

Anthropology 505 – The History of Anthropological Theory

Spring 2012

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This seminar presents an outline of the development of theory in cultural anthropology since the discipline's inception in the 19th century. We are each the product of our own training, and certainly when it comes to theory the choices we make and the points we emphasize emerge from our own predilections and concerns. So, this syllabus asserts no claim to complete coverage of theory in cultural anthropology. It does, however, touch on certain unavoidably critical moments in the history of the discipline, while also emphasizing those approaches that I feel are most important and most interesting to contemporary concerns. To those ends, we will study some of the foundational trends in early anthropological theorizing, including evolutionism, historical particularism, British social anthropology, and structuralism, with an eye to particular national traditions in Europe and the United States, before turning to more recent approaches such as symbolic/interpretive anthropology, Marxian approaches, historical anthropology, feminist anthropology, post-modernism, and globalization theory. Students will read some acknowledged classics (as well as my own idiosyncratic preferences) in the field of cultural anthropology, to build a strong working foundation for themselves as professional anthropologists. Throughout, I emphasize the interconnectedness of theoretical periods or movements, showing how ideas do not emerge in a vacuum but through dialogue and engagement with other, preceding ideas and emphases in the discipline. The result is a history of debate and internal critique, as anthropologists and other scholars have struggled to conceptualize social life, and the relationships that human beings have to one another.

Course Requirements

To succeed in understanding the often complex material that we will be reading in this seminar, students must bring their full commitment to keeping current with the work, by doing weekly readings and writing assignments. Students must come to class prepared to engage with the material, their classmates, and the instructor, in dialogue and debate. Your final grade in the course will be based on the following:

1. Weekly writing (60%): For each class session, students will prepare a two- to three-page essay (some call them reaction papers, I call them memos) exploring their responses to some aspect of the week's readings. As these memos are short, they should not aim to be comprehensive or synthetic – don't try to sum up all the week's readings in their entirety, or to make some grandiose point. Rather, pick one or two ideas that strike you from the readings that week and write a coherent, well-written, and interesting commentary that shows some insight and creative thinking. Really fine memos will identify a theme that links different readings of the week, or that links the week's reading to that of past weeks. Style matters, as does grammar, spell-checking, and of course content. Memos are due by email to me by 6:00 pm Tuesday evenings. No late writing will be accepted.
2. Class participation (30%): During the first half of the class period, each student will present her or his memo to the seminar, in the form of an oral presentation based on notes taken in preparation for writing the memo (no reading allowed!). Each presentation will be followed by discussion and debate of the points raised in the student's presentation. Following a break, we will return for the last hour of class, which will be an open discussion of key themes of the week's readings. Students are expected to push themselves to engage in seminar discussions, and to challenge their own assumptions and ideas and those of their classmates. As much of this material will be unfamiliar to most of you, you need not feel that you must have complete mastery of it in order to discuss it in class. I would prefer an atmosphere of mutual discovery and exploration, as we read through this material and try to make sense of it together. Questions, comments, and critiques all count as participation and are welcome in the course of our meetings. *Please be on time to every class meeting.*
3. Final essay (10%): You will write a 5-7 page essay based on class readings, in which you will analyze a major concept proposed by one or several of the authors studied (e.g., psychic unity, superorganic, unconscious, mode

of production, habitus, etc.). Your analysis should be evaluative and should dissect and critique the selected concept, outlining its origins, significance, changing uses, merits, limitations, and status or importance in contemporary anthropology. Your final presentation should include 1) an overview of your analysis and 2) a reflection on the impact that tracing the genealogy of this term has had on your understanding of the history of anthropological theory.

A Note on the Readings

In preparing this syllabus, I have opted for breadth over depth in the assignment of readings. That is, rather than reading any one book in its entirety, I have chosen to excerpt sections of various readings, so as to expose you to as many different authors as possible in the course of this semester. It might be argued that the other approach – to read more of a few select authors – would have been better; but my goal here is to present the development of anthropological theory in its broad sweep, so that later you might on your own choose to go back and read more of the authors to whom you’ve been introduced in this seminar. With that in mind, I suggest you buy some of the following books, to stock your personal library and to facilitate your reading in this course. There are, however, no required texts to purchase for the seminar.

Pierre Bourdieu. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.
Emile Durkheim. *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*.
Mary Douglas. *Purity and Danger*.
E.E. Evans-Pritchard. *The Nuer*.
Sigmund Freud. *Civilization and its Discontents*.
Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Cultures*.
Antonio Gramsci. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*.
Donna Haraway. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*.
Claude Levi-Strauss. *The Savage Mind*.
Bronislaw Malinowski. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*.
George Marcus and Michael Fisher. *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*.
Karl Marx. *Capital*, vol. 1 and *The German Ideology*.
Marcel Mauss. *The Gift*.
Renato Rosaldo. *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Cultural Analysis*.
Marshall Sahlins. *Culture and Practical Reason*.
Raymond Williams. *Marxism and Literature*.
Eric Wolf. *Europe and the People Without History*.

Course Schedule – All readings are available on the course [Sakai](#) site.

Wed. 1/18 – Introduction to the Course

Wed 1/25 –Colonial Anthropology: Evolutionism

- Charles Darwin. 1871. *The Descent of Man* (excerpt).
- Edward B. Tylor. 1871. “Primitive Culture.”
- Lewis Henry Morgan. 1877. “Ancient Society.”
- Herbert Spencer. 1897. “The Evolution of Society.”
- George W. Stocking. 1982. “The Dark-Skinned Savage: The Image of Primitive Man in Evolutionary Anthropology.”
- George W. Stocking. 1987. “The Idea of Civilization Before the Crystal Palace (1750-1850)”

Wed 2/1 – What is society? Theorizing the Collective Consciousness

- August Comte. 1848. *A General View of Positivism* (excerpt):
- Emile Durkheim. 1895. “What is a social Fact?” In *Rules of the Sociological Method*.
- Georg Simmel. 1908. “How is Society Possible?” Online at:
- Emile Durkheim. 1915. *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (excerpt).
- Marcel Mauss. 1923. *The Gift* (excerpt).

Wed 2/8 – Modernity in Crisis: German Social Theory

- G.F.W. Hegel. 1812. *The Dialectic of History* (excerpt).
- Karl Marx. 1845. “Feuerbach: Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlook.” In *The German Ideology*.
- Karl Marx. 1867. “The Process of Capitalist Production.” In *Capital*, vol. 1.
- Max Weber. 1904. “The Spirit of Capitalism,” chapter 2 in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.
- Max Weber. 1919. “Politics as Vocation.”
- Sigmund Freud. 1929. *Civilization and its Discontents* (excerpt).

Wed 2/15 – The Boasian Response: Anthropology in the US

- Johann Gottfried von Herder. 1784. *Materials for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (excerpt).
- Franz Boas. 1896. “The Limitations of the Comparative Method of Anthropology.”
- Franz Boas. 1920. “The Methods of Ethnology.”
- Edward Sapir. 1924. “Culture, Genuine and Spurious.”
- Ruth Benedict. 1930. “Psychological Types in the Cultures of the Southwest.”
- Margaret Mead. 1935. Introduction to *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*.
- Alfred Kroeber, 1952. “The Concept of Culture in Science.”
- George W. Stocking. 1974. “The Basic Assumptions of Boasian Anthropology.”
- Matti Bunzl. 1996. “Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition: From Volksgeist and National Character to an Anthropological Concept of Culture.”

Wed 2/22 – British Social Anthropology

- Bronislaw Malinowski. 1922. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, pp. 1-25, and 81-104.
- A.R. Radcliffe-Brown. 1924. “The Mother’s Brother in South Africa.”
- A.R. Radcliffe-Brown. 1935. “On the Concept of Function in Social Science.”
- E.E. Evans-Pritchard. 1940. “The Nuer of the Southern Sudan.”
- Bronislaw Malinowski. 1945. “The New Tasks of a Modern Anthropology.”
- Max Gluckman. 1956. “The License in Ritual.”

Wed 2/29 – Modernist Anthropology: Structuralism

- Claude Levi-Strauss. 1955. “The Structural Study of Myth.”
- Claude Levi-Strauss. 1958. “Structural Analysis in Linguistics and Anthropology.” In *Structural Anthropology*.
- Ferdinand de Saussure. 1959. *Course in General Linguistics* (excerpt).
- Mary Douglas. 1966. “Powers and Dangers” and “External Boundaries.” Chapters 6 and 7 in *Purity and Danger*.
- James Clifford. 1981. “On Ethnographic Surrealism.”

Wed 3/7 – Symbolic and Interpretive Approaches

- Clifford Geertz. 1973. “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture.” In *The Interpretation of Cultures*.
- Clifford Geertz. 1973. “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight.” In *The Interpretation of Cultures*.
- Victor Turner. 1974. “Passages, Margins, and Poverty: Religious Symbols of Communitas.” In *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors*.
- Marshall Sahlins. 1976. *Culture and Practical Reason* (excerpt).

Spring Break

Wed 3/21 – Marxian Legacies

- Roy Rappaport. 1967. “Ritual Regulation of Environmental Relations Among a New Guinea People.”
- Antonio Gramsci. 1971. “State and Civil Society.” In *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*.
- Pierre Bourdieu. 1977. “Structures, Habitus, Power.” In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.
- Raymond Williams. 1977. *Marxism and Literature* (excerpt).
- Eric Wolf. 1982. *Europe and the People Without History* (excerpt).
- Stuart Hall. 1986. “The Problem of Ideology: Marxism Without Guarantees.”
- Gayatri Spivak. 1988. “Can the Subaltern Speak?”
- William Roseberry. 1989. “Balinese Cockfights and the Seduction of Anthropology.”

Wed 3/28 – Feminist Anthropology

- Sherry Ortner. 1974. “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?”
- Chandra Mohanty. 1984. “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse.”
- Joan W. Scott. 1986. “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis.”
- Judith Stacey. 1988. “Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?”
- Donna J. Haraway. 1991. “Gender for a Marxist Dictionary: The Sexual Politics of a Word.”
- Catherine Lutz. 1996. “The Gender of Theory.”

Wed 4/4 – Postmodernism and Foucault

- Michel Foucault. 1975. *Discipline and Punish* (excerpt).
- Michel Foucault. 1978. *The History of Sexuality. Vol. 1.* (excerpt).
- David Harvey. 1990. “Time-Space Compression and the Postmodern Condition.” In *The Condition of Postmodernity*.
- Frederic Jameson. 1991. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (excerpt).

Wed 4/11– The “Writing Culture” Critique of Anthropological Knowledge

- George Marcus and Michael Fisher. 1986. “Introduction” and “A Crisis of Representation in the Human Sciences.” In *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*.
- James Clifford. 1988. “On Ethnographic Authority.”
- Renato Rosaldo. 1989. “Grief and a Headhunter’s Rage,” “The Erosion of Classic Norms,” and “After Objectivism.” In *Culture and Truth*.
- Fran Mascia-Lees, Pat Sharpe, and Colleen Cohen. 1989. “The Postmodernist Turn in Anthropology: Cautions from a Feminist Perspective.”
- Lila Abu-Lughod. 1991. “Writing Against Culture.”

Wed 4/18 – States, Nations, and Globalization

- Arjun Appadurai. 1996. “Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology.” In *Modernity at Large*.
- Comaroff, Jean, and John L. Comaroff. 2000. *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism* (excerpt).
- Ulf Hannerz. 2001. “Notes on the Global Ecumene.”
- Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson. 2001. “Beyond ‘Culture’: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference.”
- Ferguson, James. 2001. “Anthropology and Its Evil Twin: ‘Development’ in the Constitution of a Discipline.”
- Daniel Goldstein. 2010. “Toward a Critical Anthropology of Security.”

Wed 4/25 – Paper presentations