

070.322/688: ANTHROPOLOGY AND FICTION

Johns Hopkins University, Spring 2011

Thursdays 1:30-3:50 PM, Gilman 186

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Encounters are essential to anthropology: encounters with others, with experience, with life, with difference, with the unknown. Although such encounters are typically imagined to take place through anthropological fieldwork, we focus in this course on encounters made by reading and writing anthropological literature. Anthropological works have focused more closely in recent years on qualities like affect, memory, imagination, desire, and impulse. So many of these works, however, have themselves been sensuous, impassioned, dreamlike, or fantastical in their written form. We will explore what is at stake in such forms of literary expression in contemporary anthropology. Looking at fiction, poetry, memoir, film, and other experimental ethnographic forms, we will consider anthropological writing as a creative practice of provoking altered states of feeling.

Reading. There are seven short books to purchase for the course, all of which are listed below, and available at the campus bookstore. Other articles and excerpted readings for the course are available on library e-reserve (password PAN322). We will also watch one ethnographic film.

Requirements (and % of overall grade). You are expected to read carefully all assigned readings before class each week, and to be prepared to participate in active class discussion (15%). Each of you will be responsible for drawing together class discussion themes in a brief oral commentary, once over the course of the semester (5%). You will write one brief exercise of ethnographic description (<3 pp) over the course of the semester (10% – we will read and discuss each of these in class, week by week). You will compose one longer piece of experimental anthropological work (<10 pp, if prose), to be presented as a paragraph proposal (5% - due March 10), a first draft (15% - due April 8), and a final version (15% - due May 9). Lastly, you will write one short essay (<5 pp) in which you draw upon course readings to reflect upon the idea, experience, results and anthropological significance of your experimental effort (35% - due May 9). By “experimental” all I mean is this: “try out an idea, see what happens.” I strongly encourage you to discuss with me individually your evolving work for the course. All papers are due as e-mail attachments by midnight that day; no extensions, exceptions, or excuses, and late assignments will be marked down 10% per day. On academic honesty, please consult <http://www.advising.jhu.edu>.

Schedule

I. Anthropology as Fiction

February 3 **Introduction**
 Angela Garcia, “How Dion Died,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 17, 2010

February 10 **An Anthropologist in a Fictional World**
 Ursula K. Le Guin, “The Word for World is Forest” in *Again, Dangerous Visions*, ed.
 by Harlan Ellison (Doubleday, 1972), and “Entretien avec Ursula K. Le Guin”
 with Helene Escudie, in *Conversations with Ursula K. Le Guin* (Mississippi, 2008)

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- February 17 **Writing Culture**
Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description” and “Notes on the Balinese Cockfight” from
The Interpretation of Cultures
George Marcus and James Clifford, “The Making of Ethnographic Texts: A
Preliminary Report,” *Current Anthropology*, 26(2), 1985
Vincent Crapanzano, “Hermes’ Dilemma: The Masking of Subversion in
Ethnographic Description,” in *Writing Culture*, ed. by Marcus and Clifford
Michael Carrithers, “The Anthropologist as Author,” *Anthropology Today*, 4(4), 1988

- February 24 **Ethnography and Experience**
Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Duke, 2007)

II. Experiments in Ethnographic Form

- March 3 **Poetry**
Adrie Kusserow, *Hunting Down the Monk* (BOA Editions, 2002), and “Ethnographic
Poetry” in *Arts-Based Research in Education*, ed. by Cahnmann-Taylor and
Siegesmund (2008)

- March 10 **Field Diary**
Michael Taussig, *Law in a Lawless Land: Diary of a Limpieza in Colombia* (Chicago, 2005)

- March 17 **Film**
Jean Rouch, *Jaguar* (93 minutes, 1967), and “On the Vicissitudes of the Self” and
“Jaguar” from *Cine-Ethnography*, ed. by Steven Feld (Minnesota, 2003, 87-101,
204-209)

- March 31 **Novel**
Paul Stoller, *Jaguar: A Story of Africans in America* (Chicago, 1999), and “The Work
Must Go On: A Tribute to Jean Rouch,” *American Anthropologist*, 107(1), 2005

III. Altered States of Feeling

- April 7 **Drifting**
Marc Auge, *In the Metro* (Minnesota, 2002)

- April 14 **Dreaming**
David Shulman, *Spring, Heat, Rains: A South Indian Diary* (Chicago, 2009)

- April 21 **Inventing**
Tobias Hecht, *After Life: An Ethnographic Novel* (Duke 2006)

- April 28 **Revealing**
Wallace Stevens, “Of Mere Being”
Michael Jackson, *The Palm at the End of the Mind* (Duke, 2009)

- May 5 **Our Own...**