

GONZAGA-IN-FLORENCE SYLLABUS

Course: SOCI 395: **Sociology of Italian Culture**
Credits: 3 Credits
Instructor: **Pierluca Birindelli, Ph.D.**



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Office Hours: by appointment (pierluca.birindelli@email.it) and/or directly after class

Meeting times: Wednesday: 15:35 - 18:15

Course description and objectives

The aim of the course is to introduce the concept of culture in the sociological sense. After clarifying the meaning of the word 'culture', other related concepts will be analyzed: values, rules, lifestyles, attitudes, beliefs, stereotypes. The two main sociological points of view on genuine cultural practices and artifacts will be outlined: the symbolization and experience of shared representations (the Durkheimian tradition) or shared meanings (the Weberian or interpretative tradition). Attention will also be drawn to the notion of social and cultural change: the processes of secularization, globalization (and localisation), mediatization, individualization, value change and cultural pluralization. Afterwards, some qualitative (non-standard) research methods (participant and non-participant observation, ethnography, ethnology, narrative and biographical approach) will be outlined. Concepts and methods learnt in the first part of the course will be applied to Italian culture to identify its specific features. The following cultural dimensions will be looked at in-depth: responsibility / dependence; particularism / universalism; passivity / activity. Italian-ness will be compared on the one hand with traits of the American, Northern European and Mediterranean cultural heritage; while on the other the distinguishing features of Florentine-ness will be identified.

In the framework of cultural processes thus constructed we will then focus on: the creation of a sense of belonging and the experience of being "different"; self-recognition and recognition of others (as individuals and as members of a group); the dynamics of interaction with another person/other people as well as the origins of representations and stereotypes. Another objective of the course is to take an in-depth look at the concept of individual and collective identity; within the lifecycle stages particular attention will be given to the passage from youth to adulthood, depicting a peculiar Italian phenomenon: the prolongation of youth.

As well as learning theoretic propositions and paradigms students will be invited to undertake a journey of self-awareness, so as to internalize the themes tackled during the term and apply them in a critical manner. Part of the course will be set aside for the theme of journey. Students will thus be able to supplement their studies by learning concepts which will help them to elaborate what they are experiencing. The historic background will give preference to the period from the end of the Second World War to the present day. The basic concepts (theories, paradigms etc.) adopted — and shared with the students — allow for an interdisciplinary approach, including Sociology, Psychology, Cultural Studies and Cultural Anthropology. The narrative approach will be our "discipline glue".

Method

The course has a seminar format. Lectures will introduce the main topic, with the support of slides synthesizing concepts, paradigms, theories and examples extracted from the readings. You will be divided in groups of three, carry out in-class exercises and report on them. Experiential work will be used to elaborate concepts raised throughout the course.

Course requirements, participation and attendance

Throughout this course, you are expected to engage in active participation by contributing your thoughts, ideas and questions. To do so it is crucial that you study the required readings and are ready to share your opinions on the topics discussed in class. Course requirements include a midterm exam, an autobiographical protocol and a research paper.

For the *autobiographic paper* each student will write, under the professor's supervision, a partial autobiography (10/15 pages), in which he/she recounts the events which led him/her to choose the study program in Florence, the expectations he/she entertained, the encounter with reality, the

prospects of life back in the United States. In the final part of this work each student will interview one of his/her colleagues. The *research paper* (5/10 pages) consists of a social-anthropological description of a place in the city of Florence. Students will describe and recount (with the help of photographic documentation) a place in the city: a square, a district, a café etc. You are expected to make reference to the interpretative methods of analysis acquired during the course. Both papers – written and submitted during the course following the professor's indications – will form a single work (*final paper*). Attendance is mandatory. Unauthorized absences will have negative consequences for your final grade.

Technology policy

Please be advised that laptops are allowed only to take notes during the lecture. You may not use your computer to surf the Web or for any other personal purpose. Please remember to turn off your cell phone.

Grading

Grading is based on a scale of 500 total points.

- Class participation: 100 points (20%).
- Mid-term exam: 100 points (20%).
- Autobiographical paper: 200 points (40%).
- Research paper: 100 points (20%).

Textbook

A course pack will be made available. In addition further readings will be given as class hand-outs or by email in a PDF-format.

Basic reference

- APPIAH, K.A. (2007) *Cosmopolitanism. Ethics in a World of Strangers*. New York: Norton.
- BECK U., A. Giddens and S. Lasch (1994) *Reflexive Modernization*. Stanford: University Press.
- BIRINDELLI, P. (2003) *The Adolescent Room*, 1st Conference “Quo vadis juvenis. Erich Fromm and Beyond: Life Styles, Values and Character of the European Youth”, International Erich Fromm Society (Tubingen).
- BOURDIEU, P. and J. Passeron (1977) *Society, Culture and Education*. CA: Sage.
- BRUNER, J. (1990) *Acts of Meaning*. London: Harvard University Press.
- COOK, T. and FURSTENBERG, F. (2002) *Explaining Aspects of the Transition to Adulthood in Italy, Sweden, Germany, and the United States*, in “Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science” Vol. 580: pp. 257-287.
- ELIADE, M. (1958) *Birth and Rebirth. Rites and Symbols of Initiation*. New York: Harper & Row.
- EUROSTAT (1997) *Youth in the European Union*. Bruxelles: European Commission.
- EUROSTAT (2007) *Young Europeans through statistics*. Luxembourg.
- FORGACS, D. and R. LUMLEY (Eds., 1996) *Italian Cultural Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- FROMM, E. (1941) *Escape from Freedom*. New York: Farrar & Rinehart.
- FROMM, E. (1959) *Values, Psychology and Human Existence*, in A.H. Maslow (ed.) *New Knowledge in Human Values*. New York: Harper & Row.
- GEERTZ, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic.
- GERGEN, K. (1991) *The Saturated Self. Dilemmas of identity in contemporary Life*. New York: Basic.
- GIDDENS, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity*. Stanford: University Press.
- GOFFMAN, E. (1959) *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday.
- GRISWOLD, W. (1994) *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. London: Sage.
- HANNERZ, U. (1992) *Cultural Complexity. Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning*. New York: Columbia University.
- KLUCKHOHN, C. (1951) *An Anthropological Approach to the Study of Values*, in “Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences”, Vol. 4, No. 6: pp. 2-3.
- LASCH, C. (1980) *The Culture of Narcissism*. London: Abacus.
- LEED, E.J. (1991) *The Mind of the Traveller. From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism*. New York: Basic.
- LEJEUNE, P. (1989) *On Autobiography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- ROSEN, C. (2005) *The Overpraised American*, in “Policy Review”, 133: pp. 27-43.
- SCHWARTZ, H. (1977) *Qualitative Sociology. A Method to the Madness*. New York: Free Press.
- SPATES, J. (1983) *The Sociology of Values*. In “Annual Review of Sociology” 9: 27-49.
- TAYLOR, C. (1989) *The Politics of Recognitions*. Princeton: University Press.

Course outline & schedule (*The order could be changed according to professor's judgment*)

Week 1	<p>Introduction to the course: values and human existence Reading – KLUCKHOHN, C. (1951) <i>An Anthropological Approach to the Study of Values</i>, in “Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences”, Vol. 4, No. 6: pp. 2-3. – FROMM, E. (1959) <i>Values, Psychology and Human Existence</i>, in A.H. Maslow (ed.) <i>New Knowledge in Human Values</i>. New York: Harper & Row.</p> <p><i>Exercise and/or Discussion</i></p>
Week 2	<p>Self and other recognition: the experience of travel Reading – LEED, E.J. (1991) <i>The Mind of the Traveller</i>. New York: Basic. <i>For a History of Travel</i>, pp. 1-22; <i>The Mind of the Modern Traveler</i>, pp. 285-293.</p> <p><i>Exercise and/or Discussion</i></p>
Week 3	<p>Culture: toward a useful definition Reading – GRISWOLD, W. (1994) <i>Cultures and Societies in a Changing World</i>. London: Sage. <i>Preface</i>, pp. xv-xix; <i>Culture and the Cultural Diamond</i>, pp. 1-20 – GEERTZ, C. (1973): <i>The Interpretation of Cultures</i>. New York: Basic. <i>Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture</i>, pp. 3-30.</p> <p><i>Introduction to the autobiographical paper</i></p>
Week 4	<p>Late modernity and self-identity. global, local and the mediation of experience Reading – GIDDENS, A. (1991) <i>Modernity and Self-Identity</i>. Standford: University Press. <i>Introduction</i>, pp. 1-9; <i>The Contours of High Modernity</i>, pp. 10-34; <i>Self-identity, history, modernity</i>, pp. 74-80; <i>Lifestyles and life plan</i>, pp. 80-88; <i>The theory and practice of the pure relationship</i>, pp. 88-98.</p> <p><i>Exercise and/or Discussion</i></p>
Week 5	<p>The culture of narcissism and the fall of public man Reading – LASCH, C. (1980) <i>Culture of Narcissism</i>. London: Abacus. <i>Preface</i>, pp. xiii-xviii; <i>The Awareness Movement and the Social Invasion of the Self</i>, pp. 3-30; <i>The Narcissistic Personality of Our Time</i>, pp. 31-51; <i>Afterword: The Culture of Narcissism Revisited</i>, pp. 237-249. – GIDDENS, A. (1991) <i>Modernity and Self-Identity</i>. Standford: University Press. <i>Narcissism and the self</i>, pp. 169-174; <i>Critical observations</i>, pp. 174-179; <i>The uses of therapy</i>, pp. 179-180; <i>Tribulations of the Self</i>, pp. 181-208.</p> <p><i>Introduction to the research paper</i></p>
Week 6	<p>Symbolization and experience: shared meanings and shared representations Reading – GRISWOLD, W. (1994) <i>Cultures and Societies in a Changing World</i>. London: Sage. <i>Cultural Meaning</i>, pp. 21-51; <i>Culture as a Social Creation</i>, pp. 52-77.</p>
Week 7	<p style="text-align: center;">Mid-Term Exam</p> <p>Qualitative sociology: reality reconstruction (1) Reading – SCHWARTZ, H. (1977) <i>Qualitative Sociology</i>. New York: Free Press. <i>Participant Observation and Interviewing</i>, pp. 37-59; <i>Personal Accounts and Life Histories: Reconstructing the Individual's Reality</i>, pp. 61-73.</p>

Week 8	<p>Qualitative sociology: reality reconstruction (2) Reading – SCHWARTZ, H. (1977) <i>Qualitative Sociology</i>. New York: Free Press. <i>The Sociology of Everyday Life: Nothing Unusual (or Otherwise) is Happening</i>, pp. 183-205; <i>Participant Observation in Formal Sociology</i>, pp. 247-264.</p> <p><i>Deadline for the choice of the research paper</i></p>
Week 9	<p>Italian culture on stage Reading – GOFFMAN, E. (1959) <i>Presentation of Self in Everyday Life</i>. New York: Doubleday. <i>Introduction</i>, pp. 1-16; <i>Conclusion</i>, pp. 238-255. – FORGACS, D. and LUMLEY, R. (Eds., 1996) <i>Italian Cultural Studies: an Introduction</i>. New York: Oxford University Press. <i>Anthropological Perspectives on Culture in Italy</i> pp. 52-71; <i>Catholic Culture</i>, pp. 129-140.</p> <p><i>Exercise and/or Discussion</i></p>
Week 10	<p>Youth and adulthood: Italy versus United States Reading – BIRINDELLI, P. (2003) <i>The Adolescent Room</i>, 1st Conference “Quo vadis juvenis. Erich Fromm and Beyond: Life Styles, Values and Character of the European Youth”, International Erich Fromm Society (Tubingen). – COOK, T. and FURSTENBERG, F. (2002) <i>Explaining Aspects of the Transition to Adulthood in Italy, Sweden, Germany, and the United States</i>, in “Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science” Vol. 580: pp. 257-287. – ROSEN, C. (2005) <i>The Overpraised American</i>, in “Policy Review”, 133: pp. 27-43.</p> <p><i>Exercise and/or Discussion</i> <i>Choice of the research theme-place</i></p>
Week 11	<p>The prolongation of youth Film screening: “L’ultimo bacio” (2000, Gabriele Muccino)</p> <p><i>Exercise and/or Discussion</i></p>
Week 12	<p>The cultural circle Reading – GRISWOLD, W. (1994) <i>Cultures and Societies in a Changing World</i>. London: Sage. <i>The production, Distribution, and Reception of Culture</i>, pp. 78-105; <i>Culture and Organizations: Getting Things Done in a Multicultural World</i>, pp. 128-151.</p> <p><i>Exercise and/or Discussion</i></p>
Week 13	<p>Multiculturalism: recognition and rhetoric Reading – GRISWOLD, W. (1994) <i>Cultures and Societies in a Changing World</i>. London: Sage. <i>The Cultural Construction of Social Problems</i>, pp. 107-127. – TAYLOR, C. (1989) <i>Multiculturalism and The Politics of Recognitions</i>. Princeton: University Press. <i>Introduction</i> (Amy Gutmann), pp. 3-24.</p> <p><i>Review</i></p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Final paper (autobiographical and research paper) and presentation</p>