

**The Centre for Social Studies
2011-2012**

Theories of Culture.
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Course description.

The main aim of the course is not to discuss what culture is, but rather to theorize what culture is about. In other words, the course will present the main “topics,” or “issues” of culture, that is the pivotal concerns of human existence as they are culturally represented. In the course we assume human beings as relatively uncomplicated creatures that are basically concerned with four issues only: Death, the Sacred, Power/Violence, and Sex. Thus, in the first few weeks of the course we will study various cultural discourses that have served to (mis)represent those issues as well as the various relations between their cultural representations.

In the second part of the course we focus on the problem of identity that in a way condenses the issues mentioned and makes them on the one hand a personal concern of an individual and—on the other—a social concern of a group. We will discuss “Gender,” “Class,” and “Tribe” as the main types of identification, together with corresponding discourses of sexual roles, lifestyle, nationalism and ethnicity. We will pay attention to the contemporary transformation of the very concept of identity.

The main objective of the course is to see culture as an ambiguous entity that locates itself “in between” different spheres of life. Three of such cultural “in-betweens” will be emphasized:

- A. Culture between “the existential” and “the social;” with the corresponding conflict between individual and social functions of cultural constructs.
- B. Culture between fear and hope; where culture will be analyzed as an answer to our anxieties and in the same time as the source of more concrete fears.
- C. Culture between inertia and transgression; with the corresponding conflict between stability and dynamism as the outcomes of cultural processes.

The intention of the course is to review a great historical and geographical variety of cultures, following an assumption that although all cultures are basically about the same set of concerns, the ways in which these concerns are culturally handled may be radically different and may decide that each culture is a unique entity that only partly can be translated into the language of other cultures. This situation will be treated as the final cultural “in-betweens:” where culture finds itself between unity and plurality or between universalism and particularism.

Requirements.

There are regular requirements concerning attendance and in-class participation as specified in the MA Course Handbook. Students will be asked to give a presentation during class, based on an assigned reading. The final course essay that will be the

basis of the grade must be written on one of the topics, the list of which will be distributed.

The content of the course.

1. An introduction to the course. The concept of culture.

What culture is believed to be: culture as a uniting and divisive factor. What culture is about: death sex, violence and the sacred as the main existential modalities of liminality and transgression. Culture as a response to anxiety and a fear-producing activity. Circular self-perpetuation of culture. Fear and Otherness. Culture as an art of managing Otherness. Death as the Unmanageable Other and its avatars. An illustration: "Don Giovanni." From death to seduction, or from myth to opera.

Readings:

William H. Sewell Jr. 2005 Logics of History. Social Theory and Social Transformation. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press. Chapter 5.

Elemer Hankiss, 2001 Fears and Symbols. An Introduction to the Study of Western Civilization. Budapest: Central European University Press. Chapter 1

Recommended literature:

Alexander, Jeffrey C. 1990 Analytic Debates: Understanding the Relative Autonomy of Culture. In: J. C. Alexander, S. Seidman (eds.) Culture and Society. Contemporary Debates. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Geertz, Clifford 1973 The Interpretation of Cultures. New York: Basic Books. Chapter 2: The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man.

Halton, Eugene 1992 The Cultic Roots of Culture. In: R. Muench, N. J. Smelser (eds.) Theory of Culture. Berkeley—Los Angeles—Oxford: University of California Press.

Smelser, Neil J. 1992 Culture: Coherent or Incoherent. In: R. Muench, N. J. Smelser (eds.) Theory of Culture. Berkeley—Los Angeles—Oxford: University of California Press.

2. Culture and social order. A case study of Merina royal ritual.

The concept(s) of ritual. Rites of passage and the concept of liminality (Victor Turner). Ritual and ambiguity. Ritual and the representation of the Other. Types of Otherness. Death as Paradigmatic Other. Merina ritual: the synthesis of death, time,

and authority. Culture and social order: identity and social structure. Ritual as means of keeping death “in the right place” and “in the right time.”

Readings:

Zygmunt Bauman 1992 Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies. Cambridge: Polity Press. **Introduction, Chapter 1.**

Norman O. Brown 1985 (1959) Life Against Death. The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History. 2nd Edition. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press. **Chapter 8.**

Recommended literature:

Bell, Catherine 1992 Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bloch, Maurice 1987 The Ritual of the Royal Bath in Madagascar: The Dissolution of Death, Birth and Fertility into Authority. In: D. Cannadine, S. Price (eds.) Rituals of Royalty. Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Eisenstadt, S. N. 1992 The Order-maintaining and Order-transforming Dimensions of Culture. In: R. Muench, N. J. Smelser (eds.) Theory of Culture. Berkeley—Los Angeles—Oxford: University of California Press.

Lukes, Steven 1998 [1975] Political Ritual and Social Integration. In: W. Outhwaite, L. Martell (eds.) The Sociology of Politics. Vol. 2. Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing. An Elgar Reference Collection.

Turner, Victor 1974 [1967] The Forest of Symbols. Aspects of Ndembu Ritual. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. Esp. Chapters 1 and 4.

Turner, Victor 1969 The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. Esp. Chapters 3 and 4.

3. Culture as a tool for “processing/constructing Otherness.” Case study: the image of a Jew in Polish society and in the anti-Semitic posters.

4. Death and the sacred.

Liminality and death. Existential and cognitive ambiguity of human being. Culture as an attempt to silence the scandal of death Cultural attitudes towards death: death-acceptance, death-denial, death-defiance (Franz Borkenau). Religion and transformation of existential anxiety into transcendental fear. Modern forms of repressing (denying) death: “reversed death” (Philippe Aries) as cultural answer to and source of the lack of ontological security.

Readings:

Zygmunt Bauman 1992 Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies. Cambridge: Polity Press. **Chapter 2.**

Clifford Geertz 1973 The Interpretations of Cultures. New York: Basic Books.
Chapter 4: Religion As a Cultural System

Recommended literature:

Aries, Philippe 1977 L'homme devant la mort. Editions du Seuil.

Brandon, S. G. F. 1972 The Deification of Time. In: J. T. Fraser, F. C. Haber, G. H. Mueller (eds.) The Study of Time. Berlin—Heidelberg—New York: Springer.

Borkenau, Franz 1965 [1955] The Concept of Death. In: R. Fulton (ed.) Death and Identity. New York.

Elchardus, Mark 1988 The Rediscovery of Chronos: The new Role of Time in Sociological Theory. "International Sociology" Vol. 3. No. 1.

Gioscia, Victor 1971 On Social Time. In: H. Yaker, H. Osmond, F. Cheek (eds.) The Future of Time. Garden City, New York.

Humphreys, S.C. 1981 Death and Time. In: S. C. Humphreys, H. King (eds.) Mortality and Immortality. London: Academic Press.

Leach, Edmund R. 1971 [1961] Rethinking Anthropology. London: Athlone Press. Chapter 6.

Lewis, J. D., Weigert, A. J. 1981 The Structures and Meanings of Social Time. "Social Forces" Vol. 60: 2.

Plessner, Helmuth 1951 Ueber die Beziehung der Zeit zum Tode. "Eranos—Jahrbuch." Bd. 20.

Stace, W. T. 1952 Time and Eternity. An Essay in the Philosophy of Religion. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

5. The sacred and power.

Rene Girard: culture as *victimage*. The sacred and violence: genesis of myths and rituals in acts of foundational sacrifice. Scapegoat and religious belief. Crisis of Degree. Mimetic desire. Religion as a system that maintains the mechanism of victimage in a symbolic-ritual form, in order to keep violence away from the community. "The King" as a personification of violence under control, removed from the community. The sacred "legitimization" of power. Myths, symbols, and rituals of power.

Readings:

Georges Balandier 1972 Political Anthropology. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd. Chapter 5.

Susan Buck-Morss 2000 Dreamworld and Catastrophe. The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press. Section 2.2: Time Fragments.

Clifford Geertz, 1983 Local Knowledge. Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology. New York: Basic Books. Chapter 6: Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power.

Recommended literature:

Cannadine D., Price S. (eds.) 1987 Rituals of Royalty. Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Girard, R. 1991 A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Girard, R. 1986 The Scapegoat. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Girard, R. 1977 Violence and the Sacred. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Gluckman, M. (ed.) 1962 Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Huntington, R., Metcalf, P. 1979 Celebrations of Death. The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 5 and 6.

Kertzer, D. I. 1988 Ritual, Politics, and Power. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Mair, L. 1977 Primitive Government. A Study of traditional Political Systems in Eastern Africa. Bloomington and London. Chapter 9.

6. Power, sex and culture in the process of modernization.

Foucault: modern dissemination of power; from Panopticon to (self)discipline to biopower. The body in culture: “carnival pleasures” vs. cultural repression. Foucault: investment, discipline and the body; repression. Elias: bodily functions and civilization process. Luhmann: sexuality and love as a generalized symbolic medium of communication. Giddens: modernity, democracy and sexuality. Jervis: modern civilization of the body.

Readings:

Michel Foucault, 1991 The Repressive Hypothesis. In: Rabinow, P. (ed.), The Foucault Reader, Penguin Books.

John Jervis 1999 Transgressing the Modern. Explorations in the Western Experience of Otherness. Oxford: Blackwell. **Chapter 7.**

Recommended literature:

Elias, N. 1994 The Civilizing Process. Oxford: Blackwell.

Foucault, M. 1990 [1976] The History of Sexuality. Vol.1. Vintage Books, Inc.

Giddens, A. 1992 The Transformations of Intimacy. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Luhman, N. 1986 Love As Passion. The Codification of Intimacy. Cambridge: Polity Press.

McNay, L. 1995 Foucault, Feminism and the Body. In: The Polity Reader in Social Theory. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Smith-Rosenberg, C. 1990 Sex as Symbol in Victorian Purity. In: J. C. Alexander, S. Seidman (eds.) Culture and Society. Contemporary Debates. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

7. Cultural identities 1: Gender.

Repression and modern gender. The ambiguity of a woman: between nature and culture. Sexual stratification: social structure and sexual roles. Sexual roles as cultural constructions. Sexualization of identities. Bodily knowledge. Gendered time. "Democratization of sex" in modernity and its consequences for gender roles. Sex sells? Case study: sexual images in advertising.

Reading:

Judith Okely 1996 Own or Other Culture. London and New York: Routledge. **Chapter 4: Gypsy Women. Models in Conflict.**

Recommended literature:

Annett, J., Collins R. 1975 A Short History of Deference and Demeanor. In: Collins, R. Conflict Sociology. Toward an Explanatory Science. New York—San Francisco—London: Academic Press.

Davies, K. 1989 Women and Time. Weaving the Strands of Everyday Life. Lund: Lund University Press.

Jervis, J. 1999 Transgressing the Modern. Explorations in the Western Experience of Otherness. Oxford: Blackwell. Chapter 5.

Okely, J. 1996 Own or Other Culture. London and New York: Routledge. Chapters 7 and 8.

Theweleit, K. 1987 Male Fantasies. Vol. 1. Cambridge: Polity Press. Esp. Chapter. 1.

8. Cultural identities 2: Class.

Pierre Bourdieu: cultural capital and the struggles for reconversion. Habitus and the fields of life-styles. Class and cultural differentiation. Cultural identity and social positions. Struggles over words and the problem of domination.

Reading:

Pierre Bourdieu 1990 Social Space and Symbolic Power. In: Pierre Bourdieu, In Other Words. Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Recommended literature:

Alexander J. C. 1995 Fin de Siecle Social Theory. Relativism, Reduction, and the Problem of Reason. London and New York: Verso. Chapter 4: The Reality of Reduction: The Failed Synthesis of Pierre Bourdieu.

Bourdieu, P. 1994 [1979] Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste. London: Routledge. Esp. Part 2.

Calhoun, C. 1995 Critical Social Theory. Culture, History, and the Challenge of Difference. Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Blackwell. Chapter 5: Habitus, Field, and Capital: Historical Specificity in the Theory of Practice.

Jenkins, R. 1992 Pierre Bourdieu. London and New York: Routledge.

9. Cultural identities 3: “Tribe.”

The cultural Other. Old xenophobia and modern nationalism. The dangers of relational identity. National community as transgression of an individual fear of death. Case study: Jews and Poles as “people of different times.” Nation and death. Case study 1: national commemoration as a battlefield of memory (the posthumous life of an enigmatic General). Case study 2: commemorative enforcing of continuity at the expense of others (the posthumous life of a cemetery).

Reading:

Zygmunt Bauman 1992 Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies. Cambridge: Polity Press. Chapter 3.

Recommended literature:

Anderson, B. 1983 Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. London: Verso.

Apter, D. E. 1963 Political Religion in the New Nations. In: Geertz, C. (ed.) Old Societies and New States. Glencoe: The Free Press.

Gellner, E. 1998 Language and Solitude. Wittgenstein, Malinowski and the Habsburg Dilemma. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jervis, J. 1999 Transgressing the Modern. Explorations in the Western Experience of Otherness. Oxford: Blackwell. Chapter 3.

Smith, A. D. 2003. *Chosen Peoples*. Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press. Chapter 1: Nationalism and Religion. Chapter 2: The Nation as a Sacred Communion. Conclusion.

10. Summary and comparison: death, sex, violence and the sacred in modern and postmodern cultures.

Michel Foucault: discipline, power and the birth of modern society, political economy and technology of the body. Anthony Giddens: separation of time and space, emptying of time, disembedding of social institutions, problems of continuity, identity, and modernity, ontological (in)security. Modern culture as repression of death. From repression to obsession. Jean Baudrillard: symbolic exchange and death. Zygmunt Bauman: postmodern deconstruction of immortality. Modern and postmodern identities. Case study: images of the postmodern play with death.

Readings:

Zygmunt Bauman 1992 Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies. Cambridge: Polity Press. **Chapter 4, Chapter 5.**

Recommended literature:

Baudrillard, J. 1988 Selected Writings. Ed. by Mark Poster. Cambridge: Polity Press. Chapter 5.

Foucault, M. 1995 [1975]Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison. Vintage Books, Inc.

Giddens, A. 1981 A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism. Vol. 1: power, Property and the State. Berkeley—Los Angeles.....

Kellner, D. 1989 Jean Baudrillard. From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond. Cambridge: Polity Press. Esp. Chapter 4.