

Culture and Cognition
Sociology 901
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Overview: In recent years there has been a budding of a new interest in culture that has revolved around the incantation of “culture and cognition.” In any abstract, formal sense, it is hard to defend this as a new field, but in the sociological sense (which is all that really matters) there is clearly something new afoot. This interest is different from the sociology of culture generally conceived in two ways. First, it is not specifically concerned with Culture in the narrow sense of productions, but culture in the wider anthropological sense (although specific cultural products may be used to get at this culture).^{*} Second, it is not interested in the vague, evanescent and global level of culture involving things such as “symbols” unless these can be made concrete and related to defensible models of cognition. This interest is also different from social psychology as currently constituted, basically because of a lack of interest in the problems that (largely for historical reasons) became central to social psychology as it currently stands. (The substitution of “cognition” for “psychology” also seems to imply that conventional psychological models are considered to be exhausted.)

Instead, the study of culture and cognition is an attempt to look at patternings in subjectivity that arise because of the placement of that cognizing apparatus which we call the human mind in institutional settings. How exactly this is to be done, however, is not yet worked out. This makes the field incredibly exciting. This class will be in modest form a contribution to the project—fortunately, there is little enough work that we need not simply survey what has been done. We are also free to determine the lines of what should be done. This class will both survey what there is in this area and determine where further work should take place.

Class Format: Each class section has a focal reading or set of related readings; for part of the class I will make an argument for how this contributes to our understanding of culture and cognition, and/or provide background. The rest of the session will be an evaluation of the material. By the end, we will probably actually know something about cultural and cognition, as opposed to only knowing about the sociology of culture and cognition.

^{*} The criticisms of the “sociology of culture” that will be made in the first week are not intended to apply to the sociological works that investigate the production, distribution, and reception of such culture. This is not a course about that kind of culture, but the quality of work here is surprisingly high given the temptations towards laxity. Here see work by Richard Peterson, Howard Becker, Paul DiMaggio, Wendy Griswold, Diana Crane, Cynthia and Harrison White, Albert Bergesen, Meyer Schapiro, Janice Radway, and Elihu Katz, as well as younger scholars like Paul Lopes, Bethany Bryson and Noah Mark. (While not about high culture exactly, the recent work of Stanley Lieberson is I think of great importance.) There are others of course but I plead lack of space.

Class Requirements: Students *get* to write a paper. The best choice would be a manageable research project that has the potential to grow to a publishable paper. The next would be an analytic/theoretical paper. Other than that, cheerful attendance is expected, and active attendance of a particular nature: because this is a new field, I will be attempting to make connections and string things together. Destructive criticism is extremely helpful at this stage, and hence I will expect students to be watching for errors and alternatives and offering other ideas whenever possible.

Readings: There are some required books at the University Bookstore:

Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, *Primitive Classification*.
 John Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies* (Cambridge).
 Edwin Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild* (MIT Press)
 Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*
 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (Harvard)
 Harrison White, *Identity and Control* (Princeton)

The other readings are on electronic and print reserve at the 8th floor Social Sciences Library, with the exception of those that are available on JSTOR. These are indicated in the syllabus.

1. INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE SOCIOLOGY OF CULTURE

Reading: Eviatar Zerubavel, *Invitation to Cognitive Sociology*; Roy D'Andrade *Development of Cognitive Anthropology*.

If we really want to finish before our time runs out, perhaps instead we should talk about what *isn't* wrong with the sociology of culture. Today we do three things: we deal with organizational issues; we review some predecessors of Marx & Engels and Durkheim & Mauss to get us ready for next time; we discuss the state of the sociology of culture more generally.

Regarding the reading: these are as close as we can get to “texts” for cultural and cognition, and since I will be repeatedly falling into debate with Zerubavel’s text, we might start browsing before the class begins. I will also be adding bits of D’Andrade as the relevance becomes apparent.

2. HOMOMORPHISMS AND HOMO ECONOMICUS

Reading: Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, 146-193 in Tucker; Durkheim and Mauss, *Primitive Classification*.

The Culture and Cognition problem isn’t really new—it goes back to two venerable traditions in the sociology of knowledge to establish a correspondence between subjectivity and social structure, the Marxian and the Durkheimian. Both suggest some sort of homomorphism—structural identity—between society and culture. We will take both arguments seriously.

Background Reading: As suggested above, there are some predecessors that make these readings a bit easier, but I doubt that they are necessary for what we will be looking at. For Marx, a good selection would be G.W.F. Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, also available in accessible form as *Reason in History*, and then Ludwig Feuerbach's *Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy*.^{*} For Durkheim, the best would be David Hume, *An Essay on Human Understanding*, vol 1 and Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (or the more accessible version of *Outline of any Future Metaphysics that will be Able to Present itself as a Science*).

3. THE DURKHEIMIAN PROBLEM

Reading: Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 1-18, 207-241, 355-373, 433-448 ; Bergesen, "Durkheim's Theory of Mental Categories: A Review of the Evidence"; Levy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 35-39, 69-70, 76-80, 167-174 Levi Strauss *The Savage Mind*, 1-23, 35-53; Horton, "African thought and modern science."

The conventional sociological understanding of the relation between culture and social structure comes from the Durkheimian attempt to establish homomorphism between culture and social structure; this leads to a largely incoherent idea of the formal equivalence of all sets of boundaries. We will return to this theme later; here we go to the Durkheimian problem of how to understand the relationships between "primitive" and "scientific" thought.

Additional readings for the fanatic: Peter Worsley's *Knowledges* is one of the more interesting, though somewhat loose, contributions to this. Bradd Shore's *Culture in Mind* has some excellent points. Levi-Strauss's essay on *Totemism* is also a classic. Also look at Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande*; Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion*; A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*; Barry Barnes, "The Conventional Component in Cognition"; the articles collected in a volume entitled *Rationality* edited by Bryan Wilson. You might also consider the whole Captain Cook debate (espec. Sahlins's *How Natives Think, About Captain Cook for Example*; then there's tons of anthropological work on categorization stuff, inductive logic, and ethnoscience that are quite relevant). Bergesen is putting forward a thorough critique of Durkheimian and Meadian sociological assumptions: you should read his "Chomsky Versus Mead" (*Sociological Theory* 22[2004]:357-370).

4. LANGUAGE AND THOUGHT

Reading: Ferdinand DeSaussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 1-23, 65-70, 79-100; Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, (see above); Benjamin Whorf's *Language, Thought and Reality*, 57-64; Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xv-xxiv, 128-138, 145-150, 157-162, 226-232.

One way of attempting to normalize the instabilities introduced with the idea of the formal equivalence of primitive and scientific thought is to assimilate the culture/cognition link to language. Since language served as the template for the relation between culture and cognition throughout the twentieth century, we will pay special attention to the version that became most influential.

^{*} Translated titles of things I haven't read in a while are provisional until I remember what they are called.

Additional Readings upon which I may draw: Just as Foucault takes Levi-Strauss's *Savage Mind* to the phylogenetically pre-scientific, Piaget (e.g. *The Construction of Reality in the Child*) takes it to the ontogenetically pre-scientific, that is, the child. Because it is difficult to approach Vygotsky without a sense of what Piaget was up to, I will probably say something about his general approach. There is a difference between Saussurian structuralism and the particular linguistic structuralism that Jakobson introduced via phonology; the latter might be more interesting for some students. Abercrombie's *General Approach to Phonetics* would be a good start here.

5. A PRAGMATIC TURN

Reading: C. S. Peirce, "How to Make our Ideas Clear," "What Pragmatism Is," "The Doctrine of Necessity Examined"; J. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 1-15; Michael Silverstein, "Shifters, Linguistic Categories, and Cultural Description"; Labov, *Sociolinguistic Pattern*, 110-142; John Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies*, selections.

Now with this general approach to cognition we can return to the issue of meaning, and see the incredible wrong-headedness of the structuralist approach that considers meaning to be part of an abstract system abiding nowhere and everywhere. The pragmatist approach begins from the incontestable idea that words don't mean anything, *we* mean things with words. Things then get easier.

Additional Readings upon which I may draw:

William James is widely dismissed as the dumb pragmatist by most or tolerated as the senile progenitor by adherents; however his *Pragmatism* often expresses in poetic language insights that the others had a difficult time formalizing. The philosophic issues of how this approach to constatives (statements that "this is that") are best handled by John Dewey, various essays and *Experience and Nature*, selections. A good approach to semantics from a basically pragmatic perspective is found in Giles Fauconnier, *Mental Spaces*, and Susan Gal, *Language Shift* has a classic approach to the pragmatic use of language that undermines the words and things assumptions. Finally, Stanley Lieberman's work in sociolinguistics is also worth renewed consultation.

6. SPEAKING AND THINKING

Reading: Vygotsky, "The development of the Higher Mental Functions" in J. Wertsch, ed, *The Concept of Activity in Soviet Psychology*; Vygotsky, 1929 article in *Journal of Genetic Psychology*; Vygotsky, *Thinking and Speech*, 243-285; G.H. Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, 13-18, 33-51, 68-82, 132-144, 152-178, 186-192.

With a different approach to language, can we return to the fundamental problems pertaining to the cultural organization of cognition which we found assailing us with the homomorphic attempt in the second week? The Vygotskian approach—to the extent that there is one that is transportable to the current day—may have some fundamental insights for us. It is similar to that of Mead—both consider the mind to be the importation of social process. If so, then we have one possible explanation for culture and cognition. How is this different from the conventional "socialization" account (e.g. the Parsonian in which personality is the introjection of culture)? There is an answer.

Additional Readings Upon which I may Draw: I rely heavily on some thoughts of Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, which is also a "practical-activity" approach to knowledge a little zestier than that of the pragmatists or Leninists. Vygotsky is a difficult catch, not the least because in addition to Vygotsky's main (and wretchedly written) *Thinking and Speech*, there is also Vygotski's *Thought and Language*. Two translators, two books, one ugly mess.

7. SYMBOLIZING AND METAPHORIZING

Readings: Karen Cerulo, *Identity Designs: Sights and Sounds of a Nation*, 1-9, 35-54, 75-89, 117-135; Paul Shepard, *Thinking Animals*, 1-37, 56-66, 125-130, 157-166; Leach "Animal Categories," Roberto Fernandez, "Metaphors"

In keeping with our pragmatic turn we may refrain from analyzing "symbols" and "metaphors," but instead consider these actions. We look not only at how people do things by symbolizing, but to what extent we may speak of the aggregation of such actions into a system.

Additional Readings Upon which I may Draw: Lakoff's various works are considered must reads in this field although I think sociologists will get the idea just from reading the back cover. But if you are interested, I would recommend *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*. And Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* and *Genealogy of Morals* are the progenitor of all philosophically rich philological explications of metaphors. Worth reading, even though impossibly inaccurate.

8. MINDS AND MODELS: BOUNDARIES VS PROTOTYPES

Readings: DiMaggio, "Culture and Cognition" [JSTOR: *Annual Review of Sociology* 23(1997):263-287]; Rosch, "Principles of Categorization" from *Cognition and Categorization*; Kuhl, "Categorization Tests on Animals and Infants," Bornstein, "Perceptual Categories in Vision and Audition," both from *Categorical Perception*, edited by Harnad; Lamont, *Money, Manners, Morals*, xix-23, 100-110, 123-128; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 1-10, 20-23, 36-38, 42-44, 51-58; *How Institutions Think* 55-59; Zerubavel, *The Fine Line*, 1-32; Zelizer, "Making Multiple Moneys" (from *Explorations in Economic Sociology*).

We've previously seen problems with the categorical Durkheimian perspective. But concepts are still used. To what extent can we think of concepts as being defined by boundaries? (I won't spoil the surprise by telling you the answer yet.)

Additional Readings upon which I may draw: The work in cognitive science on borders, schemata and all of that is huge. In the same collections as the Rosch piece is from is a piece on ethnobiology by Brent Berlin which is a good summary of what was known up to 1978. Since then, I think the work of Scott Atran on classification systems is of importance here; as for schemas there are reviews of the general concept that show how empty it is (equivalent to frame or "whatever we are talking about"). A more Piagetian use of schemata is defensible and here I like Harriet Whitehead's *Renunciation and Reformulation*.

9. PERCEPTION AND REMEMBERING

Reading: Wolfgang Köhler, *Gestalt Psychology*, 1-8, 46-50, 100-111, 120-124, 136-156, 181-196, 238-247, 320-326; J. J. Gibson, *The Ecological Theory of Visual Perception*, selections; Ludwig Fleck, *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*, xxvii-23, skim 23-27, 27-38 optional and then 38-51.

Much of the work that claims sociological effects on perception is less than conclusive. It may be that there the problem is not simply the focus on boundaries, but the use of the concept of “concept” in the first place. What other options are there to describe cognitive elements? Here we turn to the *Gestalt* school of psychology which not only approaches the chunking of cognition without the concept of the concept, but also pays a great deal of attention to perception.

Additional Readings upon which I may draw: Christian von Ehrenfels, *On Gestalt Qualities*; Kurt Koffka, *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*, Kurt Lewin, *Essays on Field Theory*; Wolfgang Köhler, “Value and Fact”; Ernst Cassirer, *Substance and Function, and Einstein’s Theory of Relativity*; Walter Lacquer, *Making Sex*. Thomas S. Kuhn famously built upon Fleck’s basic idea but drew heavily on *Gestalt* theory. Those who have not read should take a look—while technically problematic for a history of science, the basic ideas are very reasonable. On memory also Roy D’Andrade (1973) “Cultural Constructions of Reality.” Pp. 115-127 in *Cultural Illness and Health*, edited by Laura Nader and Thomas W. Maretzki. Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association.

10. MINDS AND MODELS: SIMPLE BRAINS AND RICH ENVIRONMENTS

Reading: Simon, *Sciences of the Artificial*, 51-83; Gigenrenzer, Todd and the ABC Group, *Simple Heuristics that Make us Smart*, 3-34, 59-72; Kahneman and Tversky, TBA; Lave, *Cognition in Practice*, 97-123, 148-158; Stigler et al, “Consequences of Skill: The Case of Abacus Training in Taiwan.” *American Journal of Education* 94(1986): 477-479; Howard Margolis, *Patterns, Thinking and Cognition*, 1-23, 73-86, 141-156.

The psychology introduced in the last week turns out to allow for a parsimonious and exciting approach to the relation between mind and social environment—instead of positing a homomorphism, the mind is organized as a set of faculties to make use of pre-existing regularities in the environment. This helps explain the great contextual variability in the success of the same or similar cognitive strategies. (That is, “there’s a very thin line between smart and stupid.”)

Additional Work upon which I may draw: Some of the educational research along these lines has been conducted by people with at least a nominal allegiance to Vygotsky; there is also a Cambridge School with its own newsletter that pursued these insights in a consistent and empirically productive manner. For example, that nice piece about how people multiply and divide milk boxes. I think this is in J. Cole and S. Scribner, *Culture and Thought: A Psychological Introduction* or Cole, *Mind, Culture and Activity*.

11. DELIBERATE EXTERIORIZATION LOOKING AND HEARING

Reading: Edwin Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild* (we're going to read all of this for this week and next, but for this week pay special attention to 96, 112-116, 128-30, 153-5, 164-174); Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, 1-18, 36-51, 68-71, 90-99, 108-111; Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*; Bruno Latour "Visualization and Cognition," *Knowledge and Society* 1986:1-40.

If we have minds that afford complements to the causal regularity of the environment, then we should be able to deliberately change environments to be better able to put in and take out information. That, in a nutshell, explains the increasing shift to visual storage of information and the refashioning of the world into a particular form of visibility following a set of conventions that we have learned to see as natural. But more generally, this serves as an example for how cognition actively shapes social environments.

Other Readings upon which I may draw: Alfred Crosby, *The Measure of Reality* (espec. 129-137, 140-142, 150-157, 161-178, 182-192, 227-240) has a very accessible overview; Samuel Edgerton, *The Heritage of Giotto's Geometry: Art and Science on the Eve of the Scientific Revolution*, 1-22, 36, 38-46, 111, 239-253, 270-271, has a very important view of the use of visual forms to contain information. Also take a look at some of the essays in the new anthology *Picturing Science, Producing Art*, edited by Caroline Jones and Peter Galison. Other things might be S. Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the 17th Century*, Edgerton's *The Renaissance Discovery of Linear Perspective*, W. M. Ivins, *On the Rationalization of Sight*.

12. DISTRIBUTED COGNITIONS AND APPROPRIATED TURNS

Reading: Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild*.; and his "Social Organization of Distributed Cognition," Schlegloff in the same Collection, John Heritage and Geoffrey Raymond, "The Terms of Agreement: Indexing Epistemic Authority and Subordination in Assessment Sequences," *Social Psychology Quarterly*, forthcoming. Essays from Hedwig Te Molder and Jonathan Potter, *Discourse and Cognition: Perspectives and Arguments*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) if it comes out in time.

I don't know whether the distributed cognition people (assuming they are still around) see things this way, but conversation analysis pursues a compatible program of focusing not simply on the indexical components of any statement (which we discussed back in week 5) but the conversation itself as a cooperative and fundamentally shared cognitive undertaking. It thus gives us a good place to investigate the ways in which joint production of a cultural understanding (or reality* as we might say) can take place.

Other Readings upon which I may draw: Also see Hutchins' *Culture and Inference: A Trobriand Case Study*; regarding distributed cognitions—this was an idea that got a wide adherence even though there were basically examples of what people really meant by it. A classic collection is Resnick, Levine, and Behrend's *Socially Shared Cognitions*, which has a great piece by Hutchins. For a correction to some of the wilder versions of SSC, see Salmon, "No Distribution without Individuals' Cognition," which appears in his edited volume, *Distributed Cognitions: Psychological And Educational Considerations*. I also use James Kitts's work modeling influence as neural networks which allow for higher order problem solving ("Structural Learning: Attraction and Conformity in Task-Oriented Groups," by Kitts, Macy, and Flache, *Computational and Mathematical Organization Theory*, 5:129-145, 1999). Finally, the fundamental idea of the production of "the illusion of reality" comes from Goffman, especially *Interaction Ritual*.

13. AESTHETICS AND AFFORDANCES

Reading: Bourdieu, *Distinction*; return to Gibson and Köhler.

With what we have learned about conversation as an example of distributing joint cognition in real time, we return to culture. We focus on the sense of appropriateness on the one hand, and proprioception on the other—the dual sense that allows us to answer Tolstoy's question, who are we and what do we do, without knowing that it even is a question. At the same time, as we read Bourdieu, we get 101 additional reasons to hate the rich.

Additional Readings upon which I may draw:

It is helpful to review Kant's *Critique of Judgment*; Some of Bourdieu's other work might be of interest here, most especially *Homo Academicus* and "The Intellectual Field," "The Origins of the Concepts of Habitus and Field." To flesh out the idea of aesthetics as it unfolds here I may focus on the Platonic division between the theory of perception that handles qualities, and the theory of beauty which deals with absolutes. Bourdieu's *Homo Academicus* is actually a fantastic and deep application of the method. Also see Boltanski and Thenevot, "How One finds One's Way in Social Space."

14. INSTITUTIONS AND FIELDS I

Reading: White, *Identity and Control*; Also see the article "Social Networks Can Help Resolve Actor Problems."; Dimaggio and Powell, "Institutional Isomorphism," Essays in *The New Institutionalism* by Jepperson, Friedland and Alford, "Bringing Society Back In."

Can we pull these things together to come up with a sense of how cognizing shifts in predictable ways as we traverse social life? Doing this requires focusing on institutions and fields.

Other Readings upon which I may draw: To some extent, the focus on institutions brings us back to classical anthropology—people like Kluckhohn and Linton. It is interesting to see in what ways we confirm and in what ways we reject their approach. Were we to use Parsons as the touchstone, the question might be simply put as follows: how do we examine institutions when we treat culture not as the unmoved mover of social action, but as a product of the alignment of actions?

15. INSTITUTIONS AND FIELDS II: STUDIES DUALITY AND PROCESS

Reading: Ann Swidler, *Talk of Love*, p. 3-6, 11-34, 114-124, 160-180, 187-206; John Mohr and Vincent Duquenne, "The Duality of Culture and Practice: Poverty Relief in New York City, 1888-1917," *Theory and Society* 26:305-356 [This is in JSTOR!]; Paul Starr, "Social Categories and Claims in the Liberal State" in Hull and Douglas.

We have arrived! We have a decent sense of what culture is, what cognition is, and how we put them together. We now examine a set of exemplary studies that return us to the question of homomorphism. Instead of a one to one correspondence, we find that the connection between institution and subjectivity comes because of the plastic nature of simple problem solvers in simplified and predictable environments.

Other Readings upon which I may draw: Similar to Starr's piece is David Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture*. Also see Mohr's "Soldiers, Mothers, Tramps and Others," in *Poetics*, which uses other methods that don't make quite so clear a picture. In economic sociology, field analysis has been done by Ezra Zuckerman (AJS piece on classification) and Loundsbury and Rao (Social Forces 2004); in cuisine by Priscilla Ferguson (AJS), again, Rao (2002? Social forces?). There are plenty of other things I would argue fit here, but now let me turn it over to you.

APPENDIX: OTHER RESOURCES FOR DOING ACTUAL PROJECTS EXAMINING CULTURE AND COGNITION

Al Bergesen, "Culture and Cognition," in the *Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Culture*, edited by Jacobs and Hanrahan. New York: Basil Blackwell, in press (so I haven't read this yet).

Paul DiMaggio, "Culture and Cognition." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24:xxx-xxx.

Wendy Griswold, "A Methodological Framework for the Sociology of Culture." *Sociological Methodology* 17(1987):1-35.

Ron Jepperson and Ann Swidler, "What Aspects of Culture Should we Measure?" *Poetics* 22(1994):359-371.

Jason Kaufman, "Endogenous Explanation in the Sociology of Culture," *Annual Review of Sociology* 30(2004): 335-357.

John Mohr, "Measuring Meaning Structures." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24(1998): 345-370.

Ann Swidler and Jorge Arditi—review in the *Annual Review of Sociology* 1995 or 1996

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