

SOC 521 SOCIOLOGY OF CULTURE

Graduate Seminar, Fall 2008 (second half)

Friday, 2 to 5pm

Place: Wallace Hall-somewhere

Instructor: King-To Yeung

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“Culture” is one of the most slippery concepts in sociology. Previously the province of anthropologists, the study of culture has increasingly become an integral part of sociological inquiry. When social beings partake in symbolic exchanges, they create and recreate “culture.” From this process, we can detect traces of culture in material artifacts, in rituals and ceremonies, in systems and styles of language (verbal or non-verbal), in collective beliefs and values, in kinship and community structures, in patterns of social ties, in forms of power and ideology, and in enduring organizational forms and social institutions. Within all of this sociological “stuff,” we may find processes of meaning making and self-understanding, constructions of memories and aspirations.

In this seminar, a sociology of culture may entail at least two approaches toward a better understanding of cultural processes: 1) the investigation of how and when culture matters in shaping social structures, institutions, and social life; and 2) the examination of the active constructions and expressions of culture as forms of social action. These two approaches also intertwine with several key debates in the field: nature vs. culture; autonomy vs. dependence; structure vs. agency; instrumentalism vs. expressionism; synchronic vs. diachronic analysis. To give an overview of the subject matter, we will explore these debates against recent theoretical and methodological developments. Each of the six meetings will take on one or more themes mentioned above.

REQUIREMENTS

- 1) Analytic Questions: Prior to each meeting, e-mail King at least three analytic questions by Friday 10 am.
- 2) Primary Reader: Each week, one of you will take the role of a “primary reader” for one book. You will: (a) summarize the book’s major arguments; (b) detect what the authors mean by “culture”; and (c) evaluate and criticize the book’s treatment of culture. This is not a formal presentation. Rather, this should be a conversation with the rest of the class (since everyone will also read the book).
- 3) Short Paper: Develop your own perspective of culture using a case study of your choice. Everything is possible. The only requirement is that you must link your idea to some of the readings/ideas we have discussed in class.

TOPIC OVERVIEW

Class 1: Symbolizing: From Nature to Culture

- nature vs. culture
- play and learning
- need and socializing
- definitional issues of culture

Class 2: Framing: From Words to Actions

- Goffman's Frame analysis
- Genre, Discourse, and Power
- Key Book: Robin Wagner-Paccific's *Discourse and Destruction*.

Class 3: Strategizing: From Culture to Institution

- Cultural toolkit
- Institutionalism and its variations
- Instrumentalism and expressionism
- Key Book: Ann Swidler's *Talk of Love*.

Class 4: Living: From Self to System

- Bourdieu's *habitus*
- Wacquant's body
- Structure vs. agency
- Key Book: Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction*.

Class 5: Historicizing: From Struggle to History (Alternative Theme: Extending Bourdieu & Beyond)

- Marx's historical materialism
- Weber's value theory
- Autonomy vs. dependence
- Key Book: Richard Biernacki's *Fabrication of Labor*.

Class 6: Networking: From Relations to Publics

- Schutz's Phenomenology
- Habermas's public
- White's netdom
- Atomism vs. relationalism
- Key Book: Ann Mische's *Partisan Publics*.

CLASS I
SYMBOLIZING: FROM NATURE TO CULTURE

The word “culture” probably was coined in 1440, meaning “tillage” (*The Barnhart Concise Dictionary of Etymology* 1995, p. 178). Its Latin root, *cultūra*, suggests the idea of tending, care, and cultivation. So there you have it: The beginning is not culture but *nature*—to be precise, the tending and cultivation of nature. And somewhere in 1510 another meaning of culture emerged, namely, the cultivation (or the screw-up for Rousseau) of the mind or body through socialization and education, perhaps with the assumption that mind and body are natural constitutions of a person.

In this first class, we’ll go back to this “natural” root of culture. We will read a variety of writings on the nature-culture link observed in different groups and societies. Some of the pioneer works on this subject come from the field of anthropology. As we will see, sociologists owe much to anthropologists when it comes to the methods of studying culture. Reciprocally, the development of modern anthropology in the early twentieth century was heavily influenced by Durkheim (via the work, for example, of Malinowski). The cross-fertilization between anthropology and sociology is probably promising. So this is the path we will take in this meeting. By examining how anthropologists and sociologists look for “culture” within nature, we may learn how to approach the questions of “culture” as a distinct subject of inquiry. For each of the assigned readings, you should examine what the authors mean by “culture” and detect the specific research approaches they adopt to crack culture’s mysteries.

REQUIRED READINGS

The Wild

Fine, Gary Alan. 1997. “Naturework and the Taming of the Wild: The Problem of “Overpick” in the Culture of Mushroomers. *Social Problems* 44(1): 68-88.

Levi-Strauss, Claude. [1949] 1969. *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. Boston: Beacon. (selection: pp. 3-11; 29-33; 42-52; 61-65; 119-133.

The Play

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight” Pp. 414-451 in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York:

Kroeber, A. L. [1928] 1959. “Sub-Human Culture Beginnings.” 472-489 in *Source Book in Anthropology*, edited by A. L. Kroeber and T. T. Waterman. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World. [Originally published in 1928 by *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, vp. 3, pp. 325-342.

The Learning

Wrong, Dennis. 1961. “The Oversocialized Concept of Men in Modern Sociology.” *American Sociological Review* 26 (2): 183-193.

Dewey, John. [1910]1997. *How We Think*. Mineola, NY: Dover. Chapter 1 and 9.

The Need

Redfield, Robert. [1956] 1960. “How Human Society Operates” Pp. 345-369 in *Man, Culture, and Society*, edited by H.L.Shapiro. Oxford University Press.

The Concept

Kluckhohn, Clyde. [1945] 1962. "The Concept of Culture" in Culture and Behavior. New York: Free Press, pp. 19-73.

FURHTER READINGS

Basic Semiotics

Chandler, Daniel. 2007. "Semiotics For Beginner." [Web text] from Semiotics: The Basics. 2nd edition. Routledge.

A Structural Anthropology

Levi-Strauss, Claude. [1963] 1967. "Social Structure" Pp. 269-319 in Structural Anthropology. Anchor Books.

How is Cultural Change Possible?

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example" Pp. 142-169 in The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays. New York: Basic Books.

What is Thick Description?

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Thick Description" Pp. 3-30 in The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays. New York: Basic Books.

The functionalist approach to Culture (the Anthropological way)

Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1960. A Scientific Theory of Culture And Other Essays. Galaxy Books.

Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. 1952. Structure and Function in Primitive Society. Free Press. pp. 178-204.

Why Ethnography?

Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1922. Argonauts and Western Pacific. Long Grove. Chapter 1.

Pragmatist View on Nature

Dewey, John. [1910]1997. How We Think. Mineola, NY: Dover. Chapter 1 and 9.

G. H. Mead's Understanding of Mind and Meaning (Influenced by Dewey)

Mead, George Herbert. [1934] "Mind" Pp. 115-196 in George Herbert Mead On Social Psychology: Selected Papers. University of Chicago Press.

CLASS II

FRAMING: FROM WORDS TO ACTIONS

A system of symbols both foundational and ultimate, language is perhaps the most important tool social participants can use to construct and shape their cultures. As words facilitate communication, they necessarily produce social relations. For some theorists, words are themselves actions, with the power to "do things." Not surprisingly then, many analysts of culture apply linguistic theories to study culture and examine how culture shapes social actions. In this class, we will focus on the linguistic aspects of culture, asking in what ways we can treat culture as text, signifiers, frames, and discourses. More importantly, we will explore how to analytically link words to actions.

REQUIRED READINGS

Wagner-Pacific, Robin. 1994. Discourse and Destruction: The City of Philadelphia Versus MOVE. University of Chicago Press.

Bakhtin's Linguistics

1) On Genre

Bakhtin, Mikhail M. 1986. "The Problem of Speech Genres" Pp. 60-102 in Speech Genres and Other Late Essays. University of Texas Press.

2) On Methods

Bakhtin, Mikhail M. 1986. "Towards a Methodology for the Human Sciences" Pp. 159-172 in Speech Genres and Other Late Essays. University of Texas Press.

Framing

Goffman, Erving. 1974. Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience. Northeastern University Press. Chapter 1 & 2.

Snow, David, et al. 1986. "Frame Alignment Process, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation." American Sociological Review 51: 464-481.

Steinberg, Marc. 1999. "The Talk and Back Talk of Collective Action: A Dialogic Analysis of Repertoires of Discourse Among Nineteenth-Century English Cotton Spinners." American Journal of Sociology 105: 736-780.

FURTHER READINGS

Bakhtin, Mikhail M. 1986. "The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philosophy, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis" Pp. 103-131 in Speech Genres and Other Late Essays. University of Texas Press.

Bring Culture to Social Movements

Melucci, Alberto. 1989. *Nomads of the Present*. Temple University Press.

Taylor, Verta and Nancy E. Whittier. 1992. "Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities." Pp. 104-129 in Frontiers of Social Movement Theory, edited by Aldon D. Morris et al. Yale University Press.

CLASS III
STRATEGIZING: FROM CULTURE TO INSTITUTION

Continuing with our themes last week, we will further examine the active role of culture in producing and shaping social actions, with a focus on strategic and instrumental actions and their relations to culture as tools. Rather than being concerned with its constrictive aspects, we will discuss culture's enabling capacity—an issue we have not been able to address so far. Interestingly, when we think of culture as an active agent, we may be simultaneously undermining the autonomy of individuals in determining their own course of actions. This tension between individuals and culture will be a key to our understanding of social institutions and their productive and reproductive processes.

REQUIRED READINGS

Swidler, Ann. 2001. Talk of Love: How Culture Matters. University of Chicago Press.

Toolkit

Swidler, Ann. 1986. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." American Sociological Review 51(2): 273-286.

Vaisey, Stephen. 2008. "Socrates, Skinner, and Aristotle: Three Ways of Thinking About Culture in Action." Sociological Forum 23(3): 603-613. & Swidler's responses, pp. 614-618 & Vaisey's responses, pp. 619-623.

Motives

Burke, Kenneth. "Symbolic Action" [1973] & "Motives As Actions" [1984] in Kenneth Burke on Symbols and Society, edited by Joseph R. Gusfield. University of Chicago Press (1989), pp. 77-85; 126-131.

Strategic Interaction & Letter Writing

McLean, Paul D. 2007. The Art of Network: Strategic Interaction and Patronage in Renaissance Florence. Duke University Press. Chapter 1, 2, 5.

Storytelling

Francesca, Polletta. 2006. It Was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protests and Politics. University of Chicago Press. Chapter 1, 2,3.

FURTHER READINGS

On Narratives

Scholes, Robert et al. 1966. The Nature of Narrative. Oxford U Press. Selection.

Polletta, Francesca. 1998. "It Was Like a Fever...' Narrative and Identity in Social Protest." Social Problems vol. 45: 137-139.

Polletta, Francesca and John Lee. 2006. "Is Telling Stories Good for Democracy? Rhetoric in Public Deliberation After 9/11." American Sociological Review 71: 699-723.

On Institutions

Jepperson, Ronald L. and Ann Swidler. 1994. "What Properties of Culture Should We Measure?"

Poetics 22: 359-371.

On Cultural Resources and Constraints

Eliasoph, Nina. 1996. "Making a Fragile Public: A Talk-Centered Study of Citizenship and Power" Sociological Theory 14:3.

Eliasoph, Nina and Paul Lichterman. 2003. "Culture in Interaction." American Journal of Sociology 108: 735-794.

On Duality

Mohr, John W. and Vincent Duquenne. 1997. "Duality of Culture and Practice: Poverty Relief in New York City, 1888-1917." Theory and Society 26: 305-356.

**CLASS IV
DIFFERENTIATING: FROM BODY TO STRUCTURE**

"Class" has sometimes been treated as a separate, autonomous social sphere, one that is independent from or one that can dominate "culture." It may be argued that Pierre Bourdieu's work has successfully brought culture back into class analysis. One of the questions Bourdieu has is: How and why do cultural practices generate and reproduce class structure? To answer this question he chose, in *Distinction*, to focus on "taste"--implying a supposedly anti-Kantian approach to aesthetic judgment. In this class we will take a look at how a study of cultural practices through taste can reveal the operative mechanism of class differentiation--a mechanism that has an intimation relation to the construction of enduring social structure.

REQUIRED READING

Bourdieu, Pierre. [1979]1984. Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste, translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

FURTHER READINGS

Luhmann, Niklas. 2002. Theories of Distinction: Redescribing the Descriptions of Modernity. Stanford U Press

Lamont, Michèle. 1992. Money, Morals, & Manners: The Culture of the French and the American Upper-Middle Class. University of Chicago Press.

Wacquant, Loïc. 2004. Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer. Oxford University Press.

Willis, Paul. 1977. Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs. Columbia University Press.

Sorokin, Pitrim A. 1959. Social and Cultural Mobility. Free Press.

CLASS V
EXTENDING BOURDIEU & BEYOND

Enjoying Bourdieu? Let's continue to explore more. This class we will examine how scholars extend Bourdieu's works. We will focus particularly on the ideas of *habitus*, fields, and cultural capital.

REQUIRED READINGS

Understanding Habitus and Pre-reflexive Actions

Wacquant, Loïc. 1992. "The Social Logic of Boxing in Black Chicago: Toward a Sociology of Pugilism." Sociology of Sports 9: 221-254.

Class body

Martin, John Levi. 2000. "What Do Animals Do All Day? The Division of Labor, Class Bodies, and Totemic Thinking in the Popular Imagination." Poetics 27: 195-231.

Empirical Verification About Taste and Class

Peterson, Richard and Albert Simkus. 1992. "How Musical Tastes Mark Occupational Status Groups." Pp. 152-186 in Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality, edited by Michele Lamont and Marcel Fournier. University of Chicago Press.

Chan, Tak Wing and John H. Goldthorpe. 2007. "Social Status and Newspaper Readership." American Journal of Sociology 112(4): 1095-1134.

Lizardo, Omar. 2006. "How Cultural Tastes Shape Personal Networks." American Sociological Review 71: 778-807.

Lizardo, Omar and Sara Skiles. 2008. "Highbrow Omnivorousness on the Small Screen? Cultural Industry Systems and Patterns of Cultural Choice in Europe." Poetics (forthcoming)

Field

Martin, John Levi. 2003. "What is Field Theory." American Journal of Sociology 109(1): 1-49.

Fligstein, Neil. 2001. "Social Skill and the Theory of Field." Sociological Theory 19: 105-25.

Beyond Bourdieu

Boltanski, Luc and Laurent Thévenot. 1983. "Finding One's Way in Social Space: A Study Based on Games." Social Science Information 22: 631-680.

Boltanski, Luc and Laurent Thévenot. [1991]2006. On Justification: Economies of Worth, translated by Catherine Porter. Princeton University Press.

CLASS VI
NETWORKING: FROM RELATIONS TO PUBLICS

Contemporary theorists of culture generally agree that “culture” is not singular, but multiple and potentially contradictory. We have seen in Bourdieu’s *Distinction* how culture is differentiated by oppositions of classification, resulting in distinctive embodied practices. However, we know little from Bourdieu how coordinating and joint actions are possible given oppositional cultures and distinctions, or how different subjectivities and internalized necessities can be reconciled in public spheres (or in particular networks). This week we take a look at the mechanisms by which diverse cultures can possibly come together in interaction and understanding, not to produce coherence but to construct a society that works.

REQUIRED READINGS

Mische, Ann. 2008. Partisan Publics: Communication and Contention Across Brazilian Youth Activist Networks. Princeton University Press. Selections: Chapter 1, 2, 5, 6, 8.

Schutz, Alfred. 1962. "Choosing Among Projects of Action" Pp. 67-96 in Collected Papers, Vol 1: The Problem of Social Reality. Martinus Hijhoff.

Schutz, Alfred. 1967. "Foundations of a Theory of Intersubjective Understanding." Pp. 97-138 in The Phenomenology of the Social World. Northwestern University Press.

Habermas, Jürgen. [1981]1998. "Social Action, Purposive Activity, and Communication" Pp. 105-182 in On the Pragmatics of Communication, edited by Maeve Cooke. MIT Press.

Habermas, Jürgen. [1986]1998. "Communicative Rationality and the Theories of Meaning and Action" Pp. 183-213 in On the Pragmatics of Communication, edited by Maeve Cooke. MIT Press.

White, Harrison C. 1995. "Network Switchings and Bayesian Forks: Reconstructing the Social and Behavioral Sciences." Social Research 62(4): 1035-1063.

Somers, Margaret R. 1995. "What's Political or Cultural about Political Culture and the Public Sphere? Toward an Historical Sociology of Concept Formation." Sociological Theory 13(2): 113-144.

Eliasoph, Nina. 1996. "Making a Fragile Public: A Talk-Centered Study of Citizenship and Power." Sociological Theory 14(3): 262-289.

FURTHER READINGS

Bernstein, Basil. 1971. Class, Codes and Control: Theoretical Studies Towards a Sociology of Language. New York: Schocken Books.

White, Harrison C. 2008. Identity and Control: How Social Formations Emerge, 2nd edition. Princeton University Press.