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Social Aspects of the Sciences XIII

Cultures of Knowledge.

Fourty years after – an antirelativist turn?

May 19-24, 2008

Course Description

Idiom "Cultures of knowledge" encompasses all sorts of philosophical, sociological, anthropological and historical studies. In epistemology and sociology, it used to circle around various topics and headings. "Strong program in the sociology of knowledge", of Bloor and Barnes, and its requirements for causality, reflexivity, impartiality and simmetricity while explaining scientific claims, in the 1970s, used to provide case studies from the history of science, and refered to the idea of "social conditioning", and to social justification of knowledge claims, of both - true and false beliefs. Philosophers further discussed Wittgenstein's ideas of "language games", conceptual clusters, and finitism of reference. Can alien beliefs be properly understood or even translated? Kuhn's idea of incommensurability was en vogue. In sociology Peter Winch's *Idea of the Social Science* (written in the 1950s), gained new popularity in the period. In technology studies, Latour's Actors Networks, and "chasing scientists around" (under the banner "Science in Action") was just beginning to get ground. In anthropology discussions about the possibility of translation of foreign belief systems (and about the truth of Sapir-Whorf hypothesis) was current. Geertz's "thick descriptions" and new anthropological "reflexivity requirements" introduced a rather new approach to understanding foreign cultures. Foucault's *Archeology of knowledge* and his ideas about tacit power in "discourses" was very influential. Historical studies, influenced perhaps by the movements in 1968 around the world, broadened horizons to encompass new opinions, and new sources of anti-authoritarian local knowledge.

What is common to all these strains of cultural studies? They have all implicitly or explicitly endorsed or justified cultural, linguistic and philosophical relativism.

Thirty to fourty years after, in spite of a very broad spectrum of cultural studies in the academe, we see a certain exhaustion, an "anti-relativistic turn", a turn away from relativistic agendas. "Cultures of knowledge" is nowadays a banner for research and historical, anthropological and sociologica case studies (for instance for current projects at the University of Giessen, or at the Austrian Academy of Sciences) which refrain from any relativistic idiom. Conferences and congresses under the same heading (for instance the one held in Goa in 2005) refrain from any topic that might refer to the relativists above. Instead, the idiom now describes the research on universals of human characteristics.

Why is that happening? Have natural scientists won "scientific wars", leaving humanists and social scientists at odds how to gain new respect? Have intrinsic deficiencies of the theories above proved to be insurmountable? Or are there external causes for such an "anti-relativistic" turn ("clash of civilizaton" for instance, or the universality of economic laws)?

The directors of the seminar invite all scholars to contribute, and to answer these questions. This should be our focus. But participants may feel free to contribute by reviewing historical events, false theoretical claims, or by

trying to prove that the impression about the anti-relativistic turn is just that - an impression. They may otherwise contribute by presenting papers on the current state of studies in the broad spectrum of "Cultures of knowledge".

Course Directors

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IUC, conference fees, travelling and accommodation

The Inter University Centre in Dubrovnik, Frana Bulića 1, established in 1971, is a nongovernmental educational institution gathering scholars from all over the world. Presently it hosts 50 conferences and seminars a year. Its aim is to promote cooperation between universities on an international scale, mainly by offering series of courses on a postgraduate level. It is presently supported by more than 240 universities that are members of the IUC. An extensive list of its activities, addresses, mails etc. is available at <http://www.iuc.hr>. The governing bodies of the IUC are available at http://www.iuc.hr/news_details.php?vijest=41.

Travelling. There are several flights from Zagreb to Dubrovnik a day. Flight arrangements via Zagreb to Dubrovnik used to be cheaper than direct flights. Buses from the airport in Dubrovnik drive every half-hour and stop in the vicinity of the IUC. Due to the distance, we do not recommend international bus travel to Dubrovnik.

Costs. The respective universities and scholars should cover all costs. Scholars may try to apply for scholarships and tuitions at their respective universities and institutions. Membership of their universities in the IUC might be of some help. Several national agencies and international institutions, like Open Society Institute, Budapest, Friedrich Naumann Stiftung, Heinrich Boell Stiftung, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Zagreb, Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), and Oesterreichischer Akademischer Austauschdienst have been very helpful in the past.

Fees. According to the guidelines for courses issued by the IUC, "The IUC requires the payment of a small course fee, currently \$50, to be paid by all course participants... For each course a general fee of \$500 should be paid. Course directors are responsible for it." *Due to our long-standing relationship with the Directorate, we have so far been relieved of these dues.*

Accommodation. Participants may be accommodated in several hotels or in private accommodation. Due to the constant raise in prices for bed & breakfast in Dubrovnik Hotels in recent years, a number of participants have informed themselves at <http://www.gulliver.hr> (tel. +385 20 313300) for the private accommodation arrangements. Other useful addresses and phone numbers for accommodation in Dubrovnik:

- turistički informativni centar -Grad, Od sigurate 1	(020) 323 587
- turistički informativni centar -Pile, Branitelja Dubrovnika 7	
-- ured	(020) 427 591
	(020) 426 253

- turistički informativni centar -Gruž, Obala Stjepana Radića 29	(020) 417 983
- turistički informativni centar-Lapad, Šetalište kralja Zvonimira 25	(020) 437 460
- turistički informativni centar-Kolodvor, Obala pape Ivana Pavla II 44A	(020) 417 851

Among the hotels, the most frequently used one by our participants was Hotel Lero (tel. +385 20 341333); local bus service is used to and from the hotel to IUC. For other hotels see IUC site, phones above, or other agencies at the Internet.

Zagreb, Vienna, Tuebingen January 2008

Please distribute this circular to everybody who might be interested in the seminar.