

## COMM 517: Seminar in Rhetorical Theory and Culture

Summer, 2007

(Class #20617D) 2:00-4:50 MTRF, THH 219

*Professor:* Dr. Randy Lake

*Office:* ASC 206C

*Hours:* By appointment (I am teaching another class in the mornings on these days, so my schedule unfortunately is extremely tight. I do plan to be in my office for some time on Wednesdays.)

*Telephone:* (213) 740-3946

*E-mail:* [rlake@usc.edu](mailto:rlake@usc.edu) (This is the most efficient way to reach me. I check my e-mail regularly during the weekday, when I am in the office. However, weekends and evenings are much more sporadic so, if you e-mail me at these times, please do not expect an immediate reply.)

*Course Description and Objectives:* This course examines a number of 20th-century approaches to rhetorical theory, with particular emphasis on cultural symbols. Several key questions will guide our inquiry: what is the capacity for human symbol use, and how did it come about? what role do symbols play in the construction of selves? in association with others? in the creation of cultures? what are the cultural forms of symbolic expression and how are they to be understood? and what are the politics of such understanding?

In seeking answers to these questions, we will engage the spectrum from idealist to pragmatist to structuralist to critical to postmodernist approaches. This course is not a survey of anthropology and ethnography; rather, it is an in-depth examination of certain fundamental ways to thematize “culture” as an issue in rhetorical theory, that is, as a component of the processes by which humans create and respond to symbols. This course is designed to complement other offerings in rhetoric and across the curriculum, including 511, 515, 519, 522, 605, and 636, in both the theorists it covers and the perspective from which these theorists are discussed.

### *Basic Texts:*

George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934)

Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man* (1944)

\_\_\_\_\_, *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences* (1942; formerly known as *The Logic of the Humanities*)

Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (3rd ed; 1957)

\_\_\_\_\_, *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling* (abridged ed.; 1988)

Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (1963)

Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969)

Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973)

James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (1988)

Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991)

Ted C. Lewellen, *The Anthropology of Globalization* (2002)

Additional readings as assigned.

*Format:* Seminar style, which places a premium on discussion

*Assignments:*

1) Come to each class session with a handful of key terms and 2-3 key questions raised for you by the readings.

2) A project of your design and execution, relevant to the scope of the course and related to the general topic of rhetoric and cultural symbols. It may be an individual or group project; if the latter, all members of the group will receive the same grade. I encourage you to consult with me on the direction you take. Your goal should be a paper of publishable quality. Please be advised that I will assign an “Incomplete” only under truly extraordinary circumstances.

3) Reports on supplementary readings, as assigned.

*Tentative Daily Syllabus:* It may be necessary to modify this schedule a bit.

R 5/17            Introduction to the course  
                  **Lewellen, Chs. 1-3, 5-6**

F 5/18            Self and Other Find Themselves: George Herbert Mead  
                  **MSS, introduction, Pts. I-III**

M 5/21 Self and Other Create Society: Mead redux  
                  **MSS, Pt. IV; “Fragments on Ethics”**

T 5/22            Self and Other Create Cultural Forms: Ernst Cassirer  
                  **Essay**

R 5/24            The “Science” of Cultural Forms: Cassirer redux  
                  **Logic**

F 5/25            The New Key to Cultural Forms--the Symbol: Susanne Langer  
                  **PNK**

T 5/29            Mind, Feeling, and Cultural Forms: Langer once more with feeling  
                  **M:EHF, Chs. 1, 3-11, 16-23**

R 5/31            Structures of Culture: Claude Levi-Strauss  
                  **Structural, Chs. I-IV, X-XI, XIII, XV**

F 6/1             Structure and Anti-Structure: Victor Turner  
                  **Ritual**

- M 6/4 Describing Culture Through Thick and Thin: Clifford Geertz  
***Interpretation, Pts. I-III***
- T 6/5 Thicker and Thinner: Geertz redux  
***Interpretation, Pts. IV-V***
- R 6/7 From Description to Postmodern Critique: James Clifford  
***Predicament, introduction, Pt. 1***
- F 6/8 Critiquing Ourselves: Clifford redux  
***Predicament, Pts. 2-4***
- M 6/11 Retreat From the Postmodern Abyss--Self and Other in High Modernity: Anthony Giddens  
***Modernity, introduction, Chs. 1-3***
- T 6/12 Advancing to the Rear?: Giddens redux  
***Modernity, Chs. 4-7***