



Introduction to Culture Studies,: (UK & Ireland)

Course Notes Summer 2017

online:

<http://www.spence.saar.de/courses/culture>

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culture

/ˈkʌltʃə/ (say ˈkulchuh)

noun **1.** *Sociology* the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings, which is transmitted from one generation to another.
[The Macquarie Dictionary of Australian English]

0 Basic organization; theoretical introduction

0.0 General information about the course

0.0.1 Overall goal(s) of the course

In this course we examine the geology, geography, history and culture of the United Kingdom and Ireland.

The course attempts to answer four (perhaps mutually related) questions:

- “In what ways does the culture of the inhabitants of the islands at the northwestern edge of Europe differ from the culture of people living elsewhere?”
- “How did these differences arise, historically?”
- “Why was it (of all times and places!) in *nineteenth-century England* that—after a timespan of approximately four billion years—the evolution of matter on our planet finally became conscious of itself?”
- “What contribution have scholars from Britain/Ireland made to the development of materialist philosophy, the scientific method, political liberalism, and social utilitarianism?”

In pursuit of answers to these questions, and in the course of critiquing those answers, we temporarily adopt various theoretical perspectives, among which the most important are:

- evolutionary biology (Darwin)
- historical and cultural materialism (Marx and Engels; Harris; Diamond)
- anthropological functionalism (Malinowski, Boas)

0.0.2 Who this course is for

The course is a *Modulelement* of the *Culture Studies Englisch (CSE)* module of the *BA Studienfach (Ergänzungsfach) Sprachkompetenz 2. Fremdsprache (Englisch)*. Other students are welcome to attend the course provided they have a reasonably sound knowledge of the language of instruction, English.

0.0.3 How the course works

The course runs for one 15-week semester ($1 \times 2 \text{ SWS} = 2 \text{ SWS}$) and meets Thursdays from 10–12 (in practice, this means 10:15 to 11:45). After each class (15 x 2 hours) there is a significant amount of homework, consisting of exercises designed to review what has just been learnt and prepare the ground for what is to come. The total extent of the course is thus 30 (15 x 2) contact hours, plus an additional 60 hours devoted to homework, making a total of 90 hours for 3 credit points.

0.0.4 Communication

All students taking the course should make sure that their correct email address is on the course mailing list. When sending an email to the course leader, please make sure that the piece of text

[culture]

(including the square brackets!) is included in the subject line. (This will happen automatically if you are reading any email I have already sent you concerning this course and you simply hit the “Reply” button.)

0.0.5 Successful participation

Students are expected to attend regularly. *If you are unable to attend one of the lessons, it is vital that you contact me beforehand to let me know. Missing more than two lessons altogether would seriously compromise your chances of successfully completing the course.*

At the end of the semester (in the last week of lectures), there is a written test which covers the whole of that semester’s work; the test takes place during the normal class time (Thursday 10–12). Those students who pass the test are awarded 3 credit points towards their Bachelor’s degree. Students who fail the written test at the first attempt have the chance to resit it (typically during the last week of the semester break, at what would have been the normal class time) and if they are still unsuccessful at their second attempt, they can do an oral test instead (at a time to be arranged by mutual agreement).

The written test will be based on the questions contained in the weekly worksheets, which are included at the end of each section of the present document.

ERASMUS students taking the course can obtain a graded certificate (*benoteter Teilnahmeschein*) by attending regularly and passing the written test, or an ungraded certificate (*unbenoteter Teilnahmeschein*) on the basis of regular attendance without sitting the test.

Most of the course materials, including the weekly worksheets, are included in the document you are reading right now; certain additional materials will be distributed in the lessons; and other materials can be accessed by following the links on the course website.

0.0.6 Provisional timetable

<i>Week</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Unit</i>	<i>Description</i>
01	20.iv	00	Basic organization; theoretical introduction
02	27.iv	01	Geology
03	04.v	02	Geography, climate, initial human settlement
04	11.v	03	C1–C5: Roman Britain
05	18.v	04	C5–C10: Anglo-Saxons and Vikings
06	25.v		NO CLASS
07	01.vi	05	C11–C15: Middle Ages
08	08.vi	06	C16: Absolutism and Reformation
09	15.vi		NO CLASS
10	22.vi	07	C17: Parliamentarism
11	29.vi	08	C18: Industrial Revolution (1)
12	06.vii	08	C18: Industrial Revolution (2)
13	13.vii	09	C19: Imperial Britain
14	20.vii	10	C20: Post-Imperial Britain
15	27.vii		TEST

0.1 A note on how to use these course notes

Each unit of this course typically consists of the following parts:

0. An attempt at a one-page executive **summary** of the unit, often in the form of a graphic.
1. A set of **workpoints**—ideas for students to investigate, as a ‘way in’ to the topic(s) to be dealt with.
2. A checklist of **learning goals** for the unit.
3. An **outline** of the relevant portion of the cultural history of Britain / Ireland.
4. A list of the main **points of difference** between the British / Irish experience on the one hand, and that of continental Europe on the other.
5. A list of **references** which can be consulted for further information.
6. A **worksheet** containing a small number of questions and exercises related to the current unit.

At the very beginning of the course, we look not at the *culture* of the United Kingdom and Ireland, but at their *geology* and *geography*, as culture is contingent upon these.

After each class, students should complete the corresponding worksheet; before the next class, they should look at the workpoints and learning goals for the next unit.

The examination at the end of the course will be based on the weekly worksheets.

0.2 Learning goals for this unit

1. Ascertain whether this is the right course for your needs.
2. Reach agreement about:
 - a) starting and finishing times of lessons
 - b) date of final examination and registration procedure (if any)
 - c) modalities of teaching and learning
3. Exchange contact details
4. Address some fundamental semiotic questions (see Worksheet in Section 0.6 below):
 - a) terminology (geographical vs. political)
 - b) flags
5. Begin exploring the theoretical framework of the course

0.3 Historically-oriented cultural materialism

The central theoretical tool that we will need to develop is a **materialist theory of culture through time**. Let us examine this four-part notion one part at a time:

- The word **CULTURE** is taken in its semi-technical sociological sense and is intended to mean: ‘the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings, which is transmitted from one generation to another.’ [The Macquarie Dictionary of Australian English]
- The word **THEORY** is used not in its colloquial sense as a synonym for “hunch” or “guess” but in its technical, scientific sense: ‘In science, the word theory refers to a comprehensive explanation of an important feature of nature supported by facts gathered over time. Theories also allow scientists to make predictions about as yet unobserved phenomena.’ [National Academy of Sciences (2005), *Science, Evolution, and Creationism* (brochure)]
- Anyone who follows the scientific method is automatically committed to **METHODOLOGICAL NATURALISM**. Many (but not all) scientists find they can think more clearly and accurately about science if they make the further assumption of **PHILOSOPHICAL MATERIALISM**: ‘the only thing that exists is matter; (...) all things are composed of *material* and all phenomena (including consciousness) are the result of material interactions.’ [Wikipedia]
- The notion of **TIME** is typically represented in Western cultures *linearly*. But time can also be represented in the form of a *spiral*, and when studying the evolution of complexity (including the evolution of consciousness and culture) the key to a deeper understanding often turns out to be as simple as agreeing to use a *logarithmic scale* for the time dimension.

There are two materialist theories of culture that are relevant and accessible: those developed by Karl **MARX** (1818–1883) and Marvin **HARRIS** (1927–2001) respectively. With the exception of Unit 2, in which Jared **DIAMOND**’s use of Harris’ work is referred to, we shall be mainly working with the Marxian theory.

The Marxian theory of sociocultural evolution is based on the notion that society consists of a **base** plus a **superstructure**. The base consists of the physical **FORCES OF PRODUCTION** (such as industrial technology) and the socioeconomic **RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION** (such as capitalist vs. worker) associated with those forces. The superstructure consists of the **STATE INSTITUTIONS** that enforce the power of one group over another (such as parliament, law courts, prisons, police, armed forces) and the prevailing **IDEOLOGY** (‘what is thinkable, what is doable’, including science, philosophy and art; art includes literature, music, painting, sculpture, architecture, etc.). It is impossible to understand the superstructure without also studying the base.

In addition to these core notions, we shall also take various insights from the works of the biologist Charles **DARWIN**, the anthropologists Franz **BOAS** and Bronislaw **MALINOWSKI**, the sociologists Peter **BERGER** and Thomas **LUCKMANN**, the psychologist Lev **VYGOTSKY** and the sociologist of education Basil **BERNSTEIN**.

0.4 Possible sources of difficulty

Among the difficulties we can expect to encounter are the following:

- It may turn out to be conceptually difficult to switch back and forth between linear, spiral, and logarithmic representations of the **time** dimension.
- Philosophical **materialism** may be ‘culturally foreign’ for some students, who may be more comfortable with some form of philosophical idealism (such as Neoplatonism, for example).
- It may be difficult to avoid simplistic, mechanistic, **causal** explanations of processes of historical development and change.
- It may be difficult to discuss every aspect of the superstructure in relation to every aspect of the base for every historical period; for this reason, in the second half of the course, we shall tend to concentrate on just one or two institutions, such as parliament or the church, depending on which social institutions underwent the most **rapid and significant change** in the period we are concerned with.
- Is **language** part of the superstructure? (The historical development of the English language will be of constant interest to us; if the phonetics, vocabulary and grammar of English have evolved over the centuries, what about its semantics? What does it mean to ‘think in English’—at some period in its history? More generally: How much does language influence human thought? And what other factors influence thought?)
- Should **religion** be treated as an institution, or as a form of ideology, or both?

0.5 Further reading

0.5.1 Reading No. 1 (from the year 1859)

No one ought to feel surprise at much remaining as yet unexplained in regard to the origin of species and varieties, if he makes due allowance for our profound ignorance in regard to the mutual relations of all the beings which live around us. Who can explain why one species ranges widely and is very numerous, and why another allied species has a narrow range and is rare? Yet these relations are of the highest importance, for they determine the present welfare, and, as I believe, the future success and modification of every inhabitant of this world. Still less do we know of the mutual relations of the innumerable inhabitants of the world during the many past geological epochs in its history. Although much remains obscure, and will long remain obscure, I can entertain no doubt, after the most deliberate study and dispassionate judgment of which I am capable, that the view which most naturalists entertain, and which I formerly entertained—namely, that each species has been independently created—is erroneous. I am fully convinced that species are not immutable; but that those belonging to what are called the same genera are lineal descendants of some other and generally extinct species, in the same manner as the acknowledged varieties of any one species are the descendants of that species. Furthermore, I am convinced that Natural Selection has been the main but not exclusive means of modification.

Source: Charles Robert DARWIN, M.A. [1859] *On the origin of species by means of natural selection, or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life*. London: John Murray [1st edition], p. 6.

Available online at:

<http://darwin-online.org.uk/contents.html#origin>

0.5.2 Reading No. 2 (from the year 1859)

(...)

(...) My inquiry led me to the conclusion that neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life, the totality of which Hegel, following the example of English and French thinkers of the eighteenth century, embraces within the term “civil society”; that the anatomy of this civil society, however, has to be sought in political economy. The study of this, which I began in Paris, I continued in Brussels, where I moved owing to an expulsion order issued by M. Guizot. The general conclusion at which I arrived and which, once reached, became the guiding principle of my studies can be summarised as follows.

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these

relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.

In studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production. No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society.

(...)

Source: Karl MARX [1977] *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, (with some notes by R. Rojas).

Available online at:

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>

0.5.3 Reading No. 3 (from the year 1935)

The linguistic problem before the ethnographer is to give as full a presentation of language as of any other aspect of culture. Were it possible for him to reproduce large portions of tribal life and speech through the medium of a sound film, he might be able to give the reality of the culture in much greater fullness and the part played by language within it. But even this medium would not dispense him from a good deal of additional interpretation and commentary. For, as we shall see in the course of our theoretical argument and of its practical applications, language differs from other aspects of culture in one respect: there is much more of the conventional or arbitrary element in the symbolism of speech than in any other aspect of manual and bodily behaviour. Processes of tilling the ground, however much they may differ from one culture to another, have

a great deal in common. A European peasant transplanted into a coral atoll or a high plateau of Central America, would still recognise what his brother husbandman is doing; he would not understand a single word of the other's speech.

In dealing with language at the pre-literate stage, the ethnographer is faced by another difficulty. The speech of his people does not live on paper. It exists only in free utterance between man and man. *Verba volant, scripta manent*. The ethnographer has to immobilise the volatile substance of his subject-matter and put it on paper. Whereas the language of literature in more highly developed communities is handed down to us on marble, brass, parchment or pulp, that of a savage tribe is never framed to be taken outside its context of situation. The speech of a pre-literate community brings home to us in an unavoidably cogent manner that language exists only in actual use within the context of real utterance.

The ethnographic approach thus demonstrates better than any other how deeply language is connected with culture. It also shows how to study language outside the framework of its cultural realities—the beliefs of the people, their social organisation, their legal ideas and economic activities—must remain entirely futile.

Language therefore must be linked up with all the other aspects of human culture. Language is not something which can be studied independently of cultural reality. To divide anthropology, as one of the leaders of our science has done recently, into three disciplines, one of which is concerned with the human frame, the other with culture, and the third with language—shows that the relation between language and culture has not been sufficiently appreciated by modern Anthropology in general. Language is intertwined with the education of the young, with social intercourse, with the administration of law, the carrying out of ritual, and with all other forms of practical co-operation. It is the function of language within these activities which is the primary linguistic problem for the cultural anthropologist—whatever the grammarian, the philologist, the logician or the aesthete may look for. As regards the anthropological problem, I found that I could not have recourse to any of the theories or methods already in existence. The grammarian—even the scientific grammarian—is still mainly concerned with the ethical aspect of the question. He teaches you how you ought to speak, what you ought to avoid, and what ought to be your ideal.

Source: Bronisław MALINOWSKI [1935] *Coral Gardens and their Magic: A Study of the Methods of Tilling the Soil and of Agricultural Rites in the Trobriand Islands [Volume Two: The Language of Magic and Gardening]*. London: George Allen & Unwin, pp. vii-viii.

Available online at:

http://www.archive.org/stream/coralgardensandt031834mbp/coralgardensandt031834mbp_djvu.txt

0.5.4 Reading No. 4 (from the year 1997)

Why didn't capitalism flourish in Native Mexico, mercantilism in sub-Saharan Africa, scientific inquiry in China, advanced technology in Native North America, and nasty germs

in Aboriginal Australia? If one responds by invoking idiosyncratic cultural factors—e.g., scientific inquiry supposedly stifled in China by Confucianism but stimulated in western Eurasia by Greek or Judaeo-Christian traditions—then one is continuing to ignore the need for ultimate explanations: why didn't traditions like Confucianism and the Judaeo-Christian ethic instead develop in western Eurasia and China respectively? In addition, one is ignoring the fact that Confucian China was technologically more advanced than western Eurasia until about A.D. 1400.

Source: Jared DIAMOND [2005] *Guns, Germs and Steel: A Short History of Everybody for the Last 13,000 Years*. London: Vintage Books. pp. 10–11. [Initial publication: 1997]

0.6 Worksheet for Unit 0

1. Discuss the meaning of the following terms. When should you use them? When should you *not* use them? Do any of them pose translation problems (DE-EN and/or EN-DE)?
 - a) British Isles
 - b) Great Britain
 - c) Britain
 - d) British
 - e) England
 - f) The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
 - g) Ireland
 - h) Northern Ireland

2. Describe (and sketch) the following flags:
 - a) the flag of England
 - b) the flag of Wales
 - c) the flag of Scotland
 - d) the flag of St Patrick
 - e) the flag of the Republic of Ireland (Eire)
 - f) the flag of the Kingdom of Great Britain
 - g) today's Union Jack
 - h) the flag of Australia
 - i) the flag of New Zealand