

# 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@gmail.com](mailto:pierluca.birindelli@gmail.com)) 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 and anthropological sense. After clarifying the meaning of the word ‘culture’, other related concepts will be analyzed: values, norms, lifestyles, attitudes, beliefs, stereotypes. Attention will also be drawn to the notion of social and cultural change (de-secularization, globalization, mediatization, individualization). Concepts and methods learnt in the first part of the course will be applied to Italian culture to identify its specific features. The following dimensions will be looked at in-depth: *Erlebnis / Erfahrung* (Experience in German); Expressive / Instrumental; Propensity to consume / Propensity to invest; Dependence / Responsibility; Passivity / Activity; Particularism / Universalism. Italian-ness will be compared with traits of the American, Northern European and Mediterranean cultural heritage. 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 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. Sometimes students will carry out in-class exercises (individually or in groups) and report on them. Students’ social and cultural experiences will be used to elaborate concepts raised throughout the course.

## Course requirements, participation and attendance

Throughout this course students are expected to engage in active participation by contributing their thoughts, ideas and questions. Thus, it is crucial to study the required readings and be ready to share opinions on the topics discussed in class. Course requirements include a midterm exam and a research paper. The research paper (5/10 pages) is about one of the topics discussed during the course (or linked to them). In this work, students are expected to make reference to the interpretative concepts and methods of analysis acquired during the course and to their autobiographical experience, as well as finding (at least) one newspaper article and one scholar article about the chosen theme. Data and conceptual tools for the research paper are available on my blog: <http://pierluca-birindelli.blogspot.com/>. Attendance is mandatory. Unauthorized absences, coming late to class and late papers will have negative consequences for the final grade.

**Grading:** Class participation: 30%; Mid-term exam: 30%; Research paper: 40%.

## **Textbook**

A course pack in PDF format (no charge) will be made available in Florence.

## **Readings**

- BAUMAN, Z. (2001) *Identity in the globalizing world*, in "Social Anthropology" 9, 2: 121–129.
- BIRINDELLI, P. (2010) *How to do Words with Things*, in "Vulgo.Net.", Multilingual European Review in Social Science, ISSN: 1213-5518: 1-17.
- BIRINDELLI, P. (2010) *Lands of Toys; Idols and Heroes of Italian and American Youngsters; Americans, Italians and Europeans*. Notes from an ongoing research project: 1-10 (class handout).
- CAMPBELL, J. (1949) *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Cleveland: Meridian.
- 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.
- GRISWOLD, W. (1994) *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. London: Sage.
- 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.
- LUZZI, J. (2002) *Italy without Italians: Literary Origins of a Romantic Myth*, in "MLN" 117: 48–83.
- MILLS, C.W. (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press. *Excerpts*: 1-4.
- RAPPORT, N. and R. STADE (2007) *A Cosmopolitan Turn - or Return?*, in "Social Anthropology", 15, 2: 223–235.
- SCHUDSON, M. (1989) *How culture works: perspectives from media studies on the efficacy of symbols*, in "Theory and Society", Vol. 18, No. 2: 153-180.

## **Course outline & schedule**

### **Week 1:**

#### **Introduction to the course: culture, identity and narratives**

- MILLS, C.W. (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press. *Excerpts*: 1-4.  
*Introduction to the research paper*

### **Week 2:**

#### **Values and human existence**

- 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: 2-3.
- FROMM, E. (1959) *Values, Psychology and Human Existence*, in A.H. Maslow (ed.) *New Knowledge in Human Values*. New York: Harper & Row: 1-6.

### **Week 3:**

#### **Self and other recognition: the experience of travel**

- LEED, E.J. (1991) *The Mind of the Traveller*. New York: Basic. *For a History of Travel*, 1-22; *The Mind of the Modern Traveler*, 285-293.

### **Week 4:**

#### **Culture: toward a useful definition**

- GRISWOLD, W. (1994) *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. London: Sage. *Preface*, xv-xix; *Culture and the Cultural Diamond*, 1-20.
- GEERTZ, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic. *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture*, 3-30.

**Week 5:**

**Culture, symbols and experience**

- SCHUDSON, M. (1989) *How culture works: perspectives from media studies on the efficacy of symbols*, in “Theory and Society”, Vol. 18, No. 2: 153-180.

Review

**Week 6: Mid-term exam**

**Late modernity and self-identity**

- BAUMAN, Z. (2001) *Identity in the globalizing world*, in “Social Anthropology” 9, 2: 121–129.

**Week 7:**

**The culture of narcissism**

- LASCH, C. (1980) *The Culture of Narcissism*. London: Abacus. *Preface*, xiii-xviii; *The Awareness Movement and the Social Invasion of the Self*, 3-30; *The Narcissistic Personality of Our Time*, 31-51; *Afterword: The Culture of Narcissism Revisited*, 237-249.
- BIRINDELLI, P. (2010) *Lands of Toys*. Notes from an ongoing research project: 1-3 (class handout).

Deadline for the choice of the research paper

**Week 8:**

**Youth and adulthood: Italy and United States**

- BIRINDELLI, P. (2010) *How to do Words with Things*, in “Vulgo.Net.”, Multilingual European Review in Social Science, ISSN: 1213-5518: 1-17.

**Week 9:**

**Old and new heroes: a mythical way into cultural values**

- CAMPBELL, J. (1949) *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Cleveland: Meridian, *Excerpts* : 1-8.
- BIRINDELLI, P. (2010) *Idols and Heroes of Italian and American Youngsters*, Notes from an ongoing research project: 1-3 (class handout).

**Week 10:**

**Italian culture on stage: Italy without Italians**

- LUZZI, J. (2002) *Italy without Italians: Literary Origins of a Romantic Myth*, in “MLN” 117: 48–83.

**Week 11:**

**Being American and being Italian: clichés from the two shores**

- BIRINDELLI, P. (2010) *Americans, Italians and Europeans*. Notes from an ongoing research project: 1-5 (class handout).

**Week 12:**

**Multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism: recognition and rhetoric**

- RAPPORT, N. and R. STADE (2007) *A Cosmopolitan Turn - or Return?*, in “Social Anthropology”, 15, 2: 223–235.

Review

**Week 13: Final paper and presentation**