” (under this property ontic conception), and not the typical constitutive stuff, is the “mark of the cultural.”

Note that this positive ontic claim comes with an implicit negative claim: culture is not unique to the *individual*. An idea that occurs to a single person, a “private language” (for the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, a logical impossibility), an artifact that only one person

knows how to use, or a norm that only one person follows, is not cultural under this conception. This intuition, derived from the sharedness property claim, sometimes clashes against the related (locational) ontic intuition that culture can be “in” or “internalized” by people so that we can speak of such a thing as “personal” culture.

The sociologists Rachel Rinaldo and Jeff Guhin (2022) make this point explicitly:

[T]he idea of a wholly “personal” culture is something of an oxymoron, in a sense similar to Wittgenstein’s denial of the possibility of a private language...Personal declarative culture and nondeclarative culture are those elements of the culture contained within a person, whether their memories or future plans, their speech or thoughts, their bodily activities, or bodies themselves. Yet actual culture—whether practiced declaratively or nondeclaratively—is necessarily at once public and personal; otherwise it is hard to recognize it as culture, for, despite its multitudinous definitions, “culture” is nearly always understood as something with a social basis” (p. 36-37).

By a “social basis,” I presume that Rinaldo and Guhin use a “sharing” criterion for counting something as a cultural kind (S. P. Turner, 2014, p. 67). However, they are also making a hybrid location ontic claim (e.g., culture is both in people and the world). As we have seen, this last type of ontic locational claim is pivotal for characterizing the cultural kinds of most interest to social and cultural scientists. However, property and location claims must be kept distinct. People who reject the proposal that if something is personal (in the sense of being internalized by people via a learning process and then being “carried” by people after internalization), then it cannot be culture draw on Geertz’s argument for making the property “public” decisive for counting something as a cultural kind (Wuthnow, 1989).

However, as the anthropologist Claudia Strauss (2018, p. 111) notes, this argument is confused because “Geertz and his expositors conflate different meanings of *public* and *private*” (italics in the original). According to Strauss, the most prominent meaning of “public” simply means “external to people” or available for public inspection. So in this respect, a performance, a ritual, a stop sign, or a building are “public culture.” As Strauss points out, “public” can also mean “shared” or widespread. Under this last reading of the term “public,” cultural-kinds can be non-public and thus personal (a locational claim) and shared (a property

claim). This is how Talcott Parsons (one of Geertz's teachers at the Harvard Department of Social Relations) thought of internalized values. In this respect, the location claim (culture is personal) does not logically entail anything about the sharedness property.

Moreover, it is clear that sharedness as a criterion cannot have the magic ontological properties that its proponents sometimes think it has. A given entity can count as cultural kind regardless of whether it is shared or not. In this respect, using the criterion of sharedness to define cultural kinds from other kinds leads to incoherent ontological gerrymandering, committing the analyst to a "groupist" fallacy. This is clear if we follow the anthropologist Leslie White (1959) and ask the naive question: How many people need to share something for that something to cross the invisible boundary and go from "not culture" to "culture"?

...[I]f expression by one person is not enough to qualify an act as a cultural element, how many persons will be required? Linton...says that "as soon as this new thing has been transmitted to and is shared by even one other individual in the society, it must be reckoned as a part of culture." Osgood...requires "two or more." Durkheim (1938:lvi) needs "several individuals, at the very least." Wissler... says that an item does not rise to the level of a culture trait until a standardized procedure is established in the group. And Malinowski...states that a "cultural fact starts when an individual interest becomes transformed into public, common, and transferable systems of organized endeavor."

As White implies, it is implausible to suggest that an entity's nature is radically transformed by gaining the (relational) property of being a duplicate or being shared across multiple people. An artifact remains an artifact, whether it is unique or doubled, and so does an idea, belief, representation, skill, and so on. This was underscored by the anthropologist Gerald Weiss (1973) when sarcastically noting that:

...[s]ince there is no difference in kind between, for example, an idea held by one man [sic] and the same idea held by two or more, we are justified in stipulating that any human nongenetic phenomenon, shared or not, is a cultural phenomenon. The "group fallacy" that [for] culture to be culture [it] must be shared has only one thing to say for itself: it is widely shared (1401).

In this way, focusing primarily on the "shared part of culture" as a defining property perforce "exclude[s] individual ideas and inventions that appear only in certain contexts and are not necessarily agreed upon right away" (2004, p. 53). The anthropologist David Bidney

writing in his canonical monograph on theoretical anthropology agrees, noting that

The category of the social and that of the cultural are not identical, as is commonly supposed, since there may be social phenomena which are not cultural facts, such as the size of a given population, and cultural phenomena which are not social, such as the creation of a poem by an individual (Bidney, 1968, p. 28).

Building sharing into the definition of culture precludes the study of how culture acquires the property of being shared, the mechanisms by which such sharing happens, and the social interests involved in actually preventing such sharing (Morin, 2016; Sperber, 2011). As Ross (2004, p. 53) notes, dropping sharedness as a defining criterion, “opens up the possibility of including not only change, but also processes of social domination...in the formation of the shared part of culture.”

Systemness

Another common property claim about culture is that something is cultural only to the extent that it is organized as a “system” of lower-order cultural kinds. For instance, Norton (2019, p. 2) makes the ontic claim that (at least some subset of cultural kinds) form a “complex, intersubjective system,” melding a locational (culture is located in an intersubjective space) and systemness property claim. Quinn and Holland (1987, p. 3), on their part, observe that any cultural theory worth its salt needs to “explain the apparent systematicity of cultural knowledge. The observation, old to anthropology, that each culture is characterized, and distinguished from others, by thoroughgoing, seemingly fundamental themes.” Linking systemness to an entitative view of “cultures” as complex wholes made distinct from one another by the possession of certain thematic unities was a pervasive conceptualization of culture in classical anthropological theory, characterizing the work of both functionalist social anthropologists like Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, and members of the Boasian lineage of cultural analysis such as Benedict, Mead, and Kroeber.

Like sharedness, systemness property claims cut across other ontic claims, such as

those related to composition. For instance, theorists can conceive of culture as inherent “ideal” or “symbolic” but leave open the possibility for it to be organized as a “system”—or in weaker senses as an organized collection—of ideal entities, material artifacts, or behaviors (Archer, 1996; Bidney, 1968; Sewell, 2005). In the history of cultural theory, idealists have also tended to be coherentists (Parsons, 1951), but this need not be. As noted, ontic property claims usually come as a bundle. One usual bundle is that between sharedness and systemness. Accordingly, theorists in the “system” tradition of cultural analysis (such as Parsons and Geertz) also emphasize “sharedness” as a critical property of cultural kinds, yoking together the two property claims. Analysts who emphasize both systemness and sharedness make a strict differentiation between culture as a “collective thing” versus culture as an “individual thing,” making the couplet of sharedness and systematicity criterial for bounding cultural from other kinds. These analysts reason that, since culture is what is replicated, communicated, and ultimately shared across people if something is a unique individual trait, it is *ipso facto* not cultural (Elder-Vass 2012: 39).

Any type of systemic or “plural” conception of culture (e.g., culture as a complex object composed of a set of interconnected or inter-related “culture units”) necessarily invites the contrast of culture as a complex supra-personal object against the individual (Bidney, 1968; Kuper, 2009; Norton, 2019). However, whether the complex object is endowed with the ontic property of systemness does not entail the “culture versus individual” distinction. Yes, individuals can indeed stand opposed to culture as a complex whole endowed with systematicity and coherence (e.g., an overarching system of ideas) as they did in the mid-twentieth century functionalist conception of Parsons or Kroeber’s (1917) early theory of culture as an idealist “superorganic” realm). In this case, the linkages between the culture/not-culture with the collective/individual binary (such that culture corresponds to collective and non-culture to individual) seem warranted. However, this is not the only possibility. This stance is common among sociological theories of culture influence by

Durkheim or neo-Durkheimian considerations.

In other analytic traditions, especially ones that see culture as supra-individual, compositionally diverse (e.g., composed on amalgams of ideas, practices, institutions, artifacts, and the other cultural kinds), and therefore not necessarily systematic, individuals can come face-to-face “against” culture not as a complex, systematic object but as a loose and not necessarily systematic aggregation of everything that has been learned, recorded, and preserved before (whether in biological or external memory). This would include the entire artifactual or behavioral “social heritage” as conceptualized in the original Boasian conception of culture (Bidney 1968) and contemporary neo-Boasian alternatives (Risjord, 2012). From this perspective, there is no dualism between culture and the individual because a single individual can contribute to the overall cultural heritage (e.g., by coming up with a new idea, practice, or artifact). Moreover, there is no necessary requirement that this social heritage (composed of a number of distinct cultural subkinds) be arranged in an overarching system. Therefore, individual things (ideas, practices) are part of culture (or the overall cultural heritage), not its opposite. Thus, individuals do not “face” culture the way they would a systematic mass of collective elements but are active parts and contributors to the overall cultural process (Bidney, 1968, p. 133ff).

Provenance

Etiological Claims

The final type of ontic claim about cultural kinds is not about the stuff that it is made of, its usual locations, or about a special criterial property of this stuff; instead, whether something is cultural or not depends on its *etiology*. This answers the question: “Where do cultural kinds come from?” In classical anthropological theory, the difference between etiological and compositional claims about the “stuff” of culture was usually marked by pointing to the distinction between “culture” and the *causes of culture* (Bagby, 1953; Coulborn,

1952).

Etiological claims played a key role in demarcating culture from other phenomena in the French ethnological tradition; proponents of this approach made the (negative) ontic claim that culture was *not nature*. This implied that what made something culture was some type of non-biological or non-physical provenance. For instance, the nature/culture distinction was central to Lévi-Strauss (1966), who saw it as having fundamental implications for our understanding of humanity, history, and evolution. Thus, if something came into existence (e.g., in evolutionary or geological time) without human intervention (such as mountains, rivers, or tigers), it was not culture. By the same token, if the existence of something depended on, and could be traced (whether in historical or ontogenetic time) to human intervention (like a house, a plow, a writing system, or an incest prohibition), then it was culture. Even more pivotally, via human intervention, something could undergo an ontological transformation and pass from being a natural kind (raw meat) to a cultural kind (cooked meat) (Lévi-Strauss, 1969).

Etiological versus Compositional Claims

Like property claims, etiological claims cut across compositional claims about the “type of stuff” cultural kinds are made of. Thus, an idea occurring to a person, or a house built by a person, or a new system of billing and accounting devised by a person, or a new style of dancing invented by a person, all count as cultural kinds, even though here we are mixing compositional subkinds (ideas, artifacts, institutions, practices). What counts is not the underlying substance of the stuff, but the history of how the stuff came about. If something emerges out of a human-led creative process and not a natural process of biological maturation and physical change, then it is a cultural kind. Note also that human skills and abilities are a special (self-referential) version of this last etiology ontic claim. A human ability or trait is biological (and thus not cultural) if its existence and etiology do not depend on human intervention (e.g., the trait arises due to genes or pure biological maturation); a

human capacity is cultural if its existence (and thus etiology) involves people (whether the self or others), such as teachers, self-training, or a role model serving as a source to imitate. Thus, the ability to perform the Hopi Snake Dance is a cultural kind, but the ability to see using a normally developed visual system is not. Like before, in-between cases emerge as theoretically suggestive. For instance, while the general ability to see three-dimensional objects is not a cultural kind, by the etiology criterion, a specifically trained ability to see certain objects in particular ways is (Baxandall, 1988).

Etiological versus Property Claims

The last example suggests that etiology claims are not necessarily yoked to specific property claims. However, a positive argument can be made linking property and etiology claims. This means that etiology claims can lead to different intuitions than property claims concerning what counts as a cultural kind. This is because an individual token of a cultural-kind can meet the etiology criterion of being the product of human ingenuity and/or a learning process without having the property of being shared or being part of a larger cultural system (while a lot of learning is collective, some subset of learning is individual), which for some analysts are essential for counting as a cultural kind. Thus, a paranoid schizophrenic may develop a mapping between lexical items and referents that only they can decode (a private language). Although this private language will fail the sharedness criterion, it counts as cultural according to the etiology one because it is the product of an individual creative process (Bidney, 1968). In a (now classic) non-human case of this cultural process among non-human animals, when the macaque monkey named Imo started washing sandy potatoes at the river in the small Japanese island of Koshima (Kawai, 1965), the practice was cultural (according to the etiology criterion) even before other monkeys imitated her because it was a product of non-human animal ingenuity (e.g., Imo was not compelled to wash potatoes because of her genes or as a result of inexorable biological maturation). However, according to the shared property criterion, monkey potato washing only became cultural until

some critical mass of other conspecifics beyond Imo also began to engage in the practice.

Two Kinds of Cultural Kinds

Cognitive and Artifactual Kinds

It is possible to develop a useful taxonomy of cultural kinds by taking etiology as the most pragmatically useful property for demarcating cultural from other natural kinds, and ontic claims about location as cutting different cultural kinds at their joints. Following this approach to distinguish between different kinds of cultural kinds, suggests a natural division into two broad subkind families. On the one hand, we have cultural kinds primarily located in people, and developed, invented, learned, and internalized by them in some way (Quinn et al., 2018). I will refer to these as *cognitive kinds* (Wheeler, 2015). On the other hand, we have cultural kinds primarily “embodied” in material artifacts and other technologies and physical signatures outside of people (e.g., writing, technology, the built environment, digital or magnetic recordings, etc.). In what follows, I will refer to these as *artifactual kinds*.⁹

Dividing cultural kinds into cognitive and artifactual subkinds has a long pedigree in cultural theory. In fact, as noted by the philosopher turned-anthropologist David Bidney (1968), whether artifacts are recognized as cultural kinds provides the main line of division in 20th century cultural theory between what he referred to as “idealist” and “realist” approaches (see Risjord, 2012 for further discussion). For instance, Ward Goodenough’s distinction between “culture” and “cultural artifacts,” is analogous to that between cognitive and artifactual kinds. For Goodenough, only “learned” cognitive kinds counted as “culture.” Artifactual kinds did not count as culture because “the material objects people create are not

⁹ Cognitive is here used maximally to include such traditionally considered cultural kinds in the psychological, social, and cultural sciences as ideas, beliefs, habits, skills, and (personal) values, norms, narratives, and many more. All have an etiology in the activity, ingenuity, and experiences of people, and all come to be embodied in people via some specifiable learning, internalization, or experiential conditioning mechanism. For present purposes, we can ignore the details of the processes by which different cognitive kinds come to be internalized by people (see Lizardo, 2021 for discussion).

in themselves thing they learn”(Goodenough, 1981, p. 50). Instead, what people learn (in interacting with cultural artifacts) are “conceptions of them [artifacts]...how to use them, and...how to make things like them” (ibid). In establishing this point, Goodenough makes an analogy with language, noting that via “their experience of other people’s utterances, people learn a language; but the language is not the utterances. It is the percepts, concepts, recipes, and skills by which to make utterances...” (ibid). Here Goodenough couples a single location claim (culture only exists as personal culture internalized by people in the form of cognitive kinds) and offered a demarcation criterion based on learning (only those kinds that can be learned—internalized—count as culture).

The dual approach to classifying cultural kinds reveals why Goodenough’s proposal is too restrictive. The problem is in the demarcation criterion. Using the capacity to be learned or internalized to bound the domain of cultural kinds leads to Goodenough’s single-location, monistic conception by fiat. Instead, if we use the more accurate criterion of historical provenance (being the product of human creativity and ingenuity), then both cognitive and artifactual cultural kinds can be accommodated as proper members of the cultural domain, as was done in classical Boasian and neo-Boasian approaches in cultural theory (Risjord, 2012). In classic anthropological theory, artifactual cultural kinds were the kinds populating the realm of what was referred to as *material culture* (Bidney, 1968). I avoid this designation, for two reasons. First, I use the term artifact in a maximal sense (Heersmink, 2021, p. see for a similar approach), not just to refer to middle-sized objects and technologies, instead encompassing any signature on a physical medium that is external to people, from the material side of spoken and written language (see e.g. Clark, 2006), to the large-scale “built” environment, to such “social kinds” as money, promises, and marriage (see Roversi et al. (2013) for an explication of artifacts along similar lines). In one limiting case, the (encultured) human body, especially its effectors like hands, lips, and tongue (most notably in the production of “signals” with representational import) is the artifact par excellence (Downey,

2014; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962).

Second, the notion of material culture invites the (substance-dualist) inference that there is such a thing as “non-material” culture. But all cultural kinds, both internalized in people or externalized in artifacts, have a physical realization, in this sense, dualism is a non-starter; talk about “non-material culture” is eliminated as obscurantist nonsense, in the same way as Cartesian non-material cognitive kinds play no role in the contemporary sciences of the mind. As noted at the outset, the location claim is neutral as to the “stuff” cultural kinds are made out of, and the ontological claim with regard to substance is that both cognitive and artifactual cultural kinds are *ultimately* “made out of” the same (physical) stuff (Lizardo et al., 2019). As such, the overall approach recommended here is compatible with (relatively non-controversial) physicalist stances in contemporary philosophy and the sciences of the mind.

This is not to imply the actual physical realization of cognitive and artifactual kinds is comparable; the former mainly (core) realized in people’s brains, nervous systems, and bodies, while the latter is realized as external physical objects (with object maximally defined to include temporally evanescent objects like a pattern of sound waves in the air) and “assemblages” of such objects (O’Brien & Opie, 2002). Artifactual kinds thus have distinct ontic locations and forms of physical organization, although it is possible for an artifactual kind to have the same function as a cognitive kind (Wheeler, 2015). For instance, in Clark and Chalmers’s (1998) famous example establishing the intuition for the “extended mind” thesis, the artifactual kind “Otto’s notebook,” while located in the external world outside of Otto, has the same *function* (helping Otto remember) as would the cognitive kind “explicit memory representation” if it were to be located in Otto.

Cultural or Cognitive Kinds?

Is there a consequential ontological difference between cognitive kinds as defined here (and presumably the exclusive concern of the “social” cognitive and cultural sciences)

and the cognitive kinds of concern in the psychological and cognitive neurosciences (Samuels, 2009; Wheeler, 2015)? It must be clear by now that there is no fundamental ontological difference between these since, as argued earlier, acquiring the “shared” property, does not result in magical ontological transitions from one kind of thing to another. As such, the cultural (cognitive) kinds studied by anthropologists and sociologists are the same kind of things as those studied by neuroscientists, psychologists, and philosophers of mind (Bloch, 2012; R. D’Andrade, 1990; Sperber, 1996; Wheeler, 2015). There are not two sets of sciences studying two different kinds of things, but a single set of sciences (the cognitive social sciences) studying the same kinds of (cultural) things (Lizardo, 2014).

Recent moves in cognitive science to speak of the “extended mind” (Clark & Chalmers, 1998; Menary, 2010; Wilson, 2004) reinforce the idea that the cultural and the cognitive are largely overlapping domains. According to extended mind theorists, artifactual kinds, when reliably and properly coupled with brain-bound cognitive processes (and associated cultural cognitive kinds in the form of mental representations), can also be thought of as proper components of extended cognitive systems. Thinking of cognition in an extended sense means that cognitive activities can include the use of artifacts (e.g., pads, paper, pencils, and so forth) to engage in cognitive feats (e.g., solving a hard math problem) that would otherwise be impossible without them (Heersmink, 2021). This means both internalized cultural kinds and (some) subset of artifactual kinds count, under fairly common conditions as genuine cognitive kinds (Wheeler, 2015).

However, this does not imply that there is a perfect overlap between the cultural and cognitive kind domains. Some cognitive kinds are not cultural kinds. For instance, it is possible, as argued by linguist Noam Chomsky, the philosopher Jerry Fodor and the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, that there are such things as innate cognitive kinds (Khalidi, 2016), such as Fodorian inborn concepts, Chomskyan language faculties, Sperberian cognitive modules, or Levi-Straussian binary codes encoded in the human brain via genetic

mechanisms. The etiology criterion rules these out as cultural kinds, but they would still count as cognitive kinds. Other “innate” or purely biological cognitive kinds that used to play influential roles in the cultural and social sciences, such as the Freudian notion of “instinct” (Sulloway, 1992), would also be ruled out as cultural kinds, but they would still count as cognitive kinds. In the same way, such cognitive kinds as “primary” or “basic emotions” or “core emotional affects” fail to be cognitive kinds because their development and expression are primarily set by a biological maturation schedule, with generic and incidental environmental input (Khalidi, 2016; Panksepp, 2005). Other related cognitive kinds, on the other hand, such as the “secondary” or “social emotions,” “feeling rules,” or “emotional appraisals,” fall closer to the cultural kind side (Barrett, 2006).

Additionally, a variety of artifactual cultural kinds, either by intrinsic (e.g., a chair or a table) or contingent (an ancient knot-tying artifact for performing arithmetic nobody possesses the skill to use anymore) reasons, do not count as cognitive kinds. This is because they cannot be (in the case of chairs or tables) or are currently not (in the case of the obsolete knot-tying system) a reliably coupled component of an extended cognitive system (Heersmink, 2021). Whether non-cultural cognitive kinds should play an explanatory role in the social and cultural sciences is an issue that shall remain open but is not prejudged by the framework proposed here. Additionally, various non-cognitive artifactual cultural kinds (the vast realm of material culture) play a pivotal role in some brands of cultural explanation (McDonnell, 2016).

Concluding Remarks

In this paper, I have argued that the various “culture concepts” of classical cultural theory are best thought of as (more or less coherent) *packages of ontic claims*. Because these claims are usually made implicitly, various disagreements and controversies in cultural analysis are misread as debate about method, when they are in fact debates concerning claims about the nature of culture. Importantly, That different packages of ontic claims give us

different intuitions as to what counts as a cultural kind should not be a cause for despair. This is actually a widespread issue across many kinds in the physical, biological, cognitive, and social sciences (Taylor & Vickers, 2017). Instead, clashing intuitions further support making ontic claims explicit so that we at least know what we disagree about. As already noted, some progress has been made concerning locational claims. Still, analysts are a bit more coy when it comes to compositional, property, and etiology claims.

Another reason why being ontologically explicit pays off is that it can help us identify existing blind spots in cultural theory. For instance, property claims concerning sharedness are sometimes assumed to be conclusive rather than argued for explicitly. This is even though sharedness can be problematic for some of the things we would like to call culture (e.g., practices or implicit presuppositions) without proposing a mechanism leading to such sharedness (S. P. Turner, 2001). As intimated earlier, this implies that some ontic claims can be substantively (not definitionally) linked. For instance, the property claim that culture is that which is “shared” can be linked to the etiology claim by proposing a plausible mechanism(s) leading to sharedness: culture is that which is learned from others via instruction or imitation (Love & Wimsatt, 2019).

Finally, differentiating between different types of ontic claims about culture allows us to organize the various culture/not-culture binaries in a more comprehensive framework. So, as we have seen, while the juxtaposition culture/individual makes sense from a property (shared/not shared or public/private) perspective, it doesn't make sense from an etiological perspective. According to the etiology criterion, something can be cultural and be the product of an individual creative process (Bidney, 1968), or known only to a single person (or non-human animal) in the world (Weiss, 1973). In the same way, while the culture/biology or culture/nature opposition doesn't make sense from a property perspective (something can be shared because it is fixed by biology, like stereoscopic vision), it makes sense from an etiology approach. Finally, compositional distinctions such as the increasingly obsolete “ideal” versus

material culture opposition make sense from a compositional perspective, although they cross-cut history and location criteria.

References

- Adams, F., & Aizawa, K. (2010). The value of cognitivism in thinking about extended cognition. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 9(4), 579–603.
- Adams, G., & Markus, H. R. (2004). Toward a conception of culture suitable for a social psychology of culture. *The Psychological Foundations of Culture*, 335–360.
- Alexander, J. C. (2003). *The meanings of social life: A cultural sociology*. Oxford University Press.
- Archer, M. S. (1996). *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bagby, P. H. (1953). Culture and the Causes of Culture. *American Anthropologist*, 55(4), 535–554.
- Barrett, L. F. (2006). Are Emotions Natural Kinds? *Perspectives on Psychological Science: A Journal of the Association for Psychological Science*, 1(1), 28–58.
- Baxandall, M. (1988). *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*. Oxford University Press.
- Bender, A., Hutchins, E., & Medin, D. (2010). Anthropology in cognitive science. *Topics in Cognitive Science*, 2(3), 374–385.
- Bidney, D. (1968). *Theoretical Anthropology*. Transaction Publishers.
- Bloch, M. (2012). *Anthropology and the Cognitive Challenge*. Cambridge University Press.
- Boyd, R. N. (1999). Kinds, Complexity and Multiple Realization: Comments on Millikan's "Historical Kinds and the Special Sciences." *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, 95(1/2), 67–98.
- Brubaker, R., Loveman, M., & Stamatov, P. (2004). Ethnicity as cognition. *Theory and Society*, 33(1), 31–64.
- Clark, A. (2006). Language, embodiment, and the cognitive niche. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 10(8),

370–374.

- Clark, A., & Chalmers, D. (1998). The Extended Mind. *Analysis*, 58(1), 7–19.
- Cohen, M. D., & Bacdayan, P. (1994). Organizational Routines Are Stored as Procedural Memory: Evidence from a Laboratory Study. *Organization Science*, 5(4), 554–568.
- Coulborn, R. (1952). Causes in Culture. *American Anthropologist*, 54(1), 112–116.
- D'Andrade, R. (1990). Some propositions about the relations between culture and human cognition. In J. W. Stigler (Ed.), *Cultural psychology: Essays on comparative human development*, (pp (Vol. 625, pp. 65–129). Cambridge University Press, ix.
- D'Andrade, R. G. (1995). *The Development of Cognitive Anthropology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Downey, G. (2014). “Habitus in Extremis”: From Embodied Culture to Bio-Cultural Development. *Body & Society*, 20 (2), 113–117.
- Driscoll, C. (2017). The Evolutionary Culture Concepts. *Philosophy of Science*, 84(1), 35–55.
- Elder-Vass, D. (2012). *The Reality of Social Construction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gallie, W. B. (1955). Essentially Contested Concepts. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 56, 167–198.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. Basic books.
- Glennan, S. (2017). *The New Mechanical Philosophy*. Oxford University Press.
- Goodenough, W. H. (1957). *Cultural Anthropology and Linguistics*.
- Goodenough, W. H. (1981). *Culture, Language, and Society* (Second). The Benjamin/Cummings Publishing Company.
- Goodenough, W. H. (2003). In Pursuit of Culture. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 32(1), 1–12.
- Gross, N. (2018). The Structure of Causal Chains. *Sociological Theory*, 36(4), 343–367.
- Hannerz, U. (1992). *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning*. Columbia University

Press.

Haslanger, S. (2005). What Are We Talking About? The Semantics and Politics of Social Kinds. *Hypatia*, 20(4), 10–26.

Haslanger, S., & Saul, J. (2006). Philosophical Analysis and Social Kinds. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes*, 80, 89–143.

Heersmink, R. (2021). Varieties of artifacts: Embodied, perceptual, cognitive, and affective. *Topics in Cognitive Science*, 13(4), 573–596.

Holland, D., & Quinn, N. (1987). *Cultural Models in Language and Thought*. Cambridge University Press.

Jerolmack, C., & Khan, S. (2014). Talk Is Cheap: Ethnography and the Attitudinal Fallacy. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 43(2), 178–209.

Jung, M.-K. (2015). *Beneath the Surface of White Supremacy: Denaturalizing U.S. Racisms Past and Present*. Stanford University Press.

Kaufman, J. (2004). *Endogenous Explanation in the Sociology of Culture*.

<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.30.012703.110608>

Kawai, M. (1965). Newly-acquired pre-cultural behavior of the natural troop of Japanese monkeys on Koshima islet. *Primates; Journal of Primatology*, 6(1), 1–30.

Keesing, R. M. (1974). Theories of culture. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 3(1), 73–97.

Kendig, C. (2015). *Natural Kinds and Classification in Scientific Practice*. Routledge.

Khalidi, M. A. (2013). *Natural Categories and Human Kinds: Classification in the Natural and Social Sciences*. Cambridge University Press.

Khalidi, M. A. (2016). Innateness as a natural cognitive kind. *Philosophical Psychology*, 29(3), 319–333.

Kroeber, A. L. (1917). The Superorganic. *American Anthropologist*, 19(2), 163–213.

- Kroeber, A. L., & Kluckhohn, C. (1952). Culture: a critical review of concepts and definitions. *Papers. Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology, Harvard University*, 47(1), 223.
- Kuper, A. (2009). *Culture: The Anthropologists' Account*. Harvard University Press.
- Lamont, M., & Molnar, V. (2002). The study of symbolic boundaries. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28, 167–195.
- Leach, E. (1976). *Culture and Communication: The Logic by which Symbols Are Connected. An Introduction to the Use of Structuralist Analysis in Social Anthropology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Levi-Strauss, C. (1963). *Structural anthropology*. Doubleday.
- Levi-Strauss, C. (1966). *The Savage Mind*. University of Chicago Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1969). *The Raw and the Cooked*. Harper & Row.
- Lizardo, O. (2007). “Mirror neurons,” collective objects and the problem of transmission: Reconsidering Stephen Turner’s critique of practice theory. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*.
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1468-5914.2007.00340.x>
- Lizardo, O. (2014). Beyond the Comtean schema: The sociology of culture and cognition versus cognitive social science. *Sociological Forum*.
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/socf.12130>
- Lizardo, O., Sepulvado, B., Stoltz, D. S., & Taylor, M. A. (2019). What can cognitive neuroscience do for cultural sociology? *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 1–26.
- Love, A. C., & Wimsatt, W. C. (2019). Explaining cultural evolution: An interdisciplinary endeavor. In *Beyond the Meme: Development and Structure in Cultural Evolution: Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* (pp. vii – xxxii). University of Minnesota Press.
- McDonnell, T. E. (2016). *Best Laid Plans: Cultural Entropy and the Unraveling of AIDS Media Campaigns*.

University of Chicago Press.

Menary, R. (2010). *The Extended Mind*. MIT Press.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of Perception* (C. Smith, trans.). Routledge & Kegan Paul.

(Original work published 1945)

Millikan, R. G. (1999). Historical kinds and the "special sciences." *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, 95(1/2), 45–65.

Mohr, J. W., Bail, C. A., Frye, M., Lena, J. C., Lizardo, O., McDonnell, T. E., Mische, A., Tavory, I., & Wherry, F. F. (2020). *Measuring Culture*. Columbia University Press.

Morin, O. (2016). *How Traditions Live and Die*. Oxford University Press.

Norton, M. (2019). Meaning on the move: synthesizing cognitive and systems concepts of culture. In *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* (Vol. 7, Issue 1, pp. 1–28).

<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41290-017-0055-5>

Norton, M. (2020). Cultural sociology meets the cognitive wild: advantages of the distributed cognition framework for analyzing the intersection of culture and cognition. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 8(1), 45–62.

O'Brien, G., & Opie, J. (2002). Radical connectionism: thinking with (not in) language. *Language & Communication*, 22(3), 313–329.

Panksepp, J. (2005). On the Embodied Neural Nature of Core Emotional Affects. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 12(8-9), 158–184.

Parsons, T. (1951). *The Social System*. The Free Press.

Popper, K. (1978). *Three Worlds*. Tanner Lecture on Human Values, University of Michigan .

https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_documents/a-to-z/p/popper80.pdf

- Pugh, A. J. (2013). What good are interviews for thinking about culture? Demystifying interpretive analysis. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 1, 42–68.
- Quinn, N., Sirota, K. G., & Stromberg, P. G. (2018). Conclusion: Some Advances in Culture Theory. In N. Quinn (Ed.), *Advances in Culture Theory from Psychological Anthropology* (pp. 285–327). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Reed, I. A. (2011). *Interpretation and social knowledge: On the use of theory in the human sciences*. University of Chicago Press.
- Rinaldo, R., & Guhin, J. (2022). How and Why Interviews Work: Ethnographic Interviews and Meso-level Public Culture. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 51(1), 34–67.
- Risjord, M. (2012). Models of culture. *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Social Science*, 387–408.
- Rossi, I. (1974). *The unconscious in culture: the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss in perspective*. Dutton Childrens Books.
- Ross, N. (2004). *Culture and Cognition: Implications for Theory and Method*. SAGE.
- Roversi, C., Borghi, A. M., & Tummolini, L. (2013). A Marriage is an Artefact and not a Walk that We Take Together: An Experimental Study on the Categorization of Artefacts. *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, 4(3), 527–542.
- Rowlands, M. (2010). *The New Science of the Mind: From Extended Mind to Embodied Phenomenology*. MIT Press.
- Samuels, R. (2009). The magical number two, plus or minus: Dual-process theory as a theory of cognitive kinds. In *Two Minds: Dual Processes and beyond*, 129–146.
- Schaller, M., Conway, L. G., & Crandall, C. S. (2003). The psychological foundations of culture: An introduction. In *The psychological foundations of culture* (pp. 12–21). Psychology Press.

- Sewell, W. H., Jr. (2005). The concept (s) of culture. *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn*, 76–95.
- Smith, C. (2016). The Conceptual Incoherence of “Culture” in American Sociology. *The American Sociologist*, 47(4), 388–415.
- Sperber, D. (1996). *Explaining culture: A naturalistic approach*. Blackwell Publishers.
- Sperber, D. (2011). A naturalistic ontology for mechanistic explanations in the social sciences. In P. Demeulenaere (Ed.), *Analytical sociology and social mechanisms* (pp. 64–77). Cambridge University Press.
- Stocking, G. W. (1984). *Functionalism Historicized: Essays on British Social Anthropology*. University of Wisconsin Press.
- Strauss, C. (2018). The Complexity of Culture in Persons. In N. Quinn (Ed.), *Advances in Culture Theory from Psychological Anthropology* (pp. 109–138). Springer International Publishing.
- Strauss, C., & Quinn, N. (1997). *A cognitive theory of cultural meaning* (Vol. 9). Cambridge University Press.
- Sulloway, F. J. (1992). *Freud, Biologist of the Mind: Beyond the Psychoanalytic Legend*. Harvard University Press.
- Swidler, A. (2008). Comment on Stephen Vaisey’s “Socrates, Skinner, and Aristotle: Three ways of thinking about culture in action.” *Sociological Forum*, 23(3), 614–618.
- Taylor, H., & Vickers, P. (2017). Conceptual fragmentation and the rise of eliminativism. *European Journal for Philosophy of Science*, 7(1), 17–40.
- Thagard, P. (2014). Explanatory Identities and Conceptual Change. *Science & Education*, 23(7), 1531–1548.
- Turner, M. (2001). *Cognitive Dimensions of Social Science*. Oxford University Press.
- Turner, S. P. (2001). Throwing out the tacit rule book: Learning and practices. In T. Schatski, K.

Knorr-Cetina, & E. von Savigny (Eds.), *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (pp. 120–130).
Routledge.

Turner, S. P. (2014). *Understanding the tacit*. Routledge.

Vaisey, S. (2009). Motivation and Justification: A Dual-Process Model of Culture in Action. *American Journal of Sociology*, 114(6), 1675–1715.

Weiskopf, D. A. (2008). The plurality of concepts. *Synthese*, 169(1), 145.

Weiss, G. (1973). A Scientific Concept of Culture. *American Anthropologist*, 75(5), 1376–1413.

Wheeler, M. (2015). *A tale of two dilemmas: cognitive kinds and the extended mind*.

<http://dspace.stir.ac.uk/handle/1893/23589>

White, L. A. (1959). The Concept of Culture. *American Anthropologist*, 61(2), 227–251.

Wilson, R. A. (2004). *Boundaries of the Mind: The Individual in the Fragile Sciences - Cognition*. Cambridge University Press.

Wilson, R. A., Barker, M. J., & Brigandt, I. (2007). When Traditional Essentialism Fails: Biological Natural Kinds. *Philosophical Topics*, 35(1/2), 189–215.

Wimmer, A. (2008). The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries: A Multilevel Process Theory. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 113(4), 970–1022.

Wuthnow, R. (1989). *Meaning and moral order: Explorations in cultural analysis*. University of California Press.