



UNIVERSITÀ  
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

## COURSE SYLLABUS

### Representations and Cultural Practices

2526-2-E4001N116

---

#### Learning objectives

The aim of the course is to provide students with a set of theoretical and practical tools to understand and analyze the social organization of contemporary cultural worlds in both their practical and discursive dimensions.

1. Knowledge and understanding: a solid introduction to the theories and key concepts of contemporary cultural studies, with particular attention to the symbolic dimensions of power.
2. Applied knowledge and understanding: tools for critically analyzing cultural representations and practices within specific social contexts.
3. Independent judgment: the ability to critically reflect on contemporary cultural phenomena and take a well-argued position.
4. Communication skills: the ability to present theoretical concepts and the results of cultural analysis in both written and oral form.
5. Learning skills: development of a critical and reflective study method aimed at fostering autonomous learning

#### Contents

The course is divided into three parts:

1. An introduction to the main contemporary theories in the field of cultural studies, with particular focus on the role of power.
2. An analysis of the processes involved in the construction of cultural boundaries.
3. A study of the logics and social organization of creativity, with a focus on the worlds of art and science.

## Detailed program

The course is structured in four parts. It introduces the main contemporary theories in the field of cultural studies through a critical analysis of contributions from various disciplines — from sociology to anthropology, from the philosophy of social sciences to cultural history. In the final section, the socio-cultural analytical approach will be applied to a specific contemporary social phenomenon.

The first part addresses the interpretation of social action, focusing on the relationship between the cultural construction of bodies and symbolic power. We will ask what it means to speak of “individual behavior” and to what extent we are free to act and to intervene collectively to change certain courses of action.

The second part is dedicated to deconstructing the concept of cultural identity, with particular attention to boundary-work and the role played by power mechanisms at both the subjective and institutional levels. We will explore themes such as the mask, cultural difference, and visual representations of categories of belonging.

The third part examines two specific fields of cultural production, engaging in a critical analysis of artistic and scientific forms of knowledge. We will compare different modes of the “social organization of truth” produced within these two social domains.

The fourth part of the course is dedicated — through in-depth case studies, practical exercises, and collective discussions — to the analysis of cultural representations and practices related to a specific contemporary social phenomenon defined during the first three parts. The aim here is to critically discuss the current state of cultural research on this phenomenon, both in Italy and internationally, and to test the analytical categories introduced earlier in the course.

## Prerequisites

Basic knowledge of the main theories and issues in the cultural sociology and communication processes

## Teaching methods

Classroom lectures; seminar activities; in-class discussion of texts and audiovisual materials. The course consists of 56 hours in total:

60% lecture-based teaching (frontal lessons supported by multimedia materials);

40% interactive teaching (discussions, group work, practical exercises);

Up to 30% of the total hours may be delivered remotely, in accordance with the program guidelines.

## Assessment methods

Three alternative assessment tracks are available, to be chosen by the student:

### **Track A – Active (attending students with presentations and final paper)**

Participation in group seminar presentations in class.

Critical discussion of readings in class and a monographic essay on two authors.

Final individual paper (8–10 pages), on a topic agreed upon with the instructor.

Assessment: Class presentation (30%), monographic essay (20%), final paper (50%).

### **Track B – Observational (attending students with written exam)**

Participation in lectures without classroom presentations.

Study of course packet + one supplementary book chosen from the list under “readings discussed in class.”

Assessment: Final written exam with open-ended questions on the course packet and selected book (100%).

### **Track C – Non-attending students**

Independent study of the texts listed under “readings not discussed in class.”

Assessment: Final written exam with open-ended questions (100%).

### **Assessed competences:**

Theoretical knowledge and critical thinking (all formats);

Ability to apply knowledge (presentation and final paper);

Independent judgment and communication skills (presentation and final paper);

Learning ability (all formats).

### **Grading criteria:**

Grades are expressed on a 30-point scale, with attention to theoretical rigor, clarity and appropriateness of sociological vocabulary, and critical autonomy.

### **Alignment with learning objectives:**

All assessment formats are designed to evaluate integrated acquisition of the following competences: understanding, application, autonomy, communication, and learning.

## **Textbooks and Reading Materials**

### **Course reader with in-class commentary**

Dispensa *‘Rappresentazioni e pratiche culturali, A.A. 2025-2026’* (che sarà reperibile poco prima dell’inizio del corso, presso la copisteria Fronteretro, Viale Sarca 191), che include, i seguenti saggi (o loro estratti parziali) in traduzione italiana.

### **a. Practices under Power: Rethinking Individual Behavior**

1. SCHUTZ, A. (1955) Don Chisciotte e il problema della realtà, Roma, Armando, pp. 25-59, ed. or. in *Collected Papers*, vol.II, Martinus Nijhoff, 1971 (1955).
2. DOUGLAS, M. (1966) La contaminazione nella sfera profana, in *Purezza e pericolo*, Bologna, il Mulino, pp.57-73, ed. or. in *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of the Concept of Pollution and Taboo*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Book, 1970.
3. ELIAS, N. (1982) Mutamenti dell’aggressività come piacere, in *Il processo di civilizzazione*, Bologna, il Mulino, pp. 351-368, ed. or. *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp., 1969
4. BOURDIEU, P. (1997) La conoscenza col corpo, Milano, Feltrinelli, pp.145-171, ed. or. in *Meditationes Pascaliennes*, Paris, Editions de Seuil.
5. FOUCAULT, M. (1975) I mezzi del buon addestramento, in *Sorvegliare e Punire*, Torino, Einaudi, pp.186-212, ed. or. *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*, Paris, Gallimard.
6. GINZBURG, C. (1978). Spie, Radici di un paradigma scientifico. *Rivista di storia contemporanea*, 7(1), 1.

### **b. Cultural Identity in Question: Power and the Politics of Boundary Work**

7. HALL, S. (1996) Chi ha bisogno dell'identità?, Milano, il Saggiatore, pp.1-17, ed. or. in Hall, S. e du Gay, P., Questions of Cultural Identity, London, Sage,.
8. SAID E. W. (1999) Una geografia immaginaria e le sue rappresentazioni: orientalizzare l'Oriente, in Orientalismo, Milano, Feltrinelli, pp. 56-78, ed. or. Orientalism, New York, Pantheon Books, 1978
9. HOBBSAWN, E.J. (1983) Come si inventa una tradizione, Torino, Einaudi, ed. or. in Hobsbawn, E.J. e Ranger, T., The Invention of Tradition, Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, pp. 3-17.
10. PIZZORNO, A. (2005) Saggio sulla maschera, in "Studi culturali", N.1, pp.85-109
11. GOFFMAN, E. (1977) La ritualizzazione della femminilità, ed. or. La ritualisation de la féminité, in "Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales", 14, pp. 37-50.

### **c. Creativity in Art and Science: Practices, Meanings, and Representations**

12. BAXANDALL, M. (2001) L'occhio del Quattrocento, in Pittura ed esperienze sociali nell'Italia del Quattrocento, Torino, Einaudi, pp. 41-103 (estratti), ed. or. Painting and Experience\* in Fifteenth Century Italy, Oxford University Press, 1972
13. FINE, G.A. (2006) Attraverso un vetro scuro. Le previsioni meteorologiche e le promesse del "lavoro sul futuro", in "Etnografia e ricerca qualitativa", N.2, pp.215-247
14. BOURDIEU, P. (2003) Un mondo a parte, in Il mestiere di scienziato, Milano Feltrinelli, pp.47-106 (estratti), ed. or. Science de la science et réflexivité, Paris, Raison d'agir, 2001.
15. SWEDBERG, R. (2020). Using metaphors in sociology: Pitfalls and potentials. The American Sociologist, 51, 240-257.

Più un libro a scelta tra i seguenti:

- Whyte, W. F., & Ciacci, M. (2011). Street corner society: uno slum italo-americano. Bologna. Il mulino.
- Miller, D., & Woodward, S. (2012). Blue jeans: The art of the ordinary. Univ of California Press.
- Illouz, E. (2025). Modernità esplosiva. Il disagio della civiltà delle emozioni. Torino: Einaudi

### **Material for non-attending students**

- GIGLIOLI, P. P. (2007), Da Parsons a Ricoeur passando per Bali, in Aut Aut, n.335, pp. 37-55
- GOFFMAN, E. (2001) Asylums. Le istituzioni totali: i meccanismi dell'esclusione e della violenza, Torino, Comunità.

### **Students must also choose one of the following texts:**

- SENNETT, R. (2006). Il declino dell'uomo pubblico. Bruno Mondadori.
- TODOROV, T. (1984). La conquista dell'America: il problema dell' "altro". Torino. Einaudi.
- BURKE, P. (1993). La fabbrica del Re Sole. Milano. Il Saggiatore.

## **Sustainable Development Goals**

QUALITY EDUCATION | REDUCED INEQUALITIES | SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES |  
RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION | CLIMATE ACTION

---