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Term: Winter 2012  
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ANTH 441  
RECENT CULTURAL THEORY  
(204 Chapman Hall)

Course goals
No matter how hidden from view to the uninformed reader, theory is a pervasive dimension of all anthropological texts (including films). To be fully literate in the field—in all the social and human sciences, in fact—it is necessary to know some theory. *Theory* is a scary word. Other words are less scary but point in the same direction: *approach, framework,* and *perspective.* What assumptions does the author make, what questions does s/he ask, what kind of knowledge does the author hope to generate, what does the author see and not see, what methods does the author use? The history of anthropology is the history of a series of theoretical frameworks and their intellectual careers: the debates that particular frameworks have inspired (in publications, professional papers, and the classroom). Frameworks come into existence—frequently in response to perceived problems with existing frameworks—are taken up, critiqued, and revised or retired, depending upon how devastating the criticism has been. Today's anthropologists ask rather different questions than the anthropologists of yesteryear asked, and what counts for "cutting edge" research is quite different today than it was in the past. Rest assured that tomorrow's questions will be different from those of today, and that what is "cutting edge" today will eventually seem hopelessly antiquated. The course surveys a range of frameworks, inquiring into their strengths and weaknesses and their respective intellectual careers. The aim is to sensitize students to the theoretical dimensions and stakes of anthropological works.

Readings and films
There are no books to buy for the course. All assigned readings will be available under “Course Documents” on the course Blackboard site. Note that I am posting documents on one site only, ANTH 4/541. The book *Visions of Culture* by Jerry D. Moore, 2nd edition (2005), will soon be available on reserve in the Knight Library (GN 33 M587 2004). With the exception of its chapter on Levi-Strauss, it will not be reading. But it contains discussions, complete with biographical detail, of a number of the authors we will be reading, and you may find it a useful reference work.

Performance requirements and basis of grade
There are four performance requirements:

- Take-home midterm: 25%
- Take-home final: 35% *(the final will be comprehensive)*
- Multiple double-spaced one page-long discussions of assigned readings: your top 10 scores will count for 30% of your grade
- Attendance and participation: 10%

* I expect your writing in the course to be grammatical, well spelled, and clearly written. If your early work in the course reveals deficiencies in spelling, grammar, and/or ability to express yourself, I will point this out to you. From the moment you get this warning until the end of the course, you will lose points for any further bad writing.

At the end of the syllabus you will find a list of best practices in taking essay exams. The grading system used in this course is as follows:

- A—Outstanding performance relative to that required to meet course requirements;
demonstrates a mastery of course content at the highest level and an ability to communicate that mastery in writing.

**B** = Performance that is significantly above that required to meet course requirements; demonstrates a mastery of course content at a high level and an ability to communicate that mastery in writing.

**C** = Performance meets the course requirements in every respect; demonstrates an adequate understanding of course content and an ability to communicate that understanding in writing.

*Note that getting a C- or better is necessary for clearing the requirement in the cultural anthropology major.*

**D** = Performance that demonstrates a marginal understanding of course content and that is therefore not sufficient to clear the theory requirement in cultural anthropology.

**F** = Performance demonstrates an inadequate understanding of the course content.

**Key dates**

1/16, 2/8 Class cancelled
2/6 Take-home midterm will be posted on BB by the end of the day
2/13 Take-home midterm is due by 4 pm; hard copy is preferred
3/14 Take-home final will be posted on BB by the end of the day
3/22 Take-home final is due by 3:15 pm

Everyday that readings are assigned, with the exception of 1/11 and 2/1, a one-page writing exercise will be due. The question to be answered in that writing exercise will be posted on BB ("course documents" to "reading-related writing exercises") at least two days prior.

**Classroom etiquette**

It is important to maintain a positive, pleasant classroom atmosphere. To do so:

1. **Come on time and plan to stay at least through the break (if there is one). **Do not leave in the middle of the session.** If you do not plan to stay for the full session, or until the break, if there is one, DO NOT COME TO CLASS!**

2. Do not talk with your neighbors. If you have comments to make or questions to ask, raise your hand and let the whole class know what these are. If other students are talking, show them the courtesy of listening. Needless to say, I expect you to show me that courtesy as well.

3. Do not eat while you are in the classroom.

4. Turn off your cell phones and other electronic equipment. If you plan to use your computer in class, that's fine but sit in the front two rows of the classroom.

5. **Any student who is being disruptive will be asked to leave the room and reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards.**

**Plagiarism**

The "Office of Student Life's Academic Dishonesty Policy" defines plagiarism in these terms: "Plagiarism is the inclusion of someone else's product, words, ideas, or data as one's own work. When a student submits work for credit that includes the product, words, ideas, or data of others, the source must be acknowledged by the use of complete, accurate, and specific references, such as footnotes [or parenthetical citations]." A standard citation style I will expect you to use in this course is (for example): Rappaport 1967:25. The key website on plagiarism is http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/. You may also wish to look at the parallel website for instructors: http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/faculty/. Anyone found guilty of plagiarism on
any exercise will receive an F in the course, and I will report the student to the Office of Student Life and Student Conduct and Community Standards. I have posted the University of Oregon’s “Plagiarism Guide” as a “course document” on the course’s Blackboard site. At the end of this syllabus, you will find an example of a plagiarized text with instructions as to how to correct it. Citation is the key!

Student assistance
The Teaching and Learning Center (68 PLC) provides a wide array of services that meet just about every academic need. Especially relevant to this class are the writing labs, open Monday through Friday on a drop-in basis, for assistance in refining performance texts. If you are using Blackboard for the first time or are otherwise technologically challenged, technical assistance may be found at: 1) Information Technology Center (ITC), 2nd floor, Knight Library, and 2) Microcomputing Services, basement of McKenzie Hall, 346-4412. You may find this website helpful:
http://libweb.uoregon.edu/faculty/studentsuccess.html (“Library Resources for Student Success”).

Disability students
If you require special accommodation, please contact Disability Services (164 Oregon Hall) and have them prepare formal notification to me of your accommodation requirements.

COURSE OF STUDY

Week one

(1/9) Introduction to the course

(1/11) Durkheimian sociology and the study of exchange


Week two

(1/16) No class; Martin Luther King Day
(1/18) **Idealism v. materialism:** Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism v. Marx and Marvin Harris’s “cultural ecology” or “cultural materialism”

*NY Times* obituary for Lévi-Strauss (died shortly before his 101st birthday in 11/09).

**Week three**

(1/23) **Historical anthropology I**


(1/25) **Historical anthropology II**


**Week four**

(1/30) **Interpretive or interpretative anthropology (anthropology as translation)**

Summaries of *Hamlet* (to help you read the Bohannan article)
(2/1) A look back


Week five

(2/6) Gender, sexuality, feminism I


Take-home midterm will be posted on blackboard by the end of the day.

(2/8) Class cancelled; instructor out of town

Week six

(2/13) Gender, sexuality, feminism II

Midterm is due by 4:00 pm


More assignments to come.

(2/15) “A crisis in representation”: Anthropology’s postmodernism and the Freeman-Mead debate


Film: Margaret Mead and Samoa (VT 01340)

Week seven

(2/20) The Postcolonial critique of anthropology


Film showing: Edward Said on Orientalism (DVD 01999)

We will discuss this film in light of 1) the Mead-Freeman controversy, 2) the relationship of the "literary" turn to the "postcolonial" critique of anthropology, and Mohanty's article. Be prepared to contribute to the discussion.

(2/22) Critical race theory; critical race feminism

Readings to come.

Week eight

(2/27) Globalization and transnational anthropology I: readings


(2/29) Globalization and transnational anthropology II: films and discussion

Film clips: Maharajah Burger; Hollywood and the Muslim World
Week nine

(3/5) The anthropology of the state


(3/7) Engaged anthropology and its dilemmas

Readings to come.

Week ten

(3/12) Material culture studies


(3/14) Review

Exam week

(3/22) Finals are due by 3:15 pm; hard copy preferred.

Example of Plagiarism (From An Actual Plagiarized Student Text)

Student text:

Clifford Geertz wrote of “thick description,” a term that he borrowed from Gilbert Ryle to describe his own method of doing ethnography. According to Geertz, cultural anthropologists’ task aims to observe, record, and analyze a culture. More specifically, he or she must interpret signs to gain their meaning within the culture itself. The interpretation must be based on the “thick description” of a sign in order to see all the possible meanings (Geertz, 1973). Geertz insisted that anthropologist (sic) should analyze the full description; more meanings of a culture, be exposed to it and fully understand its customs before conducting anthropological research. Therefore the anthropologist must be both empirically rigorous and a savvy interpreter, akin to a psychoanalyst. NOTE THAT THERE IS NEITHER A CITATION NOR USE OF QUOTATION MARKS HERE. Geertz was concerned about the anthropologist’s role and the discipline’s methodology NO CITATION, NO QUOTES and it was crucial for cultural anthropologist
to understand their subjects as well as culture, and what the culture meant to the people. Understanding a people’s culture exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity (Geertz 1973:14). Note here that the student did cite his source, but he failed to put quotation marks around it.

Note that this answer merits NO points because it contains plagiarized texts! Moreover, the entire exam merits NO points because it contains plagiarized texts within it!!

Texts cribbed from:

1. For him [Geertz], the anthropologist’s task is to use what he called thick description to interpret symbols by observing them in use. Therefore the anthropologist must be both empirically rigorous and a savvy interpreter, akin to a psychoanalyst. In 1972 he wrote that “cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings . . . .”

2. Mr. Geertz was also deeply concerned about the anthropologist’s role and the discipline’s methodology.

3. Looking at the ordinary in places where it takes unaccustomed forms brings out not . . . the arbitrariness of human behavior . . . , but the degree to which its meaning varies according to the pattern of life by which it is informed.

Understanding a people’s culture exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity.

Correct documentation (right way):

Clifford Geertz wrote of “thick description,” a term that he borrowed from Gilbert Ryle to describe his own method of doing ethnography. According to Geertz, cultural anthropologists’ task aims to observe, record, and analyze a culture. More specifically, he or she must interpret signs to gain their meaning within the culture itself. The interpretation must be based on the “thick description” of a sign in order to see all the possible meanings (Geertz, 1973). Geertz insisted that anthropologist (sic) should analyze the full description; more meanings of a culture, be exposed to it and fully understand its customs before conducting anthropological research. “Therefore the anthropologist must be both empirically rigorous and a savvy interpreter, akin to a psychoanalyst”(Yarrow 2006). Geertz was “concerned about the anthropologist’s role and the discipline’s methodology” (ibid.) and it was crucial for cultural anthropologist to understand their subjects as well as culture, and what the culture meant to the people. “Understanding a people’s culture exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity” (Geertz 1973:14).

Works cited (Yarrow MUST be listed in the bibliography because it does not appear on the syllabus):

BEST PRACTICES WHEN TAKING AN ESSAY EXAM

1. Partition your answer as the question requires, leaving a space between each subdivision.
2. Answer the question asked.
3. Keep in mind that you have to convince me that you have done the reading, paid attention to the lecture/powerpoints, and understood the reading and the lecture/powerpoints. A vague answer is a poor answer. Be specific.
4. Combine generalizations and abstractions with specifics. This then helps me understand what you are getting at with your more abstract statements.
5. A good strategy is to have a summary paragraph, summarizing your main points. This can occur at the beginning or the end of the answer.

SAMPLE HIGH-SCORING ANSWERS
(NOTE THAT THESE USE THEORETICAL LANGUAGE WELL AND READINGS ARE CITED AND DISCUSSED;
NOTE, TOO, THAT THEY ARE WELL WRITTEN, WITH NOT MISSPELLINGS AND GRAMMATICAL ERRORS)

1. **Q:** Why are the problems with world system theory, according to Sahlins?
   **A:** According to Sahlins, the major deficit of world system theory as explained by Ragin and Chirot and adhered to by Eric Wolf is the homogeneous endpoint of the spread of capitalism of their own culture in their adoption and/or adaptation of capitalism but also have a reciprocal effect on the metropoles of the first world. By showing the plurality of cultures that undeniably exist, it is difficult, if not impossible, for an all-encompassing theory such as world systems theory to be credible. Etc.. He questions the omnipotence of capitalism, citing historical examples of its interaction with other cultures . . . The third-world components of the world system not only maintain aspects

2. **Q:** Provide an example of materialist analysis in the anthropological writings we have read. Why do you say that this reading is a materialist one?
   **A:** A reading illustrating materialism is Wolf's reading, in which his Marxist-inspired view of the core and the periphery emphasizes economic determinism. This reading is materialist because Wolf gives primacy to the economy through the examples of first and third worlds and the exploitation of the periphery for the gain of the core. He does not believe that culture as a meaningful system has a causal force but focuses rather on economics as a determining factor.