

COMM 517: Rhetorical Theory and Culture

Spring, 2021

Class #20795

3:30-6:20 Th

Professor: Dr. Randy Lake

Office: ASC 206C (Currently unavailable)

Office Hours: By appointment

Contact Information:

Phone: (218) 226-4693

Email: rlake@usc.edu. This is the most efficient way to reach me. I check my email frequently during weekdays. However, evenings and weekends are much more sporadic so, if you email me at these times, please do not expect an immediate reply.

Please note: I will be located in the Central time zone until further notice (2 hours later than Los Angeles).

I wish to acknowledge that USC lies in the traditional land of the Tongva people and I strive to honor the path they have shown in caring for this place for generations past, present, and future.

Course Description and Objectives:

This course examines certain foundational 20th- and 21st-century theories regarding the symbolic bases of human culture. 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 poststructuralist 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 a component of the processes by which humans create and respond to symbols. This course is designed to complement other offerings across the curriculum, in both the theorists it covers and the perspective from which these theorists are discussed.

Core Readings:

The course will orient around:

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

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

—, *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences* (1942; formerly *The Logic of the Humanities*)

Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942; 3rd ed. 1957)
—, *Feeling and Form* (1953)
Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (1963)
Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973)
Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (1974)
James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (1988)
Christian Meyer and Felix Girke, eds., *The Rhetorical Emergence of Culture* (2011)

I anticipate that we will engage portions of most of these works. However, we will not read all of them in their entirety; we may not read a few of them at all; and we will engage additional readings. To this end, I have left space in my course planning for student requests; I welcome your suggestions for other materials that would enrich the course, given its general thrust and objectives.

Two useful secondary resources are:

Rapport, Nigel, and Joanna Overing. *Social and Cultural Anthropology: The Key Concepts*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2007.
Barnard, Alan, and Jonathan Spencer, eds. *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Format:

This class emphasizes collaborative learning, in which we jointly ask questions of the material and each other and explore possible answers. In short, the class is heavily discussion-oriented. Do not expect to sit on your hands and be told everything you need to know. Instead, be prepared to engage the material—to offer comments, ask and answer questions—in conversation with your classmates and your instructor. In order to facilitate discussion, it is *imperative* that you engage the material assigned *before class* each week and engage it sufficiently to formulate some thoughts and questions.

Assignments:

- ❑ Weekly (beginning January 28) reaction papers, uploaded to Blackboard no later than 7:00 p.m., Pacific time, on Wednesdays. Treat these as opportunities to ask questions of, apply, amend, extend, emend, explore implications of, evaluate, and otherwise engage the readings, not simply to summarize them. 20 pts. (20%)
- ❑ Reports. Please prepare comprehensive written notes (in outline or other appropriate form) on assigned materials for distribution; oral reports should highlight, elaborate, supplement, etc., the written notes. 10 pts. (10%)
- ❑ Discussion. As befits a doctoral seminar, the heart of the course. The quality of your contributions matters more than their quantity. 40 pts. (40%)
- ❑ Seminar paper. An original scholarly research project that engages course materials, themes, and concepts, and culminates in a written paper suitable for submission to an academic conference. 30 pts. (30%)

Total: 100 pts. (100%) Your instructor reserves the right to curve course grades when converting from points to letter grades.

Add/Drop Dates for Session 001 (15 weeks: 1/15/2021 – 4/30/2021; Final Exam Period: 5/5-12/2021)

Friday, February 5: Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

Friday, February 5: Last day to drop a class without a mark of “W,” except for Monday-only classes, and receive a refund for Session 001

Tuesday, February 9: Last day to drop a Monday-only class without a mark of “W” and receive a refund for Session 001

Friday, March 5: Last day to drop a course without a mark of “W” on the transcript for Session 001. Mark of “W” will still appear on student record and STARS report and tuition charges still apply. [Please drop any course by the end of week three (or the 20 percent mark of the session) to avoid tuition charges.]

Friday, March 5: Last day to change pass/no pass to letter grade for Session 001. [All major and minor courses must be taken for a letter grade.]

Friday, April 9: Last day to drop a class with a mark of “W” for Session 001

Tentative Weekly Syllabus:

For the reasons given above, some modifications in this schedule undoubtedly will be needed.

January 21 Introduction to the course
Read: **Strecker and Tyler, *Culture and Rhetoric*, “Introduction”; Rapport and Overing, “Culture”; Rapport and Overing, “Agent and Agency”; Barnard and Spencer, “Culture,” in Barnard and Spencer, 136-43.**

January 28 George Herbert Mead I
Read: **Miller, *George Herbert Mead: Self, Language, and the World*, “Introduction,” Ch. 1; Joas, *G. H. Mead: A Contemporary Re-examination of his Thought*, Ch. 1; *Mind, Self, and Society*, Introduction, Parts 1-3**

February 4 George Herbert Mead II
Read: ***Mind, Self, and Society*, Part 4; Joas, Chs. 2, 9; Cook, *George Herbert Mead: The Making of a Social Pragmatist*, Ch. 7; Aboulafia, *The Cosmopolitan Self: George Herbert Mead and Continental Philosophy*, Ch. 1.**

If possible (feel free to skim): Mead, "The Nature of Aesthetic Experience," in Reck, *Selected Writings*, Ch. 19; Mead, "Fragments on Ethics," in *Mind, Self, and Society*, 379-89; Miller, Chs. 14-15.

- February 11 Ernst Cassirer I
Read: Gawronsky, "Ernst Cassirer: His Life and His Work," in Schilpp, *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer*, 3-37; *An Essay on Man*, Chs. 1-8; Langer, "On Cassirer's Theory of Language and Myth," in Schilpp, 379-400.
- February 18 Ernst Cassirer II
Read: *An Essay on Man*, Chs. 9-12; "The Myth of the State," in Verene, *Symbol, Myth, and Culture: Essays and Lectures of Ernst Cassirer 1935-1945*, 217-67 [includes: "Philosophy and Politics," "Judaism and the Modern Political Myths," and "The Technique of Our Modern Political Myths"].
Reports: (1) Krois, *Cassirer: Symbolic Forms and History*--concentrate on Introduction, Chs. 1-2, 5. (2) Lipton, *Ernst Cassirer: The Dilemma of a Liberal Intellectual in Germany 1914-33*--concentrate on Chs. 1, 6, 8-10. (3) Skidelsky, *Ernst Cassirer: The Last Philosopher of Culture*--concentrate on Introduction, Chs. 1, 4-5, 7-9.
- February 25 Susanne K. Langer I
Read: Dryden, "Susanne K. Langer," in Dematteis and McHenry, *American Philosophers 1950-2000*, 189-99; *Philosophy in a New Key*, Chs. 1-7 [skim 1-2]
- March 4 Susanne K. Langer II
Read: *Philosophy in a New Key*, Chs. 8-10; *Feeling and Form*, Chs. 1-6; Reports: (1) *Feeling and Form*, Chs. 7-12 [on music/dance]. (2) *Feeling and Form*, Chs. 13-16 [on literature]. (3) *Feeling and Form*, Chs. 17-19, Appendix [on drama/cinema]; Campbell, *Form and the Art of Theatre*, Ch. 3 [concentrate on pp. 61-70, concerning tragedy and comedy].
- March 11 Claude Lévi-Strauss; Victor Turner
Read: D'Anglure, "Lévi-Strauss, Claude," in Barnard and Spencer, 333-36; Bloch, "Structuralism," in Barnard and Spencer, 530-35; *Structural Anthropology*, Chs. 1, 3, 10-11, 13, 15; Shipton, "Turner, Victor (1920-1983)"; *The Ritual Process*, Ch. 3; *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, Chs. 1, 5-6.
- March 18 Clifford Geertz
Read: Polster, "Geertz, Clifford James"; Rapport and Overing, "Interpretation"; *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Chs. 1-2, 6, 8, 13-15.

Report: Geertz, *Local Knowledge*, Introduction, Chs. 1-5.

- March 25* James Clifford
Read: Barnard and Spencer, "Reflexivity"; Rapport and Overing, "Auto-Anthropology"; *The Predicament of Culture*, Introduction, Chs. 1-3, 9, 12
- April 8* (Re)Inventing the Wheel? Part I
Read: Meyer and Girke, Introduction; Part 1
- April 15* (Re)Inventing the Wheel? Part II
Read: Meyer and Girke, Parts 2-3
- April 22* Wellness Day—NO CLASS
- April 29* Presentations

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

The Annenberg School for Communication is committed to upholding the University's academic integrity code as detailed in the *SCampus* guide. It is the policy of the School of Communication to report all violations of the code. Any serious violation or pattern of violations of the academic integrity code will result in the student's expulsion from the Communication major or minor.

If you have any doubts about what is and is not an academic integrity violation, please check with me. The University presumes that you are familiar with its standards and policies; should you be found to have committed a violation, ignorance of these standards and policies will not be accepted as an excuse.

Support Systems

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press "0" after hours – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298
equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298
usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776 dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710 campussupport.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101 diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation,

and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call [dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu](https://dps.usc.edu/emergency.usc.edu)

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Annenberg Student Success Fund

annenbergscholarships.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenbergscholarships-and-awards

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.

Breaking Bread Program undergrad.usc.edu/faculty/bread/

The Breaking Bread Program is designed to provide individual undergraduate students with an opportunity to meet and have scholarly discussions with faculty members outside of the normal classroom setting. Through this program, students and faculty enjoy good company and great conversation by literally “breaking bread” over a meal together and USC will pick up the tab! Your meal event can take place anywhere outside of the normal classroom setting. Your venue can be a restaurant or eatery on or off-campus.