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Course Description
The interpretive approach, as a coherent theoretical and methodological response to a perceived crisis in anthropology, posed a challenge to the traditional theoretical goals and methods of the discipline and began to unseat our dependence upon scientific logical empiricism and challenge our attempts to achieve objective knowledge and "ethnographic realism." One stimulus was provided by the examination of "culture as text" and of ethnography as a type of literature, a literary genre bound by implicit rules and conventions. As anthropologists have sought new ways to represent cultural experience and its contextuality, they have approached ethnography as text, as narrative, as allegory, and as "true fiction" in their search for ethnographic authority. At the same time in further blurring the disciplinary boundaries between anthropology and literature, they have focused on the anthropologist as author, the novel as ethnography, the implications of reflexivity, intersubjectivity, and feminism for ethnographic practice, and sought new textual strategies. Our aim in the seminar will be to assess the strengths and weaknesses of interpretive anthropology as expressed by its strongest supporters and critics and to consider the implications of its emergence for the future of anthropology. As Geertz (1988) has written: "Anthropology is going to have to find out if it is to continue as an intellectual force in contemporary culture...if its mule condition (trumpeted scientific mother's brother, disowned literary father) is not to lead to mule sterility."

Required Books
The following have been ordered for the bookstore:


Recommended Books


Other assigned readings can be found on reserve in the library. [f] indicates folder copy; [R] indicates volume on reserve.

Course Requirements
1. Careful and thoughtful preparation and participation in seminars. Completion of discussion and written exercises for class. You should complete at least six of the written exercises for exchange with classmates; they cannot be written after the seminar meets. Exercises should be handed in at midterm (October 20) and end of term (December 1st). ([50%])

Topics for Discussion
--ethnography in the context of theory in the 1990s
--the nature of the dialectic between experience and interpretation
--the implications of reflexivity and dialogic for ethnographic practice
--the new textual strategies that ethnographers are developing
--the relationship between anthropology and literature/literary theory
--ethnography as writing
--literature as ethnography
--interpretive anthropology as cultural critique
--the politics of representation in literature and ethnography
[You should add your own topics for discussion to our list as we go on and share them with others]

2. A 15-20-page research paper on one of the following topics. See guidelines at end of syllabus. Paper topic [5 pages with preliminary bibliography] is due in class on October 20th. The first draft should be finished by December 8 for discussion in class, and final paper is due in class on December 15th. No extensions possible. [50%]
(1) Reading novels as ethnography/reading novels anthropologically
I. Introduction; Malinowski, Ethnographic Realism, and its Foundations

September 8

Assigned Readings:


Marcus, George and Dick Cushman 1982 Ethnographies as texts. Annual Review of Anthropology 11:25-69. [R]


For Discussion:

Today, we will begin our discussion of ethnography as a literary genre, that is, as a type of literature bound by a particular set of rules and conventions. First read Marcus and Cushman's article, paying special attention to the sections in which the authors discuss the characteristics of ethnographic realism and authority in ethnographic texts. Then read the sections I have assigned from Notes and Queries and Argonauts of the Western Pacific. See if you can "deconstruct" Malinowski's chapter in terms of the devices that the author uses to create the "reality" of the Trobriands. In what ways might the advice that the anonymous authors of Notes and Queries offer fieldworkers tend to reinforce the conventions of ethnographic realism? How does Malinowski establish his authority in Argonauts and in what ways might a current ethnographer establish authority differently? It would help our discussion if you could take a look at some ethnographies with which you are familiar and compare them in terms of the conventions of ethnographic realism to Argonauts.

Exercise:

Write a page or two on the ways in which the conventions of what Marcus and Cushman call "ethnographic realism" are manifested in the assigned reading from Argonauts (if these materials are new to you). Alternatively you might consult:


What is the role of description, interpretation and generalization in Firth's introduction (or another ethnography of your choosing)? Could we say about the introduction, as Sperber does elsewhere about Evans-Pritchard's anecdote, that "not a single statement in it expresses a plain observation"? What is a "plain observation", anyway?

Alternatively, mount a challenge to Torgovnick's essay.
II. Foundations of Interpretive Anthropology

September 15

Assigned Readings:
Geertz, Clifford
1973 Thick description: toward an interpretive theory of culture. In The Interpretation of Cultures, pp. 3-32. [R]

1973 Deep play: Notes on the Balinese cockfight. In The Interpretation of Cultures, pp. 412-453. [R]

1983 'From the native's point of view': On the nature of anthropological understanding. In Local Knowledge, pp. 55-71. [R]

1983 Blurred genres. In Local Knowledge, pp. 19-35. [R]

Wikan, Unni

A critique:
Keesing, Roger

For Discussion:
Clifford Geertz's role in the development of interpretive anthropology can hardly be overestimated. He remains one of the most productive and well-known anthropologists. Yet today, within interpretive anthropology itself, critics of Geertz are increasing and his influence is waning. In today's session, we will examine Geertz's position in interpretive anthropology and discuss three of his most important articles. As you read the articles, ask yourself: What is "thick description"? What are its main characteristics? How is it done? How do we come to know "the native's point of view", that is, how members of another culture think, feel and perceive? What is the relationship between "thick description" and anthropological theory?

Exercise:
Linda Conner (1984:271) criticizes Geertz with the statement: "Thick description sometimes appears to come out of thin air." Examine "Deep Play" as an example of Geertz working out in an ethnographic format his ideas on thick description. Does his analysis in the article come "out of thin air"? Write a few pages on what Geertz perceives as his aims in "Deep Play" and how he goes about accomplishing them.

III. The New Ethnography: Theorizing Cultural Representation

September 22

Assigned Readings:

Clifford, James
For Discussion:
In reading Malinowski, we looked at the devices that an older generation of anthropologists used to create ethnographies. Today, we will discuss the work of some members of the current generation of anthropologists who are breaking with mainstream ethnographic traditions and pursuing new goals. Find an example of new directions in the writing of ethnography (preferably in article form); read as much of the text as possible and bring it to class; you may select something you have read in another anthropology class to date. We will examine the ways in which anthropologists are experimenting with style and ask ourselves: to what extent have the goals of ethnography really changed? To what extent (and in what ways) is there continuity with traditional goals? Possible authors you might consider are: Paul Rabinow, Vincent Crapanzano, Kevin Dwyer, Renato Rosaldo, June Nash, Michael Taussig, Ruth Behar, Elizabeth Povinelli among others.

Exercise:
Discuss your selection in terms of its aims and the relationship between the content of the papers/chapter and the style in which they are written. That is, try to look behind the narrative and see the ways in which the ethnographers are trying to achieve their effects. To what extent, and in which sense, is the paper/chapter an "ethnographic allegory."

Alternatively, write against Clifford's analysis in "Spatial Practices."

IV. Anthropologist as Author
September 29
Assigned Reading:
Clifford Geertz
Points for discussion:
To what extent is the crisis that Geertz outlines for anthropology specific to our field, to what extent is it more generalized across fields?
How is Geertz himself an author? What does it mean in terms of his own prose? How is the prose seductive, convincing? Discuss this in light of several selected passages from the text.
Take a given paragraph and read it from a variety of perspectives, i.e., from several fields and what do we take from it?
What does it mean to be concerned with literary matters? Poetics? To be authors instead of writers?
In what ways does Kenneth Burke influence the telling?
What is the most effective chapter and why?

Exercise:
Geertz writes "anthropology is going to have to find out if it is to continue as an intellectual force in contemporary culture...if its mule condition (trumpeted scientific mother's brother, disowned literary father) is not to lead to mule sterility." Examine Geertz's notion of what anthropology and ethnography are (and are not) and take a position on what should be the direction of the field in the future.

V. "True Fictions": What Can Ethnographers Learn from Novelists?
October 6
Assigned Reading:
Handler, Richard and Daniel Segal
1990 Jane Austen and the Fictions of Culture, entire volume

Glowinski, Michael

Strathern, Marilyn

For Discussion:
What are "the persuasive fictions of anthropology"? If so, what are the implications for the discipline of anthropology? What are the possibilities for reconciliation between humanistic anthropology and anthropology that aspires to be a "human science"? What lessons can modern ethnographers can learn from writers of fiction?

Exercise:
Focus on Handler and Segal's analysis of kinship in Austen. What is anthropological about it? How adept is Austen at being an anthropologist?

VII READING WEEK
October 13
Prepare paper topic (5 pages)
DUE IN CLASS October 20th

VII. Reflexivity, Dialogic Anthropology, and Halfies
October 20
Assigned Reading:
Bachnik, Jane
1986 Native perspectives of distance and anthropological perspectives on culture. Anthropological Quarterly 59:75-83. [f]

Watson, Graham

Abu-Lughod, Lila

Rosaldo, Renato

Behar, Ruth

For Discussion:
The idea that ethnography should be reflexive lies at the very core of interpretive anthropology yet Watson (1987:29) criticized anthropologists for "claiming to confront reflexivity while merely managing it." What is reflexivity? What is intersubjectivity? In what ways should ethnographies be reflexive? Is analysis and interpretation shortchanged as interaction is elaborated? How ethnographic is reflexive anthropology? We will consider these issues over the next few seminars in our discussion of Behar’s Translated Woman.

Exercise: Does a dialogical approach lead to a fetishism of the self? Discuss in light of Beharís two chapters in The Vulnerable Observer. OR Should we be sympathetic to an ianthropology that breaks your heart.

VIII. What is Feminist Ethnography?
October 27
Assigned reading:
Fran Mascia-Lees, Pat Sharpe and Colleen Cohen
1989 The postmodernist turn in anthropology: Cautions from a feminist perspective. Signs 15(1):7-33. [f]
Strathern, Marilyn  

Enslin, Elizabeth  

Visweswaren, Kamela  

Moore, Henrietta  

For Discussion: 
Strathern argues that feminist scholarship offers common ground between disciplines and yet cannot be parallel to the disciplines because it works across them. What does she mean? Why might feminist scholarship have made its greatest gains in anthropology, literature and history? What are the implications for the relationship between anthropology, literature and feminism? What might it mean to look at the social constitution of knowledge from a feminist and anthropological perspective? Address these questions by illustrating your answers with readings and ethnographic cases from the course as a whole so far.

Exercise: What is feminist ethnography? OR should (can) there be feminist ethnography?

**IX. Feminist Ethnography: Practice**

November 3  
Assigned Reading:  
Behar, Ruth  

Frank, Gelya  

For Discussion:  
What are Behar's representational strategies? Select one that you think is effective (or not) and document its occurrence throughout the ethnography. Does she establish ethnographic authority? How or how not? OR Discuss the ways in which autobiography can be a form of social analysis.
Exercise:
Does Behar's biography in the shadow make you squirm (see Frank)?

X. Politics of Representation: Sexuality in Literature and Film
November 10
Assigned Reading:
DuPuis, Reshela

Bird, Carmen

Jolly, Margaret

Boon, James A.

Viewing: Jane Campion's "The Piano"

Exercise: Map out a carefully argued anthropologically grounded response to an aspect of either DuPuisís or Birdís discussion of "The Piano." OR Map out the issues involved in constructing a representation (in film) of the past. What are the politics involved in such a representation? What place do our late twentieth century politics have in such a representation?

XI. Politics of Representation: Pacific Tourism/Travel in Literature
November 24
Assigned Reading:
Sharrad, Paul
1990 Imagining the Pacific. Meanjin 49(4): 597-606. [f]

Hau'ofa, Epeli

Heroniko, Vilsoni
Pratt, Mary L.

Theroux, Paul

Farber, Tom

Hau'ofa, Epeli

Exercise: Select one of Hau'ofa's chapters to present in class and be prepared to address how Hau'ofa models the fusion of anthropology and literature. What devices does he use? OR What voice(s) does he assume? What might he have to say to Paul Theroux, to Tom Farber?

XII. Politics of Representation: Race/Class in Pacific Literature
November 24
Assigned Reading:
Yamanaka, Lois-Ann

Caraway, Nancie

Wilson, Rob

For Discussion/Exercise: Defend Yamanaka from those critics who maintain that she is not a Hawaiian author. If not, from where does she write? OR Discuss the ways in which Yamanaka's novel is/is not ethnography. Consider the parallels between Yamanaka's representation of child molestation and colonialism.

XIII. Politics of Representation: Literature in The New Pacific
December 1
Assigned Reading:
Wendt, Albert  

Farber, Tom  

Bhaba, Homi  

Ellis, Juniper  

For Discussion: Formulate (and map out response) to a focused question of your own.  

**XIV. And V. Project Discussions**  
Draft due in Week XIV. Final draft due in Week XV. Typed, double-spaced, one inch margins, pages numbered, elite typeface (if possible), proofread. Follow bibliographical format outlined in American Ethnologist, Style Guide (on reserve). Prepare for class distribution a one page critical summary of your paper that raises points for discussion and consolidates course readings.  

Paper Topics: Select one of the following topics. You may focus on any texts you choose within the constraints of the topic, but I have provided some prompt questions and possible sources to get you started.  

(1) Reading novels as ethnography/reading novels anthropologically  
Using Handler and Segal's analysis of Jane Austen's work as your theoretical basis, select another author and read his/her fiction as ethnography. You might for example select a novel by a contemporary detective fiction writer such as Agatha Christie, or a literary classic such as a Henry James novel. How is fiction different from ethnography? What does it mean to read fiction as ethnography? How is this question answered when you juxtapose fiction with the ethnographic corpus, for example Christie against rural British ethnographies?  

(2) The "anthropological novel"  
The classic example here is Eleanor Bowen's Return to Laughter but one might include detective novels by authors such as Tony Hillerman (The Blessing Way, The Skinwalkers), or Barbara Pym (Murder at Government House) which also are packed with ethnographic information. Are these novels ethnography? In what ways are they distinct? How might Clifford's notion of ethnographic allegory apply? Does the novel allow for a more complex representation of reality? Look at Nash and Wintrob's (1972) "The emergence of self-consciousness in ethnography," Current Anthropology 13(5):527-542 and consider the role of self-consciousness in ethnography. What are the advantages of fictionalizing ethnographic experience?
(3) Native history and native literature
Although interpretive anthropology is clearly concerned with getting at the native's point of view, "what the devil they think they are up to," it has been less than comfortable with the native's own telling. How are we to approach and read native history and literature? Can we use such native expressions as data, as cultural artifacts? What modifications might the ethnographer have to make in doing so? You may consider for example the work of Chinua Achebe (Arrow of God, Things Fall Apart), D.T. Niane (Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali), Keri Hulme The Bone People, Witi Ihimaera (The Matriarch, Tangi) among others. American authors such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker may also belong here.

(4) The travelogue as ethnography
Read Mary Louise Pratt's "Fieldwork in common places" (IN Clifford 1986 Writing Culture) and select a travelogue, for example, Claude Levi-Strauss's Tristes Tropiques or an excerpt from Captain Cook's journals or Mark Twain's travels in Hawaii. Pratt sees the ethnographic genre as continuous, or flowing out of, the traditional genre of travel accounts. The continuity rests in the blending of first and third person, personal narrative and objective description. What separates ethnography from travel accounts? How may Levi-Strauss's Tristes Tropiques (and others) be read as an extension of the literary tradition of travel accounts? Is it anthropology or literature? Pratt speaks of a "contradiction between the engagement called for in fieldwork [personal] and the self-effacement [impersonal] called for in formal ethnographic description..." (p. 33). How is this tension appropriate to Levi-Strauss's writing? Consider what significant implications Pratt's article or Levi-Strauss's book (or other travelogue) holds for the future of ethnography. See also Thomas (1992) below.

(5) Diaries and letters as ethnography
Here you might examine the diaries and letters of anthropologists (see for example Malinowski's diary or Mead's letters) or you might read diaries and letters of "informants" as data for "doing" ethnography. What does it mean to read a given literary form anthropologically? How are such forms distinct from ethnographic writing? Are they ethnography? See Nicholas Thomas's (1992) "Against ethnography," Cultural Anthropology 6(3):306-322 for a critical distinction between fieldwork, ethnographic analysis, and writing ethnography.

(6) Designing a course in anthropology and literature or postcolonial literature. This may be a regional (such as Latin America or Southern Africa or US South) or national (for example Ireland or Morocco) or ethnic course (for example, Latino/Latina or gay/lesbian) or it might be topical (for example, science fiction as ethnography, or detective fiction as ethnography). Syllabus design should follow this one.

This syllabus reflects the influence of Bill Rodmanís syllabus, "Interpretive Anthropology," and Geoffrey White and Vilsoni Heroniko's 1997 Summer NEH syllabus, "Politics of Representation."