

Deep Culture Podcast – © Joseph Shaules – The Japan Intercultural Institute
 Transcript Episode 5: Three brains, two minds, and one person

Time	Speaker	
00:00	Joseph	Culture isn't in a particular part of the brain. Culture permeates our whole organism.
00:16	Joseph	Hello, I am Joseph Shaules. Welcome to the Deep Culture Podcast, where we dig into the science and the psychology of culture and mind. I am here with...
00:28	Yvonne	Yvonne van der Pol. Hello. Hi, Joseph.
00:31	Joseph	We've been seeing each other a lot these days.
00:35	Yvonne	Exactly. This is already the third day in a row this week. So, yes, we have been around, and we don't really live next door, do we?
00:46	Joseph	Is it 15,000 km or something? I'm in Tokyo, Japan.
00:49	Yvonne	I'm not sure, but yes, and I'm based in the Netherlands, in the center of the country, in a small village. Yes, we are quite apart, but since we've been working together in the Masterclass, we've done a lot of work together.
01:05	Joseph	We were, just yesterday, talking to internationalists from all over the world that were joining us to talk about brain-mind sciences and what that has to do with intercultural work. And, that's been a wonderful experience to have this passion for these intercultural professionals.
01:29	Yvonne	Yes, it has been great. People are so excited to dive into this topic, and of course, exploring this with each other. We have been running for these webinars, and of course, the Podcasts are related to what we have been doing in the webinars as well. It's interesting to talk with intercultural professionals either educators, trainers or coaches. We are working on actual culture, cultural differences and diversity.
01:59	Yvonne	I'm intrigued by how our brain works, how our mind works, but also to make sense of the words and terminology we are using. There is, of course, a body of research in the field of neuroscience and cultural neuroscience, but what exactly do

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		interculturalists need to know in order to inform their work?
02:21	Joseph	That's a really hard question to answer because there is so much research going on in so many different areas. So, we're trying to cook some of that down to come up with a few things that might help interculturalists do their work. And, neither of us are neuroscientists or cognitive psychologists, but there are some basic insights that I think are really important. So, we'll be talking a little bit about one of the questions that came up in the process of this Masterclass that we are teaching.
03:00	Yvonne	Yes. One of the questions, which is relevant and logical, is, "Where is culture in the brain?" Is there location? Is there a place where it's based?
03:12	Joseph	I mean it sounds like a very simple question, right? You think, "Well, is there like a spot?" or "Where is it?" But, of course, even the question itself mixes up a couple of things, right? The brain is a physical object. It's an organ. But, culture is ideas. It's meanings. It's values. It's patterns. It's the way that people live.
03:38	Joseph	So, these are two separate levels of thinking: the level of the physical brain and the level of thought, meaning, customs and those kinds of things. So, how do we bridge that gap? How do we answer that question? That's kind of what we are going to be working at today.
03:58	Yvonne	I liked short and small sentences, and once in a live training that we had pre-corona time, which was that all you have to know as an interculturalist is three brains, two minds, one person. Why don't we take that as the starting point also for this podcast?
04:26	Joseph	In this Masterclass we've been teaching, one of the things we talked about is, if you are living in a foreign country, if you grew up between cultures, if you like traveling, if you are interested in cultural difference, you really need to understand how deep culture is within us. I think that's the point of this "three brains, two minds, one self." It's a way for us to understand what a

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		deep part of us culture is. I think we should all understand this.
05:00	Yvonne	It's been very helpful for me to personally understand this. Of course, we experience ourselves as one, as one individual, but understanding the dual-processing of mind, two minds, and those three brains, those three areas, and how they interact. It has been very helpful.
05:18	Joseph	Shall we start with the three brains, what we mean by three brains? What are the three brains that we are talking about?
05:24	Yvonne	Exactly. There are three brains. We are talking about brain stem here. We are talking about the limbic system, and we are talking about the neocortex.
05:32	Joseph	And, sometimes we talk about the brain stem, some people call it the reptilian brain. It's kind of the instinctive brain of the limbic system and sometimes talked about as the mammalian or the feeling brain. And then, the neocortex is sometimes called the primate or the thinking brain. So, how do we visualize this?
05:58	Yvonne	If we can ask our listeners now to raise your hand in the air and to put your thumb in between your fingers, and fold your fingers in a fist. Have a look here at your hand.
06:12	Joseph	OK. So, this is a little complicated to explain. You hold up your hand in front of your face, you fold your thumb into your palm, and then, you grab it in a fist. Now you are looking at your fist with the thumb put in 90 degrees. So, you can see, if it's your right hand, then you can see that it's bent over to the left. Do you think that's clear, Yvonne?
06:42	Yvonne	I hope that's clear, and if not, let's just have look at your hand, which is beautiful anyway.
06:47	Joseph	Right. So, the wrist, that's the brain stem. That's the oldest, in evolutionary term, the oldest structure in our brain, and this is where basic bodily functions happen. We should say that we are talking about these as though they are three brains, but of course, they are not three brains. They are totally integrated

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		into each other, and they totally work together. They are not separate modules. But, it's helpful to know how they relate to each other.
07:19	Joseph	By the wrist, that's the brain stem. And then?
07:22	Yvonne	And then, we just go up higher, and then we enter the limbic system, the mammalian brain.
07:28	Joseph	And, where is that?
07:29	Yvonne	That's your thumb inside.
07:32	Joseph	So, that's the thumb that's inside.
07:34	Yvonne	Yeah, exactly.
07:35	Joseph	The limbic system is very important for emotion. It's important for learning. If you burn yourself on the stove, and you are like, "Aahh!", that is processed in the limbic system, the feeling brain. And, the neocortex?
07:53	Yvonne	And then, the neocortex is actually the last part that has evolved in the evolutionary biology. It's the part of all the other fingers that are just lying on top of it. It's our thinking part. It's related also to our ethics, and we can make moral decisions.
08:13	Joseph	Right. So, it's kind of wrapped around. The closer you get to the front, the closer you get to capacity that is strictly human. It's the primate brain, the thinking brain. So, one way to say it is that we are animals that think. We do have basic instincts and drives.
08:35	Yvonne	We experience hunger, so the reptilian brain.
08:38	Joseph	And then, we learn complex tasks to satisfy these basic instincts and drives.
08:46	Yvonne	For instance, we learn to bake cookies. That's the neocortex, complex skills.
08:51	Joseph	Right. We are hungry, so we decide to bake some cookies. But, that's not just a rational decision. Our decisions are driven by emotion.
09:04	Yvonne	And, we get upset. We get upset when those cookies burn, or we get upset when there are more kilos on the scale.

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09:15	Joseph	Our cookies burn, so we get upset about that, and our emotion is coming into this. We then think abstractly or morally about what we should, what we want to do about the situation.
09:28	Yvonne	Yes, we decide, for instance, to eat salads over the next weeks. That's a decision also by the neocortex.
09:35	Joseph	Right. So, the neocortex has these higher-order functions, abstract thinking. But, the key, of course, is that all of these functions are integrated into each other, and they are all functioning at the same time. So, this question, "Where is culture in the brain?" has a simple answer: it does not reside in any particular place in the brain.
10:02	Joseph	Rather, cognitive processes are embodied, meaning that thought, language, ideas, meaning, all of these abstract elements of our experience, all of the things that we think about when we talk about culture, we talk about customs, we talk about values, those are all intimately connected with our bodily states and our emotion. So, in that sense, culture permeates our whole organism, and it's experienced as part of the self.
10:51	Joseph	We've talked about these three brains, but I think if you are interested in cultural difference, travel or living abroad, you need also to know about dual-processing models of cognition. These are the two minds that we were talking about.
11:12	Yvonne	Yes. So, we are talking here about attentive mind and intuitive mind. Actually, the attentive mind is about analytic conscious thought, and the intuitive mind is about unconscious autopilot.
11:25	Joseph	Right. So, we used to talk about conscious and unconscious, but now, we are understanding that this unconscious or intuitive part of our mind is much more complex than we used to realize, and that this autopilot that we rely on everyday to navigate through our everyday life is really influenced very deeply by our background and by culture in fact.
11:58	Joseph	We know, of course, that when you are in a foreign

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		environment, you can't just be on autopilot. One of the really great things about going to a foreign country or being in a foreign situation is that you are always getting these surprises, things coming up, things that are unexpected or culture shock. It's really like a chance to watch how your mind works. It's a chance to see the wheels turning inside. And, you notice that, although we feel like we are just rational and logical people, of course, it's not that simple.
12:33	Joseph	We have our conscious thought, but we also have this autopilot, this other part of our mind. Specialists call that "dual-processing models of cognition." We used to call it conscious and unconscious, but now, we are talking about dual-processing models of cognition.
12:53	Yvonne	And, those two minds are what we call attentive mind and intuitive mind. The attentive mind is about analytic conscious thought, and the intuitive mind is about cognitive unconscious autopilot. The interesting part, what I find it interesting is that the attentive mind has a limited source, actually resource to think these things through because it costs a lot of energy.
13:20	Joseph	Right.
13:21	Yvonne	So, here is the autopilot taking over, it's always there, and you can never switch it up. And, that's the thing, you know? It's there, and it's also where the culture is, but also those deep patterns and also bias is. We jump to conclusions easily without us knowing because that's the attentive mind. That's an interesting interplay between those two minds.
13:44	Joseph	Right. So, the intuitive mind that is kind of this autopilot, fast, effortless. It's unconscious, it gives us a feeling of what's normal, and it's pattern-based. And then, the attentive mind is this kind of slow, intentional, conscious, problem-solving part of our mind. And, of course, in a foreign situation, the autopilot just doesn't always work.

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14:12	Yvonne	It's interesting. Recently, I coached a German CEO coming to the Netherlands, being new in this Dutch-German company but predominantly, in his office, Dutch. There was this training question about dealing with Dutch in workplace and workplace culture. And, he said, "Well, actually I find a lot of similarities. I don't see that much difference." We talked this through, and all of a sudden, he said, and that was interesting, he had detected this pattern.
14:42	Yvonne	He said, "Well, I do see the Dutch interrupt much more during meetings." OK, that was a pattern, and he noticed it. He hadn't thought it through yet, but it is only through our conversation that he brought this up. For him, in his position, also as a new leader, all those interruptions made him a bit uncomfortable. "How should I make an interpretation out of this?" "What does it mean?" "What does it mean about meeting?"
15:11	Yvonne	From there, actually we came into a very valid conversation about leadership, about logic around meetings and decision-making, and how all voices could be heard. That might be some cultural differences, actually, that he didn't expect at first but thought, "It's rather similar."
15:33	Joseph	That's really interesting. So, this is a German working with Dutch people, right? So, culturally, you might think it's not that far apart. But, when you are actually working together, these kinds of things come up. It's really interesting that he noticed this very small thing like interrupting. But, it's a sign of something deeper. It's a sign of deeper patterns. And, you said that he felt irritated by this?
16:01	Yvonne	Oh, he wasn't really enjoying it that much because he expected, in these meeting, that people listen to each other carefully, and only then when a moment he, as a leader, opens the floor for different opinions, then they would come in and not just at random, you know, all those interruptions.

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16:24	Joseph	So, these were unexpected, and this irritated him. This is another example of how culture shapes our intuitive mind based on our previous experience, based on our cultural background, and just what we feel is normal. Things happen, which don't seem normal, and that makes us irritated. And then, our blood pressure rises, and we get in a bad mood.
16:49	Joseph	And, of course, that's completely in our body. That irritation is completely physical. So, there really is no clear separation between the thoughts, the feelings, the intuitions and the bodies. It's all together in one.
17:07	Yvonne	And so, here we come, one person with two minds and three brains.
17:22	Joseph	What's so great about intercultural experiences is that they challenge us. They get us out of our comfort zone. If we can slow down a little bit, not jump to conclusions too quickly with the intuitive mind but let our attentive mind kind of reflect on what's going on, then we can have some insights.
17:47	Yvonne	Yeah. Seeing these patterns, seeing these two minds working in tandem is very helpful.
17:56	Joseph	That's something that is good for anyone who is having foreign experiences, living abroad, and going to be traveling. Use this as an opportunity to get to know your mind.
18:41	Joseph	Well, I think it's about time to wrap up this episode, Yvonne. I had so much fun with you.
18:46	Yvonne	Yes, it was good talking to you again, like we have been talking so often recently, and also because of the Masterclass, Brain, Mind and Culture, in which it is a pleasure to work with people from around the globe who are interested in this topic, and also during these podcasts, with listeners from everywhere. People are having biracial, bicultural background because of their family histories, or traveling or working internationally, and now in the COVID time, maybe often online. To dive a bit deeper,

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		that's exactly what we aim for. To really see how brain, mind and culture interrelate.
19:31	Joseph	We will keep exploring in future episodes. Just let us know how you like this episode. Please subscribe to the Deep Culture Podcast, rate us, and write a review on Apple Podcast. We would love to hear from you. You can reach us at dcpodcast@japanintercultural.org .
19:53	Joseph	You can find out about the Masterclass that we have been talking about, it's the Masterclass in Brain, Mind and Culture, at www.japanintercultural.org . Or just do a web search for Japan Intercultural Institute. This podcast is sponsored by the Japan Intercultural Institute that is an NPO dedicated to intercultural education and research.
20:20	Joseph	Thanks to our master sound engineer, Robinson Fritz, and also to Chriss Koyama, our production assistant. And, thanks to you, Yvonne for spending this time with me. I look forward to seeing you next time.
20:32	Yvonne	Yeah, I look forward to seeing you, and thank you all for listening.