Course Description

The aim of the course is to introduce the concepts of communication and culture, and to develop an understanding of communicative processes across cultural boundaries. After a brief review of the main theoretical approaches, we will deepen the ritual approach and examine key media representation of the “typical” Italian cultural experience.

Course Objectives

Having clarified that culture is both a producer and product of communication, we will then focus on: media representations of typical (or stereotypical) Florentine, Italian, European and American cultural features — paying special attention to communicative-cultural incidents/dilemmas, and their effects on personal and collective identity construction; the mediatization of experience and the sense of otherness. Moreover we will discuss the social impact of old and new media on the shaping of communities and public spheres, trying to grasp how modern communication affects the “sense of place” and the “sense of time” (both at home and abroad). Part of the course will be dedicated to the communicative and cultural experience of young American students abroad. They are immersed in the new media, and this state of mind influences their experience of a different culture — they are connected with “home”; they have a Facebook profile through which they can display their “on-line Self”; they instantly communicate (Skype, Whatsapp, etc.) their cultural encounters. Finally, students will try to answer in a critical and thoughtful way – that is by identifying the disturbed (the double bind) or the disturbing (propaganda) communication – to the questions: “How does one’s socio-cultural background affect values and communication styles?; “Which kind of stories (culturally grounded) do I use to interpret my experience abroad?”. The basic concepts (theories, paradigms etc.) adopted are part of Communication Studies, Sociology, Psychology, Cultural Studies and Cultural Anthropology. The narrative approach will be our “discipline glue”.

Course Requirements and Learning Outcomes

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, be ready to share opinions on the topics discussed in class and hand in short papers following the guidelines. Course requirements include a midterm exam and a research paper. The midterm exam consists in answering (essay form) to one mandatory question then to pick another among a list. Each question is worth 100 point; the final grade is given by the average. Usually each answer should be approximately 1 to 2 handwritten pages. In the autobiographical-autoethnographical paper (around 15 pages) students are expected to make reference to the interpretative concepts and methods of analysis acquired during the course and to their autobiographical experience abroad, as well as finding (at least) one scholarly and one non-scholarly source – for further information see the appendix at the end of the syllabus. At the end of this course, the successful student is expected to be able to: 1) actively engage him/herself with the topics brought to his/her attention – assessed in the participation; 2) understand the main theoretical perspectives and empirical findings discussed in class – assessed in the midterm exam; 3) analyze how one socio-cultural feature has affected his/her communicative experience abroad – assessed in the first part of the final research paper; 4) critically understand and apply concepts and methods learned during the course in the research project – assessed in the final paper.

Teaching 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. Film screening and consequent discussion will take place in order to enhanced students socialization to certain cultural features of the Italian and European culture and society. 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. A teaching method is efficient if the students prepare in the
correct way. Students are also responsible for the success of the teaching method, as the pedagogical value of a method has to be enacted by each participant in the process.

Teaching Commitment
My primary goal is to foster students’ critical thinking and imagination. I believe that the best way to obtain this objective lies in the capacity to construct a dialogic environment, where is crystal clear that learning together, the best we can, is our mission (nothing more, nothing less). Students shall never censor themselves, but always express their opinions upon any theme – and the discussion about sensitive themes shall never be avoided in a social science class – keeping in mind that reading, studying and being curious is the only way to construct thoughtful interpretations. Students should also try to take the challenge of exploring unknown cultural territory, not expecting to receive the “perfect map” – you go from A to B and then to C and so on – in advance. I believe knowledge has little to do with the practice of reassuring ourselves each step we take; I prefer to wander a bit in the forest of cultural symbols and only afterwards find our way out. In our learning itinerary, students shall never be scared of making mistakes; mistakes, in the narrow sense of it, do not exist. These are the meta-objective of the course, on my behalf the only thing I can guarantee 100% is intellectual honesty.

Grading
Attendance and participation: 30%; Mid-term exam: 30%; Final research project: 40%.

Grades
94-100 % A
90-93.9% A-
86-89.9% B+
83-85.9% B
80-82.9% B-
76-79.9% C+
72-75.9% C
70-71.9% C-
65-69.9% D+
60-64.9% D
Below 60% F

Attendance, academic honesty, decorum and other policies
It is required to observe Gonzaga University’s policy regarding absences and academic honesty. Students are expected to behave properly and to show self-respect and respect for others. 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. Documented learning disabilities or other medically certified problems that need special accommodation for any of the student's expected academic performances will be treated with the due attention.

Required Readings
Readings are available in PDF format (no charge) at the course webpage.

**Movies and Documentaries**
- A Room with a View (James Ivory 1985)
- Enchanted April (Mike Newell 1995)
- Italian for Beginners (Lone Scherfig 2000)
- Journey to Italy (Roberto Rossellini 1954)
- Stealing Beauty (Bernardo Bertolucci 1996)
- Tea with Mussolini (Franco Zeffirelli 1999)
- The Portrait of a Lady (Jane Campion 1996)
- Under the Tuscan Sun (Audrey Wells 2003)
- Where Angels Fear to Tread (Charles Sturridge 1991)
- The Social Network (David Fincher 2010)
- Eat, Pray and Love (Ryan Murphy 2010)
- To Rome with Love (Woody Allen, 2012)

I will introduce new movies during the semester. Students will suggest movies, documentaries or videos as part of their research project.

**Recommended additional resources**
Data and conceptual tools for the overall course and the research paper are available on my blog: [Pierluca Birindelli](#).

**Course outline & schedule (The order and content can be changed if necessary-useful)**

**Week 1:**
Introduction to the course.
The “ritual” and the “transmission” model: Communication as Culture
**Exercise:** A communicative experience abroad
**Exercise:** Media Representations of (and travelling to) Florence, Italy, Europe
Introduction to the research paper: Interpreting your Blog and/or Facebook or Other Social Networks
**Exercise:** Cross Cultural Communicative Challenges in Florence: the Culture Shock. See the post: [Culture Shock in Florence](#)

**Week 2:**
The city of Florence: ethnographical observation
**Exercise:** My Florence Map
Ted Talk: Happy Maps (Daniel Quercia)
**Exercise:** The meaning of being in Florence
**Exercise:** America is... Americans are; Italy is... Italians are; Europe is... Europeans are; To me “Cosmopolitan” means...
Week 3:
The communication of cultural objects: shared narratives
Film screening: Under the Tuscan Sun (Audrey Wells, 2003);
Exercise: The "authentic" Italian Experience. See the post: Under the Tuscan Sun: Staged Authenticity
Exercise: Find a movie/documentary/video about Italy/Italians and comment it

Week 4:
The power of cultural symbols in the media
Film Screening: Eat, Pray and Love (Ryan Murphy 2010)
Exercise: Media representations of foreigners (Americans) in Italy, Florence

Week 5:
Media, community, society: sense of place, sense of time
Film screening: Italian for Beginners (Lone Scherfig, 2000). See the post Italian for Beginners
Exercise: Find a Newspaper Article about Italy/Italians and comment it

Week 6:
The myth of love and romance under the Tuscan sun
Selection of scenes from: Tea with Mussolini (Franco Zeffirelli 1999); The Portrait of a Lady, Henry James (film adaptation 1996, Jane Campion); A Room with a View, E.M. Forster (Film adaptation 1985, James Ivory, See the post: A Room with a View); Stealing Beauty (Bernardo Bertolucci 1996)
Review

Week 7:
Mid-term exam
Exercise: “Semiotic Awareness”

Week 8:
Experience in the digital age
- TED Talk (2012) Sherry Turkle: Connected, but alone?
Film screening: The Social Network (Fincher 2010), see the post The (A-?) Social Network
Exercise: Interpreting Facebook Activity Abroad
Exercise: Young Americans Youtube Videos

Week 9:
Research paper proposal and Focus Group
Authenticity on stage
Exercise: Staged Authenticity

Week 9:
The “othering” process and ideologically biased representations

Week 10:
Communicative and learning styles: Italy and US
– Research paper presentation
– Review and discussion

Week 11:
Research paper presentation and discussion

Week 12:
Final research paper hand in
Appendix: Final Autobiographical-Autoethnographical Paper Guidelines and Format

Cross Cultural Communication

A significant photo connected with the title

A title for the overall work

Your first and last name

Your Picture

Submission: by email (file in attachment)
Table of contents

The biographical accounts are guided by this template divided into three sections pointing out the basic phases of travel (departure-transition-arrival). The narrative framework is enhanced with two sections: preliminary and return. The collective identity preliminary consists in a general reflection on your Nationality (region and city), your idea of Florence, Italy and Europe. Still in the preliminary, write your opinion on the meaning of the term “Cosmopolitan”. The departure section reconstructs the social, economic and cultural background upon which the decision to study and live abroad took place. Here we find autobiographical accounts your sociocultural milieu (family, hometown, peers and education etc.) and the cultural objects influencing the representation of Italy, Europe and the idea of travelling in general. The transition-passage section is where different life experiences abroad are recounted (city life, housing, friends, education, interaction with locals, food, social life etc.) accompanied by an account of the virtual community made up of social networks and the bridge kept alive with home. The arrival consists in portraying a bond/link/contact/attachment with a human being of the host culture and/or with a place that became familiar during the stay. In the return section you will reflect and try to anticipate the main meanings of the experience abroad after you are back home and the contextual acknowledgement and valorization of your travel experience.

For each section and mini-chapter you need to make an effort to find a title pointing out the main meaning(s).

Collective identity preliminary
- Collective Identities: “American”, “Italian”, “European”, “Cosmopolitan”. Copy and paste the exercise: America is… Americans are; Italy is… Italians are; Europe is… Europeans are; to me “Cosmopolitan” means… Develop-interpret what you already wrote. See if your opinions have changed in the meantime.

1. First Section — “Departure”. Main: How the decision of going abroad took shape
- Family
- Hometown
- High School
- University
- Peers, Friends, girlfriend/boyfriend
- Key biographical passage(s)

2. Second section — Transition (Passage). Main: Your experiences abroad
- The meaning of being abroad — “Why Am I in Florence?”
- Myself: key experiences abroad
  - Trip to Florence (flight, taxi from the airport, etc.)
  - Roommates, Apartment
  - First walk in the city
  - First night out, Nightlife, Partyng
  - Orientation / Disorientation
  - First day of school, school impressions, professors, peers
  - First trip from Florence / Weekend Travels
  - Eating practices in Florence: markets, restaurants, diners
  - New friends abroad
  - Interaction with locals / other foreigners
  - Intimate life
- Relations / communications with home, family, friends, etc. (Phone Call, Postcards, Facebook, Instagram, Snap Chat, Pinterest, Twitter, Viber, WhatsApp, Skype, Face Time)
- Us: American Students in Florence (Italy, Europe); my generation
- An Other: The “profile” of a hypothetical Italian young person. See the exercise and integrate if with your reflections at the end of the semester
3. Third section — Arrival. Main: A bond with a person, with the city
   - A bond/link/contact with a person of the host culture and/or with a place
   - My Map: “City Explorations and City Landmarks”
     - Draw “landmarks” of places (streets, squares, cafés, etc.) you have experienced and gained familiarity with. Update your “landmarks”. Take a picture of your map and paste it in the document.
     - Take another look at the map and add a brief comment of your experience of the city

4. Return home / Future. Main: Meanings of my travel experiences when I get back home
   - Who is going to acknowledge and valorize your travel experience and how and why?
   - The meaning of my travel experience in 10 years’ time
   - Myself over the years

5. Final free interpretations about the whole experience abroad
   - ...

Bibliography

Development of the paper
You are expected to use — it is up to you do decide in which part of the paper — at least one concept from the course (readings, slides, blog, class discussion, movies...) and find (and use) one scholarly and one non-scholarly source on your own.

Format
- Use this file for the final submission.
- Submit the paper within the deadline by email. File in attachment. Name the file with you last name.
- Around 10 pages double spaced (cover, index and bibliography excluded)
- Use font Times New Roman 12 (or similar).
- If you are using figures or tables, put the number and the description (Fig. 1: Description; Tab. 1: Description).