

Occasional Seminar

Wednesday, June 14, 16-18 hours

FU Berlin, Rost- und Silberlaube, Habelschwerdter Allee 45, 14195 Berlin

Room: KL 29/111

## Killing the Concept of *CULTURE*... ... only to re-define it in new ways

(A triologue between Anthropology, Sociology and Cultural Psychology)

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The concept of *culture* is inherently paradoxical as it is both loved and hated in different social sciences. It is precisely by the 1990s – when anthropology lost interest in further discussion of the concept of culture—it re-emerged in cultural psychology as a notion that unified a number of post-cognitivist theoretical perspectives into a heterogeneous mindscape generally labeled *Cultural Psychology*. The latter is distinct from *cross-cultural psychology* which treats the label “culture” as a proxy label for groups of research participants from different societies. In sociology, culture is understood in many different ways, of which mentalism, textualism, intersubjectivism, and practices are certainly the most prominent ones that enjoyed sustained popularity. These different views are – paradigmatically – reflected in disciplinary self-descriptions, for instance regarding the opposition between *Cultural Sociology* and the *Sociology of Culture*. Our discussion of the Death of *Culture* in the social sciences— comparing the perspectives of the three disciplines—is actually oriented towards finding ways for constructive resurrection of the concept. This could happen (in *Cultural Psychology*) through the translation of the generic concept into the interplay of hierarchies of dynamic sign systems (Cultural Psychology of Semiotic Dynamics) in analogy of the conceptual progress in chemistry in 1840s-1870s. This entailed developing a variety of formal languages for various needs for making sense of the phenomena. In *Sociology*, more recent approaches (again) focus on the acquisition of culture, as reflected in socialization, cultural fragmentation, or acquired disposition models and the distinction between declarative and non-declarative acquisition processes. *Social and Cultural Anthropologists* preferred to avoid the term over almost two decades, since the prevailing entity of culture and ethno-locality had been deconstructed convincingly vis-a-vis globalization theories. The discipline’s shift from villages, communities, or neighborhoods as primary units of analysis towards the subjectivities and multi-localities of case studies has countered essentialism and ethnocentrism, but has left the discipline’s former core concept theoretically orphaned.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

**Jaan Valsiner** is a cultural psychologist with a consistently developmental axiomatic base that is brought to analyses of any psychological or social phenomena. He is the founding editor (1995) of the Sage journal, *Culture & Psychology*. He is currently Niels Bohr Professor of Cultural Psychology at Aalborg University, Denmark. He has published and edited around 40 books, the most pertinent of which are *The guided mind* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1998), *Culture in minds and societies* (New Delhi: Sage, 2007), and *Invitation to Cultural Psychology* (London: Sage, 2014). He has been awarded the *Alexander von Humboldt Prize* of 1995 in Germany, and the *Hans-Kilian-Preis* of 2017, for his interdisciplinary work on human development, and Senior Fulbright Lecturing Award in Brazil 1995-1997. He has been a visiting professor in Brazil, Japan, Australia, Estonia, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, United Kingdom, and the Netherlands. E-mail: [jvalsiner@gmail.com](mailto:jvalsiner@gmail.com)

**Christian von Scheve** is Professor of Sociology at Freie Universität Berlin where he heads the Research Group Sociology of Emotion. He is a member of the board of the DFG Collaborative Research Center “Affective Societies” and Research Fellow at the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW). His main areas of interest include emotion, culture, and stratification as well as economic sociology and social psychology.

**Thomas Stodulka** is Junior Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Freie Universität Berlin. His long-term fieldwork (2001-2015) with street-related children, adolescents and young men in Yogyakarta, Indonesia translated into various articles and the monograph *Coming of Age on the Streets of Java* (2017, transcript). He is co-editor of volumes on emotion and the role of emotions and affects in scientific research. He has been awarded the Marie-Curie/EURIAS fellowship (2016/17) and is currently co-directing interdisciplinary research projects on the role of affects in ethnographic knowledge production (2013-17), and anthropological perspectives on *datafication* (2017-18).