

Anthropology 365
**LIFE HISTORY, (AUTO)BIOGRAPHY, AND THE QUESTION OF THE
SUBJECT**

TH 4:00-6:50PM, GFS 108
Fall 2014

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How can we know ourselves and “others”? How do culture, power, history, and meaningful social forces/ axes of power such as gender, race, sexuality, class, colonialism, among others, shape/ constrain/ enable living a life? We will engage these questions as they have been addressed in Anthropology and in other (inter)disciplines.

Undergirding the practice of life history are (tacit) assumptions—both theoretical and commonsensical—of the subject/ self/ person/ individual. Conventional U.S. ideology posits the existence of a pre-linguistic, pre-cultural “self” or individual, separate from society. We will engage with and problematize this ideological notion of the individual and of the self/ world binary throughout the course.

Anthropology encompasses a rich history of engaging with questions of (power-laden) cultural difference. How do we think about the category of the “human” in the wake of cross-cultural evidence that destabilizes the human/ non-human binary, and in the light of theoretical developments in the U.S. and European academies that problematize the borders among human/ animal/ object/ machine? What notions of the “self” or “subject” subtend conventional modes of narrating lives in (auto)biography and life history? In a related register, whose lives are conventionally seen as worth telling? Further, the course argues that the actual form of the (auto)biography—with its protagonist (as hero) and its conventional deployment of linear time—reinscribes power-laden cultural assumptions and the forces of gender, race, class, sexuality, among other axes of power. Can anthropological theory and poststructuralist theories of the subject help to destabilize these conventions?

Throughout the course, thinking structurally, culturally, and historically will be crucial. For example, does time move in purely linear fashion? What residues and hauntings from the past and from historical trauma might continue to shape the present and the ways that we live? And how might thinking about the imbrications of “larger social forces” and the subject/ self/ person disrupt conventional assumptions that underlie ideologies, politics, academic theories, artistic practice? For example, many iterations of mind/body dualism still grip our imaginations, such as the binary between theory and practice. The subject/world binary is another relatively intractable dualism that both anthropological ethnography and poststructuralist theory challenge.

Finally, we take up the question of genre and aesthetic/ cultural form as central to the production of the subject. What difference does it make when a self/ subject is produced/ produces itself through narrative? Drama and performance? Music? Poetry Photos? Film? Social media? Do new notions of subjectivity/ self/ and (auto)biography emerge from the internet and its many innovations? Finally, how might culturally different notions of death shape the ways we conceptualize our lives? Questions of genre, form, and culturally/ historically specific notions of narrative, life, death, and the subject are all salient here.

During the semester, you will have the opportunity to engage in fieldwork, to interview and perform each other, to render (auto)biography in multiple registers, and to give presentations on readings. Active participation is the key, and the course will be as meaningful for you as the effort you devote to the projects.

I encourage both theoretical rigor and creativity. The aim of the course is to hone critical skills and to foster creative border crossings. I look forward to an engaging, intellectually productive, FUN semester.

BOOKS

The following have been ordered from the USC bookstore:

- Vincent Crapanzano, TUHAMI: PORTRAIT OF A MOROCCAN
- Michel Foucault, THE HISTORY OF SEXUALITY, VOL. 1
- David Henry Hwang, YELLOW FACE
- Carolyn Steedman, LANDSCAPE FOR A GOOD WOMAN

ARTICLES ON BLACKBOARD

- Ayad Akhtar, "On Reading Plays," DISGRACED
- Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, Introduction, NEW MATERIALISMS: ONTOLOGY, AGENCY, AND POLITICS
- David L. Eng, Chapter 5, THE FEELING OF KINSHIP, QUEER LIBERALISM AND THE RACIALIZATION OF INTIMACY
- Charles Keil et al., Foreword and Introduction, MY MUSIC
- Dorinne Kondo, Chapters 1 and 7, CRAFTING SELVES: POWER, GENDER, AND DISCOURSES OF IDENTITY IN A JAPANESE WORKPLACE
- ---, "(En)Acting Theory: Anna Deavere Smith, the Subject, Writing"
- ---, "(Re)Visions of Race," from THEATRE JOURNAL
- ---, SEAMLESS: A PLAY IN TWO ACTS
- Tia deNora, "Music and Self-Identity," MUSIC IN EVERYDAY LIFE
- Edward Said, Introduction, ORIENTALISM
- Deborah Wong, Chapter 14, SPEAK IT LOUDER

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Because of the nature of the material, the size of the class, and my commitment to feminist pedagogy, the class will be run as a seminar. Consequently, ACTIVE participation is critical. We won't have a class if no one has done the reading or contributes to discussion. Grades will be assigned according to the following criteria:

I. Participation: Discussion and Attendance 30%

To promote an active, engaged atmosphere, your effort and enthusiasm are critically important. Attendance, both physical and mental, is key. At each class, I will solicit a question from each member of the class in order to help guide our discussions, in addition to any remarks or contextualizing of the readings that I might provide. I would like to hear from each of you, so that you will have the opportunity to voice your reactions to the material—and perhaps we will be able to engage in generative debate! READING the material beforehand is thus crucial. If it seems to me that students are not completing the reading assignments, I will institute an additional requirement that will involve posting summaries to Blackboard before each class.

II. Presentation 10%

The presentation should comprise a short summary and questions/ provocations for discussion. No more than 15 minutes, please! We want to engage the issues as a class, but the presentation will help set the stage. As with the discussion questions I solicit from all members of the class, the provocations should raise open-ended issues rather than simply solicit information.

III. Projects 60% (20% each)

Three projects are required during the semester.

A. The first—an icebreaker—involves interviewing a classmate and performing him/ her. Don't worry if you don't have an acting background. The acuity of observation/ analysis of your interviewee is critical here, as is your insight into your process. This exercise is based on the work of Anna Deavere Smith, who is known for interviewing people and performing them on stage, in what anthropologists could see as “performative ethnography.” Accordingly, we will engage in an exercise that involves interviewing each other and presenting those performances, along with a short written analysis of your process. I have been a dramaturg for three world premieres of Smith's plays, and her acting theory can lead into fascinating insights into a character/ person's distinctiveness and his/her (our language betrays us!) reproduction of convention in constructing a putatively “unique” identity.

B. The second project will involve autobiography, ideally in discursive/ narrative form. This essay / narrative will be 7-10 pages.

C. The final project allows three different possibilities:

- 1) reprising the interview/ performance in another register—e.g., film, poetry, music, analysis of meaningful objects, etc.
- 2) reprising the autobiography in another register.
- 3) interviewing a different informant, again using a mode of representation for the final project that is different from narrative alone.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students must work independently on all individual assignments; collaborating on individual assignments is considered cheating and will be penalized accordingly. All USC students are responsible for reading and following the USC Student Conduct Code, which prohibits plagiarism. Some examples of behavior that is not allowed are: copying all or part of someone else's work (by hand or by looking at others' files, either secretly or if shown), and submitting it as your own; giving another student in the class a copy of your assignment solution; consulting with another student during an exam; and copying text from published literature without proper attribution. If you have questions about what is allowed, please discuss it with the instructor.

Students who violate University standards of academic integrity are subject to disciplinary sanctions, including failure in the course and suspension from the University. Since dishonesty in any form harms the individual, other students, and the University, policies on academic integrity will be strictly enforced.

LAPTOP AND PHONE POLICY

Laptops and phones are banned unless you are doing a presentation that requires power point or other visuals. I will happily confiscate your technology for the duration of the class period if you violate the policy.

Many of the readings are online, for your convenience. Please print out readings so that we can refer closely to the texts in class. The cost of printing is far less than the price of a reader produced through custom publishing.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1

Thursday, 8/28

Introduction: How can we know another? Ourselves?

Week 2

Thursday, 9/4

Anthropological Approaches: the interview process and concepts of self/subject

Readings:

Vincent Crapanzano, *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan*

Dorinne Kondo, from *Crafting Selves*, chapters 1 and 7.

INDIVIDUAL LIVES AND SOCIAL FORCES: DISRUPTING THE SUBJECT/ WORLD BINARY

Week 3

Thursday, 9/11

Sexuality, Power, and the Subject

Readings:

Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution."

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, selections.

Week 4

Thursday, 9/18

Interviewing and performing (racialized and gendered) others

Readings:

Anna Deavere Smith, from *Talk to Me*.

Dorinne Kondo, "(En)acting Theory," unpublished ms.

Kondo, "(Re)visions of Race," *Theatre Journal*.

Film:

Anna Deavere Smith, *HBO Master Class*

Exercise:

Interviews with each other. Bring recording devices.

Week 5

Thursday, 9/25

Performances of your interviewee.

Due:

3-5 page summary of the process, relating it to issues of the subject, power, representation, race/ gender, performance, due at the beginning of class.

Week 6

Thursday 10/2

Lecture by Simeon Man, Provost Postdoctoral Fellow, on war and the militarization of Hawaii. He draws in part from oral history, so we will be able to see how historians deploy oral historical material and what “larger” issues individual lives might point toward. The lecture is part of the ASE Commons Lecture Series. I will keep you posted as to the venue, as this has not yet been determined.

Week 7

Thursday 10/9

Gender, Class, Race, Genre

Film: *56 Up*

Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*

AUTO/BIOGRAPHY, GENRE-BENDING AND THE (NON) NARRATIVE: “TELLING LIVES” IN MULTIPLE WAYS

Week 8

Thursday 10/16

The material world: objects, machines, technology

Janet Hoskins, from *Biographical Objects*

Coole and Frost, from *New Materialisms*, Introduction

Poletti and Rak, *Identity Technologies*, Part One (three chapters).

Presentations: everyone please bring in an object or equivalent. If you are using social media, a laptop would be acceptable for this session.

Week 9

Thursday 10/23

“Telling” a Life in Music

Readings:

Deborah Wong, from *Speak It Louder*

Charles Keil et. al., editors, Introduction from *My Music*

Tia De Nora, from *Music in Everyday Life*

Assignment:

Bring in music that means something to you. Be prepared to talk about its autobiographical significance.

Week 10

Thursday 10/30

Genre-bending and race

Readings:

Ayad Akhtar, "How to Read a Play"

David Henry Hwang, *Yellow Face*

Edward Said, from *Orientalism*

Week 11

Thursday 11/6

Autobiography due.

Week 12

Thursday 11/13

Memory, Historical Trauma, and the (I'm)possibility of Knowing

Readings:

David Eng, from *The Feeling of Kinship*

Dorinne Kondo, "Seamless."

Film:

Rea Tajiri, "History and Memory"

Week 13

Thursday 11/20

How do we encapsulate a life? Poetry and mourning

Reading:

Renato Rosaldo, *The Day of Shelly's Death*.

Michelle Rosaldo, chapter from *Knowledge and Passion*.

Week 14

Thanksgiving Break

Week 15

Thursday 12/4

Conclusion; final presentations.

Paper due: December 8 at 10 a.m. on Blackboard, Turnitin.