ANTHROPOLOGY 280: Theories of Culture  
Spring 2009

Instructor Dr. Brigittine French  
Office: 306 Goodnow  
Office Hours: M/F 9:00-10:00  
W 11:00-12:00  
M/W 1:15-2:15  
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“It is in the moment when epistemology seems at its most frail that new insights are generated.” Michael Herzfeld 2001

Description  
This course provides a broad overview of the development of theory and application of it in anthropological thought and scholarship. Through readings and assignments, I have designed the course to be an intellectually engaging and hands-on approach to the use of theory in the history of anthropology. Throughout the semester, we will consider various anthropological epistemologies—their assumptions, their applications, their efficacies, and their critiques. We will be guided by Herzfeld’s pedagogical approach to theory, embracing a “militant middle ground,” in order to straddle the on-going and productive tensions in the discipline. Throughout the semester, we will move between positivistic/deconstructionist, emic/etic, synchronic/diachronic, and scientific/humanistic approaches to social understanding in anthropological theory.

Texts  
Preparation
1) The reading for this course is challenging; the authors’ are intellectually ambitious and the prose are dense. For these reasons, it is imperative that you read in advance of our class meetings. Be sure to read footnotes and consult bibliographies for every reading as they will help contextualize the material we’re covering.
2) Think about and formulate informal answers to questions that are circulated on blackboard, both those by the professor and classmates, so that you are prepared for every discussion.
3) Read for main points and central concepts. In other words, try to avoid getting bogged down in the intricacies of specific ethnographic points or theoretical musings. Once you have a sense of the overall argument and perspective, and then return to the readings in more detail a second time.
4) The formal assignments are based upon substantive written work. This means that you should build in time for revision. In other words, the course is writing intensive and should be done in advance of the deadline. I will be happy to look at drafts of assignments, provided you ask me to do so 48 hours before the assignment is due.

Assignments
Exams: There will be two take home exams (8-10 pages). The exams will be broad essay questions that ask you to explain and synthesize various theoretical orientations using course materials.
Papers: There will be two formal papers. The first paper will help you develop an overview of the course material (7-8 pages). The second paper is an independent research project (10-12 pages) that involves an empirical investigation of contemporary theory as it has been applied and represented in major anthropological journals in recent years.
Discussion: I expect active, engaged participation. Both questions and silences are essential components of a successful class. Listen, speak, question, and work toward developing a scholarly community for discussing anthropological theory this semester.
Blackboard questions: Approximately once a week students will be required to post questions for our collective consideration. A schedule will be assigned the first day of class. The questions will be used to assess student comprehension, to track common areas in need of explanation, and to structure class discussion.

Grading and Evaluation
Synthesis Paper 20 percent 40 points
Midterm Exam 23 percent 46 points
Abstract/Annotated Bib 5 percent 10 points
Research paper 25 percent 50 points
Blackboard questions 15 percent 30 points
Discussion 10 percent 20 points
Informal Response 2 percent 4 points
Final Exam (optional) 40 points

Students and Accommodations
Anyone who needs some modification in seating, testing, or other class requirements should inform me so that the appropriate arrangements may be made. Please see me after class or during my office hours.

Late Assignments
No late assignments will be accepted without prior approval.

BACK TO THE FUTURE: ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE 21st CENTURY

Mon, Jan 19 Assumptions and Orientations: Contemporary “Isms”
Wolf, *A Thrice Told Tale.*
INFORMAL RESPONSE DUE.

Wed, Jan 21 Wolf, *A Thrice Told Tale*
Erickson and Murphy, “Conclusion”
Herzfeld, “Foreword and Preface”

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY

Fri, Jan 23 Erickson and Murphy, Introduction and Part One pp. 21-74

Mon, Jan 26 Erickson and Murphy, Part One pp. 75-90 and Part Two

Wed, Jan 28 Erickson and Murphy, Part Three pp. 141-202

THE MILITANT MIDDLE GROUND: ANTHROPOLOGY AS THE PRACTICE OF THEORY

Fri, Jan 30 Herzfeld, “Orientations: Anthropology as a Practice of Theory”

Mon, Feb 2 Herzfeld, “Epistemologies”
FOUNDATIONAL THINKERS

Wed, Feb 4  McGee and Warms, “Nineteenth Century Evolutionism”
            Darwin and Wallace, “On the Tendency of Species to Form
            Varieties” in e-reserves/pioneerweb.
            Spencer, “The Social Organism” in McGee and Warms

Fri, Feb 6  Tylor, “The Science of Culture” in McGee and Warms
            Morgan, “Ethnical Periods” in McGee and Warms

Mon, Feb 9  Marx and Engels, “Feuerbach” in McGee and Warms

Tues, Feb 10  OVERVIEW OF TRENDS PAPER DUE IN MY OFFICE BY 3:00 PM

Wed, Feb 11  McGee and Warms, “Foundations of Sociological Thought”
            Durkheim, “What is a Social Fact” in McGee and Warms
            Durkheim, “The Cosmological System of Totemism and the Idea of
            Class” in McGee and Warms.

Fri, Feb 13  Mauss, “Excerpts from The Gift” in McGee and Warms

Mon, Feb 16  Weber, “Class, Status, Party” in McGee and Warms

CULTURE THEORY IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY: HISTORICAL
PARTICULARLISM, FUNCTIONALISM, AND CULTURE AND PERSONALITY

Wed, Feb 18  McGee and Warms, “Historical Particularism”
            Boas, “Methods of Ethnology” in McGee and Warms
            Boas, “Introduction to the Handbook of American Indian
            Languages” in e-reserves/pioneerweb

Fri, Feb 20  Kroeber, Eighteen Professions” in McGee and Warms
            Starn, “A Compromise between Science and Sentiment” and “Ishi,
            Alfred, and Theodora” in e-reserves/pioneerweb

Mon, Feb 23  Film:  *Ishi: The Last Yahi*

Wed, Feb 25  McGee and Warms, “Functionalism”
            Malinowski, “The Essentials of the Kula” in McGee and Warms

Wed, Mar 4  Arensberg, “The Interpretation of Custom” and “The Family and the Land” in e-reserves/pionweerweb

Fri, Mar 6  McGee and Warms, “Culture and Personality”
Benedict, “Psychological Types in the Cultures of the Southwest” in McGee and Warms
TAKE-HOME EXAM HANDED OUT IN CLASS

Mon, Mar 9  French, “Partial Truths and Gendered Histories: Ruth Bunzel in American Anthropology” in e-reserves/pioneerweb
Hernandez, “Multiple Subjectivities and Strategic Positionality: Zora Neale Hurston’s Experimental Ethnographies” in e-reserves/pioneerweb

THEORETICAL DIVERSIFICATION: BUILDING UPON EVOLUTIONS, STRUCTURES, SYMBOLS, AND MATERIALITY

Wed, Mar 11 Mead, “Introduction to Sex and Temperament” in McGee and Warms
Documentary video: Margaret Mead and Samoa

Fri, Mar 13  McGee and Warms, “The Reemergence of Evolutionary Thought”
Steward, “The Patrilineal Band” in McGee and Warms
EXAM DUE IN MY OFFICE BY 2:00 PM.

SPRING BREAK

Mon, Mar 30 White, “Evolutionary Stages, Progress, and the Evaluation of Cultures” in e-reserve/pioneerweb

Wed, Apr 1  McGee and Warms, “Neomaterialism”
Harris, “The Cultural Ecology of India’s Sacred Cattle” in McGee and Warms

Fri, Apr 3  Rappaport, “Ritual Regulation of Environmental Relations among a New Guinea People” in McGee and Warms
Herzfeld, “Environmentalisms”
Mon, Apr 6  McGee and Warms, “Structuralism”
Benveniste, “A Look at the Development of Structural Linguistics”
in e-reserves/pioneerweb

Wed, Apr 8  Levi-Strauss, “Structural Analysis in Linguistics and in
Anthropology” in McGee and Warms
Levi-Strauss, “Four Winnebago Myths” in McGee and Warms

Thurs, Apr 9  ABSTRACT AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE FOR
FINAL PAPER IN MY OFFICE BY 3:00

Fri, Apr 10  Ortner, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture” in McGee and
Warms

Mon, Apr 13  McGee and Warms, “Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology”
Douglas, “External Boundaries” in McGee and Warms


Fri, Apr 17  Geertz, “Deep Play” in McGee and Warms

RECENT TRENDS IN THE PRACTICE OF THEORY: SOCIOBIOLOGY,
HISTORIES, FEMENISMS, POST-MODERNISM, AND POST-STRUCTURALISM

Mon, Apr 20  McGee and Warms “Sociobiology, Evolutionary Psychology, and
Behavioral Ecology”
Wilson, “The Morality of the Gene”

Wed, Apr 22  McGee and Warms, “Postmodernism and Its Critics”
Rosaldo, “Grief and a Headhunter’s Rage” in McGee and Warms
and “After Objectivism” in e-reserves/pioneerweb

Fri, Apr 24  McGee and Warms, “Globalization, Power, and Agency”
Bourdieu, “The Economics of Linguistic Exchanges” in e-
reserves/pioneerweb

Mon, Apr 27  Bourgois, “From Jibaro to Crack Dealer: Confronting the
Restructuring of Capitalism in El Barrio” in McGee and Warms

Wed, Apr 29  Herzfeld, “Histories” and “Politics”
Fri, May 1    McGee and Warms, “Anthropology and Gender: The Feminist Critique”
            Stoler, “Making Empire Respectable” in McGee and Warms
            TAKE-HOME FINAL EXAM HANDED OUT IN CLASS

Mon, May 5   Herzfeld, “Sufferings and Disciplines”

Wed, May 6   Sanford, “Introduction: Engaged Observer” e-reserve/poineerweb

Fri, May 8   Course synthesis

Mon, May 11  THEORETICAL TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY
            ANTHROPOLOGY PAPER DUE IN MY OFFICE BY 4:30

Wed, May 13  OPTIONAL FINAL EXAM DUE IN MY OFFICE BY 9:00 AM