Volume 3 (2017) Cultural Lag:
An Underestimated Issue in Postmodern Society

In 1922, American sociologist William F. Ogburn introduced the term cultural lag[1] into the vocabulary of sociology when he referred to the time gap between changes that take place in material culture, often driven by technology, and human adaptations to these changes in the non-material (symbolic) cultural realm of beliefs, norms, values, norms, and assumptions. Ogburn pointed to the key issue of cultural lag – that non-material culture tends to resist change and/or change at a much slower pace than material culture does, thus producing problems for people and social structures in mastering these challenges.

The topic of cultural lag is underestimated in postmodern society, especially in regard to globalization and the consequences of the expanded presence and effects of digital technologies (e.g., digitalization) in our lives. Digitalization, already part of social science discourse for some time, refers not only to the *presence* of digital technologies but also to their *processes* and *effects* on human and social life.

According to British sociologist Anthony Giddens, globalization has led to an unleashed society, a "runaway world", in which people have to constantly adjust to ever newer situations.[2] With the advancing digitalization of both home and work life, the increasing speed of change in material aspects of culture has drastically impacted the options available for communication among humans. However, the speed and extent of change are accompanied by a number of problems and conflicts, mainly resulting from a *cultural lag* due to the delay between technological innovations and societal adjustments.

Looking back in history, it seems clear that industrialization slowly but consequently dismantled estate-based societies. However, the speed of change then was still moderate in comparison to that experienced in postmodern society. Despite its slower pace, change in the era of industrialization and its underestimated effects also had far reaching consequences. One example is the take-over of power by the Nazis in Germany in the 1930s, profiting from groups who felt endangered or disadvantaged by the consequences of industrialization and the First World War.

In postmodern societies we experience a kind of "future shock" where humans are propelled too fast into the future by digital technologies and their effects on our lives in combination with globalization. Experts on cultural change point out that many people experience insecurity and anxiety in response to changes beyond their control. In turn, the speed of changes may impair people's readiness to master the challenges of adaptation. Apparently, we have arrived in the age of side effects – unintended and often unpredictable consequences which occur not only to an immense extent but also in an accelerated fashion.

The key to coming to terms with various cultural lags is time – time to observe, experiment, and evaluate changes in material culture in order to make sense of innovations and to decide on their acceptability and use to us. Unfortunately, time is a necessary element that many people in contemporary societies do not have in sufficient quantities.

The aim of Volume Three of *Sociology between the Gaps* is to seek answers to the problems and conflicts that cultural lags produce in these accelerated societies where side effects may occur and to speculate about how these problems and conflicts can either be prevented or solved. The following are among the aspects of cultural lag that *may be* the subject of papers submitted for publication consideration to **SBG3:**

—Ideas around preparing human beings to accept transformative innovations, adapt to the beautiful "new world" and thus reduce cultural lag;

—Exploration of the social and legal ramifications of autonomous (self-driving) cars;

—Consideration of the use of robots in health care, office work, or factory work;

—Research that considers the consequences of on-line buying and selling for our lives, or changes brought on as banks and banking businesses exist in a digital environment;

—Analyses of the effects of e-books and digital learning tools for reading and education;

—Exploration of how individuals who are not conversant in digital technologies navigate and live in an increasingly digital world;

—Analyses of whether and how the spread of digital communication, including social media, enhances or diminishes our quality of life; and

—Explorations around "big data" and its implications for access, security, transparency, and problem solving in the future.

The CALL for Submissions to SBG3 begins on March 1, 2017. Send submissions directly to the Editor-in-Chief at jruggier@providence.edu. Generally, submissions will be peer reviewed within three weeks of receipt. **Therefore, submissions accepted for publication will appear on the SBG website in a timely manner** *throughout 2017-2018.*

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[1] William F. Ogburn, *Social Change: With Respect to Cultural and Original Nature.* Oxford: Delta Books, 1966.

[2] Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalisation Is Reshaping Our Lives.* 2nd ed. London: Profile Books, 2002.