Introduction to Expressive Culture

The purpose of this course is to introduce the concept of culture as a crucial dimension of human life. Because we tend to think of thought and action as stemming from individual impulses, we find the notion of a shared, highly variable, but influential force in our lives hard to fathom. Even if we speak of "society" as a familiar concept, we tend to make of it a uniform, oppressive force, some institution outside ourselves that we individually confront and oppose. Yet only if we can learn to recognize how deeply we share certain assumptions and inclinations with others—but only some others, and to varying degrees—can we appreciate the degree to which culture inheres within us and makes us who we are.

The course begins by considering the many inferences we draw, often unconsciously, when we look at people’s faces and when we listen to them speak, that is, what implicit meanings we find in someone’s appearance and accent. Implicit meanings become particularly noteworthy in expressive genres, such as folklore and mass media. So we will turn our attention to the kinds of meanings, implicit and explicit, that analysts have found (or argued about) in fairy tales. We will then consider how similar kinds of analyses might be made of a number of films, including American, English, and Asian ones: how they, too, constitute something like fairy tales.

An introductory course cannot cover any single topic in great depth. My intention is to compensate for that fact by pointing to some of the many intriguing and timely issues that the subject of expressive culture opens up. My hope is that this survey will entice students into looking into these issues in greater depth in later coursework. More importantly, I hope that the course will enable students to analyze their own experience in cultural, rather than purely individual, psychological terms.

My office hours this semester are on Tuesday afternoons from 2:00 till 4:00. However, I realize that students may not be able to come to my office at this time. Please feel free to email me to arrange to meet me at another time. You do not have to have a formal agenda to justify a visit to my office. I am happy to speak with students on matters of general interest. If you come to my office during office hours or when we have set up an appointment but find that I am speaking with someone else, please let me know that you are waiting.

Reading and viewing assignments:

Readings will be available as pdf files on the Canvas site for the course. The book, Sleuthing the Alamo, by James Crisp, is available in new and used copies at the University Co-op Bookstore. All reading is required. Copies will also be available at the PCL Reserves desk.
The course includes a number of films that will be shown on Monday and Tuesday evenings (with the exception of Thanksgiving Week, see below) at 6 p.m. If you do not attend either of the screenings of a film arranged for the class, you are obliged to arrange to see it on your own time.

Grading and exams: There will be two mid-term exams and a final essay. Each of the exams will be worth twenty-two points; the final essay will be worth twenty-four. The rest of a student’s grade (32%) will be based on ten (out of a possible twelve) weekly comments students write on the reading and/or viewing (each worth two points), and attendance and participation in section discussion (worth a total of twelve points). Each comment must be submitted through Canvas before your section meets. No credit will be given if you fail to attend class: simply submitting your comment does not suffice. No comments will be required during the first week, Thanksgiving week, or the final week of the semester. Assignments cannot be made up. No options for getting extra credit are available in this course.

Classes will consist of both lecture and discussion. Students are expected to attend class and to be prepared to enter into discussion. Students are also expected to come to class punctually and remain throughout class. Consistent tardiness or frequent absence must be explained.

Please do not use laptop computers or cell phones during class.

Lectures Online

I have agreed to have the course linked to the Lectures Online recording system. This system records the audio and video material presented in class for you to review after class. Links for the recordings will appear in the Lectures Online tab on the Canvas page for this class.

To watch a recording, simply click on the Lectures Online navigation tab and follow the instructions presented to you on the page. You can learn more about how to use the Lectures Online system at http://sites.la.utexas.edu/lecturesonline/.

Recordings are presented free of charge through the 12th class day. After the 12th class day you will need to pay a one-time course materials charge to gain access to all recordings for the class.

Students with disabilities

Students with disabilities are welcome to take this course. Accommodation will be made for such students in accordance with whatever arrangements a student makes with the Office for Students with Disabilities. Please provide your TA and me with documentation of those arrangements as soon as possible. Please do not wait until immediately before a mid-term to speak with us about this matter.
Students under stress

Undergraduates are entering upon a particularly exciting and stressful period in their lives. Many feel overwhelmed at times and they may not have systems of support established yet to help them deal with the challenges that necessarily arise. It is therefore important to know that counseling services are available at UT. I have myself benefited greatly from various forms of psychotherapy over the years and would urge students to take advantage of the help they can get from trained counselors on campus. Here’s where to find out more: [https://cmhc.utexas.edu/](https://cmhc.utexas.edu/)

Gender and sexuality are particularly likely to generate questions and anxiety. Here is a resource for all students who want help thinking through these matters: [http://diversity.utexas.edu/genderandsexuality/](http://diversity.utexas.edu/genderandsexuality/)

Schedule

**Week 1**  
August 30 – September 1  
Introduction: What do we infer from looking at people’s faces?

Reading:  
You are required to look at the following web pages:  
[http://homepage.psy.utexas.edu/homepage/group/LangloisLAB/facialattract.html](http://homepage.psy.utexas.edu/homepage/group/LangloisLAB/facialattract.html)  
[http://homepage.psy.utexas.edu/homepage/group/LangloisLAB/averagenessbeauty.html](http://homepage.psy.utexas.edu/homepage/group/LangloisLAB/averagenessbeauty.html)  
[http://homepage.psy.utexas.edu/homepage/group/LangloisLAB/preferences.html](http://homepage.psy.utexas.edu/homepage/group/LangloisLAB/preferences.html)

If you are intrigued and want to know more about Dr. Langlois’s research, you are encouraged to download the following article:  

Although much of the article is technical, reading p. 390 to the top of p. 395, and pp. 404-408 will give you the gist of the study and results. This reading is optional but worthwhile.

**Notes that sections will meet on Friday as usual.**

**Week 2**  
September 4 – 8  
What do we infer from listening to people speak?

No class Monday, September 4, Labor Day.

Reading:  
GN 316 M87 1989
Required viewing:
*American Tongues* VIDCASS 5999 UGL AV Collection Reserves (56 min)
Tuesday, September 5, at 6 p.m., in WRW 102

**Week 3**  
**September 11 - 15** What do we learn from fairy tales? Psychological and sociological perspectives.

Reading:
GR 550 B47 1989

GR 550 Z58 1997

**Week 4**  
**September 18 - 22** What else do we learn from fairy tales? Feminist perspectives.

Reading:
GR 550 W38 1994

**Week 5**  
**September 25 - 29** How do people imagine themselves as members of communities?


Reading:

**Week 6**  
**October 2 - 6** How do communities differ?

Reading:
GT 95 I58 1992

**Week 7**  
**October 9 - 13** Does history consist of stories?

Reading:
F 390 C79 200

**Week 8**  
**October 16 - 20** How do we like to represent ourselves?
Reading:
Crisp, James E. *Sleuthing the Alamo*. Pp. 103-98.
F 390 C79 200

Required viewing:
*The Alamo*, directed by John Wayne. DVD 3377 (162 min.)
Monday, October 16, and Tuesday, October 17, in WRW 102, at 6 p.m.

**Week 9**  **October 23 - 27**  **How do we represent ourselves when representing others?**

Reading:
G 1 N275 L88 1993

Required viewing:
*Pocohantas*, by Disney. DVD 3376 (81 min)
Monday, October 23, and Tuesday, October 24, in WRW 102, at 6 p.m.

**Week 10**  **October 30 – November 3**  **Others representing themselves.**

Readings:

Required Viewing:
*The Fast Runner (Atanarjuat)*. DVD 1344 (161 min)
Monday, October 30, and Tuesday, October 31, at 6 p.m. in WRW 102

**Week 11**  **November 6 - 10**  **Other others representing themselves.**

Reading:

Required viewing:
*Ong-Bak: the Thai Warrior*. DVD 4260 (105 min.)
Monday, November 6, and Tuesday, November 7, at 6 p.m. in WRW 102

**Week 12**  **November 13 - 17**  **Diasporic South Asians representing themselves.**

Reading:
PN 1993.5 I8 D47 2000

Required viewing:
*Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*. DVD 4306 (189 min)
Monday, November 13, and Tuesday, November 14, at 6 p.m. in WRW 102

**Week 13   November 20 - 21   Thanksgiving Week**

More diasporic South Asians representing themselves, differently.

Required viewing:
*Bend it like Beckham* DVD 1933 AV Library (112 min)
**Monday, November 20, only** at 6 p.m., in WRW 102

No class on Wednesday, November 22.

**Week 14   November 27 – December 1   What’s at stake in representations?**

Required viewing:
*The Occupation of the American Mind: Israel’s public relations war in the United States.*
Electronic resource (85 min)
Monday, November 27, and Tuesday, November 28, at 6 p.m in WRW 102.

**Week 15   December 4 - 8   Conclusion: What have you learned in this course?**

No additional reading. No additional viewing.

The final essay topic will be made available in class on Wednesday, December 6. It will be due at 12 noon on Friday, December 15. You must submit your final essay on Canvas.