

ANGR 280b: Core Seminar in Cultural Anthropology
Spring 2017, University of California, San Diego

Room, Time: TBA, Th 11-2

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“Consequently, most of us really exist at the mercy of other people’s formulations of what’s important.” June Jordan

“Does a mind seek to free itself from these norms of all thought? Society no longer considers this a human mind in the full sense, and treats it accordingly.” Emile Durkheim

“The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives.”
Audre Lorde

Overview

Human beings live in connection, never totally of our own choosing. Our connections – with each other (family, friends, strangers), with our environments, with other forms of life – make us who we are. How we use our bodies, who we think we are, how we think, what our communities, families, and other groups look like – all of this comes about in and through our connections with things beyond us. These connections take on different patterns across history and across geography, and they shape the possibilities of what it means to be human. Sociocultural anthropology provides us with tools for understanding these formative connections – how they make us who we are, how some of them are readily visible to us, and how others can pass us by unnoticed. It provides us with tools to understand how certain possibilities of human life are made to flourish while others are diminished or precluded, how the good life of some is reliant on the misery of others.

This course is a critical inquiry into human connection. We will traverse sociocultural anthropology to explore prevalent techniques for understanding and transforming the connections that bind us together, shove us apart, and give shape to our lives. You will read exemplary theoretical and ethnographic texts, participate in structured discussion, and write papers, all with the aim of developing practical tools for understanding how connections give rise to similarity and difference, how power operates in and among groups, and how transformations – of our selves, of our relationships, and of the very nature of being human – happen. We start off by looking at some of the foundational approaches to these questions and examine the use of conceptual tools like ‘function,’ ‘structure,’ and ‘culture.’ We then look more closely at particular thematics within anthropological inquiry – the enduring legacy of Marxism, the power and presumption of practice, and anthropology’s dialectic relation with difference.

The objectives of the class are: 1) professional familiarity with a canon; 2) critical assessment of that canon in light of some of anthropology’s theoretical emphases; 3) critical assessment of that canon in light of anthropology’s geographical emphasis on “somewhere else” and theoretical claims of universality.

Objectives

1) Canons are arbitrary. Yet they are also necessary for professional training. Foundational texts of a discipline serve as a guide, showing us what tools people have tried before: what those tools are, what they can do, and what they can't do. The foremost objective of this course is to assist you in establishing a conceptual foundation for your own research: for you to understand the important schools of thought and practice in sociocultural anthropology, for you to be able to engage these concepts in class and out, and, ultimately, for you to rework these concepts and develop your own.

2) The relevance of a canonical corpus to contemporary issues depends in part on the questions we put to that canon. In this course, we will focus on five kinds of question salient within sociocultural anthropology:

1. What are the connections that bind people together? *The problem of structure.*
2. How might those connections change? *The problem of history.*
3. How do actors perceive, if at all, the sociocultural systems of which they are a part? *The problem of historicity.*
4. How do actors engage such systems in light of their perception? i.e. How do cognition, volition, desire, and practice mesh together or contradict each other? *The problem of the subject.*
5. How do various groups of entities, who recognize each other as different in terms of these practices or perceptions, live in the same society or in the same world? *The problem of alterity.*

We will read the texts with these problems in mind. Each student will be asked to choose one of these five questions as a way to engage with the texts we read.

3) Anthropology takes great pride in its attention to “non-Western” peoples. Our foundational texts, however, are mostly “Western,” and we use evidence from the “non-Western” to make statements about humans more generally. It is not a coincidence that the discipline of anthropology came into being at the same time the “West” started an ongoing military, economic, racial, religious, and cultural domination of the world. Still, North Atlantic theorizing has proceeded as if that world and that domination were irrelevant to our theories. The third objective of this course is to contextualize anthropology's imagination and engagement with its objects of study within broader political and economic projects. Anthropology's attention and imagination are shaped by the larger connections in which this discipline sits. We will frame the course with a critical examination of the conditions that make a practice of anthropology possible.

Obligations

This course is intended to cultivate you as a professional scholar as much as it is intended to familiarize you with key arguments that have shaped anthropology and social theory through the 20th and 21st centuries. To this end, we will engage in a variety of activities aimed at honing your reading, writing, listening, presentation, and discussion skills.

Participation

You are expected to attend all class meetings having read the assignments for that day. **We will be moving rapidly through a tremendous amount of difficult text. You are responsible for engaging with all of it, with an eye on developing strategies for dealing with large amount of texts in short periods of time. Please refer to the reading guide.**

Our class time will be divided among lecture, writing exercises, and discussion. **You are expected to post 3 questions about the readings by 7am the day of each class.** These questions can

probe things you did not understand, or that you think are crucial to understanding the readings – or their interconnection – for that day.

Guiding Question

You are at the start of a decades-long process of establishing and following a trajectory of research. That research is more valuable to you and your interlocutors when driven by your fundamental questions. Your research will be shaped by how you frame your engagement – with texts, with other academics, with your conceptual objects of study – through the questions you bring to it. Part of this course will be to help you hone formulating such questions. **The third week of class (4/19), you will submit a guiding question based on one of the five central problems above** (e.g., structure, subject, alterity...). This question will be your theoretical lens for the quarter. You will ask it of each work we read, and you will use it as the basis of your writing. You can reiterate the questions above (e.g. structure: how do cultural systems hold together?) or you can refine it according to your interests (e.g. alterity: does difference require conflict?). Be thinking of your guiding question from the first week, and compose it in conversation with your burgeoning, long-term research interests.

Writing

You are expected to submit two papers that engage readings from the course through the lens of your guiding question. **The first is due via email by 11:59pm Sunday, May 13.** It should stake out an argument about the first six weeks of reading using your guiding question. The paper should be no more than 3,000 words. **The second is due via email by 11:59pm Tuesday, June 12.** It should also advance an argument about the readings of the course framed by your guiding question, no more than 6,000 words.

Writing is a craft that can always be improved. Part of the exercise of this course is the development of this fundamental skill set. I recommend that everyone get a copy of *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace* and use it as a regular reference as you develop your writing voice.

Note-Taking

I recommend that you develop habits of note taking for everything you read in graduate school. I have found it useful to take notes in a word processing program while reading and then, when finished with a text, craft a paragraph that summarizes the text and frames it with respect to my current research focus. I now have seventeen years of such notes readily available on my computer; they are an incredible resource.

Schedule – Please do the readings in the order they are listed.

April 5 Anthropological Need

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 2003. “Anthropology and the Savage Slot” p7-28 in *Global Transformations*. Palgrave.

Visweswaran, Kamala. 1988. “Defining Feminist Anthropology.” *Inscriptions* 3/4:7-24.

Simpson, Audra. 2007. “On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, ‘Voice,’ and Colonial Citizenship.” *Junctures* 9:67-80.

April 12 An Enlightened West: Anthropology's Conditions of Possibility

Kant, Immanuel. "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" in *Political Writings*. 6pages.
Foucault, Michel. 2007(1997). "What is Critique?" in *The Politics of Truth*. Semiotext. p41-81.

DuBois, WEB. 1969[1903]. "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Signet Classics.
p43-53. Available [here](#).

Césaire, Suzanne. 2012[1945]. "Leo Frobenius and the Problem of Civilization" "The Malaise of a
Civilization" and "The Great Camouflage" in *The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent*. Wesleyan
University Press. p3-10, 28-33, 39-48.

Fanon, Franz. 1963. "Preface" (by Sartre) and "On Violence" in *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York:
Grove Press. p1-63.

Wolf, Eric. 1982. Introduction in *Europe and the People without History*. Berkeley: University of
California Press. p1-23.

April 19 The Law of the Fathers: Of Families and Witches

James, CLR. 1931. "Introduction" (by Kelley) in *A History of Pan-African Revolt*. p1-34

Radcliffe-Brown, AR. 1965(1952). "Patrilineal and Matrilineal Succession" p32-47, "The Study of
Kinship Systems" p49-89, and "On Social Structure" p188-204, in *Structure and Function in
Primitive Society*. New York: The Free Press.

Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1930. "Kinship." *Man* 30:19-29.

Evans-Pritchard, EE. 1933. "The Intellectualist (English) Interpretation of Magic." *Bulletin of the
Faculty of Arts, Egyptian University* 128-142.

Douglas, Mary. 1970. "Introduction" pxiii-xxxviii in *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*. New York:
Tavistock.

April 26 The Function of Politics: Structure, Conflict, and Process

Wells, Ida B. 1900. *Mob Rule in New Orleans*. Available [here](#).

Hall, Stuart. 1978. "The Politics of Mugging" in *Policing the Crisis*. p327-397.

Evans-Pritchard, EE. 1940. Introduction, Chapters 1-4 p1-191 in *The Nuer*. Oxford: Oxford
University Press.

Leach, Edmund. 1954. Chapter 1 p1-17 in *Political Systems of Highland Burma*.

Turner, Victor. 1967. Introduction p1-18 and "Chapter 4: Betwixt and Between" p93-111 in *The
Forest of Symbols*. Cornell University Press.

Douglas, Mary. 1996(1970). "Chapter 5: The Two Bodies" p72-91 in *Natural Symbols*. Routledge.

May 3 The Structure of Language

- Fanon, Franz. 2008(1952). "The Negro and Language" in *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press. p17-38.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. 1916. Selections from *Course in General Linguistics*, Baskin translator.: Intro Chp3: "The Object of Linguistics" **redline**; Part 1 Chp1: "Nature of the Linguistic Sign" **ALL**; Part 1 Chp3: "Static and Evolutionary Linguistics" **redline**; Part 2 Chp3, 4, 5, 6 **ALL**. p7-17 **redline**, 65-69 **ALL**, 79-100 **redline**, 111-129 **ALL**. about 25pages.
- Sapir, Edward. 1985(1927). "The Unconscious Patterning of Behavior in Society" p544-559 in *Selected Writings in Language, Culture, and Personality*. University of California Press.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1986. "The Problem of Speech Genres" p60-102 in *Speech Genres and Other late Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Benveniste, Emile. 1971. "The Nature of the Linguistic Sign" p43-48, "The Nature of Pronouns" p217-222, "Subjectivity in Language" p223-230 in *Problems in General Linguistics*.
- Jakobson, Roman. 1990. "Langue and Parole: Code and Message" p80-109, "Shifters and Verbal Categories" p387-392 in *On Language*. And "Metalanguage as a Linguistic Problem" p113-121 and "On the Linguistic Approach to the Problem of Consciousness and the Unconscious" p148-162 in *Selected Writings, VII*.

May 10 Culture and Interpretation — three moments

- Mead, Margaret. 1928. *Coming of Age in Samoa*. William Morrow and Company (Skim)
- Benedict, Ruth. 1934. Chapters 1, 2 p1-44 and 7, 8 p223-278 in *Patterns of Culture*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Hurston, Zora Neal. *Of Mules and Men*. (selections)
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" p3-32 in *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books.
- Clifford, James. 1986. "Introduction: Partial Truths" p1-26 in *Writing Culture*. University of California Press.
- Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson. 1988. "Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference." *Cultural Anthropology* 8:77-104.
- Trouillot, Rolph. 2003. "Adieu Culture, a New Duty Arises" p97-116 in *Global Transformations*. Palgrave.

---First paper due via email by 11:59pm Sunday, May 13---

May 17 Structuralism: The Rave for and beyond Order

- Levi-Strauss, Claude. 1963(1945). "Structural Analysis in Linguistics and in Anthropology" p31-54 in *Structural Anthropology Vol 1*. New York: Basic Books.
- Levi-Strauss, Claude. 1969(1949). "Nature and Culture" p3-11, "The Principles of Kinship" p479-498 in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. Beacon Press.
- Fanon, Franz. 2008(1952). Introduction, Chp 5, Chp 6 in *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press. p1-7, 82-108, 109-162.
- Foucault, Michel. 1982. "The Discursive Regularities" in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Vintage. p20-76.
- Lyotard, Jean-Francois. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition* p1-17.

May 24 Marxism

- Dalla Costa, Mariarosa and Selma James. 1973. "Women and the Subversion of Community." p2-35.
- Davis, Angela. 1972. "Reflection on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves." p81-100.
- Robinson, Cedric. 1983. "Slavery and Capitalism" "Labor, Capitalism, and Slavery" "Slavery and Democracy" in *Black Marxism*. p199-204.
- Federici, Silvia. 2004. "Introduction" and "The Accumulation of Labor and the Degradation of Women" in *Caliban and the Witch*. p11-20, 61-132.
- Mies, Maria. 1997. "Colonization and Housewifization." p74-111.
- Gramsci, Antonio. 1971. "The Intellectuals" *The Prison Notebooks*. p5-14.
- Taussig, Michael. 2010(1980). Chapters 1 and 2 in *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism*. University of North Carolina Press. p3-40

June 1 Practice, Performance, Pragmatics

- Ortner, Sherry. 1984. "Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26 (1): 126-166.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. "Section 1: The Limits of Objectivism" p1-29, "Structure and the Habitus" p72-95, "Structures, Habitus, Power" p159-197 in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1982. Introduction p37-42 and "The Production and Reproduction of Legitimate Language" in *Language and Symbolic Power*. Harvard University Press. p42-65.
- Peirce, Charles Sanders. 1870. "Pragmatism" in *The Essential Peirce, selected writings V2*. p399-433.
- Austin, J L. 1955. Lectures 1, 2, 8 in *How to do things with Words*. 20 pages.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1988(1977). "Signature, Event, Context" in *Limited, Inc*. Northwestern University Press. p1-24.
- Silverstein, Michael. 1995(1974). "Shifters, Linguistic Categories, and Cultural Description" in *Language, Culture, and Society: Meaning in Anthropology*, ed. B. Blount. Westview Press.

June 8 The Subaltern Strikes Back (and always has)

- Said, Edward. 1989. "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors." *Critical Inquiry* 15(2):205-225.
- Fabian, Johannes. 2006. "The Other Revisited." *Anthropological Theory* 6(2):139-152.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1991. "Writing Against Culture" in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*. Richard G. Fox, ed. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press. p137-162.
- Mahmood, Saba. 2015. "Introduction" in *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*. p1-28. Available through UCSD library as electronic resource.
- Césaire, Aimé. 1950. *Discourse on Colonialism*. Kelley's introduction and the essay. p7-78.

Final paper due via email by 11:59pm Tuesday June 12.