

GONZAGA-IN-FLORENCE SYLLABUS

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



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Office Hours

By appointment: pierluca.birindelli@email.it

Meeting times

Tuesday: 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 (or their effects) 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. 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 – are part of Sociology, of Psychology, of Cultural Studies, of Cultural Anthropology.

Requirements

Course requirements include student presentations, a mid term exam, an autobiographical protocol and a sociological paper.

For the *autobiographic protocol* each student will write, under the professor's supervision, a partial autobiography (15/20 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 final paper (10/15 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.

Students 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.

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.

Grading

Grading is based on a point scale of 500 total points.

- Class participation: 100 points.
- Mid-term exam¹: 100 points.
- Autobiographical protocol: 200 points.
- Social-anthropological description of a place in the city of Florence: 100 points.

Bibliography

Readings (available in a course pack) from:

- GEERTZ, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic.
- GIDDENS, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. 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 Press.
- LASCH, C. (1980) *The Culture of Narcissism. American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations*. London: Abacus.
- LEED, E.J. (1991) *The Mind of the Traveller. From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism*. New York: Basic.
- SCHWARTZ, H. (1977) *Qualitative Sociology. A Method to the Madness*. New York: Free Press.
- TAYLOR, C. (1989) *The Politics of Recognitions*. Princeton: University Press.

¹ Mid-Term exam consists of four questions on the following chapters: 1) W. Griswold (1994) *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. London: Sage: *Preface*, pp. xv-xix; *Culture and the Cultural Diamond*, pp. 1-20; 2) A. Giddens (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford: University Press: *Introduction*, pp. 1-9; *The Contours of High Modernity*, pp. 10-34; *Self-identity, history, modernity*, pp. 74-80; *Lifestyles and life plan*, pp. 80-88; *The theory and practice of the pure relationship*, pp. 88-98.

Course Outline & Schedule

<p>Week 1</p>	<p>Self and Other Recognition: The Experience of Travel Reading Leed, E.J. (1991) <i>The Mind of the Traveller. From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism</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>Week 2</p>	<p>Late Modernity and Self-Identity. Global, Local and the Mediation of Experience Reading Giddens, A. (1991) <i>Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age</i>. Stanford: 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>Week 3</p>	<p>The Culture of Narcissism and the Fall of Public Man Reading Lasch, C. (1980) <i>Culture of Narcissism. American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations</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. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age</i>. Stanford: 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>Week 4</p>	<p>Sociology of 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>Week 5</p>	<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>
<p>Week 6</p>	<p>Qualitative Sociology: Reality Reconstruction (1) Reading Schwartz, H. (1977) <i>Qualitative Sociology. A Method to the Madness</i>. New York: Free Press. - <i>Participant Observation and Interviewing: Reconstructing the Reality of Social Groups</i>, pp. 37-59; <i>Personal Accounts and Life Histories: Reconstructing the Individual's Reality</i>, pp. 61-73. - Mid-Term Exam</p>

Week 7	<p>Qualitative Sociology: Reality Reconstruction (2) Reading Schwartz, H. (1977) <i>Qualitative Sociology. A Method to the Madness</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>
Week 8	<p>Into the City: Italian-ness and Florentine-ness Reading Hannerz, U. (1992) <i>Cultural Complexity. Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning</i>. New York: Columbia University Press. - <i>The Urban Swirl</i>, pp. 173-216. 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. - <i>The social-anthropological description of a place in Florence (Research Plan)</i></p>
Week 9	<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>
Week 10	<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>. Pinceton: University Press. - <i>Introduction (Amy Gutmann)</i>, pp. 3-24.</p>
Week 11	<p>Communication and Culture Reading Griswold, W. (1994) <i>Cultures and Societies in a Changing World</i>. London: Sage. - <i>Culture in a Wired World</i>, pp. 153-173.</p>
Week 12	<p>Center / Periphery. A Creolizing World? Reading Hannerz, U. (1992) <i>Cultural Complexity. Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning</i>. New York: Columbia University Press. - <i>The Global Ecumene</i>, pp. 217-267.</p>
Week 13	<p>Final Paper Due</p>