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Reply to Sonnett and Breiger

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"All models are wrong, but some are useful." So wrote the eminent statistician George E. P. Box.

I am flattered by the attention and controversy my argument in *Culture* has generated. For the most part, I'd like to let my original piece and the critiques of it stand on their own and let the conversation migrate to the discussion forums of CultureWeb (<http://www.ibiblio.org/culture/forum>). Let me, though, make a few quick points:

1.) Sonnett and Breiger generously expressed their admiration for my work; I, too, am a great admirer of their work, as well as that of thinkers whose work I have critiqued (e.g., Mohr, Martin, Mische, Pattison). It is because of the theoretical and substantive brilliance of this line of work that the critique I am proposing is even possible.

2.) I am emphatically not proposing that regression and its analytical cousins be used to investigate theoretical puzzles for which they are inappropriate. Rather, I am arguing that many of the questions to which cultural sociology addresses itself actually *are* amenable to regression methods, and that in these

cases we should prefer regression over the invention or adaptation of more obscure approaches.

3.) Many of the concerns contained in Sonnett and Breiger's rejoinder seem essentially aesthetic in character—that is, they express a preference for "configurational" and "relational" methods *because of the method's representational elegance* instead of because of the theoretical puzzles to be solved. Indeed, another colleague wrote me privately that he avoids regression because it "looks like a line;" he prefers methods that "look like webs." Returning to Box's aphorism, the aesthetic criterion seems inappropriate. Many relational and configurational methods can be operationalized as measures which, in turn, can be included in regression models, thereby evaluating the relative importance of relational and "Newtonian" causal accounts. But it is a mistake to assume relational models are better causal descriptors simply because they are relational.

I look forward to a continuing productive discussion of these matters on CultureWeb.

Announcements

SPECIAL ISSUE, *THESIS ELEVEN*

Thesis Eleven has published a special issue examining the cultural sociology of the section's Chair-Elect. The issue, entitled "The Alexander Effect: Sociology After Culture," is vol. 79, no. 1 (November 2004). Its table of contents is available online, at--

www.sagepub.com, link to "Journals."

CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

Symbolic Interaction announces a call for papers for a special issue on recent research on popular music and everyday life. The deadline for submissions is January 1, 2005. The special issue editor:

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