



predicaments of culture:

strangers in strange lands

This semester we are going to examine the theories and practices of ethnography through both text and film. We shall trace the precursors of ethnography through close readings of narratives from d'Ailly to texts of the early 15th Century which imagine otherness through historical or "scholarly" representations of culture, as well as travel writings whereby the writer no longer remains a passive reader of culture, but instead seeks encounter. From here, we shall study the shift in representing culture, beginning with the wanderer who idly explores other cultures in order to observe and gain insight into certain peoples to the formally trained anthropologist who must, in order to write "objectively" about culture, sustain certain scientific knowledge and fieldwork methods. Likewise, we will engage the contingent issues that anthropology brings into question, such as: the authority of the ethnographer, the objectivity of ethnographic engagement, issues of time and narration, the presence of the observer, and the politics of epistemology. Such questions necessarily lead us through very delicate terrain inasmuch as interrogating the basis of ethnography often challenges the validity of anthropology as a "scientific" or an "objective" forum. We shall spend the second half of the semester examining ethnographic surrealism and dialogic agendas in anthropology in order to better understand how contemporary ethnography has been informed. Ultimately, we will interrogate the relationship of the observer and the observed in order to tease out our own historical and scientific beliefs that have long inflected our understanding of culture—as well as ethnography as a practice—which even today is presumed to be understandable, "knowable." What does it mean, after all, to *write* culture?

course requirements

class participation and preparation: You need to be prepared for class by completing all of the readings and viewings scheduled for each meeting. As well, you are expected to share your ideas and critiques with the class through the many discussions which depend upon your interpretation and dialogue. During the course of the semester, you will be asked to give an informal five minute critique in class.

reaction essays: Ten times during the semester, you are required to write a four-page essay in response to the material listed for that session. Because I want to read your *individual opinions* to the readings/viewings at hand, I am requiring that you hand in these essays each Tuesday. This will serve as an exercise for you to individually contemplate and articulate in writing your interpretations of the material at hand, rather than for you to write about what you think I want to hear after a class. It is important to note that these papers are not *reviews* of the entire reading, but are concise arguments that set out to specifically analyze and critique certain ideas, concepts, or methods in the ethnography. All papers must be typed and must observe MLA standards of style and no late papers are accepted.

office hours: I have office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4:15 through 5:15 p.m. This is time for you to ask me questions, discuss your work individually and, on a more personal level, to talk about any other courses or problems. Furthermore, you are required to come to my office hours at least twice during the semester to discuss your paper topics. If, for any reason, you cannot come to see me during my office hours, please talk to me after class and I will gladly set aside a time which is more convenient for you. You may also contact me by e-mail at: vigoj@is3.nyu.edu

evaluation

Class participation, preparation, and attendance
Reaction Essays

35%
65%

fall 1996 class schedule

imagining, traveling, writing

5 september:

Introduction to the Course

10 & 12 september:

d'Ailly. *Imago Mundi*. ✓ & de Lery. *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*. ✓
Safar. *Disorienting Encounters*. †

17 & 19 september:

Levi-Strauss. *Tristes-Tropiques*. †

24 & 26 september:

Grass. Dir. Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack. *f*
N/um Tchai. Dir. John Marshall. *f* & *Man of Aran*. Dir. Robert Flaherty. *f*
Screening: 20 September, 12 noon Avery Fisher

framing science & strategies for interpreting

1 & 3 october:

Morgan. *Houses and House-Life of the American Aborigines*. ✓
Lombroso. *Crime: Its Causes and Remedies*. ✓ & Codrington. *The Melanesians*. ✓
Dart. "The Physical Characters of the /?auni-#khomani Bushmen." ✓

8 & 10 october:

Malinowski. *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. †

15 & 17 october:

de Certeau. *Heterologies*. †
Bourdieu. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. ✓

22 & 24 october:

Chronicle of a Summer. Dir. Jean Rouch. *f* & *Réassemblage*. Dir. Trinh T. Min-ha. *f*
Screening: 18 October, 11 am 721 Broadway, Room 651

surrealist visions of excess

29 & 31 october:

Clifford. *Predicament of Culture*. †

5 & 7 november:

Breton. *The Surrealist Manifesto*. ✓
Aragon. *Payson de Paris*. †

12 & 14 november:

Taussig. *The Nervous System*. †
Bataille. *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*. ✓

19 & 21 november:

Las Hurdes. Dir. Luis Bunuel. *f* & *The Battle of Algiers*. Dir. Gillo Pontecorvo. *f*
Screening: 15 November, 12 noon Avery Fisher Center

storytelling: words & performance

26 november:

Benjamin. *Illuminations*. ✓

Favret-Saada. *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage*. ✓

3 & 5 december:

Crapanzano. *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan*. †

10 december:

Measures of Distance. Dir. Hatoum. *f* *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*. Dir. Portillo. *f*

Screening: 6 December, 12 noon Avery Fisher Center

required texts

(These texts should be purchased from Posman Books, One University Place)

- Aragon, Louis. *Payson de Paris*. Boston: Exact Change, 1994.
Certeau, Michel de. *Heterologies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
Clifford, James. *Predicament of Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.
Crapanzano, Vincent. *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
Levi-Strauss. *Tristes-Tropiques*. New York: Penguin, 1992.
Malinowski, Bronislow. *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. New York: Waveland, 1994.
Safar, Muhammed. *Disorienting Encounters*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
Taussig, Michael. *The Nervous System*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

required articles and excerpts

(These readings are Available from the Reserve Reading Room in Bobst Library, Level B)

- Ailly, Pierre d'. [Excerpts] *Imago Mundi*. Wilmington: [s.n.], 1948.
Bataille, Georges. "Sacrifices and Wars of the Aztecs." *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Zone Books, 1991.
Benjamin, Walter. "The Storyteller." *Illuminations*. Ed. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1988.
Bourdieu, Pierre. "Structures and the Habitus." *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
Breton, André. "The First Manifesto." (1924) *The Surrealist Manifesto*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 1969.
Codrington, R.H. Preface & "Sacrifices." *The Melanesians: Studies in Their Anthropology and Folk-Lore*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1891.
Dart, Raymond. [Excerpts] "The Physical Characters of the /?auni-≠khomani Bushmen." *Bantu Studies*. September 1937, Vol I. No. 3.
Favret-Saada, Jeanne. "There Must be a Subject." *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage*. Trans. Catherine Cullen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.
Lery, Jean de. "Of the Sighting and First View..." *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil, Otherwise called America*. Trans. Janet Whatley. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
Lombroso, Cesaire. "Civilization, Barbarism, Etc." & "Influence of Race." *Crime: Its Causes and Remedies*. Trans. Henry P. Horton. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1918.
Morgan, Lewis H. Preface & "The Law of Hospitality and its General Practice." *Houses and House-Life of the American Aborigines*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965.

required viewings

(We shall see these films at the Avery Fisher Center or in TISCH on the Friday previous To each Week of Film Study)

- The Battle of Algiers*. Dir. Gillo Pontecorvo. (VCA 4659)
Chronicle of a Summer. Dir. Jean Rouch with Edgar Morin. Cont/McG-H, 1961. (16mm)
Grass. Dir. Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack. Milestone Film & Video, 1992. (VCA 2901)
Las Hurdes or Land without Bread. Dir. Luis Bunuel, 1932. (VCA 924)
Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Dir. Lourdes Portillo. Direct Cinema, 1986. (VCA 2889)
Man of Aran. Dir. Robert Flaherty. Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, 1934. (VCA 698)
Measures of Distance. Dir. Mona Hatoum. Video Data Bank, 1988. (VCA 3087)
N/um Tchai. Dir. John Marshall. Documentary Educational Resources, 1966. (VCA 2435)
Réassemblage. Dir. Trinh T. Min-ha. Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1982. (VCA 2286)