



# Interpreting Culture: Rethinking Method and Truth in Social Theory (Modern German Culture and Literature)

*Joseph D. Lewandowski*

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Scholars have conducted the study of culture in two general ways: as an observer science, where behavior and world-views are measurable, rational, and subject to impartial examination; and as an interpretive art, where a scholar actually participates in the understanding of cultures. In view of increasingly manifest problems with both stances, Joseph D. Lewandowski proposes an alternative, one that capitalizes on the strengths of both schools of interpretation and in fact underpins the work of major social theorists of the modern era, including Adorno, Foucault, and Bourdieu.

Gathering insights from a wide array of anthropologists, archaeologists, and philosophers and applying them to case studies in the United States, Lewandowski develops a practical model of culture and method of interpretation that are built around the concept of "constructing constellations." According to this concept—drawn from the work of Simmel, Kracauer, Benjamin, and Adorno—cultures are made up of social fields, embedded social practices that are continually created and patterned in certain ways, akin to constellations. The constellations of embedded actions and beliefs in different settings, such as ghetto life in New York or the world of boxing in Chicago, are, Lewandowski argues, observable, measurable, and ultimately comparable.

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