

THE IN A HURRY SERIES

Culture *in a Hurry*

The invisible rules we all follow

Max Brocklesby

BOOKSINAHURRY.COM

Contents

The Whole Thing in One Page 4

Why You Should Care 6

The Core Ideas 8

How It Actually Works 22

What People Get Wrong 31

Use It 36

Terms 41

Go Deeper 45

Notes and Sources 47

Bibliography 54

The Whole Thing in One Page

A wedding dress in a museum looks like culture. The expectation that someone should marry, the relatives entitled to ask about it and the offence caused by a missing invitation are harder to put in a display case. They belong to the same subject. Culture includes the things people make and the learnt meanings, expectations and practices through which they recognise a situation, judge a response and anticipate what others will do next.

Most of these expectations are unwritten. You learn how close to stand, when a silence is awkward, which door is yours, what a gift obliges, who may interrupt, what clothing means seriousness and whether a stranger's smile is friendly, foolish or intrusive. The rules become most visible when somebody breaks one. Confusion arrives before explanation because the shared script has failed.

You did not enter this system by studying it. Other people corrected, copied, praised, mocked and included you. Repetition trained your attention and body until once difficult actions felt natural. Language supplied categories that made some differences easy to see and others hard to name. Objects carried instructions too: a queue barrier, school desk, uniform, wedding ring, menu or phone interface directs conduct before anyone speaks.

Culture therefore coordinates without requiring agreement. People may obey a norm they dislike because they expect others to enforce it. They may privately reject a practice while misreading everyone else's compliance as support. A convention can persist because changing alone is costly even when almost everybody would prefer another arrangement.

No country contains one complete culture shared evenly across all its residents. People inhabit overlapping worlds shaped by family, generation, religion, occupation, neighbourhood, class, migration, disability, gender and chosen groups. Boundaries tell members who belongs, while accents, tastes, credentials and manners can become tests whose unequal consequences are disguised as common sense.

“We all” does not mean one global code or perfect obedience. It means that no human develops outside a learnt social world, even while rejecting parts of it.

Power matters because some institutions can turn their version of normal into a curriculum, dress code, diagnosis, professional standard, border form or law. Culture is neither innocent consensus nor invisible mind control. It is contested meaning and coordination, backed by different amounts of authority.

Nor is it static. Living practices have to be performed again. Learners adapt what they receive, meanings travel and institutions standardise selected versions. Global connections can spread one format while producing many local uses. Tradition survives by being remade.

The machinery enables ordinary cooperation and can make cruelty ordinary. Culture lets strangers predict each other, pass knowledge across generations and coordinate work no individual could complete alone. It can also classify people as polluted, inferior, unserious or out of place, then hide the judgement inside etiquette or procedure. An explanation of that machinery is not a defence of its results. It is how the costs become visible.

Shared expectations shape what people do. What people repeatedly do becomes evidence of what others expect. Following, bending and resisting the rule all help construct the next version of it.

Culture is the world humans inherit from one another before they have chosen it, and the world they alter whenever they act inside it.

That is the book.

Why You Should Care

At five in the morning on 3 September 1967, Sweden changed sides. Cars, buses and bicycles that had travelled on the left moved to the right. The switch had been decided years earlier, prepared through public information, signs and road alterations, and timed so that millions of private decisions could change together. A driver who moved early was dangerous. A driver who refused afterwards was dangerous. The physical act was small. The coordination problem was national.

Driving sides are useful because nobody mistakes them for moral truth. Left and right can both work. What matters is that other people know which rule you are following. Much of culture has this shape, though it rarely announces itself so cleanly. A greeting, queue, meal, meeting or funeral depends on expectations that feel personal until somebody uses another set. Then a reasonable action can look rude, evasive, childish, cold or absurd.

That matters whenever people have to cooperate across experience. One colleague may interpret silence as agreement while another treats speaking before a senior person as disrespectful. A manager may reward the person who speaks first and call the result confidence. A school may treat one style of argument as intelligence. A public campaign may announce what everyone ought to do while accidentally advertising that few people do it. None of these errors is solved by learning a list of national traits. The task is to identify the rule, the evidence people use to infer it and the consequences of getting it wrong.

Culture also changes what researchers can safely assume. Economic games conducted across fifteen small-scale societies produced substantial variation in the studied forms of sharing and punishment. Psychology's long dependence on participants from Western, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic settings exposed another problem: a result obtained from one narrow population may describe that population well and humanity badly. The correction is not that people share nothing. It is that universality must be

demonstrated rather than granted.

It matters when rules need to change. People often treat compliance as evidence of approval, so each person waits for others to move first. At Princeton in the early 1990s, studies of students and campus drinking found that private discomfort could coexist with the belief that peers were more comfortable than oneself. Visible behaviour could then sustain the image because private discomfort remained hidden. This pattern, called pluralistic ignorance, does not explain every stubborn norm. It shows why preaching at individuals can fail when the obstacle is a false belief about the group. Sometimes the decisive intervention is credible common knowledge that many others are ready to change too.

There is a harder reason to care. Rules distribute standing. An accent can be heard as authority or ignorance. A credential can turn familiar knowledge into expertise. A dress code can look neutral while fitting one body, religion or budget better than another. Institutions convert selected habits into official standards, then mistake success under those standards for natural merit. Culture is one place where power becomes ordinary enough to disappear.

Yet the same machinery carries language, trust, craft, humour, memory and care. It lets strangers coordinate, children enter worlds built before them and groups preserve knowledge no individual could invent alone. The question is never whether culture is good or bad. It is what the rule permits, who can alter it and whose difficulties remain invisible while it works.

Once you can see culture as coordination, meaning and unequal authority, everyday life becomes less obvious and more legible. Small breaches become evidence, awkward encounters become diagnostic and apparently personal failures acquire a social history. The rules have not vanished. You have stopped confusing familiarity with nature.

The Core Ideas

The Rule You Notice When It Breaks

Imagine entering a lift and facing the back wall, then moving close to its only other passenger. Or presenting a dinner guest with a bill for each course. Nothing in physics prevents any of it. The discomfort comes from a broken expectation whose existence may never have been stated. Ordinary life runs on such expectations, and culture begins where people can rely on others to recognise enough of them.

Harold Garfinkel made this discomfort into a method. He asked students to spend time at home behaving as though they were boarders: polite, formal and distant. In one student's account, asking permission to take a snack from the refrigerator embarrassed his mother in front of her friends. Other families reacted with confusion, irritation or concern. The exercise exposed something stranger than bad manners. A person could observe the courtesies expected of a guest and violate the terms of being family.

Several kinds of rule sit inside that background. A convention coordinates choices where more than one arrangement could work, as with driving on one side of the road. A descriptive norm is a belief about what people commonly do. An injunctive norm concerns what people approve or condemn. A role carries expectations attached to a recognised position. A script supplies a likely sequence for a familiar situation, such as entering a restaurant, attending a job interview or visiting the bereaved.

These categories can pull apart. Many people may perform an action they privately dislike. A rule may be praised and rarely followed. What people say should happen can differ from what they expect to happen, and both can differ from what is punished. Calling all of this culture without separation produces mush. The mechanism depends on which expectation is active and what follows from violating it.

Values sit at a broader level. They name qualities or ends people judge desirable, such as loyalty, freedom, purity or fairness. A value does not

specify one action by itself. Two groups can honour hospitality while disagreeing about whether a guest should be left alone, fed repeatedly or drawn into family life. The same group can praise equality while its turn-taking rules distribute attention unevenly. Values matter, but the route from an ideal to conduct runs through interpretation, situation and consequence.

A common action is not automatically a norm. Commuters may carry umbrellas because it is raining, not because they expect social approval. People may use the same software because an employer installed it, or buy the same food because only one shop is open. To identify a cultural rule, look for socially learnt interpretation and dependence on what others do, approve or enforce. Material constraint and cultural expectation often combine, but they should not be collapsed.

Rules reduce uncertainty. You do not negotiate from first principles every time somebody extends a hand, falls silent or sends an invitation. Shared expectations make conduct legible and let strangers coordinate at speed. They also create blind spots. A person using another script can look morally defective when the difference is conventional, while a harmful norm can hide behind the claim that this is merely how things are done.

Culture is therefore neither every repeated behaviour nor a code written above society. It is the socially available equipment people use to identify situations, interpret conduct and anticipate consequences. The rule may be conscious, disputed or barely noticed. What makes it cultural is that its force depends on other people learning, recognising and responding to it.

We Learn a World Before We Judge It

A child does not begin by choosing a culture. The child arrives among voices, bodies, objects, schedules and reactions already arranged. Before anyone explains a value, attention is directed. Some sounds receive answers, some gestures laughter; some questions are welcomed and others end the conversation. The learner acquires a map of what matters while still discovering that there is a map.

Socialisation is the broad process through which people learn to participate in social life. Enculturation names the acquisition of the meanings and practices of a particular cultural setting. They overlap because learning how to be a person occurs somewhere. Families are early teachers, but peers, schools, religious communities, workplaces, media, laws and markets continue the work. Adults entering a profession or new country can undergo intense socialisation again.

Some teaching is explicit: how to address a judge or hold a tool. Much arrives as reaction. A learner may master the acceptable form of a question without knowing why its alternative sounds impertinent. Novices imitate a form before they can defend it, then acquire judgement through participation. Stories show them admirable and ridiculous people; institutions repeat categories until a decision about the world begins to look like a feature of it.

This learning produces schemas: compact mental structures that organise knowledge and guide interpretation. A schema helps someone recognise a classroom, apology, bargain or threat without analysing every detail afresh. Scripts order expected sequences within those situations. They are efficient because attention is limited. They are risky because a familiar pattern can be applied where it does not fit, and because people may not know which assumptions filled the gaps.

Learning also changes motivation. Repeated approval can make an action desirable rather than merely compulsory, while shame can arrive before a person can state the rule allegedly broken. Still, internalisation need not be complete. Someone may know the code, feel its pressure and decline its moral claim. Competence, belief and obedience are separate outcomes. That distinction matters whenever an observer mistakes smooth performance for deep agreement.

Much cultural competence becomes embodied. Pierre Bourdieu used the term *habitus* for durable dispositions acquired through a history of living under particular conditions. The idea explains why manners, posture, timing, taste and ease can feel natural without being innate. It does not turn people

into puppets. Dispositions generate tendencies across familiar settings; a changed setting, conflict among habits or deliberate reflection can interrupt them.

Biology still matters. Humans do not learn without evolved capacities for attention, imitation, emotion, memory and social dependence. Bodies constrain what can be practised, and temperaments and abilities differ. Culture works through organisms rather than replacing them. The serious question is not whether a trait is biological or cultural as though only one may enter. It is how bodily capacities, development, environment and social interpretation combine in a particular outcome.

Social learning is not confined to humans. Researchers have documented animal traditions in foraging, song and migration. The dividing line is not cultured humans against creatures ruled by instinct. What needs explaining is the range of human cultural invention. One proposal puts the emphasis on open-endedness: humans keep generating new kinds of activity, rather than only refining an existing technique. That is a hypothesis, not an agreed test separating us from every other species. Language, teaching and institutions help people preserve and combine knowledge across generations; identifying what makes the resulting system distinctive remains an active question.

Nor does learning end in perfect conformity. Children misunderstand. Newcomers compare. Members receive contradictory lessons from different groups. People can follow a practice strategically, reject its justification or invent a variant. Socialisation supplies a world before judgement, but it also supplies the language, skills and audiences through which judgement becomes possible.

The result is a paradox that runs through the book. Culture feels external because it was there first. It feels personal because it was built into perception, movement and desire. Both feelings are accurate.

Meaning Is Public

A wink and an involuntary twitch can involve almost the same movement of an eyelid. Their difference lies among actor, observer and setting. A wink may signal complicity, mockery, flirtation or imitation. Movement alone cannot settle which. Meaning is not hidden inside the muscle. It depends on publicly available distinctions that participants can recognise, dispute and sometimes exploit.

Symbols are things that stand for more than their immediate physical form. A flag is cloth and a claim. A ring can mark marriage, fashion, wealth or nothing beyond preference. Money works because people and institutions treat marked paper, metal or digital entries as valid claims. Words are an unusually powerful symbolic system, but clothes, colours, foods, gestures, buildings, sounds and absences can all carry learned significance.

Public does not mean unanimous. The same statue can be heritage to one group, domination to another and useful street furniture to somebody hurrying past. Meaning depends on histories, audiences and relations of authority. The mistake is to treat an object as though it emits one cultural message that every member receives. Interpretation is constrained, but rarely closed.

Clifford Geertz made interpretation central to anthropology. His method of thick description asked what an action meant within layered local contexts rather than reducing it to visible motion. His account of a Balinese cockfight read betting and matches through status, rivalry and masculine reputation. The move remains indispensable: a raid, gift, joke or ritual cannot be understood by listing behaviour alone. Yet interpretation needs boundaries. Researchers must separate what participants said, what practice suggests and what the analyst infers. Elegant symbolism is not evidence merely because it fits.

Expression does more than label an existing feeling. Consider a song associated with someone who has died. Sung among people who knew them, it can make a private memory something the group does together.

The tune gives the feeling a form that can be returned to; another listener may hear only a tune. This is an illustration, not a claim that music affects everyone alike. Stories and images can likewise give an audience something to imagine before there is an institution or rule for it. Culture includes the making of shared possibilities, not merely instructions for acceptable conduct.

Language helps divide experience into socially usable categories. Naming makes some distinctions easy to communicate, while official labels can attach consequences. A person classified as citizen, patient, pupil, refugee, expert or offender enters a different field of expectations. Categories do not create every underlying difference, but they shape which differences institutions record and how people are treated once sorted.

Categories are also tools for argument. People contest whether an encounter was banter or harassment, a gift or bribe, care or control, protest or disorder. The struggle is consequential because the accepted name brings a script, a set of responsible actors and a likely remedy. Cultural conflict often looks like disagreement over facts while turning on the prior question of what kind of event the facts constitute.

Horace Miner's 1956 satire about the Nacirema described familiar American bodily routines in the estranging language once used for exotic peoples. The joke works when the reader recognises bathrooms, dentistry and medicine beneath the ritual prose. Its lesson is methodological. Description can make the familiar look irrational and the unfamiliar look absurd by choosing vocabulary that withholds participants' reasons.

An emic account begins with distinctions meaningful to participants. An etic account uses analytical categories designed for comparison. Neither is sufficient alone. The insider may take hierarchy or harm for granted. The outsider may force local life into a borrowed scheme. Understanding improves when the two views challenge one another.

Meaning is produced in use, attached to consequences and sustained by people who recognise enough of the code. When recognition fails, the

object remains and the social action changes.

Bodies, Objects and Rituals Carry the Rules

A uniform announces a role before the wearer speaks. A form decides which identities can be entered. A phone makes one option the default and hides another behind three screens. Culture can be stored in arrangements that guide conduct without anyone having to remember the decision that produced them.

This matters because rules held only as propositions are weak. A workplace may declare equality while its meeting room gives one person a raised seat, its calendar assumes one pattern of care and its promotion system rewards constant visibility. The formal value and the practical environment can point in opposite directions. People learn from the arrangement because it governs what is easy, costly, visible and repeatable.

A recipe can specify flour and water and still leave a beginner wondering what the dough should feel like. Watching an experienced cook does not supply a missing sentence so much as connect words to pressure, movement and judgement. This is practice: meanings, bodies and objects working together. Repetition teaches someone to recognise a situation and respond before each step needs conscious calculation. The same distinction separates knowing the rules of an examination or a machine from being able to conduct one or operate the other.

Ritual concentrates this process. A ritual is a repeated, recognisable sequence whose form carries social significance beyond immediate utility. It can mark a transition, renew membership, distribute honour, manage danger or make an institution visible. Weddings, graduations, court openings, military drills and moments of silence differ in theology and purpose, but each coordinates bodies, words, objects and witnesses so that a social claim becomes publicly real.

Calling something ritual does not imply empty habit. Participants may experience devotion, scepticism, boredom, obligation or several at once. The form can persist despite mixed belief because the performance

accomplishes relations: it names a couple, admits a graduate, remembers the dead or displays loyalty. Conversely, intense belief without the authorised form may fail to produce the institutional result.

Objects and expressive forms also travel, carrying partial instructions rather than fixed meanings. A suit, fork, football shirt, religious image, melody or software platform can enter a new setting where users preserve older associations, reverse them or attach fresh ones. Material culture records practice, but never supplies a complete transcript; neither does an archive of songs or images. Archaeologists recover vessels and buildings more readily than jokes, hesitation or forbidden uses, while cultural institutions preserve some works and let others disappear. The surviving record therefore favours what was durable, collectable or judged worth keeping.

Maintenance is part of the rule. A ceremonial space must be cleaned, a uniform supplied, a database updated and a meeting timetable protected. When that labour is ignored, culture appears to reproduce itself. In practice, somebody stores the objects, teaches the sequence, corrects the novice and absorbs the cost of keeping the form available. Traditions and institutions often depend on work performed by people whose authority is lower than their contribution.

Embodiment and material support explain why reform can lag behind declaration. Policy may change overnight while habits, architecture, interfaces and routines still point backwards. The reverse is possible too: alter the path, timetable or default, and conduct can shift before belief. Culture is carried in meanings, but its staying power often sits in muscles, rooms and objects.

Belonging Has Boundaries

There is no single culture into which a person fits once. People move among overlapping groups, each with its own vocabulary, humour, obligations and tests of competence. A surgeon, football supporter, grandparent, migrant, gamer and member of a religious community may be the same individual at different moments. The relevant culture depends on which relation and situation are active.

Groups become visible through boundaries. Some boundaries are formal, such as licences, citizenship or initiation. Others are symbolic: accents, tastes, stories, clothes, references and manners that distinguish people like us from people like them. Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár describe symbolic boundaries as conceptual distinctions used to categorise people, practices and objects. Under certain conditions, these distinctions harden into social boundaries that shape access to resources and opportunities.

That conversion is not automatic. Friends can tease one another about musical taste without changing anyone's legal standing. A professional vocabulary, by contrast, may decide whose testimony is credible. The analyst has to follow the consequence rather than assume that every distinction is domination or that every shared identity is harmless.

Subcultures develop meanings and practices that differ from a wider setting while remaining connected to it. A musical or occupational group need not be a sealed world beneath one national culture. Members borrow from other groups, draw on shared institutions and vary in commitment.

Boundaries are maintained through sanctions. These range from a glance, joke or correction to exclusion, loss of work, violence or law. Deviance names conduct defined as violating a norm, not a permanent quality residing in an act or person. The same behaviour can be admired in one setting and punished in another. Studying deviance therefore reveals both the breach and the authority that gets to name it.

Newcomers make boundaries easier to see. They ask questions members stopped asking, overapply rules, miss exceptions and reveal how much

competence depends on timing. Cultural brokers translate across groups, but translation is never neutral. They choose which differences to explain, soften or hide, and may be judged disloyal by one side and inauthentic by the other.

Members also police boundaries by arguing about authenticity. The dispute may concern language, food, dress, politics or who has standing to represent the group. Such arguments are evidence of connection, not proof that one timeless essence exists. The more a culture moves through migration, commerce and media, the more energy may be spent declaring which version counts. Purity is often a project produced by contact rather than a condition that preceded it.

The national label is especially tempting because states publish statistics, schools teach narratives and passports make membership legible. National institutions do shape culture. Yet averages across a country can conceal differences larger than those between countries, while regional, religious, class, generational and organisational variation cuts across borders. Treating a national average as a personality assigned to each citizen is an ecological error wearing a flag.

Belonging offers recognition and support. It also creates outsiders, internal tests and demands for loyalty. The right question is not whether boundaries exist. Every shared world distinguishes competent participation from something else. The question is how permeable the boundary is, who controls it and what happens to the person placed on the wrong side.

Normal Is Unequally Made

A rule can spread because people find it useful, beautiful or right. It can also spread because a school, employer, platform, court or profession can require it. Culture is distributed, but the power to distribute is not.

Institutions stabilise meanings through procedures and resources. A school turns selected language, history and manners into a curriculum. A professional body defines competent practice. A museum decides what receives conservation, a platform what receives visibility and a state what

appears on official forms. Repetition makes one version of the world easier to encounter and harder to contest.

This is where common sense becomes politically interesting. Antonio Gramsci used hegemony to analyse forms of rule maintained partly through consent and ordinary understandings rather than force alone. The idea does not imply that an elite directs every thought. People interpret, negotiate and resist. Coercion remains available. Hegemony names the stronger achievement of making a social arrangement appear natural, practical or inevitable enough that many people reproduce it in daily life.

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital shows a related mechanism. Certain ways of speaking, knowing, presenting oneself and judging culture can be rewarded because institutions recognise them as signs of competence or refinement. The advantage is not that one taste contains more culture. It is that a field, such as a school or profession, converts familiarity with selected codes into credible performance. Those raised near the code may experience their ease as personality. Those learning it late must perform both the task and the translation.

The concept needs restraint. *Distinction* was grounded heavily in twentieth-century France, and the profitable code differs across settings. Cultural capital is not one worldwide ladder of opera above football. A style admired in an advertising agency may damage authority in a courtroom. The general mechanism is institutional recognition, not a permanent list of superior tastes.

Power also shapes which people are treated as representatives of a culture. Officials, elders, activists, celebrities, scholars and commercial brands may all claim to speak for a group. Their authority can be genuine, partial, contested or strategically granted by outsiders who prefer one clear voice. Internal disagreement then disappears behind a convenient spokesperson.

Measurement can reinforce the selection. Once a category enters a census, ranking, assessment or algorithm, institutions begin organising around what can be counted. The measure may reveal a real pattern and still reshape

the activity it observes. Schools teach towards exams, organisations recruit towards competency grids and creators adapt towards platform metrics. Standards coordinate large systems, but they also make unmeasured forms of competence harder to see.

Resistance is cultural too. A movement must name an injustice, produce symbols, train participants, establish credible behaviour and make a new account of normal available. Countercultures and social movements do not stand outside culture. They build competing classifications and practices, often using institutions, media and ritual against the established order.

None of this makes every norm an elite project. Many practices emerge horizontally among peers and remain beyond formal control. Power enters when versions compete, consequences differ and some actors can make their preference durable through rules, money, architecture or legitimacy.

Authority is also plural. A law can prohibit a practice that a family rewards, while a religious office, profession and online community each supply another judgement. People manoeuvre among these audiences rather than facing one cultural sovereign. The strongest rule in a situation is often the one backed by the relationship a person cannot afford to lose. That is why formal reform can leave conduct unchanged, and why a local shift can precede law.

A rule has a career. Follow who can teach it, record it, reward it and make violation expensive. That is where a shared meaning becomes an unequal structure.

Copying Changes the Copy

A recipe can wait in a drawer. A living cooking tradition cannot. Someone must use the instructions, judge the result and pass on what the paper leaves out. Human transmission often works this way: learners reconstruct a practice from fragments and adapt it to the circumstances in which they have to use it. Continuity takes work. Preserving the record and preserving the ability to act on it are different achievements.

Cultural evolution research studies how information and practice vary, spread and persist through social learning. The evolutionary analogy is useful when it directs attention to transmission, selection and accumulation. It becomes misleading when culture is treated as genetic code. People can discuss a rule, combine traditions, anticipate consequences, suppress variants and redesign institutions. Cultural forms compete through minds and organisations capable of interpretation.

Transmission is selective. People may copy a specialist for competence, a celebrity for prestige or friends for belonging. These are different reasons, and none guarantees that the most useful form spreads. What reaches the next learner depends partly on who can command attention and which channels carry the example.

Loss belongs to the process too. Skills can disappear when the apprenticeship, habitat, market or language that supported them breaks. A written record may preserve instructions without preserving judgement, rhythm or the social relations needed to use them. Cultural accumulation is therefore uneven. Humans can build on inherited knowledge, but they can also simplify, forget and recover it later under new meanings.

Diffusion occurs when a practice, object or idea moves between groups. The traveller rarely arrives whole. A borrowed dish may use ingredients available in its new home; a genre may find an audience its makers never imagined. Hybridisation names the production of forms through such encounters. It should not suggest that cultures were pure before contact. Borrowing has its own history within the tradition later defended as unborrowed.

Disputes over cultural appropriation belong here. Borrowing alone does not settle them. Questions concern restriction, attribution, profit and whether originators remain penalised for a form outsiders can use safely.

Globalisation intensifies some connections. Standard containers, platforms, brands, professional credentials and technical protocols can make distant places look alike. The same connections also create new local combinations

and sharper identity claims. A global format can carry different meanings in each setting. Convergence in objects does not prove convergence in use, and difference can be manufactured through the shared system that appears to erase it.

Tradition belongs inside this motion. A practice called traditional is one that people in the present connect authoritatively to a past. That connection may involve careful continuity, selective revival, recent codification or argument about the proper version. Declaring a form ancient can strengthen it, but age alone does not explain why people keep performing it now.

Change becomes easier to imagine when routine stops working. A crisis may suspend familiar conduct, or migration make another workable script visible. Yet seeing an alternative does not make it safe to adopt. Even a widely disliked convention can persist while each person waits for others to move. The first person to abandon it bears risks that diminish only when the replacement becomes a shared expectation.

The same dependence that made the rule stable now gives it a route to change. Each action supplies evidence from which later people infer what is expected. An unexplained breach may provoke repair; a breach others recognise as justified can help establish an exception. Enough authorised exceptions may become a replacement rule. What observers make of the act matters as much as what its performer intended.

Culture is inherited, but there is no final handover. A digital file can be copied exactly; the situations in which people use it cannot. The invisible rules endure through repeated conduct, while new audiences and circumstances keep changing what that conduct means.

How It Actually Works

Researchers left households in San Marcos, California, a comparison of their electricity use with the neighbourhood average. In the study, reported in 2007, high users tended to reduce consumption after receiving the feedback. Low users who received the comparison without an approval signal increased theirs. A message intended to encourage thrift had left the thrifty moving the wrong way.

For other households, the researchers added a hand-drawn face: happy for below-average use, sad for above-average use. The low users given the happy face stayed roughly at their earlier level. A small mark separated two messages that a number alone could blur: what other people do, and what deserves approval.

This was one residential setting, with energy-saving tips included in the feedback, not a universal recipe for reform. The experiment compared message packages; it did not read the residents' minds. Its useful lesson is that a message about the group can change conduct without changing the physical task.

The cue

Imagine a new singer's first evening with an amateur choir. This choir is fictional. You arrive while people are chatting and arranging chairs. Then one person raises a hand and the room falls quiet. Nobody has told you whether this person is the conductor, the organiser or someone asking where the toilets are. The others' response supplies the answer. Their conduct is already teaching you how to read the room.

A cue selects a possible script. Rows of chairs facing one person suggest a different distribution of attention from chairs around a kitchen table. A folder of music tells you something about the work ahead; it does not tell you whether questions are welcome while it is being done. You have to combine the objects with people's responses.

The frame may also change during the evening. A joke that belongs in the

break can become an interruption once rehearsal resumes. Learning the group means learning the transitions, not finding one permanent level of formality. This is why a person can be relaxed with colleagues and formal before a client without either performance being false.

Disputes begin when participants select different scripts. Is a dinner private hospitality or professional networking? Is an online post banter or a public statement? People can disagree about the appropriate response because they disagree about what is happening in the first place. More forcefully explaining the rule may not resolve that earlier difference.

The classification

Suppose the choir begins from printed music. One newcomer reads it easily; another can remember a melody after hearing it but has never learnt the notation. If the conductor treats difficulty with the page as lack of musical ability, a judgement about one skill has expanded into a judgement about the person. If reading is essential to this choir's method, it remains a relevant requirement. The error lies in forgetting what the test measures.

Classification saves effort. You recognise a conductor, rehearsal and score instead of confronting an unrelated collection of people and paper. The categories tell you which details deserve attention. They also invite assumptions about what a person labelled experienced or inexperienced can do. Those assumptions may be useful, wrong or out of date.

This becomes more consequential when an institution records the label. A temporary assessment can enter a file and follow someone into the next encounter, where a stranger treats it as settled knowledge. Categories designed to help people act together can become gates through which a person must pass before their situation is heard.

Schemas do not dictate every judgement. They make certain readings quicker and more familiar; questions and contrary experience can interrupt them. In the choir, hearing the second newcomer sing might change the conductor's assessment. The cultural mechanism is not that people cannot see beyond a category. It is that categories organise the first look, and the

first look can determine whether there is a second.

The apprenticeship

The new singer must learn more than the music. Suppose the choir's invitation welcomes all abilities, but experienced members sigh whenever someone asks to repeat a passage. The official message offers entry. The reaction attaches a cost to learning after arrival. A newcomer could understand both perfectly and still stop asking.

Nobody hands over this second curriculum in full. Newcomers watch which mistakes draw correction, who can make a joke and which stated rules are quietly ignored. The learning is piecemeal because much of the knowledge becomes relevant only while something is happening. A written instruction to listen carefully cannot tell a novice which sound matters until someone helps them hear it.

Participation builds that judgement. In our imagined choir, a neighbour might point to the right line, demonstrate an entry or explain a gesture. Help supplies both a skill and evidence that needing help is acceptable. Refusing it teaches something too. Reactions can make the difference between an accessible group with demanding work and a friendly-sounding group that expects competence on arrival.

People also choose whose example to follow. They may copy the most skilled singer, the person everyone likes or the friend who brought them, and these need not be the same person. More generally, prestige, success, kinship and expertise can pull cultural learning towards different models. Institutions amplify some of them through curricula and credentials; platforms amplify others through visibility.

The learner is never only a container. A newcomer can compare this group with another, preserve an objection and master a code without endorsing it. Fluency proves neither loyalty nor consent. It may be the price of taking part in something worth doing despite its faults.

The performance

Once the singer joins in, other people gain evidence of what the group is like. This is where even reluctant compliance can become self-reinforcing. Suppose nobody asks for a difficult passage to be repeated. Each newcomer may conclude that everyone else can manage it. Their own silence then helps the next person draw the same conclusion. The room can look more competent, and less troubled, than its members feel.

That is an illustration of a wider possibility, not a finding about choirs. In their 1993 Princeton studies, Deborah Prentice and Dale Miller found students reporting more discomfort with campus drinking than they attributed to their peers. The researchers established a mismatch in perceived attitudes. How people interpreted others' behaviour was part of their explanation, not a directly demonstrated cause of the mismatch.

The distinction is important: a performance is public, while the reasons for it may not be. Someone can join in from enthusiasm, fear of exclusion or the belief that everyone else wants to continue. A group cannot safely read one motive from the visible act. Nor does private disagreement necessarily mean rebellion is imminent. People may prefer the existing arrangement to the risks of challenging it.

Performance has room for variation. Members can exaggerate a convention into parody, follow its letter while rejecting its tone, or quietly make an exception. Goffman's work on encounters helps explain why these variations matter. People present themselves to an audience, protect face and repair disruptions. This does not make everyday conduct fake. Sincere regret still needs a recognisable apology before another person can respond to it.

The audience and sanction

Other people complete the act by interpreting it. A greeting unanswered, joke unrecognised or title withheld changes the social event. Audiences can reward, correct, ignore or punish, and their response teaches everyone watching which interpretation carries force.

Sanctions are often small. A pause, raised eyebrow, missing invitation or reputation for being difficult may be enough. Their subtlety helps them work because no official need defend the rule. The target may know that something went wrong without being able to identify the charge. This uncertainty encourages overcorrection.

Serious sanctions range further: exclusion from a profession, loss of housing, family violence, arrest or denial of legal status. At that point cultural and formal authority meet. The law may encode a norm, oppose it or leave enforcement to private actors. A practice does not become less cultural because it is written down, but legal force changes the cost of resistance.

Reference groups matter. A teenager may discount parental disapproval and respond intensely to peers. A professional may ignore public ridicule and fear a licensing body. The relevant norm is attached to an audience whose judgement the actor expects and values, or whose power cannot be escaped.

Sanctions also invite repair. A person who breaches a rule can apologise, explain an exception, claim ignorance, joke, blame circumstances or challenge the standard. The response tests the boundary. Acceptance marks the violation as temporary. Refusal can redefine the actor as the kind of person who does not belong. Much social order depends less on flawless conduct than on shared procedures for making breaches ordinary again.

The supports

Our imagined choir also needs a rehearsal time, an affordable room and some way to obtain the music. A welcome to all abilities does little for the person who cannot reach the building or attend at that hour. These are practical limits, not proof of anyone's prejudice. They become culturally revealing when members treat their own access as so ordinary that someone else's absence is read as lack of commitment.

These supports reduce the need for constant persuasion. They also preserve older decisions after opinion changes. An organisation can announce flexibility while keeping a timetable built around permanent office

attendance. A city can endorse accessibility while its entrances, pavements and ticket machines continue to exclude. The rule then survives as friction.

Someone must keep the room booked, distribute the parts and arrange replacements when things go wrong. This work supports the visible achievement while remaining easy to overlook. The same is true of signs, archives and databases: their apparent permanence depends on people attending to them. When maintenance succeeds, users can forget that normality has a rota.

Money and markets enter here. Commercial actors package styles, identities and rituals, but buyers do not receive meanings intact. A brand can attempt to define an object, while users appropriate it for status, irony, opposition or local belonging. Ownership of production grants influence, not control over every interpretation.

Infrastructure can outlast the values that produced it. Street plans preserve former property relations. Filing systems retain obsolete categories. A workplace inherits software designed around an earlier chain of command. Because replacing a system is expensive, people adapt conduct to old assumptions while speaking a newer moral language. Path dependence is not fate, but it explains why reform often arrives as a layer added to the machinery it meant to replace.

The institution

Institutions turn recurring expectations into durable positions, records and decisions. A school assigns teacher and pupil. A court assigns judge, witness and accused. A hospital classifies conditions and authorises treatments. These roles allow coordinated action among strangers because each person need not know the others personally.

Standardisation is the gain and the danger. Shared forms make large systems interoperable. They also privilege the cases that fit. Exceptions become administrative problems, and categories designed for one population can travel farther than their evidence. An institutional rule may be neutral in wording while imposing unequal translation costs.

Institutions also generate common knowledge. It is one thing for many people privately to support a new practice. It is another for each to know that the others know support is widespread. Public decisions, ceremonies, announcements and visible enforcement can create that higher-order expectation. Once created, it changes the risks of moving first.

This is why symbolic acts sometimes have practical effects. An apology, recognition, court ruling or public renaming may alter no material resource at the moment it occurs, yet it changes what can be said with authority afterwards. Symbolic change is insufficient when structures remain, but dismissing it as merely symbolic misses its coordinating function.

Documents let institutional culture travel. A checklist, case file, syllabus or standard operating procedure carries selected judgement beyond the original relationship. It can preserve consistency and protect people from arbitrary memory. It can also remove context, turn discretion into box-ticking and give yesterday's compromise the appearance of timeless rule. Large organisations coordinate partly by deciding which parts of local knowledge deserve a field on the form.

The unequal rule

By the time a rule is institutionalised, its origins may have vanished. The standard appears impersonal. Yet somebody's language, body, schedule, family arrangement or knowledge was easier to translate into it than somebody else's.

The advantage often feels like ease. In an institution built around your familiar code, you can attend to the task while someone else monitors how to speak, when to intervene and whether a question will expose them. Success can conceal this extra work: once the person has adapted, the institution sees the smooth result rather than what it cost.

Bourdieu made this visible through research on taste and social position in France. Familiarity with recognised art, language and manners could be converted into distinction because schools and cultural institutions rewarded those codes. The setting matters. The profitable signals change by country,

generation and field. What travels is the question: which forms of ease are being mistaken for talent because the institution helped create the audience able to recognise them?

Authority over representation adds another layer. A state, employer, media organisation or recognised leader may describe what a community values. Members may agree, bargain, remain silent or object. Outsiders often prefer the neat statement because it permits a policy or story to proceed. The resulting account can then circulate back as evidence of the culture it simplified.

Resistance needs its own infrastructure. A grievance must become a shared classification, a dispersed population must recognise allies and a new practice must be rehearsed before it feels available. Movements use meetings, slogans, songs, dress, commemorations and disciplined conduct to produce a public alternative. They are changing both sanctions and imagination: what people expect others will tolerate and what they can picture replacing it.

Changing together

Sweden's traffic switch shows the coordination problem in unusually pure form. Parliament chose right-hand traffic despite an earlier advisory referendum favouring the left. Years of preparation followed. At 05:00 on 3 September 1967, road users moved to the other side.

The case was not a spontaneous cultural awakening. Law, engineering, public information, altered signs and a common date aligned expectations. The old convention had worked because road users could expect others to follow it. Adopting the replacement alone would have put people in danger. Coordination changed what counted as competent driving without requiring either side of the road to become morally superior.

Many rules are harder to change because there is no central switch, the preferred outcome is contested or costs fall unevenly. Reform can alter law without altering intimate sanctions. A campaign can change what people say publicly while leaving practice untouched. A technology can change

behaviour quickly while older moral language persists.

Successful transition therefore requires diagnosis. Is the obstacle ignorance, a descriptive norm, an injunctive norm, material friction, dependence on a reference group, institutional classification or fear of moving alone? Different mechanisms require different interventions. Information fails when the problem is sanction. Moral appeal fails when the old action is built into the form. Quiet majority support fails when nobody can see it.

The household-energy study adds a warning. An accurate comparison can send an unwanted message about acceptable conduct. Before publicising a norm, it matters which audience will hear it and where its behaviour already sits. The question is not only whether the information is true. It is what listeners have reason to take it as permission to do.

Change becomes durable when the new conduct supplies its own evidence. Each performance tells observers that the revised rule is possible, common or approved. Objects and institutions begin supporting it. Newcomers learn the replacement without experiencing it as reform. The history remains, but the practical default has moved.

Durability does not settle justice. A harmful arrangement can become efficient once coordinated, while a humane reform can fail because its costs are immediate and its benefits dispersed. Nor does resistance always come from ignorance. People may understand the proposed rule and oppose the status, livelihood or identity it threatens. Cultural diagnosis should clarify the contest rather than redescribe every opponent as trapped in tradition. Change is political whenever groups disagree about which future deserves coordination.

Then the cycle begins again. Participants bend the replacement, institutions select versions and circumstances create exceptions. Culture never finishes because coordination must be renewed in conduct, and every renewal gives people another chance to reproduce the rule differently.

How we know

Culture cannot be read from behaviour alone, because the same act can carry different meanings and smooth compliance can hide private disagreement. Researchers therefore combine methods. Ethnography follows people through settings, relationships and repeated practice. Interviews reveal stated categories and justifications. Archives and objects show how institutions recorded and materialised selected rules. Surveys compare reported attitudes and perceived norms. Experiments can separate mechanisms under bounded conditions, while historical and cross-cultural comparison tests whether an explanation travels.

Each method leaves gaps. Participants may disagree, conceal, forget or change their account. Researchers bring their own categories and power into the encounter. National datasets favour administratively visible groups. Laboratory control can strip away the relations that gave a rule force. Digital traces record clicks and circulation more readily than irony, coercion or absence.

The strongest claims converge across evidence while keeping population, period and setting visible. Experiments estimate effects for particular interventions, samples and outcomes; interpretive claims earn confidence by explaining conduct and language without forcing disagreement into one coherent code. Cultural explanation remains interpretive, but interpretation is disciplined by provenance, comparison, counterexample and consequences that an alternative account would need to explain.

What People Get Wrong

“Culture means the arts”

Culture departments fund museums, orchestras and heritage, so the word is often narrowed to prestigious expression. That usage is legitimate and incomplete. The anthropological and sociological subject includes the ordinary classifications and practices through which people eat, wait, joke, mourn, work, argue and decide who belongs.

The word itself encouraged the confusion. It once referred to cultivation, then extended to cultivated minds and artistic refinement.

Nineteenth-century anthropology widened it towards acquired knowledge, belief, morals, law, custom and practice, although early accounts often arranged societies on a false ladder from primitive to civilised. The prestige and whole-way-of-life meanings have coexisted in modern usage.

The narrow meaning became persuasive because visible products are easier to collect than tacit rules. A painting can enter an archive. The timing of an interruption rarely does. Elite institutions also gained authority by treating selected art as culture and everyday taste as its absence.

A society can watch the same films as another and differ in family obligation or acceptable disagreement. Culture is present when nobody is performing refinement. It is also inside the museum, in decisions about what counts as art and whose knowledge is recognised. This broad meaning need not make art merely evidence of social rules: a work can alter what an audience feels or imagines. Nor does it make every action cultural. Prices, bodies and coercion also shape conduct. The useful distinction is between culture as a badge of refinement and culture as something nobody lives without.

“A country has one culture”

States make culture look national. They standardise schooling, law, language, statistics, holidays and public narratives, so national differences can be real. The mistake is moving from an average or institution to a personality supposedly carried by every citizen.

Within any country, region, class, religion, generation, profession, ethnicity, migration history and household produce overlapping variation. The relevant difference may run across borders rather than along them. A global profession can share stronger routines than neighbouring occupations in one city.

Cross-national scales can reveal patterns, but their categories, samples and averages must be kept visible. “Individualist” or “collectivist” does not diagnose a person, explain every institution or divide humanity into two

mental types. Recent cultural psychology has moved beyond a single East versus West contrast towards interacting dimensions, ecologies and institutions. The correction replaces the cultural map of coloured countries with a layered one: institutions matter, distributions overlap and the active group depends on the situation. National comparison can still be useful for a law, school system or survey population. It becomes fiction when the aggregate is put back inside every person.

“Culture is inherited in the blood”

People often speak of cultural traits as if ancestry carried manners, intelligence, violence, thrift or loyalty directly into the body. That move converts historical learning and unequal conditions into biological destiny.

Culture is transmitted chiefly through social learning, participation, institutions and material environments. Children raised under different arrangements can acquire different languages and practices from those associated with their ancestry. People migrate, convert, intermarry, code-switch and build new groups. None of this makes biology irrelevant. Human learning depends on bodies, and long-running cultural practices can interact with genetic selection, diet and disease environments.

The error lies in using ancestry as a complete causal package. It blocks investigation of which rule was taught, by whom, under what incentives and with what alternatives. It also treats group labels as biologically clean when histories of migration and mixture make that fantasy difficult to sustain. Worse, it makes change look unnatural and hierarchy look inherited. Blood is a powerful symbol of belonging. It is a poor explanation of cultural competence. Accent alone shows the difference: ancestry alone does not teach pronunciation, sustained participation does. The same principle applies less visibly to timing, trust and judgement.

“People follow norms because they believe in them”

Some norms are internalised as moral commitments. Others are followed because people expect approval, fear sanctions, depend on coordination or see no safe way to move first. Smooth compliance cannot tell these motives apart.

Pluralistic ignorance makes the problem sharper. A group can sustain a practice while many members privately dislike it, because each person reads everyone else's public conduct as support. Conversely, people may praise a standard and fail to enact it when cost or opportunity points elsewhere.

The myth survives because institutions prefer to describe obedience as shared values, while critics prefer to describe it as hypocrisy. Both can miss the mechanism. Even without an approval signal, recipients in the household-energy study changed their consumption; low users moved in the unwanted direction. Diagnose private belief, perceived behaviour, perceived approval, material dependence and enforcement separately. The distinction changes reform. Persuasion helps when conviction is missing. Public coordination helps when support is hidden. Protection matters when the rule persists through fear.

“Tradition is the opposite of change”

A tradition cannot remain alive without being performed in new circumstances. Each generation selects what to repeat, how to explain it and which version counts as proper. Continuity therefore contains judgement and variation.

The frozen image became persuasive because communities often claim antiquity to authorise a present practice, while outsiders search for an original form untouched by history. States, movements and heritage industries may codify one local or recent version and present it as timeless. That does not make the tradition fake. It makes its present authority part of the evidence.

Some traditions do preserve remarkable continuity. Others are revived, standardised or assembled from older pieces. Most contain both. Recording can itself change the form: an improvised practice becomes a fixed text, a local version becomes national and an expert gains authority to correct participants. The useful question is not whether a practice is authentic in the abstract. Ask what remains recognisable, who may alter it, what past is being invoked and why this version needs authority now. A tradition can be old and recently reorganised, sincere and politically useful, continuous and transformed. Those pairs are not contradictions.

“Globalisation makes every culture the same”

Global connections spread common platforms, brands, technical standards, genres and professional routines. Airports, shopping centres and phones can look strikingly similar across continents. It is tempting to read the shared objects as proof of shared meaning.

Use is less obedient. People fit imported forms into local schedules, languages, hierarchies and moral arguments. A global service may standardise payment while creating new regional workarounds. A musical form can circulate widely and become material for distinct identities. Contact can also intensify claims of purity as groups mark differences through the common system.

The reverse myth, that every local adaptation defeats corporate or political power, is equally weak. Ownership, infrastructure and scale shape what becomes available, and some local forms disappear when their institutions and livelihoods collapse. Globalisation produces uneven standardisation, translation and hybridisation, not one automatic endpoint. To know what converged, specify the level: object, rule, institution, practice, meaning or consequence. Similar shopfronts may conceal different obligations; different clothes may sit above the same platform contract. The direction also runs both ways. Migrants, diasporas and formerly colonised societies reshape the centres that once imagined culture travelled outward from them.

“Explaining culture excuses harm”

Cultural explanation asks how an action became intelligible, expected and enforceable. Moral judgement asks whether it should continue. Confusing the two makes understanding look like surrender.

Cultural relativism has often served as a discipline against ranking other societies by one's own unexamined standards. It requires learning local categories and histories before declaring an institution irrational. It does not require accepting every practice, denying victims within the group or treating a spokesperson as the whole culture.

The opposite mistake is using condemnation as if it explained causation. Calling a practice cruel may be correct and still reveal nothing about who enforces it, why people comply or where change could begin. Groups also contain critics, victims and reformers whose existence disproves the claim that one practice expresses a unanimous culture. Effective criticism needs both levels: standards that can condemn harm and an account precise enough to identify the machinery maintaining it. Explanation removes the protection of mystery. It does not remove responsibility, and culture cannot be used as an alibi for the people with power to act. Universal claims deserve scrutiny too, including who formulated them and whose experience was omitted, but scrutiny is compatible with firm judgement.

Use It

Find the script behind the act

When conduct seems irrational or offensive, ask what kind of situation the person may believe is taking place. The useful unit is often not the isolated act but the script connecting roles, sequence and expected response.

A silence can mean consent, resistance, respect, uncertainty or withdrawal. Giving direct advice can signal care in one relationship and intrusion in another. The explanation should not end with “their culture”. Identify the relevant group, setting and consequence. What cue selected the script?

What would a competent participant expect next? What repair would follow if the act were misunderstood?

This lens prevents two errors at once. It stops unfamiliar convention being misread as bad character, and it stops harmful conduct being protected by vagueness. A precise cultural account names the rule closely enough that it can be tested, criticised or changed.

Separate what is common, approved and enforced

A visible pattern can hide several different structures. People may do something because others do it, because others approve, because an authority requires it, because the environment makes alternatives costly or because these forces coincide.

Ask four questions. What do people privately prefer? What do they think others do? What do they think others approve? What happens to someone who departs? The answers may conflict. A practice can be common and condemned, rare and admired, compulsory and privately despised.

The distinction matters in policy and organisations. Publishing prevalence can normalise the behaviour being challenged. Announcing a value does little when promotion rewards its opposite. Training is weak when the obstacle is retaliation. A cultural diagnosis improves when it specifies the expectation rather than treating “the norm” as one undivided force.

Watch the newcomer and the breach

Competent members move too smoothly to reveal every rule. Newcomers hesitate, ask where to sit, use the wrong term and receive corrections. Their errors expose which details matter. A breach does the same by making others explain, laugh, punish or repair.

This is useful in a workplace, institution or unfamiliar social setting. Notice the questions nobody answers directly. Compare the written instruction with what veterans do. Observe which mistake is forgiven as inexperience and which is treated as evidence that a person does not belong.

Do not turn the newcomer into an unpaid anthropologist or assume every confusion lies in the culture rather than poor design. The lens is diagnostic. If competent participation depends on hidden exceptions, inherited contacts or humiliation, the problem may be the system's opacity, not the learner's deficiency.

Follow the object and the default

Values are easy to announce. Objects show which action has been made easy. Look at the room, timetable, form, interface, uniform, transport link, payment system and archive. Each contains decisions about the expected user.

A meeting can invite participation while its seating and speaking order concentrate attention. A form can claim neutrality while offering no accurate category for some applicants. A flexible policy can sit inside software that records only one standard path. The material arrangement may preserve an old rule after public language changes.

This lens shifts reform from exhortation to infrastructure. Ask what has to be moved, funded, maintained or redesigned for the new expectation to become ordinary. Then ask who performs that maintenance. Culture often appears self-reproducing because the labour keeping its objects and routines available has been made invisible too.

Ask who can define normal

When one interpretation wins, trace the authority behind it. Who can certify expertise, set the curriculum, write the form, choose the spokesperson, rank visibility, preserve the archive or impose the sanction? Whose manner already matches the institution's idea of competence?

This is more exact than declaring that everything is about power. Peers can create norms without central command, and people can reinterpret what institutions distribute. The task is to identify where unequal capacity changes the outcome. A joke among friends and a professional assessment may both draw symbolic boundaries, but only one may control a licence or

livelihood.

Also ask who bears translation costs. People fluent in the dominant code can focus on substance. Others may have to monitor accent, dress, timing and self-presentation while completing the same task. Their successful adaptation can conceal the extra work from the institution benefiting from it.

Change the shared expectation, not the opinion alone

Many reforms address isolated minds while leaving the coordination problem untouched. A person may support the new rule and still wait because moving first risks embarrassment, danger or loss. Private agreement does not create common knowledge.

Determine what must become visible. Do people need evidence that others are changing, assurance that authorities will enforce the replacement, a shared date, a protected trial or a redesigned default? Sweden's traffic switch worked because law, information and physical preparation aligned action at one moment. Most cultural transitions lack that command, but the logic remains.

Test for unintended messages. A campaign can advertise how common misconduct is. A warning that most people ignore a rule can make violation look ordinary. Public punishment can strengthen a group organised around defiance. Change is more durable when new conduct repeatedly supplies credible evidence of what is possible, expected and safe.

Sequence matters. Removing a sanction before alternatives are usable can expose early adopters. Changing language without changing decisions invites cynicism. Imposing a new form without time to learn it can make established insiders look newly competent again. Treat transition as a temporary institution with its own rules, support and feedback rather than as the instant disappearance of the old culture.

The limits

Culture explains neither everything nor nothing. Material scarcity, law, technology, coercion, disease, geography, temperament and chance can shape behaviour without waiting for shared meaning. Cultural interpretation enters because people classify these conditions, respond through learnt repertoires and coordinate with others, but it should not swallow the other causes.

The concept can become circular. People act this way because of their culture, and the culture is inferred from the fact that they act this way. Break the circle by identifying transmission, expectations, sanctions, institutions, objects and counterexamples. State the population and setting. Show what evidence would distinguish the account from an alternative based on incentives, constraint or selection.

Culture is also easier to attribute to other people. The observer's categories, research methods and moral assumptions need inspection, but perfect neutrality is unavailable. The remedy is comparison, reflexivity, participant challenge and clear separation between evidence and inference, not silence.

Nor are groups internally available for unlimited inspection. Privacy, sacred restriction, commercial secrecy and memories of exploitation can set legitimate boundaries around research. Absence of access does not licence invention, and access does not confer ownership. A strong account may need to state what cannot be known from outside.

The one thing to keep

Return to the student asking permission to take food from his family's refrigerator. In another house, the request might have been considerate. At home it unsettled a relationship normally expressed by not having to ask. The action became strange because of who did it, to whom, and against which shared history.

That is what should look different now. An encounter contains more than the

behaviour visible on its surface. People bring expectations about the relationship, an audience capable of enforcing them and different amounts of freedom to get things wrong. Your feeling that an action is obvious or offensive is a clue to those expectations. It is not yet an explanation of the other person.

Sometimes the explanation will leave your judgement intact. A rule may be understood perfectly and still deserve resistance. Cultural understanding does not oblige anyone to enjoy exclusion or rename cruelty as difference. It makes criticism more exact: whose expectation is being protected, what keeps people complying and what would let them act otherwise?

But sometimes a judgement about character will turn out to have been a collision between workable scripts. Sometimes apparent consent will be caution. Sometimes the person who seems naturally at ease will have inherited years of practice that the room has mistaken for talent. Seeing these possibilities does not abolish responsibility. It gives responsibility a more accurate address.

Garfinkel's students made familiar life strange by behaving with unfamiliar formality. You need not repeat their experiment. The next time ordinary conduct puzzles you, pause before deciding which sort of person would behave that way. There may be a better first question: what sort of world makes that action make sense?

Terms

Culture. The learned and contested meanings, expectations, practices and material arrangements through which people interpret situations and coordinate social life. It is distributed unevenly across groups, backed by unequal authority and changes through repeated use.

Norm. A socially sustained expectation about conduct. Norms can concern what people do, what they approve or what they will punish, and those dimensions may conflict within the same group and moment.

Descriptive norm. A belief about what members of a relevant group

commonly do. Reporting it can guide behaviour, but may also normalise conduct an intervention hoped to reduce by making it appear ordinary.

Injunctive norm. A belief about what others approve or condemn. It supplies a moral or social judgement and may reinforce, oppose or qualify the descriptive norm governing the same conduct.

Convention. A coordinated arrangement among several workable alternatives, maintained because participants expect others to use it. Driving sides, technical formats, queues and greeting forms often have this structure.

Value. A general judgement about what is desirable, proper or worthwhile. Values guide interpretation but do not translate mechanically into action, especially when habits, sanctions, material limits or incentives conflict.

Symbol. An object, sound, gesture or mark whose significance exceeds its physical form through shared interpretation. Symbols can coordinate membership while carrying different, contested meanings for different audiences and periods.

Schema. A socially shaped mental structure that organises knowledge and guides rapid interpretation. Schemas make situations legible, but can fill gaps with inherited assumptions that do not fit the present case.

Script. An expected sequence of roles and actions for a familiar situation, such as a meal, interview or apology. Scripts reduce negotiation while leaving room for improvisation, failure and strategic variation.

Frame. A definition of what kind of event is occurring and what features matter. Cultural conflict can begin when participants apply different frames and therefore expect different responses to the same encounter.

Socialisation. Lifelong learning of the roles, skills, expectations and identities required for social participation, acquired through families, peers, institutions, media and repeated experience.

Enculturation. Acquiring the locally specific meanings and practices of a

cultural setting. The term stresses that human development occurs inside historical social worlds rather than in an empty environment.

Habitus. Bourdieu's term for durable, embodied dispositions produced by past conditions. Habitus makes some actions feel natural without dictating every response or preventing reflection and change.

Practice. A recurrent, socially organised way of doing something that joins knowledge, bodily competence, objects and judgement. Practices often contain more skill than participants can state explicitly.

Ritual. An established sequence whose recognisable performance carries social significance. Rituals can mark transitions, renew membership, distribute authority or manage uncertainty without requiring identical private belief.

Material culture. Objects, buildings, clothing, tools and designed environments through which social meanings and practices are carried. Material evidence survives unevenly and never records every use or interpretation.

Institution. A durable arrangement of roles, rules, records and resources that coordinates conduct beyond personal relationships. Institutions stabilise standards while deciding which cases fit their categories.

Sanction. A response that rewards conformity or penalises breach. Sanctions range from approval and ridicule to exclusion, loss of livelihood, violence and formal legal punishment.

Deviance. Conduct defined as violating a norm. The label depends on audience, setting and authority, so studying deviance also reveals who has power to classify the breach.

Identity. A socially meaningful account of who someone is in relation to groups, roles and histories. People hold overlapping identities whose relevance shifts across situations and audiences.

Symbolic boundary. A conceptual distinction separating people, practices

or objects into categories. Some symbolic boundaries remain matters of taste; others harden into unequal access and durable social divisions.

Subculture. Meanings and practices through which a group distinguishes itself inside a broader setting. Subcultures remain internally varied and connected to markets, institutions and neighbouring groups.

Cultural capital. Familiarity, styles and competencies that institutions recognise and reward. Its value depends on the field, so no single list of prestigious tastes works across all settings.

Hegemony. Rule sustained partly through ordinary consent and common sense, alongside institutions and possible coercion. Hegemony is contested and never means that powerful actors control every interpretation.

Ethnocentrism. Judging other ways of life through one's own unexamined categories and treating familiarity as the human standard. Comparison can reduce it, though observers never become culture-free.

Cultural relativism. The methodological discipline of understanding practices within their local meanings and histories before judging them. It does not require moral approval or denial of internal dissent.

Emic. An account using distinctions meaningful to participants in the setting studied. Emic knowledge clarifies local sense-making but may reproduce silences, hierarchies or disagreements within the group.

Etic. An analytical account using categories designed for comparison across settings. Etic concepts can reveal patterns but risk forcing local life into a scheme imported by the researcher.

Diffusion. The movement of cultural forms between people or groups. What travels is usually selected, translated and altered, so borrowing produces neither perfect copying nor automatic cultural sameness. Disputes over appropriation ask how restriction, power, attribution and benefit shape that movement.

Ethnography. Sustained research based on close engagement with

people, practices and settings, commonly using observation, participation and interviews. Its strength is context; its evidence remains situated and interpretive.

Go Deeper

An inviting overview

Matthew Engelke, *Think Like an Anthropologist* (Pelican, 2017). Engelke introduces culture through the questions anthropologists use rather than through one grand definition. Chapters on values, blood, identity, authority, reason and nature show how apparently separate parts of life become connected once local categories are taken seriously. It is accessible, sceptical about easy universals and unusually good at turning classic debates into live problems. Start here if this book has made ordinary behaviour look less self-explanatory. Its examples range widely without pretending that a tour of difference can replace patient fieldwork, and the prose remains inviting to a reader with no background in anthropology.

The interpretation

Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, 1973). This essay collection contains the most influential modern case for treating culture as a context of meaning and for using thick description to understand action. It is also a period piece, tied to particular ethnographies and criticised for making cultures appear more coherent than their members are. Read the opening essay first, then the Balinese cockfight. The value lies as much in arguing with the method as in accepting it. Geertz teaches the reader to ask what an act means locally, then leaves later scholars to press harder on conflict, history, material constraint and unequal authority.

Culture in use

Ann Swidler, *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters* (University of Chicago Press, 2001). Interviews about love and marriage become a close test of how cultural repertoires enter real action. People command several stories about love, draw on them differently in settled and unsettled lives, and do not behave as though one value system issues orders. The book is empirically patient and supplies the best next step from this book's coordination model to the messier question of how people select among competing cultural tools. It also includes a methodological appendix, useful for seeing how an abstract argument about culture was built from interviews rather than imposed as a free-floating theory.

Culture and power

Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, translated by Richard Nice (Harvard University Press, 1984). Bourdieu shows how taste, ease and cultural competence can be converted into social distinction when institutions reward particular codes. The evidence is heavily grounded in twentieth-century France, so do not turn its rankings into a universal map of taste. It is long, dense and sometimes punishing. Read the introduction and early chapters with the tables nearby; the central mechanism repays the effort. Pair it with evidence from another country or institution so that cultural capital remains a relational tool rather than a French social order exported intact.

Notes and Sources

The notes identify the principal evidence and interpretive works behind the manuscript. The amateur choir is explicitly fictional. The lift, dinner-bill and remembered-song examples are illustrations; generic workplace, school and household possibilities are not reports of named cases. Garfinkel's family exercise, the Swedish traffic change and the named research studies are documented examples. Culture has no single agreed definition across anthropology, sociology, psychology and cultural-evolution research. The book's organising model, culture as distributed public meaning and coordination through learnt expectations, practices, expressive forms and material supports, is a synthesis rather than a claim that one field-wide formula has displaced the others.

The Whole Thing in One Page

Culture as repertoire, schema and practice. Ann Swidler's 1986 account of culture as a repertoire for action supplies an important alternative to the idea that values issue direct commands. Paul DiMaggio's 1997 review and Andrei Boutyline and Laura Soter's 2021 synthesis clarify how schemas organise perception and action without functioning as complete internal rulebooks. William Sewell's account of structure and agency supports the reciprocal model in which resources and schemas shape action while action reproduces or changes them.

Norms and coordination. Robert Cialdini, Raymond Reno and Carl Kallgren distinguish descriptive information about what people do from injunctive information about what they approve. Cristina Bicchieri develops a more formal account of norms as conditional expectations embedded in reference groups. The manuscript keeps common behaviour, moral approval, sanction and material constraint separate because they need not coincide.

Expressive forms, objects and unequal standards. Raymond Williams's history of the term, Clifford Geertz's interpretive work and Ann Swidler's account of cultural repertoires support the inclusion of artistic and

expressive forms as socially consequential meaning rather than decorative evidence. Pierre Bourdieu, Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, and Daniel Miller support the argument that culture is also carried through bodies, classifications, objects, records and institutions. These writers differ substantially in theory and evidence; the manuscript uses intersecting mechanisms without treating them as one school.

Why You Should Care

Dagen H. The City of Stockholm's Stockholmskällan archive documents Sweden's change from left-hand to right-hand traffic at 05:00 on 3 September 1967. Parliament decided on the change in 1963 after an advisory referendum in 1955 had rejected it. Public information, road alterations, signs and a coordinated transition made the replacement convention workable. The episode is used as a clear coordination case, not as a model for moral or decentralised cultural change.

Cross-cultural economic games. Joseph Henrich and colleagues reported ultimatum, public-goods and dictator-game research across fifteen small-scale societies in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* in 2005. The results showed substantial variation in the studied tasks and populations and associations with local forms of economic organisation and cooperation. They do not constitute a census of human motives or prove that every difference was caused by culture alone.

WEIRD sampling. Joseph Henrich, Steven Heine and Ara Norenzayan's 2010 review argued that participants from Western, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic societies were unusually common in behavioural research and could be unusual on important measures. Shinobu Kitayama and Cristina Salvador's 2024 review surveys later cultural psychology beyond a single East versus West contrast. The manuscript uses this literature as a warning about external validity, not as evidence that no psychological finding travels.

Pluralistic ignorance and alcohol. Prentice and Miller's 1993 Princeton studies found students reporting less comfort with campus drinking than

they attributed to peers. One longitudinal study found men's attitudes shifting towards the perceived norm; women's did not. Perceived deviance also correlated with alienation. The authors discuss different explanations for the misperception and explicitly state that they lack direct evidence to distinguish their differential-interpretation and differential-encoding accounts. The manuscript uses the attitude mismatch as evidence, and the performance feedback loop as a possible explanation, not a demonstrated universal mechanism.

The Core Ideas

Breaching background expectations. Garfinkel's 1964 article, 'Studies of the Routine Grounds of Everyday Activities', describes students acting as boarders in their family homes. The refrigerator request appears on printed page 232. The exercise also appears in *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (1967). These are reported student accounts exposing taken-for-granted expectations, not a representative experiment estimating how all families respond.

Socialisation, embodiment and habitus. Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* develops habitus as durable, generative dispositions formed under past conditions. The manuscript narrows the concept deliberately: dispositions make responses more likely and fluent without eliminating reflection, contradictory experience or change.

Animal culture and human distinctiveness. Andrew Whiten's 2019 review documents socially transmitted traditions across many animal species and treats cumulative change outside humans as an open empirical question rather than an impossibility. Thomas Morgan and Marcus Feldman's perspective, published online in November 2024 and assigned to the journal's 2025 volume, argues that cumulative change and high-fidelity transmission are not uniquely human and proposes open-ended scope as a more promising distinction. James Winters and Mathieu Charbonneau's 2026 modelling paper examines conditions under which open-ended cultural evolution might emerge. The manuscript treats open-endedness as an active hypothesis, not a settled boundary.

Meaning, thick description and expression. Clifford Geertz's opening essay in *The Interpretation of Cultures* uses Gilbert Ryle's contrast between a twitch and a wink to show why visible movement does not settle social meaning. His essay on a Balinese cockfight interprets betting and performance through village status and masculine reputation. Raymond Williams's account of culture's overlapping meanings helps keep artistic production inside the wider subject. The manuscript extends these materials cautiously: expressive forms can make feeling, memory and imagined possibility publicly available, but no work determines one audience response or political effect.

The Nacirema. Horace Miner's 1956 article redescribes familiar American bodily and medical routines in estranging anthropological language. The manuscript treats it as a methodological satire about description and ethnocentrism, not as ethnographic evidence about an unknown people.

Bodies, objects and ritual. Daniel Miller's *Stuff* treats objects as active parts of social life rather than mute reflections of ideas. Erving Goffman's *Interaction Ritual* analyses face, deference and repair in encounters. The manuscript widens these insights to architecture, forms, defaults and maintenance while preserving the distinction between illustrative examples and documented cases.

Symbolic and social boundaries. Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár's 2002 review distinguishes conceptual distinctions from social boundaries that organise unequal access. The text therefore refuses to equate every taste difference with domination while asking when a distinction acquires material consequences.

Hegemony and cultural capital. The account of hegemony follows Antonio Gramsci's prison writings as edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. The treatment of cultural capital draws chiefly on Bourdieu's *Distinction*, which is heavily grounded in twentieth-century France. Neither concept is presented as a universal list of beliefs or prestigious tastes.

Transmission and cultural evolution. Alex Mesoudi, Andrew Whiten and Kevin Laland review evolutionary approaches to cultural change; Peter Richerson and Robert Boyd develop gene-culture coevolution and social-learning mechanisms. The manuscript uses the evolutionary analogy to analyse variation, transmission and accumulation while stressing that people interpret, redesign and institutionally suppress cultural forms.

Diffusion, hybridisation, appropriation and tradition. Néstor García Canclini and Ulf Hannerz analyse cultural movement and combination across unequal transnational connections. Richard Rogers distinguishes exchange, dominance, exploitation and transculturation in debates over cultural appropriation. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's edited collection shows how practices presented as ancient may be selected, codified or reorganised in modern settings. The text does not infer that all traditions are recent inventions, that all borrowing is wrongful or that contact begins between previously pure cultures.

The operating sequence

Household energy feedback. Schultz and colleagues reported the San Marcos experiment in 2007. Households were assigned to comparison feedback or comparison plus a hand-drawn approval/disapproval face; both packages included energy-saving tips. Below-average users receiving comparison alone increased consumption from baseline, while those receiving a happy face showed no statistically significant increase. There was no untreated control. The main text reports the observed pattern without treating a within-group change as a clean estimate against receiving no message, or non-significance as proof of zero effect. The publication year is not a claim about the year of data collection.

Frames, performance and repair. Goffman's encounter studies support the discussion of face, audience and repair. DiMaggio, Swidler, Boutyline and Soter support the movement between rapid classification and the use of several cultural repertoires. The fictional choir illustrates these mechanisms; it is not evidence of their prevalence in musical groups. No single source establishes the full operating sequence; that sequence is the book's

synthesis.

Classification and institutional memory. Bowker and Star show how categories and standards organise work, render some cases visible and leave others awkward or residual. Their cases support the claim that forms and information systems preserve social decisions, although the manuscript's examples are intentionally general and do not imply one effect in every institution.

Common knowledge and transition. Bicchieri's work on social norms explains why private support and public expectation are different conditions. Dagen H supplies a documented case in which law, information, engineering and a common date aligned conduct. Moral change, decentralised movements and intimate practices rarely permit such a clean switch.

How we know. The methodological section draws on the combined strengths and limits of ethnography, interviews, archives, objects, surveys, experiments and comparison. Geertz and Engelke represent interpretive anthropology; the cross-cultural studies and norm experiments show the gains and limits of comparison and controlled intervention. The text treats cultural claims as strongest when methods converge and population, observation period, dataset vintage and setting remain explicit.

What People Get Wrong

Culture and the arts. Raymond Williams traces the word from cultivation through intellectual refinement, ways of life and artistic production. Edward B. Tylor's 1871 definition helped establish a broad acquired meaning in anthropology, although his wider evolutionary scheme ranked societies through a discredited hierarchy. Matthew Engelke provides an accessible account of the broader anthropological questions hidden by the common restriction of culture to arts and heritage. Geertz, Swidler and DiMaggio represent different versions of the broader scholarly usage.

National cultures. Kitayama and Salvador review work that treats cultural psychology as multi-level, historically situated and more varied than a single

national or East versus West axis. The manuscript does not deny national institutions or average differences. It rejects assigning an aggregate score to every individual and treating the country as the only relevant group.

Blood and learning. Richerson and Boyd explain how cultural inheritance depends on social learning and can interact with genetic evolution. The manuscript separates that interaction from racial or ancestral determinism. Claims about any specific trait would require trait-specific biological, developmental and historical evidence.

Tradition and change. Hobsbawm and Ranger remain the principal reference for codification and invented tradition, while García Canclini and Hannerz support the treatment of borrowing and hybridisation. The correction is not that continuity is false. It is that continuity itself must be reproduced, selected and authorised in the present.

Explanation and judgement. Engelke's discussions of values, reason and cultural relativism support the distinction between understanding a practice in context and morally approving it. The manuscript also keeps internal disagreement visible, since no spokesperson or observed practice proves unanimous group consent.

Use It and Terms

The practical lenses are deductions from the model developed across the book. They are diagnostic questions, not validated checklists with one guaranteed outcome. The glossary follows the usages established in the cited literature. Terms such as culture, norm, ritual, identity and institution carry wider debates than a short definition can contain; each entry is designed to prevent the most common category error and support further reading.

Bibliography

Studies and source texts

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Boutyline, Andrei, and Laura K. Soter. "Cultural Schemas: What They Are, How to Find Them, and What to Do Once You've Caught One." *American Sociological Review* 86, no. 4 (2021): 728-758. DOI 10.1177/00031224211024525.

Bowker, Geoffrey C., and Susan Leigh Star. *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999.

Cialdini, Robert B., Raymond R. Reno, and Carl A. Kallgren. "A Focus Theory of Normative Conduct: Recycling the Concept of Norms to Reduce Littering in Public Places." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 58, no. 6 (1990): 1015-1026. DOI 10.1037/0022-3514.58.6.1015.

DiMaggio, Paul. "Culture and Cognition." *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997): 263-287. DOI 10.1146/annurev.soc.23.1.263.

Garfinkel, Harold. "Studies of the Routine Grounds of Everyday Activities." *Social Problems* 11, no. 3 (1964): 225-250.

Garfinkel, Harold. *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Goffman, Erving. *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967.

Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971.

Henrich, Joseph, Robert Boyd, Samuel Bowles, Colin Camerer, Ernst Fehr, Herbert Gintis, Richard McElreath, Michael Alvard, Abigail Barr, Jean Ensminger, Natalie Smith Henrich, Kim Hill, Francisco Gil-White, Michael Gurven, Frank W. Marlowe, John Q. Patton, and David Tracer. "Economic Man in Cross-Cultural Perspective: Behavioral Experiments in 15 Small-Scale Societies." *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 28, no. 6 (2005): 795-815. DOI 10.1017/S0140525X05000142.

Henrich, Joseph, Steven J. Heine, and Ara Norenzayan. "The Weirdest People in the World?" *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 33, nos. 2-3 (2010): 61-83. DOI 10.1017/S0140525X0999152X.

Lamont, Michèle, and Virág Molnár. "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences." *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (2002): 167-195. DOI 10.1146/annurev.soc.28.110601.141107.

Miner, Horace. "Body Ritual among the Nacirema." *American Anthropologist* 58, no. 3 (1956): 503-507. DOI 10.1525/aa.1956.58.3.02a00080.

Prentice, Deborah A., and Dale T. Miller. "Pluralistic Ignorance and Alcohol Use on Campus: Some Consequences of Misperceiving the Social Norm." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 64, no. 2 (1993): 243-256. DOI 10.1037/0022-3514.64.2.243.

Schultz, P. Wesley, Jessica M. Nolan, Robert B. Cialdini, Noah J. Goldstein, and Vladas Griskevicius. "The Constructive, Destructive, and Reconstructive Power of Social Norms." *Psychological Science* 18, no. 5 (2007): 429-434. DOI 10.1111/j.1467-9280.2007.01917.x.

Sewell, William H., Jr. "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation." *American Journal of Sociology* 98, no. 1 (1992): 1-29. DOI 10.1086/229967.

Swidler, Ann. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American*

Sociological Review 51, no. 2 (1986): 273-286. DOI 10.2307/2095521.

Books, reviews and syntheses

Bicchieri, Cristina. *Norms in the Wild: How to Diagnose, Measure, and Change Social Norms*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Engelke, Matthew. *Think Like an Anthropologist*. London: Pelican, 2017.

García Canclini, Néstor. *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*. Translated by Christopher L. Chiappari and Silvia L. López. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

Hannerz, Ulf. *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places*. London: Routledge, 1996.

Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Kitayama, Shinobu, and Cristina E. Salvador. "Cultural Psychology: Beyond East and West." *Annual Review of Psychology* 75 (2024): 495-526. DOI 10.1146/annurev-psych-021723-063333.

Mesoudi, Alex, Andrew Whiten, and Kevin N. Laland. "Towards a Unified Science of Cultural Evolution." *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 29, no. 4 (2006): 329-347. DOI 10.1017/S0140525X06009083.

Miller, Daniel. *Stuff*. Cambridge: Polity, 2010.

Morgan, Thomas J. H., and Marcus W. Feldman. "Human Culture Is Uniquely Open-Ended Rather Than Uniquely Cumulative." *Nature Human Behaviour* 9, no. 1 (2025): 28-42. DOI 10.1038/s41562-024-02035-y.

Richerson, Peter J., and Robert Boyd. *Not by Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Rogers, Richard A. "From Cultural Exchange to Transculturation: A Review and Reconceptualization of Cultural Appropriation." *Communication Theory* 16, no. 4 (2006): 474-503. DOI 10.1111/j.1468-2885.2006.00277.x.

Stockholmskällan. "Högertrafikomläggningen 1967." City of Stockholm historical archive. Accessed 5 September 2026.

Swidler, Ann. *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

Tylor, Edward B. *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom*. Vol. 1. London: John Murray, 1871.

Whiten, Andrew. "Cultural Evolution in Animals." *Annual Review of Ecology, Evolution, and Systematics* 50 (2019): 27-48. DOI 10.1146/annurev-ecolsys-110218-025040.

Williams, Raymond. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Revised ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Winters, James, and Mathieu Charbonneau. "Modelling the Emergence of Open-Ended Cultural Evolution." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 381, no. 1948 (2026): 20250255. DOI 10.1098/rstb.2025.0255.