Chapter 13

On Culture, Thick and Thin:

Toward a Neo-Cultural Synthesis

William Mishler and Detlef Pollack

The concept of political culture is concurrently among the most celebrated and the most contested in political science. Although it has long been a staple of political analysis, the concept has excited controversy virtually from the moment it was imported from other disciplines. Over the years, the concept has attracted widespread criticism and generated considerable debate from both without and within. Among scholars working outside the tradition, the concept of political culture (and of culture more generally) has been attacked in various ways as a throwback to discredited ideas about national character or racial stereotypes (Abu-Lughod, 1999), as circular or tautological,' or as nothing more than a statistical error term (Erickson, McIver and Wright 1987; Aldrich, Sullivan and Borgida 1989) -the residual that cannot be explained by institutional structure and individual behaviour. Internally, as well, advocates of the concept contest not only the nature and meaning of political culture but also its measurement and distribution and its relationship, if any, to a variety of other important concepts including economic development and democracy.

It is difficult to restore value and meaning to a concept that has long suffered from such abuse. The temptation is simply to abandon the concept and the baggage it carries and to go searching for other concepts that might be less value-laden and emotionally charged. Indeed, a number of political scientists have done precisely this, choosing to drop the language of culture and to focus instead on concepts such as political attitudes and values, public opinion, political behavior, or even political rituals and symbols.' Nevertheless, the concept of culture has demonstrated remarkable tenacity. It has weathered intense criticism and not only survived but mounted an impressive comeback over the past decade (see, for example, such studies as Englehart, 1990, Putnam, 1993, or Diamond, 1999). Indeed, Eckstein (1988: 789) goes so far as to argue that `Political culture theory may plausibly be considered one of two still viable general approaches to political theory and explanation proposed since the early 1950s . . . the other being political rational choice theory'. Clearly, the popularity of the concept and its resilience in the face of persistent and intense criticism support the value of continuing efforts to come to terms with the concept and to achieve a better understanding of its meanings and potential applications.

The contributions to this volume illustrate both the richness and the diversity of political culture research. In fact, the diversity is so great and the differences in their assumptions, methods and conclusions are so profound as to raise again the question of whether it is possible to say anything meaningful about the concept of political culture or its relationship to democracy. It is the thesis of this chapter, however, that much of the confusion and conflict over the concept of political culture derive from the uneasy and often unrecognized coexistence of two very popular but fundamentally different concepts of culture in the literature. We describe these competing conceptions of culture as thick and thin. At the heart of this distinction is the argument that the concept of culture, as imported and adapted from anthropology, sociology, and psychology over the years, has evolved in ways that have fundamentally transformed its meaning. The concept of culture

as borrowed from anthropology emphasized culture's aggregate and holistic nature, its rootedness in history, its connectedness to society and ethnicity, its stability and resistance to change, its coherent structure as a network of meanings, its deductive character, and its exogenous nature as a determinant of both political structure and behaviour. Adapted to political science over the years, the concept has increasingly emphasized the individual or micro-level character of culture, the divisibility and even the independence of its parts, its diversity both within and across societies and groups, its dynamism and susceptibility to change, its ambivalence and heterogeneity, its inductive character, and its fundamental political endogenous nature. In this chapter, we elaborate the distinction between thick and thin culture and attempt to show, in the context of the research presented in this volume, how a neo-cultural conception clarifies the differences between two very divergent research traditions and how it restores a measure of meaning to political cultural research.

Thick Culture

The concept of culture has occupied a prominent position in political science since the beginning of the discipline. A search of JSTOR shows that the earliest reference is by Burgess (1886) in the very first issue of the Political Science Quarterly. Indeed, JSTOR, which includes only a small subset of political science journals, records more than 4,000 articles referencing the concept since 1886, including more than 900 articles prior to 1950. The first use of the more specialized concept, `political culture', found by JSTOR is by Partl (1926) in the American Political Science Review, although this variation of the culture concept did not become widely spread in the discipline until the 1950s and 1960s. As with many fundamental concepts in political science, the idea of culture was imported from, and heavily influenced by other disciplines, originally history and anthropology, and later sociology and psychology, especially psychoanalysis and what Almond and Verba (1963) refer to as the `psycho-cultural approach'.

Although there is a tendency to assume the existence of a `classic conception' of culture that once claimed widespread acceptance in the social sciences some time in the halcyon past, Brumann (1999) not only demonstrates that the concept has always been subject to multiple and conflicting meanings but also that the existence of culture has long excited controversy.' Sapir (1924), for example, identifies three `senses' of the term culture then in use in a famous article,' rejecting two of them and arguing strongly for the superiority of the third conception, which he modestly labelled `genuine culture'. Nevertheless, while it is impossible to find consensus on a single conception of culture, it is possible to construct an ideal typical conception of culture from a common core of characteristics and assumptions widely if not universally shared by classical conceptions. While perhaps no single conception of culture has ever embraced all of these elements, most of the early conceptions and many contemporary ones reflect most of these basic elements and are sympathetic to the underlying idea of what we call traditional or `thick culture'. The essential idea of thick culture is that societies are distinguished and structures (and individual behaviour) are fundamentally conditioned by a primordial force, unseen but highly palpable, which contains the genetic code of all that is collectively important and meaningful in that society. A classic definition of a thick culture is Tylor's *(1871: 1)* venerable formulation of culture as `that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society'. The idea of thick culture is very much in concert with the definitions of such prominent contemporary anthropologists as Geertz *(1973)* and Bourdieu *(1972).* It is also consonant with the ideas of

Eckstein *(1988),* Huntington *(1996),* Inglehart *(1990),* and Putnam *(1993)* in political science, and even more so with the ideas of most area specialists in the discipline.

Underlying a thick conception of culture is a series of assumptions, which we have numbered at seven but which could be combined or divided in various ways into a larger or smaller number of categories.' These assumptions are:

1.*Thick culture is essential; it is real and it matters:* Societies, or at least significant subgroups of societies, are distinguished by a fundamental consensus on basic values and beliefs, shared symbols and meanings, and basic social practices and institutions (e.g., family, marriage, authority patterns). The practice and meaning of shaking hands are ubiquitous and well understood as a form of social greeting in American and European societies but not so in Japanese society, where bowing is the understood symbol of social greeting. In its extreme form, culture captures and reflects the essence of a people and `becomes nearly synonymous with the "spirit" or "genius" of a people' (Sapir, *1924: 405).* As such, culture is the key to understanding both society and politics. Culture may (or may not) determine political structure, individual attitudes, or behaviour, but it does at least substantially condition them (Eckstein, *1988).* Situations do not have a direct impact on behaviour, but behaviour is severely constrained by culture. Thus, culture has profound effects, direct or indirect, on social, economic, and political development, including, in particular, society's potential for developing and sustaining democracy. Democracy needs an appropriate culture as a precondition for its functioning. Nevertheless, culture is often unconscious (Laitin, *1988).* While it is manifest in the behaviour of individuals, many if not all members of societies may take the practices in which they are engaged for granted, unaware of their existence or significance.

2. *Thick culture is fundamental if not primordial:* Cultural meanings are historically rooted and deeply embedded in a society's institutions and practices (Geertz *1963).* Culture is transmitted from one generation to the next through socialization processes in which the role of family and kinship groups are primary (Elkin *1960;* Dawson et al. *1969).* As such, the transmission of culture is emotionally based and non-rational. Meanings are taught; they are socially conveyed rather than independently experienced or rationally acquired.

3. *Thick culture is exogenous:* Culture is a given. It precedes and shapes both institutions and behaviour. Although in the long term culture may evolve in response to institutional performance and individual behaviour, in the short term the arrow only runs one way.

4. *Thick culture is holistic:* Culture is an indivisible property at group-level and is undefinable at the level of the individual citizen. While many thick culturalists are metaphysical holists (Broadbent *1968),* subscribing to the idea that culture is indivisible in theory and exists only at the group-level, virtually all are at least methodological holists who believe that, even if culture can be measured at the micro-level in principle, the concept is far too rich and complex to yield to measurement at an individual level in practice. Thus, culture must always be measured at the group-level. As a consequence, the measurement of thick culture is widely assumed to require ethnographic analysis and field work (Laitin *1988).* Thick culture yields only to thick description (Geertz *1973).* Combined with the assumption that culture is frequently unconscious (Laitin *1988),* this means that survey research is almost never capable of capturing thick culture.

5. Thick culture is externally bounded and internally homogenous: Culture defines what is common in one group and what distinguishes it from others. In its strong form, it separates `we' from `they'. In a weaker, statistical sense it assumes that there is relatively little variation within a group on fundamental meanings and behaviours or, at the very least, that within a group differences are smaller than differences between various groups. Although the term `group', in this sense, typically refers to a whole society, it may also refer to societal subgroups. In either case, however, there is a strong emphasis on the ethno-linguistic homogeneity of the group. Culture is substantially a function of language.

6. Thick culture is a coherent cluster of orientations: The elements of the belief system shape a logically connected whole. If attitudes, value orientations, and norms are transmitted. through socialization processes, and if later learning is conditioned by earlier learning, then worldviews, cognitive maps and interpretative schemes must form a coherent pattern. They are not in dissonance; otherwise they would not be able to guide people's behaviour.

7. Thick culture is durable: Culture may not be static, but at a minimum it is highly viscous - it changes very slowly, if at all, over decades or generations and then only in response to profound social change. Public opinion and even behaviour may change relatively quickly, but culture shift is evolutionary. Moreover, the direction of cultural change is monotonic. Culture does not fluctuate or oscillate in the short to medium term, it `oozes' slowly and uni-directionally from one stable state to another.

Thin Culture

Just as the traditional, thick conception of culture is an ideal type that may not be fully manifest in any specific `real world' referent, the concept of thin culture is also an abstraction. Indeed, thick and thin culture should be understood not as separate and discrete concepts but as the idealized end-points of a single conceptual continuum. Thin culture does not exist independently of thick culture. Rather, thin culture is defined in contradistinction to thick culture. It is an idea that has been cultivated over time by social scientists who on theoretical or empirical grounds, reject one or more of the basic assumptions of the classical conception. Thin culture can be thought of as a product of a series of `saving moves' (Lakatos *1970)* by political scientists eager to retain as much of the culture concept as they can while diluting or discarding various aspects of thick culture which are perceived to be incompatible with theory or inconsistent with observation. Indeed, in this sense, in contrast to the previous suggestion, thin culture might be better understood not as the opposite end of the thick culture continuum but rather as a point somewhere in the middle of a continuum between thick culture and no culture at all, as illustrated in Figure 13.1. At its `thinnest', thin culture is the end of the *visible* spectrum of the culture continuum. It is akin to the smile of the Cheshire Cat (Lewis Carroll), which is the last visible aspect of the cat before the whole animal disappears into nothingness. If behaviour can be explained without any reference to culture, only by rational motives of actors, then the point of no culture at all is reached. This means that variation in attitudes or behaviour can be explained exclusively by the social situation, rational interests, or social structure. Max Weber *(1972)* suggested an explanation of social action by referring to rational motives, and suggested turning

to value rational, traditional, affective, or irrational causes only if one fails at explaining behaviour with rational motives. At this point, we are very much in line with the rational choice approach.
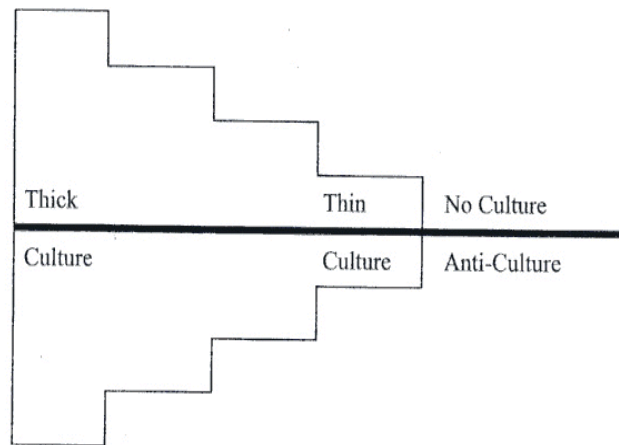

Figure 13.1 A cultural continuum

Efforts at `thinning' the concept of culture have a long history in the social sciences, but systematic efforts in political science can be traced back to the behavioural movement in the *1950s* and *1960s* and, specifically, to the efforts of Gabriel Almond *(1956)* and the Committee on Comparative Politics of the Social Science Research Council. The Committee on Comparative Politics set out to encourage a more `scientific' study of politics that was less concerned with area or country studies and more concerned with the development of concepts and methods that could be used in comparative analyses and theory development. In this context, Lucien Pye *(1965: 6)* seized on the concept of culture as one that `may be particularly well adapted for comparing and classifying political systems in terms that are relevant for understanding the character of political development and change . . . an approach which can exploit the richness of the separate traditions of country and area studies while keeping attention focused on universal problems and processes basic to the human condition'.

　　In trying to reconcile the traditional conception of thick culture with the individualist orientation and methods of behaviouralism, early political culture studies began to thin the idea

of culture.' Thus, Almond and Verba *(1963: 13),* in their classic study *The Civic Culture,* explicitly abandon the holistic assumption of thick culture (which they call homogeneity), embracing instead an individualist conception of political culture as `the particular distribution of patterns of orientation toward political objects among members of the nation'. They also thinned, albeit implicitly and less extensively, the assumption of cultural durability. The latter is reflected in their optimistic assessment of the possibilities of developing civic cultures in nations not currently possessing them (pp. *365* ff) and in their emphasis on alternatives to early life socialization as sources of culture acquisition *(pp. 299* ff). Indeed, thin culture adherents typically speak not of culture per se but of `political culture' or `civic culture' as a way of distinguishing their concept of culture from older, thicker concepts.

In the decades that followed, virtually all of the basic assumptions of thick culture came under close scrutiny, and the concept was largely abandoned as a serious analytic tool except by area study scholars (Ward *1974).* More recently, the concept of culture has been resurrected, partly by traditional scholars attempting to reassert the importance of thick culture (see Inglehart, *1988;* Putnam, *1993)* but even more so by students of political behaviour seeking to counter the hegemonic ambitions of rational choice theory and/or neo-institutionalism. The latter, however, have advanced a much thinner conception of culture, rejecting or significantly modifying virtually all core assumptions of thick culture. Specifically:

1. *Thin culture is empirical; it may (or may not) matter:* Political systems can be differentiated by the distributions of *political attitudes and values* of their populations. The nature extent, and political significance of these differences, however, are not given but rather are empirical questions, the answers to which must be determined inductively. Political culture can have important effects on the development and stability of democracy, but a civic culture is neither necessary nor sufficient for democratic governance. Instead of culture, economic and/or political performance is seen as crucial.

2. *Thin culture is constructivist and rational*: Political orientations are partly rooted in the past but also substantially conditioned by recent and contemporary experience. Even ethnic identities are as much self-chosen or psychologically primed as they are primordial (Laitin *1988).* They are acquired through a lifetime's learning process in which more proximate experiences frequently dominate (Almond and Verba *1963;* Conover and Searing *1994).* This means that political attitudes and beliefs are substantially rationally based. Voters are not fools, rather, they respond in predictable ways to the political environment.

3. *Thin culture is endogenous:* Culture is created. Institutions and behaviour shape it as much as it shapes them. Political culture and political institutions are closely and reciprocally related; the causal arrow runs both ways. Neo-culturalist theory and neo-institutional theory are two sides of the same coin, whose differences have been exaggerated by advocates of both perspectives.

4. *Thin culture is individualist:* Political culture is an aggregate of individual attitudes and beliefs; groups do not exist except as accumulations of individuals. Although the aggregation of individual attributes into group-level properties can be achieved in a complex procedure (Norrander and Jones *1996;* Duch et al. *2000),* culture is more appropriately measured at the

micro-level.

5. *Thin culture is relatively unbounded and diverse:* Culture refers to the central tendency of a group's political attitudes and beliefs. This tendency can be stronger or weaker and can admit varying degrees of variation within a group. There can be as much, or even more variation in political attitudes and values within groups than across groups. Moreover, rather than assuming the dominance of ethnic/linguistic groups, another in the string of empirical questions that neoculturalists seek to answer is at what level culture is the strongest (i.e., the grouping that minimizes the ratio of within-group to between-group variation), whether at the level of society, or subgroup, or supragroup.

6. *Thin Culture is as a rule heterogeneous and ambivalent:* In people's belief systems, competitive values coexist. The different elements of the value orientations are not structured hierarchically. They are in a state of tension to one another and sometimes even contradict each other. Culture is a kind of resource from which values are selected appropriate to the situation. These cultural resources are actualized and instrumentalized. It is not an archive that preserves all the ideas, norms, and beliefs internalized at some point in a well-structured way (McFalls, *2001).* Often values and ideas serve as legitimations of behaviour a posteriori. It is not the belief system that controls behaviour but rather the social situation and the interests deduced from the interpretation of the situation. The cognitive equipment is influenced by different circumstances, so that it does not form a coherent whole but a heterogeneous mosaic.

7. *Thin culture is dynamic:* Political attitudes and values are pliable. Both micro-attitudes and macro-attitudes change in predictable ways, often with surprising swiftness, in response to social, economic and political change. Although changes in individual attitudes can appear random and non-rational, processes at group level are remarkably well behaved.

Toward a Neo-Cultural Synthesis

Although thick conceptions of culture tend to be associated with more traditional approaches in political science, whereas thinner conceptions of culture have more recent pedigrees, both conceptions exist side by side in contemporary political science and compete for possession of the culture label. Thus, Eckstein (1988) reasserts a highly traditional conception of thick culture, only slightly thinned to account for the possibility of (slow) cultural change but with virtually no mention of the thin culture literature. Others proclaim the renaissance of political culture while advancing a fundamentally thin conception of culture, with virtually no recognition of the literature on thick culture. To the extent that they recognize the other's existence (as these examples illustrate, they frequently do not), thin culture adherents tend to dismiss thick cultural assumptions as empirically suspect, outdated and passe, whereas thick culture adherents tend to view thin culture as unworthy of the label. Furthermore, because the distinction between thick and thin culture is not widely appreciated, the concepts are frequently confused. Much cultural research tends to theorize and conceptualize culture in relatively thick terms (for example, by considering culture to be essential, fundamental and stable) while measuring culture in relatively thin terms using survey research methods (Inglehart 1988). Far from being a healthy and productive tension, the conflict and confusion that result from the failure of the two perspectives to recognize, much less to

accommodate their differences has contributed to the skepticism with which cultural approaches are regarded by those working in other traditions.

The revival of interest in the concept of culture has given rise to several recent attempts to create a neo-cultural synthesis that integrates divergent aspects of what we are calling thick and thin culture. Typically, these consist of efforts to establish a `cultural hierarchy' in which thick culture is considered fundamental and conceived of as underlying and conditioning thin culture, which is considered peripheral or as not really part of culture at all. Wildavsky's (1987 and 1988) cultural theory of preferences is exemplary of this.
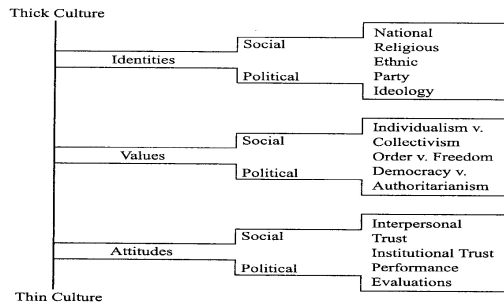
Wildavsky begins by distinguishing between what he calls culture and preferences. Culture is a decidedly thick concept defined as `the deepest desires of all: how we wish to live with others and how others wish to live with us' (Wildavsky 1987: 4), while preferences are a much thinner concept defined as the second-level or third-level choices that people make among the culturally prescribed options that are socially available.9 For Wildavsky, preferences are subordinate to, and deeply conditioned by culture, whose own origins are unclear. Culture either appears to emerge from social interactions and institutions, or it is coterminous with those interactions and institutions. In either case, social interactions and, by extension, culture, appear to be primordial, exogenous, externally bounded, and stable. Culture is thick and substantially determines preferences (thin culture), which are principal determinants, in turn, of rational choice and political behaviour (Lane 1992, elaborates this conception).

Rather than truly integrating thick and thin culture, however, these efforts mostly serve to reassert the primacy of thick culture and its powerful conditioning effects on political attitudes and behaviour. In doing so, Wildavsky and Lane continue to treat thick and thin conceptions of culture as separate and distinct, and they continue to ignore the empirical literature that calls into question many of the fundamental premises of thick culture.

In attempting to reconcile thick and thin culture, we begin with the assumption previously advanced that, despite great differences in assumptions and methods, thick and thin culture share a common ancestry and occupy (distant) positions on a common conceptual continuum. From this perspective, culture can be conceived of as a multifaceted or multilayered phenomenon, whose core attributes are relatively thick, getting progressively thinner as one moves from the core to the periphery. Indeed, something resembling this conception is implicit in much of the literature, which routinely distinguishes a hierarchy of both social orientations (identities, values, and attitudes) and social objects (society, community, regime, authority).

According to this concept, illustrated in Figure *13.2,* more basic orientations, such as identities, and orientations toward more fundamental social objects, such as nation, religion, and ethnicity, would be located closer to the conceptual core, where culture tends to be thicker. Conversely, less fundamental orientations, such as attitudes, along with orientations toward less central aspects of society (such as political authorities), would be located further away from the core, where culture is relatively thinner. Social and political values (individualism vs. collectivism, materialism vs. post-materialism, order vs. freedom) would be located somewhere in between, with social values exhibiting somewhat greater centrality (and thus thickness) than political values.

Figure 13.2 Attributes of thick versus thin culture

```
Thick Culture
   │
   │                          ┌─ Social ──────┐  National
   │                          │               │  Religious
   ├─ Identities ─────────────┤               │  Ethnic
   │                          └─ Political ────┤  Party
   │                                           │  Ideology
   │
   │                          ┌─ Social ──────┐  Individualism v.
   │                          │               │  Collectivism
   ├─ Values ─────────────────┤               │  Order v. Freedom
   │                          └─ Political ────┤  Democracy v.
   │                                           │  Authoritarianism
   │
   │                          ┌─ Social ──────┐  Interpersonal
   │                          │               │  Trust
   ├─ Attitudes ──────────────┤               │  Institutional Trust
   │                          └─ Political ────┤  Performance
   │                                           │  Evaluations
Thin Culture
```

Viewed from this perspective, culture is variable, sometimes thick, at other times thin. It varies both across and within societies in different contexts, under different circumstances and, perhaps, at different times. Thus, national identity may be a relatively thicker aspect of Russian culture than of Canadian culture (and thus have potentially different effects), in the same way that social trust may, relatively speaking, be a shallower part of Western cultures today than it was 50 years ago (Fukuyama 1999), again with potentially different effects. The important question is neither which conception of culture is correct nor even how thick or thin culture is, but rather under what conditions and in what contexts the structure of culture is likely to vary, and how these variations affect society and politics. Importantly, because culture has been treated as a homogeneous whole, very little research has focused on these questions.

A principal advantage of an integrated conception of culture is that it facilitates theory development. Rather than theorizing separately about thick and thin culture, an integrated concept encourages the development of a single, integrated theory. This is not only parsimonious but also enriches theory, since the integrated theory must not only account separately for thick and thin culture but also provide an account of the relationship between the two, and of the conditions under which different aspects of culture are likely to be relatively thick or thin.

To illustrate this potential, consider the process of acculturation. Thick and thin culture differ fundamentally on how they conceive of the process of cultural transmission. Thick cultural theory emphasizes the primacy and durability of early life, childhood, or `formative' socialization, reflecting individuals' experiences with kin, peer group, and community. Thin cultural theory emphasizes adult learning based on more recent or contemporaneous experiences with the performance of social, economic, and political institutions. Nevertheless, both theories share the fundamental assumption that culture is learned and that learning is linked at some level to experience. They differ on a series of subsidiary assumptions about when learning is most likely to occur, which shared experiences are most relevant, and how durable different lessons are likely to be (see Mishler and Rose 2001). Even this tends to overstate their differences, since socialization research acknowledges the fact that political learning continues over a lifetime, and adult learning acknowledges the role of pre-existent attitudes in structuring later learning (cf. Conover and Searing 1994).

This suggests that it may be possible to integrate the socialization and performance perspectives as complementary parts of a single, developmental or `lifetime-learning' model. According to such a perspective, acculturation might begin early in life, as a child's orientations toward society and self are shaped initially by a series of primary agents and experiences. These initial orientations, however, may subsequently be reinforced or revised depending on the extent to which early cultural `lessons' are challenged or confirmed by later life experiences (Rose and McAllister 1990; Mishler and Rose 1997). The logic of a lifetime's learning roughly parallels Fiorina's (1981) conception of party identification as a `running tally' of retrospective evaluations. Greatly simplified, an individual's cultural orientations at any moment can be conceived as a weighted average of the individual's lifetime experiences. Expressed symbolically, what we are proposing is a model:

$$C_t \;=\; \gamma + \sum_{i=1}^{t} B_i E_i + u_t \qquad\qquad\qquad \textbf{(1)}$$

in which C is a vector measuring cultural orientations in time, t; B is a vector of coefficients or weights; E is a vector of mediated social experiences for period i; and u, is an error term. By conceptualizing acculturation in this integrated way, debates about the nature of culture are reduced to an empirical question about the relative strength of the weights (coefficients) given to significant experiences at different periods in life. This is a difficult question, to be sure, given the formidable problems of measurement likely to be encountered, but nonetheless a feasible question, at least in principle.

Insofar as adult experiences reinforce early beliefs, as is likely in stable societies with durable institutions, cultural orientations should be deeply rooted and exhibit considerable stability over time. Under such circumstances, socialization and performance explanations of culture should coincide. To the extent that adult experiences contradict early beliefs, as in societies that have experienced significant social transformation or major changes in social and political institutions, cultural orientations should be considerably thinner and more volatile, and socialization and performance theories should provide very different, even contradictory explanations. Even if early attitudes and beliefs persist relatively unchanged over time, the individual's overall orientations may still change over time, as new attitudes and beliefs are acquired and overlay existing orientations, thus potentially altering the salience of pre-existing orientations and the cumulative impact of culture on behaviour. Conversely, individual interpretations of later-life experiences may be shaped to some significant degree by preexisting cultural attitudes. Thus, while a lifetime learning model incorporates important dynamic elements, it also incorporates self-reinforcing tendencies that contribute to stability.

Thick and Thin Culture in Practice: Applications of the Neo-Cultural Approach to the Contributions of this Volume

The contributions to the current chapter provide important illustrations of the best of thick and thin culture in practice. The articles by Meulemann, Rohrschneider, as well as by Jacobs/Milller/Pickel,

for example, advocate a concept of culture largely shaped by the thick culture approach. Other authors of this volume, specifically Wegener, as well as Bernik and Malnar, work with the concept of thin culture. Still others, such as Meyer, Schwarz, and Brown, or Delhey and Tobsch, are somewhere in between the two with their conceptions of culture, grounding their arguments on characteristics that we can find both in the previously described attributes of thin and of thick culture.

Let us first examine the contributions of Meulemann, Jacobs, Mdller, Pickel, and Rohrschneider, hence those contributions whose interpretations are shaped by a concept of thick culture. This will enable us to isolate a number of those assumptions identified above as pertaining to, or typical of thick culture. These authors deal with the value orientations assimilated during socialist times and describe them as deeply rooted cultural orientations, which, even in the light of the systemic changes that have occurred in the socialist countries, do not spontaneously cease to exist. They assume the tenacity of socialist value orientations (Rohrschneider, see p. 68 in this volume), which continue to have lasting effects even after the fall of the Communist regime in the country under examination (Jacobs, Muller Pickel see p. 94, p.101). These typically socialist value orientations are assumed to have been conveyed in the socialization processes specific to Communist societies. Particular agents in this process were the official institutions of the political system, ranging from kindergarten and schools to universities and from official party- and massorganization propaganda to the media and the public sphere. As far as we can observe a shift in the cultural orientations in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, we must note that this shift is occurring very gradually. At present, it is often difficult for the people in former Eastern bloc countries to accommodate to the newly introduced democratic judicial, and economic institutions. Since these authors assume that those values acquired under socialist conditions are deeply rooted, it becomes apparent that, in their conception, culture is not responsive to a change in external conditions, a position that Lucien Pye has fittingly described. In any case cultural transition can only occur after structural transition, since culture is conceived of as sluggish, viscous, and as deeply rooted in people's minds.

This approach is made explicit in the contribution of Robert Rohrschneider with his concept of institutional learning, which presumes a strong correlation between structure and culture. Specifically, he describes the acquisition of value orientations as institutionally mediated and argues that, even in times of rapid institutional change, values remain persistent. Values once internalized, such as egalitarian preferences or orientations pertaining to the authority of the state, or even socialist ideals such as collectivism, cannot be stripped like old garments. On the contrary, they continue to shape the attitudes of individuals toward the newly introduced institutions and in some cases may even undermine support for these new institutions and thus threaten their functioning (Rohrschneider p. 68).

The question now at hand is whether the influence of the socialist regimes was in fact as significant as the mentioned authors assume. Many social scientists doubt that the regimes of the Eastern and Central European countries were able to leave such a lasting mark on the attitudes and belief systems of the population. For example, Gerd Meyer (p. 176) argues in this volume that official education under socialist conditions had almost no effect at all. Moreover, Archie Brown, in his resume of the currently available literature on the topic of political culture in Communist systems, notes that the literature testifies to the `real diversity of values in Communist countries and (...) the relative failure of official socialisation efforts in Communist Europe' (Brown p. 17). If one assumes that cultural orientations are deeply rooted, the immense success of socialist education is

rather unlikely, since in this case the socialist regimes would also have encountered the previous experiences and orientations of citizens. This would mean that, especially at the beginning of their rule, they would have had to deal with a great amount of skepticism and cautiousness (which, for other reasons, was also the case in later times). It is furthermore questionable whether structural transition must necessarily always precede cultural transition, or whether cultural changes do not sometimes precede institutional changes. In both cases, one would have to assume there was a discrepancy between the official institutional system of the socialist regimes and the dominant political culture in these countries. In view of such a divergence between structure and culture, it is very likely that the educational and socialization attempts of the socialist systems were only partially successful and sometimes even explicitly rejected.

Indeed, there is a certain amount of data included in this volume's empirical studies that are difficult to interpret when using the socialization theory or the thick culture approach. Contrary to the assumptions of socialization theory, Heiner Meulemann notes that East Germans, after the systemic change in East Germany, placed greater value on individual achievement than equality - even more so than West Germans. This is the case even though they were socialized by the Communist system to value collectivist notions of equality over individual achievement. Robert Rohrschneider's finding (p. 60 figure 4.5) is equally surprising, stating that East Germans valued freedom more highly than equality immediately following the collapse of the socialist system but that this preference was reversed again shortly afterwards. According to thick culture, this development should have occurred in the opposite order. East Germans, shaped by the experience of egalitarianism and the ideal of equality under the socialist system, should have initially preferred these values. The development toward meriting freedom should have occurred gradually, varying according to the degree to which they became familiar with Western institutions, which advocate freedom. It is also surprising that in West Germany, after a long period of positive experience with the democratic institutions of the Federal Republic of Germany, support for the value of political freedom temporarily eroded in 1997/98 (p. 60 figure 4.5). Yet, another example that is not really congruent with the assumptions of socialization theory is that of the younger generations of East Germans who tend to affirm socialist values to a higher degree than the older ones (p. 65), even though the younger generations were exposed to the indoctrination of the socialist regime for a shorter period of time than the older ones. It would be possible to list a variety of other surprising research results, for example Jeffrey Hahn's findings, as cited by Archie Brown (p. 20), referring to political culture in Russia. In March 1990, he described attitudes to be `not strikingly different from what is found in Western industrial societies', and found `substantial support for democratic values', and a `clear majority' in favour of `competitive elections and a multi-party system' among the interviewed Russians. However, it is not our aim to list a wide variety of research results that are incompatible with the thick culture approach but rather to see how the adherents of political culture theory deal with the difficulties that arise from these incompatibilities.

One possibility of encountering these difficulties would be to minimize the surprise effect of the mentioned research results. Archie Brown's example, for instance, refers to the fact that the time-period immediately following the collapse of the socialist regime was an exceptional situation that enabled rapid changes, which would otherwise have been unthinkable. Also, in addition to those findings that emphasize a rapid transition in values, so Brown argues, there are other findings that draw greater attention to the persistence of latent Soviet experiences. This implies that those findings that emphasize transition simply do not go deep enough to excavate the persistence and continuity of Soviet value systems. However, according to Brown, these analyses use qualitative instead of quantitative methods, which, incidentally, refers to a controversy within political culture research,

the question in how far quantitative methods, such as conducting opinion polls, are appropriate for investigating the question of political culture.

If one supposes a rapid cultural transition, one voluntarily or involuntarily abandons an important component of the thick culture approach. It becomes difficult to uphold the argument surrounding the predominant influence of socialization, and one can no longer stress the concept that older assumptions cannot be replaced by new experiences. If one still wishes to uphold the continuity in value orientations that have been handed down, while taking into account the above-mentioned findings that are contradictory to the approach, one will be forced to introduce a differentiation into cultural research. This would make a distinction between stable value orientations and short-term opinions and attitudes. It would thus account for cultural transition on a superficial level, while at the same time it would remain feasible to maintain continuity at a deeper level. Archie Brown also offers this argument in his contribution (p. 18).

Arguing in favour of rapid cultural transition, one also has to specify the conditions under which such a transition is possible. In political science literature, one can find a variety of explanatory models for this. One possible cause for a rapid transition, as Bernik and Malnar suggest, could be the population's dissatisfaction with the existing political and social institutions. In their contribution, they hold that a `revolution in values' took place in Slovenia during the 1980s and that this occurred because the regime could no longer fulfil the people's economic needs. Another cause for the value transition in post-Communist countries could be seen in the opening of a new window of opportunity shortly after 1989. This shook up all previous value structures and opened up a new horizon of possibilities. Political scientists such as Weil (1993), Dalton (1994), and others see yet another cause in the `diffusion of values', assumed to have occurred already during the years before 1989, beginning in the West and progressing toward the East. Due to the influences of Western media, contacts with visitors from Western European countries, and even personal experiences through travelling to Western Europe, Western values were introduced into the formerly closed systems of the East and began to conquer the hearts of many people. The apparent superiority of Western democracy and the free market economy had an exemplary influence on the people in Communist countries, and this influence was able to counteract and undermine the official propaganda of the socialist systems. Finally, it is also thinkable that the support for socialist values was not deeply ingrained but, rather, riddled with ambivalence (McFalls *2001)* and that the moment the Communist regime broke down, a rapid cultural transition set in.

If one wants to argue in favour of a consistency in values throughout the time period of social, political, and economic upheaval in 1989, one has to ground this assumption, as already mentioned, on a deeper level than the official educational goals pursued by the socialist systems. One cannot assume that values such as equality, socialism, and community are constitutive of people's permanent value positions. Instead, one must go beyond the level of officially proclaimed values and investigate what kinds of values were conveyed in `real-life' situations of interaction, for example within the family, at work, or in the neighbourhood. Anna Schwarz and Gerd Meyer argue that precisely these small life worlds were the most significant agents of socialization and contributed largely to the formation of orientations and mentalities that are still influential in present times, although in a modified and quieter form. Socialization is not identical to indoctrination (Schwarz p. *156).* In capturing the socialist systems' cultural legacy, a differentiation of the concept of socialization is necessary. Most thick culture approaches do not offer such a differentiation. In referring to individual life worlds, Schwarz and Meyer seem to have succeeded in offering a more differentiated perspective on the influences of socialization. Indeed, they do not search for the cultural legacy of socialism in values such as equality, socialism, or collectivism - at least not

exclusively. Instead, they propose the argument that the official values propagated by the regimes were assimilated in individually fragmented ways by citizens, thus taking on divergent forms. Anna Schwarz argues, for example, that the officially proclaimed value of achievement did not merely mean working harder but was taken up by individuals and thus individually filled with meanings surrounding self-assertion, self-realization, and innovation. With this position, she stands in direct contrast to Meulemann, who adheres more to the first concept of achievement. Gerd Meyer (pp, 174ff), in turn maintains that many of the values conveyed during socialist times were quite ambivalent. The willingness to conform was coupled with self-assertion, apolitical insistence on the private sphere with emancipatory and critical resistance, anti-institutionalism with small-scale paternalism, etc. The value positions assimilated under socialist conditions in this ambivalent fashion could work in various ways: they could facilitate an opting out of the system but also apolitical privatism, as well as resistance and protest or even adaptation. Both authors seem to argue that people's value positions have changed substantially over the last ten years. For example, Gerd Meyer (p. 176) explicitly states that the value positions one encounters in the former socialist countries were not simply passed on from socialist times but were shaped and altered by present-day experiences. However, they both insist that, in spite of all transitions, a clearly socialist legacy has persisted in the cultural orientations of people living in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe. Taking into consideration the ambivalent nature of this legacy, they hold that one has to recognize this legacy not only as a barrier but rather as a resource, or even as a motor of transformation. Thus, they regard culture not only as a given but as something individually malleable, as something that must be individually acquired, and as something that can be altered. Thus, it would seem sensible to allocate these two positions somewhere in between the thick and the thin cultural concept.

A clear concept of thin culture is presented in the chapter by Ivan Bernik and Brina Malnar and, to a certain extent in the paper by Jan Delhey and Uerena Tobsch, as well as the contribution by Bernd Wegener. Bemik and Malnar treat culture as something that can quickly be altered, as something that must be differentiated according to social status, and as something influenced by the specific social, political and economic situation. During the 1980s, the acceptance of egalitarian and autocratic values in Slovenia drastically declined, although the value systems of managers and professionals on the one hand, and workers on the other hand clearly diverge. As a result of the collapse of the socialist systems and the introduction of democracy, the support of egalitarian and authoritarian values was virtually stripped of its social foundation (pp. 193ff). The support for socialist values was not deeply rooted but conditional. It was tied to the condition that the socialist systems would be able to fulfill people's expectations by delivering the expected performance. This means that the values were not accepted for their own sake (value rational), but, rather, chosen according to the constellation of interests (instrumental). This is why value orientations were alterable relatively quickly in the wake of social transition. During the 1980s, for example, the economic performance of the socialist regimes declined and an economic and political crisis ensued. The 1990s, when democratic and market structures began to form, exhibit a similar dynamic. One could put it this way -material interests were static while values were inconstant. Cultural orientations thus acquired the status of dependent variable and ceased to be the constant variable.

In a similar manner, Delhey and Tobsch treat cultural values as variable according to the situation. They argue that during times of political restriction liberal values take centre stage, while times of material shortages and social uncertainty result in a greater influence of egalitarian, equitable, and material values. During the time period immediately following the collapse of state socialism, a time when the experience of repression was still imminent, values of political freedom played an influential role in accounting for people's satisfaction with democracy. However, in the

years thereafter, economic indicators began to be a stronger determinant of people's satisfaction with democracy. Wegener's analyses also arrive at the astonishing conclusion that the undeniably observable cultural differences between the countries under scrutiny almost disappear once the relevant socio-structural factors are taken into account.

Wegener, Delhey and Tobsch, as well as Bernik and Malnar emphasize that value orientation is highly dependent on the situation, thus adhering to a concept of thin culture. Bernik and Malnar consider the connection between the acceptance of systemic values and the assessment of a particular system's performance to be a `stable pattern of political culture' (p. *202)*. Upon closer inspection, however, this `cultural' pattern, rather, implies the conditioning of values through interests. Thus, it addresses how the independence of cultural orientations disintegrates based on its dependence on the particular situation which, in turn, strongly dictates respective interests. However, if the pragmatic nature of the situation dictates the orientation, culture no longer has much of an independent influence on the assessment and conduct of actors. The acting individual can then be considered to be a rational agent in the sense of the rational choice approach, and can be categorized in contrast to the `homo sociologicus', who is guided by norms.

What kind of cultural definition will henceforth enable us to form more plausible hypotheses in explaining the transformation processes of the former Communist countries - the concept of thick or thin culture? Of course, the possibility that both concepts, depending on the situation, could lead us to interesting explanations should not be excluded. In an analysis of post-socialist transformation processes, however, we tend to believe that a concept of thin culture offers more far-reaching explanations than a concept of thick culture. This is based on our assumption that permanent and stable institutions are essential for the formation of deeply rooted and stable value orientations, while periods of rapid structural changes give value orientation little chance of becoming deeply rooted. The anticipated result of our inquiry is that the cultural legacy of socialism currently exerts only minor influence. The institutions of state socialism, as static as they may have been during their existence, proved to be unstable and of little social efficacy and influence in the long run. Nowadays, they have almost completely disappeared. Thick culture concepts treat culture as unaffected by context, and thus tend to view people's behaviour as irrational and unadapted to situations. In addressing one of the principal questions of this volume - to what extent the political systems of the former Communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe are consolidated by now, we have come to the following conclusions. The approaches adhering to the concept of thick culture argue for greater problems in adaptation, while those building on thin culture paint a more optimistic picture of cultural adaptation processes. This becomes apparent in the assessments of the contributions by Rohrschneider, Jacobs, Miiller and Pickel and Meulemann on the one hand, and Bernik and Malnar and Wegener on the other. Of course, only time will tell which of these assessments will come closest to reality.

Notes

1. Given that culture is frequently defined as `shared behaviour', using culture to explain behaviour is obviously problematic. Many scholars try to avoid this problem by defining culture as subjective beliefs, values and attitudes, excluding behaviour. Sometimes one gains the impression that this restricted definition is due to the fact that in this case using results of survey research is sufficient in order to encompass the features of culture.
2. Culture is at least equally controversial in the field of anthropology, which has experienced a large and diverse array of critics and numerous calls to abandon the concept as, for example,

Abu-Lughod (1991), Clifford (1988), Barth (1994) and Brightman (1995). Nevertheless, the concept is equally resilient in anthropology as well, as illustrated in a superb review of the concept by Brumann (1999).

3. Throughout this chapter we use the terms `theory' and `concept' interchangeably when referring to political culture. This is consistent with Kaplan's (1998: 52) insight that `concept formation and theory formation ... go hand in hand' - an insight that Kaplan credits to Kant and also to Hempel. We take the view that a concept is a `mini-theory' and functions in the same ways theories function.

4. Almond (1980) provides an excellent intellectual history of the development of the idea of a civic culture.

5. For example, Allport (1924 and 1927) wrote extensively in the 1920s against the concept of culture, arguing against `the group fallacy' inherent in the concept.

6. Sapir (1924) identifies the three meanings of culture as: (1) `any socially inherited element in the life of man, material and spiritual' such that, `culture is coterminous with man himself'; (2) the `rather conventional ideal of individual refinement ... that have the sanction of a class and a tradition of long standing'; and (3) `genuine culture', defined as the `spirit' or `genius' of a people or `civilization in so far as it embodies the national genius

7. Jackman/Miller (1996: 633ff) give another account of the distinctive elements of the Political Culture Approach.

8 While it is unlikely that those who first promoted the concept of political culture conceived of their effort as one of `thinning' culture, it is clear that they intended political culture to represent something different than traditional conceptions of culture. Pye (1965: 8) argues, for example, that political culture is intended: `to make more explicit and systematic much of the understanding associated with such long-standing concepts as political ideology, national ethos and spirit ... and the fundamental values of a people ... This is so because political culture consists of only those critical but widely shared beliefs and sentiments ... that give order and form to the political process. In sum Political Culture provides structure and meaning to the political sphere in the same manner as culture in general gives coherence and integration to social life'.

Pye (p. 9) further argues that political culture `represents a significant development in contemporary political analysis because it signals an effort to return to the study of the total political system without losing the benefits of individual psychology'. Almond and Verba (1963: 32) go further still, conceptualizing political culture as the `connecting link' between the micro-`attitudes and motivations of discrete individuals' and the macro `character and performance of political systems'. In other words, political culture was intended as a conceptual bridge between traditional culture and individual attitudes and behaviour.

9. Indicative of their thinness, Wildavsky likens the idea of preference to economists' conception of tastes.

References

Abu-Lughod, Lila *(1991),* `Writing Against Culture', in Fox, R.G. (ed.), *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present,* Santa Fe, pp. 137-162.

Abu-Lughod, Lila *(1999),* `Comments', in *Current Anthropology 40, pp. 13- 15.*

Aldrich, John H./Sullivan, John L./Borgide Eugene *(1989),* `Foreign Affairs and Issue Voting: Do Presidential Candidates "Waltz Before A Blind Audience?"', in *American Political Science*

Review 83, pp. 123- 141.

Allport, Floyd H. (1924), `The Group Fallacy in Relation to Social Science', in American Journal of Sociology 29, pp. 688- 706.

Allport, Floyd H. *(1927),* `The Psychological Nature of Political Structure', in *American Political Science Review 21, pp. 611- 618.*

Almond, Gabriel A. *(1956),* `Comparative Political Systems', in *Journal of Politics 18.*

Almond, Gabriel A. *(1980),* `The Intellectual History of the Civic Culture Concept', in Almond, G.A./Verba, S. (eds), *The Civic Culture Revisited,* Boston, pp. *1-36.*

Almond, Gabriel A./Verba, Sidney *(1963), The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations,* Princeton, NJ.

Almond, Gabriel A./Verba, Sidney (1980), The Civic Culture Revisited, Boston.

Barth, Frederik *(1994),* `A Personal View of Present Tasks and Priorities in Cultural and Social Anthropology', in Robert, B. (ed.), *Assessing Cultural Anthropology,* New York, pp. *349-360.*

Bourdieu, Pierre. *(1972), Esquisse d'une theorie de la pratique,* Paris.

Brightman, Robert *(1995),* `Forget Culture: Replacement, Transcendence, Reflexification', in *Cultural Anthropology 10, pp. 509-546.*

Broadbent, May *(1968),* `Methodological Individualism: Definition and Reduction', in Broadbent, M. (ed.), *Readings in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences,* New York, pp. 280-303.

Brumann, Christopher *(1999),* `Writing for Culture: Why a Successful Concept Should Not Be Discarded', in *Current Anthropology 40, pp. 1-27.*

Burgess, John W *(1886),* `The American Commonwealth: Changes in its Relation to the Nation', in *Political Science Quarterly 1, pp. 9-35.*

Clifford, James *(1988), The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art,* Cambridge.

Conover, Pamela Johnson/Searing, Donald D. *(1994),* `Democracy, Citizenship and the Study of Political Socialization', in Budge, I./McKay, D. (ed.), *Democracy and Citizenship,* London, pp. *2455.*

Dalton ; Russel J. *(1994),* `Communists and Democrats. Democratic Attitudes in the Two Germanies', in *British Journal of Political Science 24, pp. 469-493.*

Dawson, Richard E./Prewitt, Kenneth/Dawson, Karen S. *(1968), Political Socialization,* Boston.

Diamond, Larry *(1999), Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation,* Baltimore.

Duch, Raymond M./Palmer, Harvey/Anderson, Christopher J. *(2000),* `Heterogeneity in Perceptions of National Economic Conditions', in American Journal of Political Science 44, pp. 635-652.

Eckstein, Harry (1988), `A Culturalist Theory of *Science Review* 82 pp. 789-804.

Elkin, Frederick (1960), *The Child and Society,* New York.

Erickson, Robert S./Melver, John P and Wright Gerald C., Jr. (1987), `State Political Culture and Public Opinion', in *American Political Science Review* 81, pp. 797-814.

Fiorina, Morris P (1981), Retrospective Voting in American National Elections, New Haven

Fukuyama Francis (1999), *The Great Disruption: Hu Social Order,* New York.

Geertz Clifford (1963), `The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States', in Geertz, C. (ed.), *Old Societies and New Societies,* New York.

Geertz, Clifford (1973), *The Interpretation of Cultures,* New York.

Huntington, Samuel P (1996), *The Clash of Ci* New York.

Inglehart, Ronald (1988), `The Renaissance of Political Culture', in *American Political Science*

Review 82, pp. 1203-1230.

Inglehart, Ronald (1990), *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society,* Princeton.

Jackman, Robert W/Miller, Ross A. (1996), `A Renaissance of Political Culture?' in *American Journal of Political Science* 40, pp. 632-659.

Kaplan Abraham (1988), *The Conduct ofInguiry,* New Brunswick.

Laitin, David D. (1988), `Political Culture and Political Preferences', in *American Political Science Review* 82, pp. 589-593.

Lakatos, Imre (1970), `Falsificationism and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programs', in Lakatos, I./Musgrave, A. (eds), *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge,* London, pp. 91-196.

Lane, Ruth (1992), `Political Culture: Residual Category or General Theory?' i Co *Political Studies* 25, pp. 362-387.

McFalls, Laurence (2001) Constructing the New East German Man, 1961-2001 or Bringing Real Culture Back to Political Science. Working Papers Series of the Institute for European Studies, UC Berkeley.

Mishler, William/Rose, Richard (1997), `Trust, Distrust and Skepticism: Popular Evaluations of Civil and Political Institutions in Post-Communist Societies', in *Journal ofPolitics 59: 2,* p.418-451.

Mishler, William/Rose, Richard (2001), `What are the Origins of Political Trust: Testing Institutional and Cultural Theories in Post-Communist Societies', in *Comparative Political Studies* 34, pp. 30-62.

Norrander, Barbara/Jones, Bradford S. (1996), `The Reliability of Aggregated Public Opinion Measures' in *American Journal ofPolitical Science* 40, pp. 295-309.

Partl, Vaclav (1923), `American Influence on Political Thought in Czechoslovakia', in *The American Political Science Review* 17: 3, pp. 448-452.

Putnam, Robert (1993), *Making Democracy Work,* Princeton.

Pye, Lucian WNerba, Sidney (1965), *Political Culture and Political Development,* Princeton.

Rose, Richard/McAllister, Ian (1990), *The Loyalties of Voters,* London.

Rose, Richard/Mishler, William/Haerpfer, Christian (1999), *Democracy and Its Alternatives,* Baltimore MD.

Sapir Edward (1924), `Culture, Genuine and Spurious', in *American Journal of Sociology* 29:4 pp. 401- 429.

Tylor Edward B. (1871), *Primitive Culture,* London.

Ward, Robert E. (1974), `Culture and the Comparative Study of Politics, or the Constipated Dialectic', in *American Political Science Review* 68, pp. 190-201.

Weber, Max (1972), *Wirtschaft and Gesellschaft: Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie,* Tubingen.