

**SC 388 Culture Through Film**  
**Spring 2009**  
**Wednesday 3:00 to 6:00PM**  
**O'Neil 211**

Professor: Jim Hamm  
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**About the course**

This course is about the construction of realities. It explores many of the social issues of our times: truth and reality, the anthropological gaze, identity, justice, race, gender, sexual orientation, indigenous rights, marriage, Israeli/Palestinian relations, madness, deconstruction, retardation and overdetermination. Why do we think the way we do? How do people's concepts of reality influence the ways they behave? Portions of this course may be disturbing or sad. Sometimes, you will see yourselves and may not like what you see. At times you may find the course too political. You may find that you leave the course less sure about concepts that you have not previously questioned.

All of the films have been chosen to be interesting as well as provocative. Wherever possible, feature films are used. The readings have been carefully chosen to complement the films. Since the course meets once a week to view and discuss the films, it is critical that you read the assigned material before class.

Each week, we will identify what is anthropologically interesting about the films.

**Requirements**

You must attend class each week. The films are on reserve in the media center in the library. Since the course is more than watching a film, when you miss class, you miss the discussion that develops a sometimes different understanding of the topic. Be careful.

Following each film, there will be a lecture and a discussion.

You are required to prepare a two page, double-spaced paper each week on an assigned topic. The paper is due in class. If your paper is late - up to one week late, you will lose twenty percentage points. After that, the paper will not be accepted. Late papers may be turned into my mailbox in McGuinn 426.

For each paper, you have a rewrite option if you handed the first paper in on time and if you attended the relevant class. If you rewrite, you will receive the higher grade.

## **Grading**

The course grade is composed of three parts of equal weight (33.3 per cent) - the papers, the mid-term and the final.

Since the papers account for one-third of the grade, they should be taken seriously. The reason the papers are so important is that they are a way for you to find out what you understand about the topics. It is in writing that we often find logical inconsistencies in our thinking.

There are eleven papers. The assignment sheets are included in the reader.

The mid-term and the final will each be based on the material for that half of the course.

## **Attendance**

Attendance is required. There is a bonus for attendance. If you miss one class, your lowest paper grade will be dropped. If you miss no classes, your lowest two paper grades will be dropped. This is a substantial bonus: don't miss it. There are no excuses for missing a class. This is a bonus, not a penalty.

**Attendance will be taken after the break. You do not get credit for attendance if you do not stay for the discussion.**

## **Study guides**

There is a study guide for each week of the course included in the reader. **The weekly study guide is part of the assigned reading.** The paper assignment is included in the study guide.

## **Readings**

The readings have been gathered into a course pack that can be purchased from the book store. A copy is on reserve in the library. The readings have been selected to be readable, interesting and relevant. Read the assignment each week before the film. The readings will be part of the discussion. **Note, the reader has changed very little from Fall 2008. If you use a reader from Fall 2008, be sure to note the changes. All of the paper assignments have changed.**

## **Lesson Plan**

### **Week 1 (1-14-09) Truth and Reality**

What is truth? How does the position of the observer affect the perception of reality?

Film: Rashomon (1959: 87 minutes) PL801.K8 R382

Four people tell their versions of what they witnessed. There are significant similarities and differences. What happened? How does the observer's agenda affect the production of truth?

Reader: Heider, Karl. "The Rashomon Effect." American Anthropologist 90(1). 1988. 73-81

### **Paper #1 – Rashomon – due 1-21-09**

### **Week 2 (1-21-09) Race and the Cultural Construction of Difference**

If ideas of race change over time, what does that say about concepts of race?

Film: Race: The Power of Illusion: the Differences Between Us (2002: 60 minutes) HT1521.R25  
Skin Deep (1996: 60 minutes) LA229.S64

Reader: McIntosh, Peggy. "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." in Paula S. Rothenberg, ed. Race, Class and Gender in the United States, New York: Worth Publishing, 2001. 163-168

Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. Arranged Marriages. New York: Anchor Books. 1996. 35-56

### **Paper #2 - Race - due 1-28-09**

### **Week 3 (1-28-09) Justice**

How do different societies resolve conflicts? These films illustrate different ways conflict is resolved. Why does justice take different forms?

Film: Meat Fight (1974: 14 minutes) DT1058.K86 M43  
The Cows of Dolo Paye (1970: 52 minutes) (my film)  
Stranger with a Camera (2000: 58 minutes) HN79.K4 S77

Reader: Marcus, George E. and Michael M. J. Fischer. Anthropology as Cultural Critique. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1999. 137-141

Metcalf, Peter A. "Death Be Not Strange." in John B. Williamson and Edwin S. Shneidman, eds. Death: Current Perspectives. Mountain View: Mayfield Publishing Company. 1995. 83-87

### **Paper #3 – Justice – due 2-4-09**

## **Week 4 (2-4-09) Gender**

What does gender mean? How do concepts of gender change over time? One True Thing provides a striking look at the clash produced by different concepts of gender.

Film: One True Thing (1999: 128 minutes) PS3567.U336 O54

When Ellen returns home to run her parents household and care for her mother who has been diagnosed with terminal cancer, she is anything but a happy camper.

Reader: Hochschild, Arlie. The Second Shift. New York: Avon Books. 1989. 11-32

## **Paper #4 – Gender – due 2-11-09**

## **Week 5 (2-11-09) Sexual Orientation**

What does it mean to be different with regard to sexual orientation? Where do each of us fit into the gendered scheme of things? Why are homosexuals devalued?

Film: Two Spirit People (1995: 28 minutes) (my film)  
The Times of Harvey Milk (1984: 87 minutes) HQ76.8.U5 T56

Two Spirit People provides a way for Native American homosexuals to see themselves as a third gender who have been historically special and significant to their people. The Times of Harvey Milk explores an openly gay man's rise to prominence in San Francisco. Harvey is shown to represent all the people in his district.

Reader: Lang, Saline. "Lesbians: Men-Women, and Two-spirits," in Constructing Sexualities. Suzanne LaFonte, ed. Upper Saddle Hill, NJ: Prentice Hall. 2003. 202-217

## **Paper #5 – Sexual Orientation – due 2-18-09**

## **Week 6 (2-18-09) Gendered Sexuality**

What does it mean to be a man? How do men reach beyond the cultural constructions that define their roles in the world?

Film: Kinky Boots (2005: 107 min) PN1995.9.C55 K56

Kinky Boots raises questions about male gender roles and sexuality. Watch what happens to Dan and Charlie as they come full face with who they are.

Reader: Kimmel, Michael S. The Gendered Society. New York: Oxford University Press. 2008. 116-120

## **Midterm Exam – take home – due 2-25-09 (no paper due 2-25-09)**

## **Week 7 (2-25-09) Indigenous Social Resistance**

As European nations colonized the world from the fifteenth century to the present, they had to both deal with the indigenous people they subjugated and develop a justification for their often ruthless behavior. What is the cultural impact of the attempted erasure of indigenous identities?

Film: Rabbit Proof Fence (2002: 94 minutes) PN1993.5.A8 R33

Three young Australian half-cast girls are taken from their families and put into Moore River Camp to be educated to be useful to white society.

Reader: Manne, Robert. "The Colour of Prejudice." Sidney Morning Herald. Feb 23, 2002. 1-5

Johnston, Tim. "Australia Says 'Sorry' to Aborigines for Mistreatment." in The New York Times. 2-13-09. 1-2

**Paper #6 – Indigenous Rights – due 3-18-09**

**March 2 through 6. Spring Break**

**March 9 through 11. No class**

## **Week 8 (3-18-09) Marriage**

What is marriage? How and why do people enter into marriage? What are the implications for concepts of the family? How do concepts of marriage reflect and influence the way a society operates?

Film: Monsoon Wedding (2002: 115 minutes) PN1993.5.I4.M66

This film takes us into the realm of arranged marriage in India. We see contradictions between tradition and modernity and loyalties based on blood and marriage relationships. What does it mean to be a good Indian?

Reader: Nanda, Serena. "Arranging a Marriage in India." in Stumbling Toward Truth. Philip de Vita, ed. Prospect Heights: IL: Waveland. 2000. 196-204

Lahira, Jhumpa. The Namesake. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. 2003. 1-21

**Paper #7 – Marriage – due 3-25-09**

## **Week 9 (3-25-09) Madness**

What is madness? Is madness a mental health condition? Is madness assessed on the basis of behavior? Who gets to decide what constitutes madness? Is what is considered madness at one time normal at another?

Film: The King of Hearts (1966: 101 minutes) PN1997.R64

Reader: Obeyesekere, Gananath. "Depression, Buddhism and the Work Culture of Sri Lanka." in Culture and Depression. Arthur Kleinman and Byron Good, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1985. 134-137

Mills, Sara. Michael Foucault. New York: Routledge. 2003. 97-107

Cooper, James Fenimore. The Last of the Mohicans (1826). Albany: State University of New York Press. 176-178, 222-225

## **Paper #8 – Madness – due 4-1-09**

## **Week 10 (4-1-09) Orientalism: A View from the Other Side**

How do we construct the other? Why do we do this? Edward Said, in Orientalism (1978), wrote that western cultural institutions are responsible for the creation of the Other, whose differences from us can then be used to justify whatever behavior toward them we choose. Peace of Mind looks at the "Palestine question" from the perspectives of teenagers who have a shared experience.

Film: Edward Said on Orientalism (1999: 40 minutes) DS12.S24  
Peace of Mind: Coexistence Through the Eyes of Palestinian and Israeli Youth  
(1999: 57 minutes) JZ5579.P43

Reader: Said, Edward. Orientalism. New York: Vintage Books. 1979. 1-9

Barsamin, David. "Intifada 200: The Palestinian Uprising: an Interview with Edward Said, November, 2000." Z Magazine. December 2000. 52-57

Reinhart, Tanya. "The Peace That Kills." in Infopal. December 6, 2000. 1-7

Meital, Yoram. Peace in Tatters. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers. 2006. 1-10

Sundar, Nandini. "Toward an Anthropology of Culpability." in American Ethnologist. 31(2). 2004. 1-6 Note: I have condensed this article. The full text is available in the library.

## **Paper #9 – Orientalism – due 4-8-09**

## **Week 11 (4-8-09) Deconstructing the Hegemonic Discourse**

What makes soldiers kill each other? What happens if a soldier sees his enemy as a man like himself, perhaps even sharing the same belief systems?

Film: Merry Christmas (2005: 116 min) PN1993.5.F7 J69

Reader: Currie, Mark. Difference. New York: Routledge. 2004. 48-52

### **Paper #10 – Deconstruction – due 4-15-09**

## **Week 12 (4-15-09) Mental Retardation**

What are the roles and rights of both mentally retarded people and the state?

Film: I Am Sam (2002: 134 minutes) HV1553.I3

Reader: Seagull, Elizabeth A. W. and Susan L. Scheurer. “Neglected and Abused Children of Mentally Retarded Parents.” in Child Abuse and Neglect. Vol. 10 1986. 493-500

Wedding, Danny, Mary Ann Boyd and Ryan Niemiec. Movies and Mental Illness. Cambridge, MA. Hogrefe and Huber Publishers. 2005. 137-144

### **Paper #11 - Retardation - due 4-22-09**

## **Week 13 (4-22-09) Overdetermination**

Why do we seek to explain events in terms of cause and effect relationships? If, instead, we understand that an event or situation has too many determinations to be able to single out any one or several of them as a principal cause(s) and that there are likely to be more determinations that we have not recognized, then we have arrived at a point of overdetermination.

Film: The Butterfly Effect (2004: 114 minutes) PN1977.2.B88

In this film, Evan has the ability to choose a point in the past and re-enact an event to bring about a different outcome for himself and the other people involved. He can choose “door B.” As the film shows, when you change something, there are unforeseen consequences.

Reader: Gleich, James. Chaos: Making a New Science. New York: Penquin Books. 1987. 11-31

web. “Overdetermination.” [www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/sgabriel/post\\_structuralism.htm](http://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/sgabriel/post_structuralism.htm) 11-10-05. 1-5

Hawkes, David. Ideology. New York: Routledge. 1996. 128

**Final Exam due in my mailbox in McGuinn 426 on Thursday, May 7**