

Erik Olin Wright ASA President Journal II

The 2011 ASA meetings, Las Vegas, August 19-25

I flew to Las Vegas from Traverse City via Denver, from the calm, cool ambiance of the cottage on Torch Lake to the frenetic furnace Nevada. The conference had been moved from Chicago in December because of an unresolved labor dispute in Chicago hotels. The ASA has a clause in its contracts with hotels that enables it to relocate in such circumstances without penalty, but of course it is a challenge to find a city that can properly host a 5000 person meeting on short notice. Ceasar's Palace was clearly the best option.

In the end, the relocation worked pretty well. The meeting was well attended – around 5200 people, within the range of typical meetings. The part of Caesar's palace in which the actual sessions were held was pleasant, quiet, spacious. But to get there from the hotel rooms required walking through the noise and chaos of Caesar's Palace Casinos . By design, this meant meandering through rows of slot machines, card tables and roulette wheels. During the day if you wanted coffee or a drink or a snack, it was back to the zone of hell. It was 110° F outside, and in any case you couldn't easily walk from hotel to hotel, so the situation was even worse for people not staying at Caesar's. So, while the meeting came off pretty well, almost no one I talked to said that they ever wanted the meetings to come back to Las Vegas. (There were exceptions, however: one evening I went out for dinner with a group of young assistant professors and recently tenured associates and they generally thought Las Vegas was great fun. One asked me if the city could get into the regular rotation for future meetings. I explained why this had zero chance.)

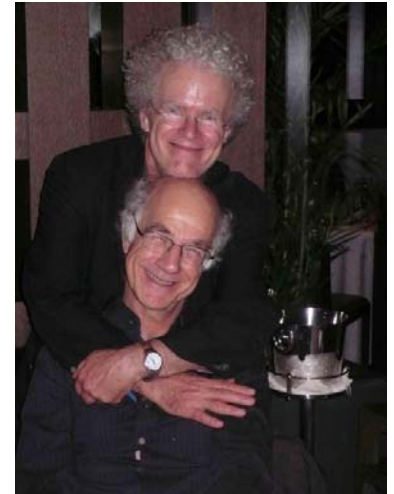
I arrived at the LV airport around 1 and had a meeting with Rachel Dwyer, a former student, at 3:30, so I figured I wasn't in a rush. At the airport I asked where taxis were, but I was told it was better to take the shuttle if I was by myself. That was a mistake – I had to wait 20 minutes and then it took nearly an hour to get to the hotel, first waiting for the shuttle to fill up and then for it to stop at six or seven hotels before getting to Caesar's Palace. At the hotel I then had to wait a good half hour to check in. Everything seems surprisingly inefficient given that the place is supposedly 100% geared to tourism.

Friday evening

The opening plenary was called "Walking the Walk and Talking the Talk: working in sociological traditions." I attended all of the plenary sessions with particular interest, wanting to reflect on what seemed to work and what didn't more than I would normally do. The general theme of the meeting was "Social Conflict: multiple dimensions and arenas," but as far as I can tell the plenaries this year were only loosely connected to issues of conflict. This is a complete contrast to the way I am planning the conference, where the three plenaries constitute a sequence tightly designed to illustrate the breadth of the theme.

Of the four talks presented in the first plenary, the most interesting for me was Michael Burawoy's. The others were largely summaries of certain strands of thinking, or elementary introductions into a subfield, or autobiographical musings. Michael's was a systematic, intellectually challenging account of different stances towards the fate of Marxism following the end of the Communism. He also used the talk as a way of touting the agenda of Real Utopias as pivotal both for sociology and for a relevant Marxism for the 21st century, so that was gratifying. As usual, he was exuberantly entertaining and funny, as well as deep. That is one of his special talents – being funny and playful without undercutting the seriousness of the treatment of ideas.

After the talk, Michael and I went out to dinner. He wanted to treat me to a fancy meal in honor of my presidency. We didn't know the lay of the land, and thus simply followed a sign to a French restaurant, Guy Savoy, on the second floor of the hotel. It turned out to be super-expensive, but Michael wanted to stay. We ended up spending over \$400, orders of magnitude beyond anything I would ever have considered. It was spectacularly good, but \$70 for a fantastic artichoke and truffle soup is still absurd. At the table next to us was a Russian hosting a group of people. I am not sure how this happened, but he said something to Michael about Michael looking familiar, Michael asked him if he was Russian, and we ended up having a rather playful repartee back and forth for a while.



Honors student meeting and Minority Fellowship Program

Saturday morning Randy Collins was double booked, so he asked me if I would stand in for him at a meeting for students who had received an ASA Minority Fellowship and also a meeting with the undergrads at the ASA from the ASA Honors program. I was happy to do both. At both sessions I talked about my perception of sociology as a community, not just as a discipline, and the role of the ASA in fostering such a deep and robust commitment to pluralism within that community. I told the students that this was really a new feeling for me since I had become president – a new appreciation for what it takes to build a strong sociological community with such values. This takes organizational effort; it does just happen. Indeed, there have been times when sociology was much less pluralistic, where there were constant methodological battles over quantitative vs qualitative methods, for example. Things are not perfect. There are forms of intolerance and ways in which some ways of doing sociology are not fully respected in some corners. But by and large the discipline has become much more pluralistic and committed to all of its forms of diversity over time, and it is my sense that the ASA has much to do with this. I also introduced the idea of real utopias as a way of bringing moral concerns into the core of sociological research. Both groups were very responsive to this.

One young woman in the MFP program said it seemed really hard to bring social justice concerns into one's research. "It is fine for you to do this. You're the president of the ASA. But not everyone is as free from pressure as you. Some people are really vulnerable. It isn't always easy to combine being and activist and an academic." I agreed with her and validated her concern: "You're absolutely right. I can pretty much do what I damn please. There are certainly

departments which are not tolerant, so this is something that we have to continually fight for. It is also true that sometimes one's moral commitments can become an excuse for sloppy work. This can be a real problem – sociology is really hard. It is really difficult to do it well, regardless of what you are doing, and this takes lots of time. One of the problems that activists face is that they just do not have the time to do their scholarship. Sometimes my radical students complain that the standards are higher for them than for 'mainstream' students. I tell them that maybe that is a good thing since what they do matters so much: it matters whether you get it right if you want to change the world. So it is not such a bad thing that there is pressure on radical students to be better than others."

The students in the ASA undergraduate honors program were especially eager, earnest, and engaged. They asked lots of questions and wanted to carry on the conversation far beyond the parameters of the time we had available.

Science policy meeting

Every year the ASA honors someone who has been a leader in social science policy. This year they honored Myron Guffman, the head of the Social and Behavioral sciences division of the NSF. Science funding in general and social science funding in particular has been under huge pressure because of the austerity budgets in the federal government. Guffman has apparently been quite heroic in defending the SBS programs. Bob Groves, the head of the census (and a former student of Bob Kahn) was also there and talked about the problems faced by the Census Bureau because of the budget slashing. Basically the Census is caught in a series of contradictory trends and pressures: It is becoming much more costly to do what the Census has always done – people are much more resistant; People like what the census does – the demand for our data is increasing especially because decision making by hunches rather than data is no longer acceptable; New technologies are being constantly created for what the census does, but they don't keep pace with added demands so they don't really end up saving costs; the wealth of digital resources increasing rapidly; and budgets are flat or declining. His conclusion was simple: *current practices are unsustainable*. He didn't seem especially gloomy, but the picture seemed bleak to me.

After their brief talks, Sally Hillsman introduced me and we chatted briefly. They both said that they would like me to come to Washington to talk to congressional staffers and others. I said I would be delighted to do this. We also talked about the current political situation and the character of the attacks by conservative republicans. Both Guffman and Grooves, but especially Guffman I think, argued that the key issue in play was the belief by conservatives that social science was irrelevant, that it didn't matter, that it was endless talk without substance. I was skeptical that this was the root issue. "I think a big part of the problem is that social science *does* matter, but that the science goes against the beliefs of conservatives. The claim that social science doesn't matter is mostly just a cover. After all, something like 40% of Americans don't believe in evolution or climate science, and a lot of these right wing Republicans are also Christian fundamentalists. They reject sociology because its findings support progressive political positions – this is really what is in play here. If evidence cannot persuade them about global warming or evolution, it is pretty hard to imagine it persuading them about poverty and sociology." They both continued to argue that sociologists needed to take a stronger more

active role in showing the world why they mattered, why their research was important for practical concerns. I wasn't completely sure if Guffman and Groves really disagreed with me or, instead, had adopted the view that conservatives were just skeptical of the relevance of social science for political reasons. I said that I would be happy to push this whenever I could as ASA President, and in any case it was undoubtedly part of the problem.

Sessions: Economic Utopias and Dystopias, and Grant Park Police Riot of 1968

I was involved in two sessions on the program. The first was organized by Jerry Davis, a wonderful economic sociologist who works on money, finance and corporations and teaches at the University of Michigan in the business school. He asked me to be the presider of the session since it so closely intersected the theme of next year's ASA. In fact, two of the presenters will be doing real utopia proposal sessions next year -- Fred Block is doing a session on Democratizing Finance, and Jerry will be doing one on Reimagining the Corporation. There was lots of enthusiasm in the audience -- I hope a harbinger of next year. The other session was originally tended as a "regional spotlight" since the meeting was to be held in Chicago, and the organizers thought that there would sufficient interest in it to hold the session even in Las Vegas. It was an unusual event. There were eight panelists -- four speakers who were in SDS and involved in organizing the protests at Grant Park during the Democratic Party National Convention in 1968, and four people giving very short comments. Tom Hayden and Dick Flacks were among the primary speakers, along with two other activists from thee period. Comments were given by Me, Fran Piven, Myra Feree and one other person. It was really a moving, memorable session. The reminiscences were powerful and poignant, and the comments interesting. Myra and I both spoke about the Wisconsin protests and the contrast with the protests four decades ago. I talked about the role of the grad students in keeping the protests peaceful, preventing a trashing of the building, working for civility in the interactions with the police; about the class and age heterogeneity of the protests; and about the sharp awareness of the class issues involved. Myra talked about the contrast in the gender issues in the movements of the 60s compared to the present. In both periods men tended to dominate, to take over leadership and assume that the women would do errands of various sorts. But this time the women challenged this and then men sat down and discussed it and modified their behavior.

Discussion with Pat Yancey, president of Sociologists for women in Society (SWS)

As part of my activities as president I plan to visit as many of the annual meetings of associations connected to the ASA as possible. One of these will be the SWS winter meeting in early February in Tampa. The meeting was planned with Pat Yancey immediately after the plenary session on Monday, but we had failed to be clear about our rendezvous spot. Fortunately we had exchanged cell phones, so we called each other and agreed to meet at the foot of the escalator from the second to the first floor of the conference area. Another unfortunately: there were two escalators. After a short while we figured out there was a problem, and the cell phones again came to our rescue. This is the kind of situation in which I think cell phones have made life especially easier -- coordinating meeting someone in a strange place where there are lots of possible contingencies.

The reason for getting together was to discuss exactly what I should do at the SWS winter meeting. My assumption was that I would just give a talk, perhaps on distinctive issues posed by the Real Utopias agenda for Feminism. But the president of SWS had a different idea. She had discussed my visit with Kate Berheide, the secretary of the ASA (a three-year elective office with huge responsibilities for budgets and related matters) who was very enthusiastic about my going to SWS. The two of them came up with the idea that there should be a workshop on Real Utopias at the conference built around a number of the real utopias proposals being prepared for the ASA meeting. In principle these are to be posted on line in January, so SWS participants could read some of them and ask: what would a gender analysis add to these proposals? Pat told me, when we met, that the SWS conferences were generally very hands-on conferences, rather than panels and lectures. I am delighted with this plan and think it could be very interesting for me as well as the participants. I have a meeting immediately before the SWS meeting – a two day conference in Santa Barbara February 1-2 on the Port Huron Statement, where I was asked to talk about the continuity between the ideas about democracy of the student movement in the early 1960s and the Real Utopias idea today. My plan, then, is to take the red eye from LA to Tampa, arrive there Saturday morning, hang out at the conference on Saturday, and then do this workshop on Sunday morning.

Program Committee Meeting

On Monday morning we had the final meeting of my program committee. It was a chance to go through the entire program and see if there were any loose ends, and also to celebrate our work in putting the program together. We began the meeting thinking that we were in a bit of trouble, since by the latest count we had committed to something like 104 sessions – plenaries, real utopia proposal sessions, thematic panels, special sessions, author-meets-critics sessions, one special presidential panel – but Kareem Jenkins reported that we had an absolute maximum of 96 time slots available. So we went through all of the sessions one by one. Some had died. Some had combined. And in the end we had only 91. I then proposed that we try to add two additional ones – one on the Port Huron Statement 50 years later, one on the Kibbutz, and one special session honoring Mel Kohn on the occasion of his retirement.

Sally Hillsman

Sandra Smith

Ron Aminzade



Ronda Levine

Kareem Jenkins

Business meeting gavel

Tuesday morning at 7:00 a.m. was the annual Open ASA Business Meeting. Almost nobody shows up for this except by those people who have to be there. There were maybe 10 people present. But occasionally, when there is some big controversy, it could be packed. One of my students, Matt Kearney came. I said to him, “Matt, I didn’t know you were so devoted to the ASA as an organization.” He replied, “I’m not. I devoted to my advisor. How often does a grad student get to see his advisor become president of the ASA?”



For me the highlight was the passing of the gavel from the 2010-11 ASA President, Randy Collins, to me. I hadn’t really planned anything specifically to say, but when I was given the gavel I made a few remarks, more or less this: “I know that in a situation like this the conventional thing to say is how honored one feels. Actually, I never quite understood precisely what ‘honored means.’ [Note: I really have no idea now why I said that, nor what I really meant by saying I didn’t know what “honored” means, since of course I do. I think what I really meant to say is that this is a cliché and obvious – of course it is an honor, but that doesn’t capture the main feeling of the moment.....]. But what I do know is how filled with emotion I am, how much this means to me. I have been a sociologist for 40 years, if you count from when I entered graduate school which was almost exactly 40 years ago. When I began I had no particular commitment to sociology, I choose it because it seemed the social science discipline in which I would be mostly able to be left alone to do my thing – it was the discipline the didn’t discipline it boundaries very much. Sociology was a base of operation for doing Marxist social science, but I didn’t feel any special identification with it as such. Indeed, my stance was more likely to be Marxism versus Sociology rather than Marxism within Sociology. After 40 years I feel deeply appreciative of Sociology as an intellectual endeavor and community of scholarship. I now recognize that the intellectual pluralism of the discipline is not something that just happened by accident, but takes work to produce and sustain.” I slightly choked up in the middle.

Nothing much of substance happened in the business meeting. The only thing of note was a resolution from the floor that the ASA Council create some kind of task force to deal with an initiative by the government to revise the IRB rules this fall. The announcement for this was issued July 26 and all comments had to be received by September 26, which is pretty short notice given the complexity of the matter. The ASA is concerned that new rules could be instituted which would make it much more difficult to secondary analysis of survey data. So a request was made for this to be discussed in Council.

ASA Council Meetings

As part of my responsibilities I attended two ASA Council meetings. The first, on Tuesday afternoon, was the final meeting of the 2010-11 Council; the second, all day Wednesday. At the first of these meetings the main issue was the discussion of a resolution submitted by the Sociology of Childhood and Youth section to amend the mission statement of the ASA to include support for the U.N. Convention of the Rights of Children and to urge the U.S. to pass the treaty. The U.S. and Somalia are the only two countries in the world to refuse to sign the convention. Of course this reflects the weakness of the convention and its ambiguities, plus the fact that it is possible to ratify the treaty with “understandings” attached which impose limitations and provisos of various sorts. Still, as an affirmation of values and fundamental aspirations, it seemed to me an obvious thing for the ASA to do, given that the mission statement already includes support for the UN Convention on Human Rights and the Convention on the rights of women.

This resolution had been submitted a year ago and Council had put off serious discussion. Randy Collins opposed the resolution. His basic reason is interesting sociologically, but I think is really missing the central point of these kinds of symbolic acts. His objection is that sociologically we know that there is no simple binary divide between adults and children. This is especially salient for the clause in the convention which affirms the rights of children to be free of sexual abuse. In the US we have statutory rape laws which have the result of making it a crime for an 18 year old to have consensual sex with a 17 year old. Young men have been imprisoned for that and forced to be registered sex offenders for life. This is clearly absurd. It is bound up with the peculiar forms of American “moral panics” around sexuality. Apparently people in prison for sex crimes is the fastest growing category of prisoner, and because of various laws like Megan’s Law, there has been a tremendous growth of registered sex offenders and people kept in prison after their terms have been served. All of this is complicated, of course, and if taken at face value, the UN convention could be seen as legitimating the idiotic US laws. Randy also invoked the specter of “unintended consequences of well-meaning reformers”, suggesting that our action could set in motion a stream of consequences that we would regret. I proposed that we add to the resolution – the part urging the Senate to approve the convention – the necessary “understanding” to deal with these issues. This, I observed, would of course make it even less likely that the Senate would approve it, since the right wing was unlikely to support any sort of subtle understanding of anything connected to sex, but it would be “teachable moment” for the ASA to lay out a principled view of these matters informed by what we know about adolescent sexuality. Someone else suggested that the sociology of sexualities section should weigh in on this. Clearly the discussion was getting way too complicated for the real task at hand. We had an initial vote on setting up a committee to rewrite the resolution in light of the discussion, with the help of the sexualities section. It lost by one vote. Then the initial resolution was defeated. I argued calmly that affirming the UN Convention was really affirming the principle that children should be viewed as having genuine rights and should be protected from parents and other sources of abuse and neglect, and that the details of the rights and restrictions were really not at issue here, but the majority wanted to avoid triggering some larger controversy, so it was defeated.

Sally said that she would inform Gertrude Lenzer (the person in the Childhood section who had submitted the resolution) about this. I have a quite long history with her, dating back almost 40 years when she taught for a year at Berkley, although we have not been in touch since then until last year. She is pretty intense and I was concerned this might lead to recriminations, but Sally later wrote that Gertrude was disappointment, but gracious. After the meeting was over, one of the people complimented me on how calm and civil I was given how strongly I felt about the issue.

The next day was “my” Council meeting. This was actually quite a new thing for me. I have never been a chair of a department, or of any other organization. Of course, sometimes I have been the “head” of an academic committee in the sociology department, but that is all totally informal, whereas this was proper chairing of a complex meeting with an elaborate agenda. I liked it and I think I’m pretty good at it, at least in the sense of making everyone feel comfortable saying their peace, moving the agenda along pretty well, and reaching reasonable decisions.



Monica Prasad

Mario Small

Randy Collins

Margaret Vetullo

Cecilia Ridgeway
(president-elect)

Last meeting of the 2010-2011 Council

The most interesting issue discussed at this Council meeting was a proposal made by Monica Prasad, a new member of Council from Northwestern, concerning the problem of slow turnaround time in some important sociology journals. She gave an impassioned presentation about how slow turnaround times put careers of assistant professors in jeopardy. The real culprit here is the American Journal of Sociology which is notoriously slow, irresponsibly so in many people’s eyes. This is one of the leading journals of the discipline, along with ASR, but unlike ASR it has no official standing with the ASA and thus, basically, we cannot do anything about it. The ASR keeps very good records about the length of time from submission to first decision, and makes these public; the AJS does not. The AJS is also a proprietary journal of the University of Chicago Press and is always edited in-house by the Chicago Sociology Department. For a variety of historical reasons they are unwilling to involve the association in the journal and at least appear to take offense when the ASA tries to meddle. So, that is the context. Monica felt something of a mission around this issue. When she ran for ASA Council, her personal statement was all about this issue, so she took this as a kind of mandate to push the issue.

We had a good and thorough discussion of the matter. Since AJS didn’t release data on waiting times, Monica wanted the ASA to do a survey of sociologists asking them how long it has taken them in the past to get reviews from different journals. I noted that these data would

be quite inaccurate. Monica replied that even rough estimates would be better than nothing. Other people added that this isn't necessarily true – that unreliable data can be dismissed out of hand and discredit the arguments more than the existing anecdotal evidence. In the end Council did not go along with a full-fledged study, but we did authorize Monica to create an ad hoc committee to discuss the issues and prepare a report based on more anecdotal data to be given to the publications committee for discussion.

The other interesting issue came from a set of proposals from the Persons with Disabilities Task Force of the ASA. "Task forces", I learned, are a specific kind of standing committee charged with preparing a report of some sort for Council, and then the association as a whole. Some of these become standing task forces, renewed repeatedly for five year commitments – like the task force of the status of women in the discipline and the task force on minorities. The disabilities Task force had ten or so recommendations around accessibility issues connected to the annual meeting, nearly all of which had already been implemented in practice by Kareem Jenkins, the director of meetings arrangements, and Margaret Vitullo, a staff person concerned with education and outreach, including disability issues. She had previously taught at Gallaudet College and was deeply committed to these issues. The task force wanted the practices that had been carried out in recent years to be codified in the ASA by-laws so that in the future, if a less diligent team was in place, these things would still be done. They all seemed self-evidently good ideas to me, but Randy raised a concern with two of them because they might have significant budgetary implications: One involved having an accessibility expert go to the hotel and convention site after the hotel had itself certified that it met all ADA accessibility requirements, and confirming that all of the many items on the official check list were in fact properly dealt with, since hotels often exaggerate their own compliance. This can involve hiring a compliance expert, although in many cities there are trained volunteers who do this. The other recommendation had not yet been done: requiring closed-captioning of the presentations in the plenary sessions to make the presentations more accessible to hearing impaired people. This involved getting a fairly high paid expert – probably \$120/hour – to do the instant typing of the speeches. Randy thought that this would be too expensive and wasn't worth it, since typed transcriptions were available for all of the plenaries after the conference, so people could always get access then. Most people on Council felt that was a bit harsh, but we still decided to get cost estimates and make a decision in the February meeting, which would still be in time for next August.

Plans for 2012

I had a lovely conversation with Kareem about some of my plans for the conference. He is really into my agenda, I can see, including the more playful parts. I want to have a square dance party. He is exploring with the city of Denver the idea of making this a block party by closing off the street between the Convention Center and the hotel and having the dance and subsequent jam session outside. He also plans to have childcare at the dance so parents can participate, and he liked the idea I had of very actively encouraging families to bring their kids, including to the jam session. It is such a pleasure for me to have this level of support and enthusiasm from the staff with whom I am working.

Cirque de Soleil

My flight after the last meeting ended at 4:30 in the afternoon was not until 11:20pm, the red eye to Chicago connecting to Traverse City. So I had a few hours. I decided to go with Kate Berheide and one other person to see “O” by the Cirque de Soleil. I had visited the home campus of Cirque when I was in Montreal on my social economy project, and was interested in seeing what they were like. It was totally over the top, wonderful, fantastical. There hardly is a point trying to describe the show. Of course the acrobatics was a marvel, in the way that the Peking Acrobats are extraordinary. But that is actually what made this magical: it was the cleverness and bizarre quirkiness of the staging and lighting. The stage consists of a huge pool in which there are many platforms, made of some kind of grate so they can be raised and lowered in the water, thus becoming a stage or the floor of the pool at varying depth. These platforms fit together so the pool area can be reduced to a very small area or a large expanse. The show then consists of all sorts of aerial stunts, some of which end in dives into the pool; water ballet and shenanigans; boats with performance on them; People riding carousel horses through the air. The costumes ranged from Mozart-era red coats with wigs to lizard-like creatures; to fairies and a bevy of women in bridal gowns. Totally engrossing and interesting.

Meditations

I continued to try to do my regular meditation routine in spite of the intensity of the schedule at the ASA meetings. On the flights in and out that was easy, of course. On the morning after my first night in Las Vegas I woke up quite early (Pacific Daylight Time) since I had come in from Michigan which was three hours later, so I decided to immediately meditate for a half hour in the darkened room before even having any coffee or anything. I hadn't ever done that before. It was interesting: I wasn't completely rested before I mediated – not quite enough sleep because of the time change – but after the meditation I was fully recharged.

The other interesting meditation I did was a mindful eating meditation. I had a free evening and spent a couple of hours wandering around the bizarre world of Caesar's Palace. One of the spots was a mock Trevi Fountain from Rome in a mock Roma piazza. I decided to have dinner there, right next to the roaring fountain. The ceiling was blue with white clouds, and as the evening went on, it got darker and darker, and eventually black with stars. I ordered a glass of Chianti and a bowl of penne putanesca. I placed the fork to the right of the pasta bowl and the wine to the left, then shut my eyes, focused on my breathing for a minute or so and then mindfully ate for the next 40 minutes without opening my eyes. I would place the food in my mouth – however much I managed to capture with my fork – and let it sit there for 10 seconds or so, then pushed it around with my tongue, feeling textures, letting the tastes meander about, and then slowly chew, followed by a sip of wine, which I also let sit for a

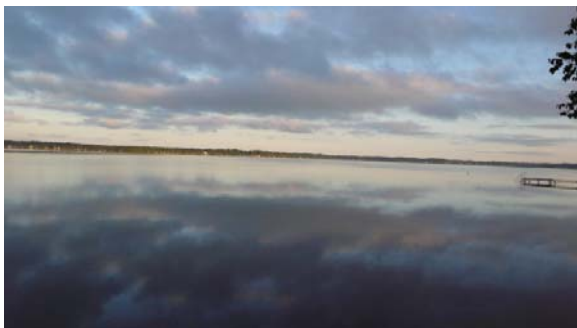
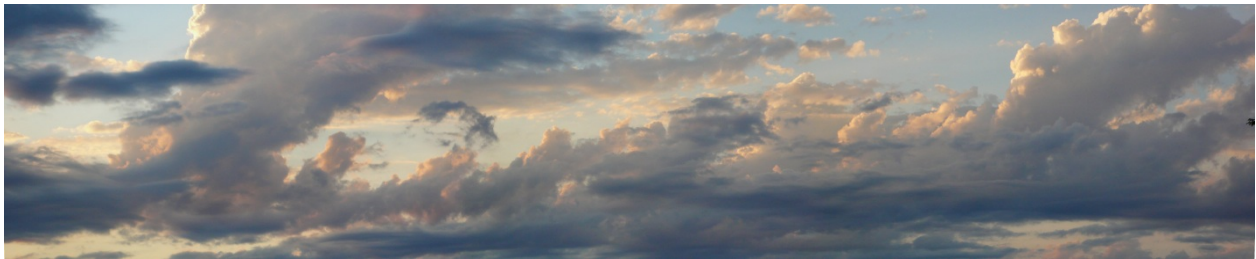
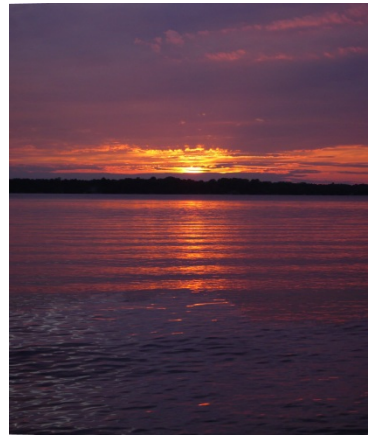


moment before sloshing it around and swallowing. In my endless quest for efficient meditation (ahem), this was pretty effective – I would have spent 20 minutes eating anyway by myself, maybe reading the paper or something while I did. So, this way, I got 40 minutes of serious focused meditation in, but it only took me 20 minutes of real time.....

UpNorth at Torch Lake, August

Marcia and I went to Torch Lake to be with Bob and Bea at the cottage the end of the first week of August. I was there the whole month except for the trip to Las Vegas for the ASA. Marcia returned to Madison to work for two four or five day stretches, driving once and flying the second time. My daily routines become very simple: Up usually around 7:00 or so, make coffee, read the New York Times on my laptop, then work for a few hours – reading dissertation chapters, writing letters of recommendation, working on a response to critical essays on *Envisioning* – interrupted by bringing coffee to Marcia when she wakes up. Then lunch with the Kahns, a little more work, a long meandering bike ride through the many hills and roads in the area, followed by a dip in the lake and a shower. Late afternoon I have been mediating, sometimes on the dock with the sun and wind on my face. Dinner, cooked by me or Marcia or Bea, followed by looking at the sunsets on those days when there is one. Se are so lucky that the cottage is on the Eastern shore of the lake so that we can see the sunsets every night. I am in a way quite obsessed with Torch Lake Sunsets. I have been photographing them forever. I must have hundreds of photos of the sun setting, and a few of moonsets as well. With my digital camera I can take a series of photos and then stich them together into amazing panoramas. This was truly a banner year (although I suppose every year is – it is more a question of being at the dock consistently at the right time), including a perfect full moon moonset. After the sun is down, the evening gets capped off sometimes by a Netflix movie, but more often just hanging out and reading in the living room.

We have been going UpNorth every summer for 40 years. It is such a powerful place. We were just starting out as grad students when we came up to the cottage the first time, without kids. In those years we came in the winter too. Then after a few years babies and soon kids joined us; for a few years just Sam, then in quick succession Jenny, Jake and Becky. The 80s and into the 90s was the golden age of summers at the cottage, sometimes the kids by themselves with the grandparents, sometimes everyone there in a jumble of intense time together. The blizzard epics and the saga of the McMurtry farm and Centaurus Bananus were told on car trips and on long walks into town from the cottage. Then one by one the kids left home, and their summers became too filled with other activities to reliably come UpNorth and then their lives too involved with other places, so for a while UpNorth was just a place for the adults to gather. But of course a new generation has begun and Ella for a while as been the new Sam.



Early morning

Moonset, 5:00 a.m.

American Political Science Association Meeting, September 2-3

The Caucus for a New Political Science invited me to give a talk at the APSA annual meeting in Seattle and then participate in a roundtable discussion of *Envisioning Real Utopias*. I wasn't that keen on going – a trip across country just before the semester begins – but, on the other hand, I do feel an obligation to participate in these kinds of symposia on my work. Anyway, it was a chance to see another professional association in action and I had never before been to an APSA convention.

The first thing that struck me as I wended my way to the registration area was that basically this was just like the ASA – the same general feel. Looking around I felt I should know lots of people. They all looked like people I knew, except I didn't. I only bumped into one person I already knew – Archon Fung – who was in an elevator as I walked by just as the door was closing and yelled out “hey Erik.” I had his cell number in my phone, so I called him and then later went out for a drink. The main differences with the ASA were fewer women – the ASA is now close to 50/50, where the APSA seemed more like 70% male.

The talk in the afternoon was, apparently, not advertised in the official program because of some kind of mistake by the organizers, so they had to get the information out to people through other channels. Still, there were twenty or so people who came, which I was told was not so bad for a late afternoon event. The room was a bit weird because the screen for the powerpoint slides was off to the far right corner of the room, so that the audience could not look at both the speaker and the screen. This meant that whenever I put up a new slide everyone turned their heads away from me. Also, the lights in the room seemed to be on one of those motion detector devices which turn all the lights off if no movement is detected for some specified length of time. About half way into the talk all the lights in the room went out, until someone got up and moved around. I said that I was flattered that everyone was giving my words such rapt attention that no motion was detected.

Sometimes when I give a talk, I see that I have very intense focus in the audience. This is especially energizing when I also feel completely on my game, thinking on my feet, improvising new formulations on the fly, spinning out new arguments or tweaking old ones. A couple of new things came out in this talk:

- I introduced the talk with some comments about the grand motivation for developing the idea of real utopias as a research agenda in social science. Two things are in play here: First, students enter sociology and political science because of moral concerns about the world of one sort or another. Some of this gets beaten out of them by the time they graduate, but many people continue to bring their moral concerns into their research. Mostly, however, this takes the form of the diagnosis and critique of the existing world rather than serious explorations of alternatives. So, one motivation is to encourage scholars to worry as much about what it would take to make a better world as they do about what is wrong with the world in which we live. Second, in the aftermath of the Cold War and the end of the command economies, the political left faced the triumphalism of “TINA” and I felt that we needed to reinvigorate a discussion

of foundational alternatives to existing structures and institutions, but that this needed to be done in a new way.

- Those comments then triggered some spontaneous thoughts about the difference between *policy analysis* and *real utopia analysis*. Both of these begin with a diagnosis and critique of the world as it is, and both seek improvements in light of the diagnosis. Policy analysis, however, begins by restricting the analysis to what can be thought of as achievable, as politically feasible, and then looks for policies that make immediate improvements from existing situation. Real Utopia analysis tries to formulate an understanding of more far reaching destinations that may not be immediately accessible and then asks what kinds of immediate changes move us in the right direction. The idea is to formulate principles that guide directions of change towards something rather than simply ameliorations and improvements of the present. I had touched on this contrast before but not quite in this way.
- Another idea I threw out concerned the analysis of worker cooperatives and the ways in which they could behave in non-capitalist ways. Economists typically assume that cooperatives will act as selfish profit-maximizers just like capitalist firms and thus create strong insider/outsider boundaries. But this assumes that cooperatives operate as isolated, individual enterprises, whereas the model I discuss is of a cooperative market economy in which coops are interconnected into associations, confederations, networks and other forms of inter-cooperative cooperation. These generate reciprocities and solidarities that mute the intensity of the tendency for exclusivism.

At the end of the talk there was a rousing and quite extended applause, really long for a relatively small group.

The panel the next day was much less interesting. Four people had prepared comments, and the written comments were generally pretty good – there were some points of muddle, but mostly they raised some interesting points for discussion. But then in the verbal presentation it was mostly the muddle that got articulated (or inarticulated). That meant that my response was mostly of the form of cleaning up the confusion, which is a lot less interesting.

An observation on the airplane

I'm flying to Philadelphia to see a performance of Becky's new show in the fringe with her company, Applied Mechanics, "Overseers". I don't know if this is just United Airlines, but now on several flights I have noticed the use of moralistic language to get passengers to comply with certain requests from the cabin attendants. As passengers get settled in the seats and stow their carry-ons, the announcement on this trip and the last I took was: "Please put the smaller of your carry-ons under the seat in front of you and the larger in the overhead bin. Do not put both items in the overhead bins. This would not be considerate for your fellow passengers." Later on the flight we hit turbulent weather and the announcement was for everyone to return to their seats with seat belts buckled. "This is for your own safety," the cabin attendant said, but then added, "and if you don't sit down you also might harm someone else." I wonder if some kind of official encouragement to invoke this sort of language was made by management.

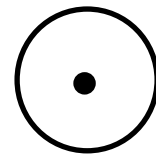
I certainly do not remember this in the past. I also I have say it was rather annoying, for some reason. It felt like being scolded.

One other little airline note: On the bumpy part of the flight I asked the cabin attendant (I was upgraded to first class and was in the first row so I could talk to her) if anyone had been seriously hurt in turbulent conditions on any flights she had been on. She said yes, in fact two of her colleagues were killed on a flight when their heads violently hit the ceiling of the cabin and they broke their necks. This is one reason why they are told to buckle up and remain seated in those conditions. I had only thought of a bumpy flight causing someone to fall from losing their balance, but I had considered that an abrupt decent could cause someone to smash into the ceiling of the cabin.

Later, at Becky's

On the flight from Chicago to Philly I was upgraded again to First Class. It's becoming a nice habit. There was a very engaging cabin attendant, Carol, in the first class cabin. I asked her about the announcement I had heard on previous flights about being considerate to other passengers. She said that she had not heard that and that it wasn't "in the book", but perhaps it was something that Continental Airlines staff were told to say. There is a lot of adjustment that happens when two airlines merge, she said, and sometimes it can be pretty difficult. The big problems are still to come for this merger – getting the seniority rights and schedule privileges merged from two systems is difficult. Carol also liked puzzles and gave me and another passenger across the aisle a series of them. I had no trouble with any of the math and logic puzzles, but was completely stumped by a couple of visual ones. Here were the two math puzzles: (1). Take 2,3,4,5 and a + and make an equation. The answer is: $3^2 = 4+5$. (2) If you have to travel 2 miles and travel 30 mph for the first mile how fast do you have to travel in the second mile in order for the average speed over all to be 60 mph? The answer is that it is impossible, because 60 mph means it takes 2 minutes to go 2 miles, and if you went one mile at 30mph you would have used up the two minutes. The two visual puzzles were:

(1) Draw a figure like the one here without lifting your pencil from the paper. The solution is to draw the inner dot, then fold the paper over so you can move the pencil to the position of the perimeter then draw the circle, unfolding the paper at the right moment.



(2) Put a cork in the crook between thumb and first finger of each hand. Then transfer them to the opposite hand between thumb and first finger. This trick is hard to describe, but I simply could not do it even after many demonstrations. As we approached Philly I asked Carol to please show me how it was done, and eventually she relented, but said that she probably would lose her magicians license if anyone found out.