Introduction

The course focuses on selected themes in the sociology of culture -- how signs, symbols, language, conceptual structures, forms of knowledge, and forms of power interact to create meaning in our life (I’m not suggesting that there will be no meaning in your life if you didn’t take this course, only that without culture there may indeed be no real “meaning” left). Four key themes will be our focus: 1) culture and domination; 2) culture and signification, 3) culture and practice, and 4) culture and media, each divided into subthemes (as with all classification systems, this too is arbitrary and rigorous). The course uses a good mix of theoretical and empirical orientations, at times, present within the same work (miraculously).

The course assumes some prior acquaintance with classical and contemporary social theory (but don’t panic, I can always help out with a “lecture”). Ideally, lectures will be kept to a minimum and class participation will be a central part of the course. Students will take an active part in the seminar, and will be responsible for leading at least one seminar discussion. Students will develop sound foundations (hopefully) in the key areas of the sociology of culture, developing the tools necessary to integrate cultural questions into their own research agendas.

Texts

Reading is an important activity for this class (and in a whole bunch of other classes about which I don’t care). This is why I am assigning, not a lot of readings, but a very modest amount. I could assign “a book a week” in a graduate class; but over the years I have realized that it is better for graduate students to have read, instead of pretending to have read, the material. So, rejoice: only three chapter-length texts a week in this class. But we must also
make a promise to ourselves: no more pretending. We will come to class having read the material, instead of taxing the brain to be clever for close to three hours.

Assignments

This course presents a variety of requirements designed to tap the full array of your academic strengths and skills (if you don’t have them, you will develop them):

1) **Deep Thoughts**: Beginning on week 1 of the semester, each student is expected to write a brief summary of each article, discussing points that you believe constitute a real strength of the material (100-word summary for each article, totaling 300 words for the three weekly articles). Second, each summary should end with a question about the material for class discussion. You will post your deep thoughts on D2L discussion forum BEFORE our weekly meetings. This work will constitute 20% of your final grade.

2) **Discussion and Presentation**: Most of our meetings will be led by students. Each student will be expected to lead at least one class discussion during the semester. Students will be graded on their performance. These grades will count for 10% of the final grade.

3) **Toward a Research Paper or Proposal**: Three short, focused written assignments are part of the course requirements:

   A) **Paper Topic and Bibliography**: Each student must propose a research topic addressing any of the substantive areas covered in this course. Students must provide a one-page description of their project, and generate a list of 12 bibliographic citations representing their research area. This assignment will count for 10% of your final grade.

   B) **Literature Review**: Using the Social Science Citation Index, students will identify the four most cited items in their bibliography. Students also will select two additional items from their list – selections driven solely by the
student’s intellectual tastes. (Obviously, if you have a list of books, we will negotiate the number of things that you read.) With these six items in hand, students must a) read the materials, b) summarize the writings’ collective contribution to the literature, and c) forward two weaknesses of this literature. Taken as a whole, what do these writings say about the current state of sociological knowledge on your topic? What are the issues and controversies introduced by these materials? What questions do the articles/books pose for the topic you are planning to research? What questions/issues are currently missing from discourse in your field? This paper should be 5-7 pages in length. It will count for 25% of your final grade.

C) Research Paper or Proposal: Students have proposed a research topic and explored some relevant literature. In this assignment students must revisit and revise their research topic, expanding it to something akin to a short article. Students also are required to discuss one possible method for studying the problem at hand. This paper should be 12-15 pages in length. It will constitute 30% of your final grade.

D) Attendance: I will view student input as vital to this course (yes, everyone says that but I mean it). Faithful attendance is a must, and students are expected to come to class prepared and ready to enter discussion. Attendance and participation will constitute 5% of your final grade.

Break up

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<td>Research Proposal/Paper</td>
<td>Dec 14, 2016</td>
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Sociology of Culture - Syllabus Fall 2016 3
Calendar

The following schedule is how we will, more or less, move forward, starting with three contemporary expressions of classical sociological thought -- Marxist, Weberian, and Durkheimian -- in our study of culture.

Week 1: September 7

Classical Influences

Terry Eagleton, Base and Superstructure Revisited -- Marxist
Walzer, Puritanism as a Revolutionary Ideology -- Weberian
Victor Turner, Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality -- Durkheimian

PART I: CULTURE AND DOMINATION

Week 2: September 14

Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci, The Intellectuals
Bourdieu, The Production and Reproduction of Legitimate Language
Scott Lash, Power after Hegemony

Week 3: September 21

Identity

Edward Said, Orientalism
Stuart Hall: Culture Identity and Diaspora

Further Readings for those who have nothing better to do:
Michele Lamont and Crystal M Fleming, Everyday Anti-Racism
Tricia Rose, *Black Noise*
Paul Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*
Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, Resistance Through Rituals

**Week 4: September 28**

**Sexuality**

Michel Foucault. *Sexual Discourse and Power*
Gayle Rubin, *Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Politics of Sexuality*
Joshua Gamson, *Messages of Exclusion*

Further Readings:
Joshua Gamson, *Freaks Talk Back*
Ault, A. *Ambiguous Identity in an Unambiguous Sex/Gender Structure: The case of Bisexual Women* "The Sociological Quarterly" Vol. 37. #3

**PART II: CULTURE AND SIGNIFICATION**

**Week 5: October 5**

**Signs**

Ferdinand Saussure: *Signs and Language*
Roland Barthes: *The World of Wrestling*
Clifford Geertz: *Thick Description*

Further reading:
Edward Sapir. 1949. *Selected Writings in Culture, Language, and Personality*
Austin, J. L. 1962. *How To Do Things with Words*
Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*
Week 6: October 12

Cognition

Claude Levi-Strauss, *Savage Mind* (ch. 1)

Eviatar Zerubavel, *The Elephant in the Room*

Wayne Brekhus, *The Sociology of the Unmarked*

Further recommended readings:

Goffman, *Out of Frame Activity*


Week 7: October 19

National

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (Intro & Origins)

Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism and Religion*

Aneesh, *Bloody Language*

Further reading:

Anderson, B. 1989. *Imagined Communities*


Anthony Smith, *National Identity*
PART III: CULTURE AND PRACTICE

Week 8: October 26

Symbolic Practice

Bourdieu, Structures and the Habitus
Bourdieu, Forms of Capital
Clifford Geertz, Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight

Week 9: November 2

Spatial Practice

Georg Simmel, The Metropolis and Mental Life
David Harvey, Modernity and Modernism
Gupta and Ferguson, Beyond “culture”

Week 10: November 9

Artistic Practice

Howard Becker, Art Worlds and Collective Activity
Matthew Rampley: Art as a Social System: The Sociological Aesthetics of Niklas Luhmann

Recommended reading:
Janet Wolf: The Social Production of Art
Howard Becker, Art Worlds.
Niklas Luhmann, Art as a Social System
PART IV: CULTURE AND THE MEDIA

Week 11: November 16

Technology

McLuhan: Understanding Media

Baudrillard, Simulations

Joshua Meyrowitz: Shifting worlds of strangers: medium theory and changes in “them” versus “us”

Further Recommended Readings:


Joshua Meyrowitz. No sense of place: the impact of electronic media on social behavior.


Week 12: November 30

Print, Sound and Screen

Foucault, What is an Author?

Walter Benjamin. The Work of Art in the Age Mechanical Reproduction

Todd Gitlin, The Unification of the World: The Supply and Demand Side of American Popular Culture

Further Recommended Readings:

Week 13: December 7

Fashion and Food

Simmel, Fashion, *American Journal of Sociology*

Marshall Sahlins, Food as Symbolic Code

Michael Pollan, Cooking Shows

Week 14: December 14

Student Presentations

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**UNIVERSITY AND SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT POLICIES**

The Secretary of the University maintains a web page that contains university policies that affect the instructor and the students in this course, as well as essential information specific to conduct of the course. The link to that web page is: [http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/SyllabusLinks.pdf](http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/SyllabusLinks.pdf)

Students with Disabilities. Verification of disability, class standards, the policy on the use of alternate material and test accommodations can be found at the following: [http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/DSAD/SAC/SACltr.pdf](http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/DSAD/SAC/SACltr.pdf)

Religious Observances. Policies regarding accommodations for absences due to religious observance are found at the following: [http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S1.5.htm](http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S1.5.htm)

Students called to active Military Duty. Accommodations for absences due to call-up of reserves to active military duty are found at the following: [http://www4.uwm.edu/current_students/military_call_up.cfm](http://www4.uwm.edu/current_students/military_call_up.cfm)

Incompletes. You may be given an incomplete if you have carried a course successfully until near the end of the semester but, because of illness or other unusual and substantiated cause beyond your control, have been unable to take or complete the final examination or to complete some limited amount of course work. An incomplete is not given unless you prove to the instructor that you were prevented from completing the course for just cause as indicated above. The conditions for awarding
Discriminatory Conduct (such as sexual harassment). Discriminatory conduct will not be tolerated by the University. It poisons the work and learning environment of the University and threatens the careers, educational experience and well-being of students, faculty and staff. Policies regarding discriminatory conduct can be found at:

http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S47.pdf

Academic Misconduct. Students are responsible for the honest completion and representation of their work, for the appropriate citation of sources, and for respect of others’ academic endeavors. Policies for addressing students cheating on exams or plagiarism can be found at the following: http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/OSL/DOS/conduct.html

Complaint Procedures. Students may direct complaints to the Sociology Department Chair or the Associate Dean for Social Sciences in the College of Letters & Sciences. If the complaint allegedly violates a specific university policy, it may be directed to the Sociology Department Chair, the Associate Dean for Social Sciences in the College of Letters & Sciences, or to the appropriate university office responsible for enforcing the policy. Policies may be found at:

http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S49.7.htm

Grade Appeal Procedures. A student may appeal a grade on the grounds that it is based on a capricious or arbitrary decision of the course instructor. Such an appeal shall follow the established procedures adopted by the department, college, or school in which the course resides or in the case of graduate students, the Graduate School. These procedures are available in writing from the respective department chairperson or the Academic Dean of the College/School. Procedures for student grade appeal can be found at: http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S28.htm

Final Examination Policy. Policies regarding final examinations can be found at the following:

http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S22.htm

Book Royalties. In accord with Department of Sociology policy, the royalties from the sale of faculty-authored books to students in their classes are donated to a UWM Foundation Sociology Account to support future awards and activities for UWM students in Sociology.