

SC 388 Culture Through Film Spring 2008

Professor: Jim Hamm
Office: McGuinn 426D
Office hours: Monday and Wednesday
Classroom: O'Neil Library 211 on Wednesday from 3:00 to 6:00 PM
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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, colonialism, identity, justice, race, gender, sexual orientation, indigenous social resistance, religion, marriage, terrorism, a view from the other side, protest 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. If you miss a film, it will be your responsibility to find and view it. 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 thirteen 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 two classes, your lowest paper grade will be dropped. If you miss one class, your lowest two paper grades will be dropped. If you miss no classes, your lowest three 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.

Class Discussion

The discussion portion of the class is important. If you have done the readings and seen the films, you should have plenty to say. Don't be silent and let me do all the talking. It is so boring! This is your class. Make it interesting. The material we will be covering is dynamite. There are no wrong answers.

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.**

Readings

The readings have been gathered into a course pack that can be purchased from the book store. A copy is on reserve. 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. You may find it difficult to use an older reader. All of the paper assignments have changed.**

Lesson Plan

Week 1 (1-16-08) Perception 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? Is there a reality? How does the agenda of the observer affect the production of the truth?

This film is foundational for the course. We will see the Rashomon effect at work throughout the course.

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

Paper #1 – Rashomon – due 1-23-08

Week 2 (1-23-08) The Gaze

What can we learn in observing others that can challenge our existing ways of seeing?

Film: Trobriand Cricket (1976: 54 minutes)

Clips from Any Given Sunday (1999: approximately 12 minutes)

The Trobriands have taken the staid English game of cricket and transformed it to meet their needs. We will use our observation of what they have done to first develop an anthropological gaze and then to turn that gaze upon ourselves as we observe our American game of football. Be prepared for a surprise.

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 #2 - The Gaze - due 1-30-08

Week 3 (1-30-08) Anthropology as a Colonial Discourse

What is the anthropologist doing when he/she observes another culture and produces an ethnography? Is the result a discovery of the way another people think and live or a construction to suit the agenda of the researcher? How do the people we study react?

Film: Margaret Mead and Samoa (1988: 51 minutes) GN671.S2 M37
Stranger with a Camera (2000: 58 minutes) HN79.K4 S77

The Mead/Freeman debate illustrates the issues that anthropologists deal with in the field and in the presentation of their results. Stranger with a Camera questions the concept of observation versus participation. When we are in the field, how are we affecting the people with whom we are working? What do we give and what do we take away? How are they affected? How do they respond?

Reader: Freeman, Derek. 2001. "Margaret Mead and Samoa," In Taking Sides. Kirk Endicott and Robert Welsch, eds. Guilford, CT: McGraw-Hill. 292-303

Holmes, Lowell D. and Ellen Rhoads Holmes. "Samoan Character and the Academic World." In Taking Sides. Kirk Endicott and Robert Welsch, eds. Guilford, CT: McGraw-Hill. 304-312

Rensberger, Boyce. "Margaret Mead: The Nature-Nurture Debate." In Science 84 Magazine. 25-30

Paper #3 – Field Work – due 2-6-08

Week 4 (2-6-08) Justice

How do different societies resolve conflicts? These films illustrate different ways conflict is resolved (or not resolved). Why does justice take different forms?

Film: Meat Fight (1974: 14 minutes) DT1058.K86 M43
The Cows of Dolo Paye (1970: 52 minutes)
Little Injustices: Laura Nader Looks at the Law (1980: 59 minutes) KF1609.L58

Reader: Gibbs, James L. 1988. "The Kpelle Moot," In J.B. Cole. Anthropology for the Nineties. New York: The Free Press. 69-76

Paper #4 – Justice – due 2-13-08

Week 5 (2-13-08) Race and the Cultural Construction of Difference

What is race? If ideas of race change over time, how do they develop? What are the implications for how we individually feel about 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. 1988. "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

Tatum, Beverly D. "Defining Racism: Can We Talk?" In Readings for Diversity and Social Justice. Maurianne Adams et al. London: Routledge. 2000. 79-82

Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. "Silver Pavements, Golden Roofs." In Arranged Marriages. New York: Anchor Books. 1996. 35-56

Paper #5 - Race - due 2-20-08

Week 6 (2-20-08) 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 O53

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

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

Paper #6 – Gender – due 2-27-08

Week 7 (2-27-08) 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)

The Times of Harvey Milk (1984: 87 minutes) HQ78.8.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. The film looks at what it means for a public figure to be openly gay.

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

Midterm Exam – take home – due 3-12-08 (no paper due 3-12-08)

Week 8 (3-12-08) Gendered Sexuality

What does it mean to be a man? How do men reach beyond the cultural constructions of 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

Paper #7 - Gendered Sexuality - due 3-19-08

Week 9 (3-19-08) 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

Three young Australian Aboriginal girls are taken from their families and put into camps to be educated to be useful to white society.

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

Hume, Marion. "Outback Ingenue." Sun Herald. Nov 2, 2002. 1-5

Quin, Karl. "Molly's Story." The Sunday Age. Feb 17, 2002. 1-7

Williams, Sue. "Home Truth." Sun Herald. Feb 3, 2002. 1-3

Paper #8 – Indigenous Rights – due 3-26-08

Week 10 (3-26-08) 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) PN1993.5.14.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 woman or man?

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

Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. "The Work Love." In Arranged Marriages. New York: Anchor Books. 1996. 57-71

Paper #9 – Marriage – due 4-2-08

Week 11 (4-2-08) 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 or vice versa? What can we say about the intersection between mental illness and madness?

Film: The King of Hearts (1966: 101 minutes)

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 #10 – Madness – due 4-9-08

Week 12 (4-9-08) 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: Orientalism (1999: 40 minutes) DS12.S24
Peace of Mind: Coexistence Through the Eyes of Palestinian and Israeli Youth (1999: 57 minutes)

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." Infopal. December 6, 2000. 1-7

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

Paper #11 – Orientalism – due 4-16-08

Week 13 (4-16-08) Deconstructing the Hegemonic Discourse: Humanizing the Enemy

What makes soldiers kill each other? What happens if a soldier see 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: Powell, Jim and Joe Lee. Deconstruction for Beginners.

Paper #12 – Deconstruction – due 4-23-08

Week 14 (4-23-08) Colonialism, Postcolonialism and Terrorism

How has European colonialism since 1492 shaped the world we live in? Has colonialism ended or changed its form?

Film: The Battle of Algiers (1965: 120 minutes) DT295.B37

The Battle of Algiers has influenced revolutionaries, terrorist organizations and government intelligence agencies. It has been shown at the Pentagon as a primer on urban warfare. The segment from Advertising and the End of the World asks how world (military) powers will act in the 21st century as important natural resources are exhausted and environmental pollution renders parts of the world unlivable. Is this phenomenon part of the overdetermination of what is happening in the Middle East today?

Reader: Evans, Martin. “La Lutte continue...? Contemporary History and Algeria.” History Today. 47(2). 1997. 10-12

Gross, Larry. “A Blast from the Past that Continues to Resonate.” Film Comment 40(1). 2004. 22-23 (1-2)

Fanon, Franz. “Concerning Violence.” In The Wretched of the Earth. New York: Grove Press. 1963. 35-45

Rice, Condoleezza. “Opening Remarks to Commission on Terrorist Attacks.” MIBT Library. 4-8-04. 1-8

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

Paper #13 – Terrorism in the Contemporary World – due 4-30-08

Week 15 (4-30-08) Overdetermination

Why do we seek to explain events in terms of cause and effect relationships? How can we know that anything is exactly the cause of something else? Why are we oriented toward scientific explanations and the ability to predict? 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, one of the characters 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.” How many times have you wished that you had done something differently in the past? As the film shows, when you change something, there are unforeseen consequences. You can take an action, but you must realize that the consequences are unpredictable. The consequences of an event are overdetermined.

Reader: “The Butterfly Effect (2004).” <http://movies.yahoo.com>. 1-3

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

Web. “Chaos Theory: A Brief Introduction.”
www.inho.com/grae/chaos/chaos.html 11-10-04. 1-6

web. “Overdetermination.”
www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/sgabriel/post_structuralism.htm 11-10-05. 1-5

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

Final Exam due May 7, 2008 by 5PM in my mailbox in McGuinn 426