ten, even with the best intentions, talk right past each other, failing to understand the discursive universe of their interlocutors from other fields. But at this conference, I often witnessed – albeit in necessarily tentative, sometimes awkward ways – different sorts of specialists really try to engage with each other on equal footings, and to step outside of their habituated ways of thinking. That was heartening, not least as a riposte to thoughts of those 'specialists without spirit' that Max Weber warned was the future of all knowledge production. Perhaps such a wonderful physical environment, accompanied by the characteristic conviviality of ESA arts and culture events, acted as inspiration for going beyond, and existing at least for a little while outside of, one's accustomed scholarly habitus.

But more than that, what I reflected upon was that the beautiful *and* horrible, grand *and* sordid, joyful *and* melancholy history of Venice can only be properly grasped by points of view that are rooted in disciplinary habitus but which at the same time transcend them. Venice's beauties – including 'the arts which once rankly and voluptuously blossomed' - were in large part made possible by often ruthless mercantile and military forces. That fact does not diminish them; indeed in many ways it renders them even more remarkable. But the economist who only sees the mercantile facts and figures, the historian who sees only changing military and diplomatic conditions, the art historian who sees nothing beyond the frame of the painting, the sociologist who sees only social relations and group dynamics – all of these specialists miss the totality that is Venice, the totality that is life. This conference was a notable step on the way towards better and more effective *rapprochement* between two such specialist groups, which made attendance at this event much more than just another nice trip to another nice place for professional - and perhaps also touristic - reasons.

At the end of the conference, I met an American colleague at the airport who independently had had a similar idea to one which had struck me some days before – to start reading afresh the work of the great English historian of Venice's art and architecture, John Ruskin. Ruskin resolutely refused to separate the social, economic, moral and aesthetic reams in his writings, endeavouring to illustrate how, in Venice as elsewhere, they were thoroughly interpenetrating. In retrospect, I feel very fortunate that the conference and Venice herself ultimately pointed me back towards reading Ruskin. His writings have their flaws, of course, but at their best they combine the ardour of the art historian who loves the objects they are writing of, the passion of the campaigner concerned with the contemporary life of a beloved city and the threats posed to it, and the cool analysis of the social scientist. It seems highly appropriate, then, that a conference held in Venice should yield the outcome that I have Ruskin's masterly *Stones of Venice* beside me as I write this piece.

## Global Differences in Conceptualizing Culture: An Ongoing Colloquium

### The Problem of Translation, the Semantic Changes of the Concept of Culture in German Sociology, and the Promise of a Phenomenological Approach.

Thomas S. Eberle

To explore the global differences in conceptualizing culture is a noble cause, but also an encyclopedic one which can only be achieved collaboratively. Each member of this panel will do it from his or her personal perspective which is embedded in a particular strand of social science and in a specific local life-world. In my contribution I will focus on three points which I regard as relevant when talking about differences in conceptualizing culture:

1. The problem of translation which accounts for semantic differences which cannot be easily recognized and spelled out; I will particularly emphasize the issue of 'untranslatables.'
2. The concept of culture as established in German sociology, and its semantic changes in the last decades.
3. The promise of a phenomenological ap-

proach for cultural sociology.

## 1. The problem of translation

As English has become the predominant language world-wide, many native English-speakers see no point in learning a foreign language. As a dear friend of mine in California put it: "Everything of significance in this world is translated into English; why should I learn another language?" I have attempted many times to explain to him that every translation loses and misses much of the original meaning. Culture is a web of meanings, and a crucial part of it is encoded in language. My thesis therefore was (and still is): *You cannot really understand another culture if you do not understand its language!* My American friend could not grasp what I meant. And how should he? He did not understand another language, so I had to argue in English and could not demonstrate the issue with concrete examples of translation problems.

Neither the English nor the Americans have a great tradition of learning other languages. I therefore think that the *problem of translation* must be emphasized at an ASA meeting. But it is also a hot political issue back home, in Switzerland where I come from, and in the European Union, which consists of 27 different nation-states but has nevertheless to achieve communication, coordination and collaboration. Let me briefly illustrate the issue with the debates in my home country: Switzerland is a tiny country in the heart of Europe, which has been multicultural from its inception. It has four traditional languages – German, French, Italian and Romanch – and they are all official languages, which means that every law and government regulation is translated into these four languages – although the percentage of Italian speaking Swiss is only 6.5%, and the percentage of Romanch Swiss just half a percent (0.5%). I have been socialized with a multicultural consciousness, in which it is out of the question that you not learn other languages. How could you understand another culture without speaking that language? How could you grasp cultural differences if you only understand your side of the boundary? And how could you develop a common sense of national identity and run a federal state, if you cannot communicate with each other? Every Swiss has to learn another official language of the country besides his or her mother tongue, before starting to study English. In order to be admitted to college, I had to have grades in three foreign languages, which means I had a knowledge of four languages.

For the last decade, a new phenomenon has been spreading. Due to processes of cultural globalization, English has become more important in many areas of life. In business, English is *the* international language, especially in big corporations. English has also penetrated child's play, notably through computer games. Now the logical question arises: Should we switch to English for intercultural communication within Switzerland, too? Why not just learn English as *the* foreign language, and learn it really well, so that every Swiss could communicate to any other Swiss – and any foreigner – in English?

The suggestion is indeed tempting: We could save the money to translate every government regulation into four languages, and save the effort to learn so many languages… However, all the people who are sensitive for cultural issues, are emphatically against it. So far, it has been a long-standing tradition in Switzerland to expect that everyone understands at least German and French, and it is still common practice that in national committees German speaking Swiss and French speaking Swiss always communicate in their mother tongue to each other. The *Swiss Journal of Sociology* is published in three languages – English as the third language – and the same applies to Conferences of the Swiss Sociological Association (and any other social science). What is at stake if we all changed to English as our intercultural language?

At stake is the richness of the cultural heritage and of the life-world, which is not adequately captured in a third language. There are different reasons for that, like the imperfect mastery of the foreign language and the problem of 'untranslatables':

¥ Although culture cannot be reduced to language, the mastery of language is crucial for intercultural communication. Even if you *live* in another language area, as I did in California, it takes years until you begin to understand the subtleties of the local life-world, like allusions, allegories, metaphors, ironies, jokes, and so on. Now, if you communicate in a language which you do not use in your everyday life at all, the quality of communication is always comparatively poor. A 'lingua franca' is not a lived language, but an auxiliary language. You can ex-

press yourself in your mother tongue in a much more precise, differentiated and elaborated way. Thus, much of the cultural richness of your life-world is lost in such a communication.

¥ Culture and language shape perception. Studies have shown that people of different languages interpret the same picture in different ways, using different interpretive frames (Lüdi 2003). Everybody who has learned to speak in a foreign language knows that it is often difficult and sometimes nearly impossible, to express something precisely or at least adequately in the other language. There are even 'untranslatables' which can only be understood in the local historical and cultural context, and their cirumscription in another language sometimes requires creating neo-logisms or assigning new meanings to conventional words. How to translate Dilthey's 'Geisteswissenschaften', Rickert's 'Kulturwissenschaften', Weber's 'verstehen', 'Sinn' and so on, into English? Or how to translate Mead's 'mind' or 'self' into German? Or how to translate 'religion' into an Asian context? We are still struggling with it – and will do so forever.

The focus on 'untranslatables' may become a prolific road for intercultural research. The French philosopher Barbara Cassin (2004) has edited a "European Vocabulary of Philosophies. A Dictionary of Untranslatables" (in French). The current research project ESSE (Espace des sciences sociales européen, 2005-now), a research group of German, French and Swiss historians, does the same for historiographic research. The focus on 'untranslatables' forces us to develop a method, which allows for transmitting a historically and culturally specific meaning-complex into another language by adequate circumscription. We have to explore the semantic field of the concept in a diachronic as well as synchronic perspective, we must analyze it in a semasiological as well as onomasiological way, and we have to consider the historical and cultural context of its use and the semantic changes over time. In contrast to theoretical universalism, which operates with very abstract and anonymous concepts, the pondering of 'untranslatables' explores the cultural singularities and particularities of each culture. (Of course, the problem of translation is not restricted to 'national' languages but is also prevalent between different sociolects of different cultural milieus.)

2. The semantic changes of the concept of culture in German sociology

The same method is recommended for exploring the *different cultural meanings of the concept of culture.* I can sketch this only in very broad strokes here. As I am a Germanic Swiss, I will focus on the culture concepts as established in *German* sociology. As many of you may know, there has been a long and strong German tradition of distinguishing 'culture' from 'civilization' and treating them as antithetical: Since Kant, *culture* has been something superior, which implied aesthetics, arts, philosophy, religion and ethics, while *civilization* has been restricted to economy, society, politics, law, technology, architecture, etiquette, fashion – and regarded as something inferior. Culture referred to the inner qualities and higher values – those that are essential for humanity and therefore have positive connotations. Civilization referred to exterior matters and lower values, like comfort, practicalities and usefulness, and was negatively connotated. This contrast accounts for the distinction between 'peoples of nature' (Naturvölker) and 'peoples of culture' (Kulturvölker), as well as for the self-description of Germany in the 19th century as a 'nation of culture' (Kulturnation). Norbert Elias (1998) interpreted this latter designation as a compensation for the nonexistent German nation-state at the time. The antithesis of culture and civilization was established for a long time, reinforced by Oswald Spengler, Ferdinand Tönnies and Alfred Weber, and it can still be found in Herbert Marcuse's publications of the 1960s, where the capitalist system represents civilization, while the literature, art, music and philosophy constitute culture (which in capitalism is absent or perverted).

The concept of civilization in French and English was quite different. Originally in distinction to 'primitive', 'uncivilized' tribes, civilization designated settled, urban and alphabetized societies. Soon the concept was used in the plural and lost its value-implications. The French and English concept of civilization was not exclusive like the German one, but inclusive, stood never in opposition to culture but encompassed all human achievements, including culture. Such differences make translations difficult. For example: When Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* was translated into German in 1998, the interpreter had great difficulties to translate

these terms. In order to avoid inevitable misunderstandings in the context of established semantic fields, he finally chose to translate the English word 'culture' by 'Zivilisation' (civilization) and the English word 'civilization' as 'Kultur' (culture) – just the other way around (cf. the annotation of the interpreter Holger Fliessbach in Huntington 1998: 14)! In German the book title is, literally translated, 'the fight of the cultures' – a wording which has spread pervasively.

How come however, that the English 'culture' was translated as 'Zivilisation'? This is difficult to comprehend after my sketch of the semantic history of the German concepts. The reason is this: German sociology reconstituted itself after WWII. Oriented to mainstream American sociology, German sociology in the 1950s and 1960s had also eliminated the concept of culture from its scope. The sociology of culture was revitalized only in the late 1970s, by Berger & Luckmann, Friedrich Tenbruck and Elias. Elias substituted the traditional German concept of 'Zivilisation' (civilization) with his own, as unintended directional processes of increasing self-control, and the others started out with a broad concept of 'culture'. Based on the philosophical anthropology of Arnold Gehlen and Helmuth Plessner, they adopted the premise that all human beings are cultural beings, that they experience a socio-cultural birth by socialization, after their biological-natural birth. This broad concept of culture encompassed every human expression whatsoever. Both Berger & Luckmann as well as Tenbruck argued that the sociology of the German founding fathers, Max Weber and Georg Simmel, had always been a cultural sociology, although they hardly used this designation. Their research perspective conceived the relationship between society and culture as an open, pluralistic, non-symmetrical and dynamic process, and both authors refrained from a substantialist, essentialist concept of culture. In the same line, the new concept of culture now contained every kind of human expression, objectivation and production, including one's own relationship to oneself. In this sense it is difficult to think of anything which is not 'culture', including nature, as it is perceived and interpreted by humans, too.

Against this backdrop, the English concept of civilization has to be translated by the German word 'Kultur' (culture) now. In this broad sense, the German Sociological Association has a section 'Kultursoziologie' (sociology of culture). What is meant by 'culture' now in Germany, still means 'civilisation' (civilization) in France. The French Sociological Association has a section 'sociologie des arts et de la culture', but 'culture' is meant here in a narrow sense – similar but not identical to the earlier German concept, which is still used in everyday life. Traditionally, the French 'culture' meant the knowledge of an individual, in German approximated by 'Bildung' and in English by 'education' : "un homme de culture" – a man of culture. Since 1980, Larousse – the French Merriam-Webster – also mentions a second meaning: a collective culture, the culture of a population. Culture in this sense is also communicated by the definition of the UNESCO. The national traditions are increasingly overlaid by such international or global definitions, but they often remain the predominant local language game.

How German cultural sociology has developed was described by Volker Kirchberg and Ulf Wuggenig in the ASA-Culture Newsletter in Spring 2004 (Kirchberg & Wuggenig 2004). Like all scientific fields, cultural sociology in Germany has diversified and become increasingly nuanced. A tentative inventory by Winfried Gebhardt (2001) identifies seven main strands of cultural sociologies:

1. An action theoretical one,
2. A phenomenologically oriented one,
3. An anthropologically oriented one,
4. A constructionist one,
5. A civilizationist one (based on Elias),
6. A German Bourdieu-school, and
7. A cultural studies strand.

Plus, in recent years, an eighth strand may be added which conceives of culture as social practices.

In other words, the field has been internationalized: each of these strands finds like-minded people in other countries who do research with similar premises. However, I agree with the assessment of Kirchberg and Wuggenig that cultural sociology in Germany has not jumped off the shoulders of their preeminent academic forefathers. It is "more an adjustment to international processes in the field, not replacing a theoretical and hermeneutically oriented sociology but adding a new sub-field" (Kirchberg & Wuggenig 2004: 9). I might add: Even if intellectual schools have subsidiaries in many countries, even if theoretical concepts and

whole approaches travel around the world – they always acquire a somewhat different meaning than they had originally. The use of each concept is embedded in a specific, local context. And this implicit, historically grown, specific cultural context endows each concept with other, different connotations – connotations which are often overlooked. Such semantic changes and differences are not a problem per se but can contribute to "new vistas", opening up new aspects and new facets and thereby enrich scientific debate. They can become a problem however, when they are overlooked and go unnoticed.

## 3. The phenomenological approach to cultural sociology

As mentioned, the phenomenological approach is a significant and comparatively strong strand within German sociology of culture, and within the German Sociological Association most of its representatives are members of the section 'Sociology of Culture' (as well as of the sections 'Sociology of Knowledge' and 'Qualitative Methods'). Let me therefore add, as my third point, some remarks on the phenomenological approach to cultural sociology. This for two reasons: firstly, because it forms my own theoretical background (e.g. Eberle 1984, 2000), and secondly – and of course more importantly – because it seems to me that this approach has currently much more significance in the German than in the American sociology of culture.

How come? It is due to the eminent influence of Thomas Luckmann in German Sociology. After the huge success of their book *The social construction of reality*, Thomas Luckmann returned to Germany, first to the University of Frankfurt and soon thereafter to the University of Konstanz, while Peter L. Berger stayed in the U.S. and went intellectually quite a different direction. Luckmann posthumously edited Alfred Schutz' *The structures of the life-world* and systematically linked them to sociology, interpreting them as a 'protosociology' (with an anthropological accent) and as a 'mathesis universalis' for 'verstehen.' In Luckmann's view, there is no such thing as a 'phenomenological sociology' : phenomenology is 'egological,' 'reflexive' and therefore 'philosophical', while sociology is 'cosmological' and 'inductive'. The goal of phenomenology is to analyze the universal structures of subjective orientation in the life-world, while the goal of sociology is to explain the general properties of the objective world. As the social reality is constructed through actions with subjective orientations, the phenomenological analysis of meaning constitution and the scientific reconstruction of social constructions of reality complement each other (Luckmann 1979, 1999). Berger and Luckmann (1966) named therefore their approach a 'phenomenologically founded, new sociology of knowledge.' Seen from today, Luckmann's contribution to the sociology of culture was manifold: the most important may be his conjunction of phenomenological and sociological analysis, his combination of sociological theory and empirical research, his interlinkage of European and American traditions of thought, his renewal of the sociology of knowledge, his contribution to the sociology of religion and to the sociology of spoken language, as well as his methodical innovation of genre analysis (cf. Schnettler 2006a, b).

Due to Luckmann's influence, a second and third generation of phenomenologically oriented sociologists have evolved in Germany, who are very active. Since 2003, the complete works of Alfred Schutz are being critically (re-)edited, including the so far unpublished manuscripts, and there have been many accompanying publications either from a phenomenological or from a phenomenologically informed sociological perspective. Recent publications include books on Schutz (Endreß 2006; Nasu et al. 2009), on how to compare cultures (Srubar, Renn & Wenzel 2005), on the 'insurmountability of cultural differences' (Dreher & Stegmaier 2007) and the current theoretical and empirical positions regarding the relationship of phenomenology and sociology (Raab et al. 2008). One of the remarkable developments is Srubar's proof that Schutz's structures of the life-world have not only a subjective but also a pragmatic pole : they consist not only in an analysis of the constitution of subjective meaning structures in the subjective consciousness but also in a pragmatic theory of the life-world, which has been overlooked so far. In other words, the life-world in Schutz' theory is not only constituted in subjective consciousness but also socially constructed in pragmatic (inter)actions (Srubar 2007, 2008). Another important development was the extension of the 'social' construction to a 'communicative' construction of reality and the concept of a 'communication culture' in this context (Knoblauch 1995), as well as the research road from the

'universal life-world' to 'cultural life-worlds' like, for example, 'event cultures' (Hitzler, Honer & Pfadenhauer 2008). Noteworthy new methods may be the 'ethnography of life-worlds' (Honer 1993) and the 'phenomenological life-world analysis' (Hitzler & Eberle 2004). I have to skip here many other developments well worth mentioning. Suffice to say that the potential is still great for promising future developments.

All of these scholars pursue a kind of 'cultural sociology' which resists a conceptual difference of 'culture' and 'society' (as is suggested, for example, by systems theory). Interestingly enough, many of them lack an explicit concept of culture or even resist it openly (as e.g. Luckmann). Phenomenological life-world analysis reveals that human actors are always meaningfully oriented to the world; the concept of culture (e.g. as a 'web of meanings') is not necessary to capture that. Phenomenologists prefer to speak of the life-world (or life-worlds) and are convinced that the structures of the life-world are more subtly and more precisely explicated by phenomenological analysis than by the accounts of other current theories of culture. I may add that Alfred Schutz had included the 'linguistic turn' from early on by emphasizing the great import of (spoken!) language, and at the same time exceeded it by anticipating the 'cultural turn'. Although (spoken) language is central to social life, the activity of typification cuts across linguistic typification. Phenomenological analysis has demonstrated quite well what I described above: how each meaning is indexical to a myriad of other meanings, and that only some of these references are made explicit – for all practical purposes. There is a horizon of references, constituted by the local life-world, which remains implicit. Each explication of such implicit references may contribute to a better understanding, but it remains inevitably partial and is an infinite enterprise. A phenomenological perspective can never overlook the problem of 'verstehen', or the problem of translation. On the contrary, the phenomenologically explicated 'structures of the life-world' – which are actually 'processes of the life-world' – serve as a 'proto-hermeneutics' (Soeffner 1999) which help illuminating such issues lucidly.

Let me close with a final remark on the politics of translation. My Californian friend was convinced that everything of significance in this world would be translated into English. He is wrong. The process of getting translated is much more complex. South American colleagues tell me that it is virtually impossible for them to get published in the United States: no-one is interested in what a South American sociologist has to say. Market-oriented publishing houses do not translate everything that is culturally significant but only that which supposedly finds readers (and thereby promises revenue). If you belong to a strand of sociology which is strong in a European (or any other) country but hardly present in the Anglo-Saxon world, it is hard to find a publisher in the latter even if you provide good-quality work. Although English is the global lingua franca: what is published in English depends on many other factors than quality, too. This fact cannot surprise a sociologist – but in our times of pervasive quality-talk, not everybody seems to be aware of it.

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# Cultural Processes

Newsletter of the Research Network *Sociology of Culture*, European Sociological Association

## Message from the Chair

Thomas S. Eberle
University of St. Gallen, Switzerland

### The Research Network *Sociology of Culture* is Coming of Age

The Research Network *Sociology of Culture* of the European Sociological Association (ESA) was founded in 2005. Much has happened since, and I am proud that we are now starting our own newsletter – a project that has accompanied us for nearly two years.

From its inception, our research network has stirred much interest. As our mission statement says: "Since the 1980's, culture has become again a key concept and central research theme within the social sciences, particularly within sociology. This 'cultural turn' had a profound impact on the general sociological research agenda and on the content of academic sociological curricula. (…) The main aim of our network is to provide a forum for discussion and exchange for sociologists of culture who are either based in Europe or whose research is devoted to one or more aspects of 'culture in Europe'. In addition, the network may also act as a European forum for the exchange of teaching experiences in the field of the sociology of culture. Last but not least, the network wants to be an intellectual space in which the different trends that nowadays re-articulate Europe's cultural identity, can be discussed from a sociological point of view. (…) In order to promote collaboration and scholarly exchange between European-based sociologists of culture and non-European sociologists with an interest in specific aspects of 'culture in Europe', the network will organize sessions and meetings at regular ESA conferences; in-between the latter, an interim

*continued on p. 2*

### *Inside Issue No. 1, August 2009*:

David Inglis……p. 3
Thomas Eberle……p. 5
Daniel Cefai……p. 12
Evelina Dagnino……p. 17
Eiko Ikegama……p. 24
Mark Jacobs……p. 30
Rudi Laermans……p. 33
Tia DeNora……p. 36

## Editor's Note

Mark D. Jacobs
George Mason University, USA

An "essay" (from the French, *essai*) is an attempt. I hope this newsletter inspires many *essais* to stretch the bounds of our sub-discipline, the sociology of culture. The newsletter is a precious space to try out ideas, to engage each other in energetic attempts to recover and renew intellectual traditions in the service of inventing new approaches to the many urgent practical problems we confront.

It is a special honor to edit this inaugural issue of *Cultural Processes* for the Research Network *Sociology of Culture* of the European Sociological Association. In his *Message from the Chair*, Thomas Eberle traces the founding, rapid growth, and future direction of the research network. And David Inglis, a member of the Board, offers a recollection of the research network's glorious meeting last November, in conjunction with the Research Network *Sociology of the Arts*, and under the sponsorship of the University IUAV of Venice. Although Inglis can hardly be called an "old-fashioned" scholar (except in his erudition), his account takes us back to Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*.

Two other Board members, Tia DeNora and Rudi Laermans, contribute to a serial colloquium on "Global Differences in Conceptualizing Culture."

*continued on p. 3*