RELG 282
The World Turned Upside Down: Carnival in Cross-Cultural Perspective

Spring 2009
Boliou 161
MW 9:50–11:00, F 9:40–10:40

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Course Description

When the rhythm calls, the government falls
Here come the cops
From Tokyo to Soweto
Viva la musica pop

We are black and white and dance all night
Down at the Hop
And the letters were tall on the Berlin Wall
Viva la musica pop

A comparative approach to carnival and related rituals of social inversion. Theoretical inquiry into carnival has traditionally pivoted on the question of resistance: Is dancing in the street a mechanism of social change? Landmark works to be considered include Bakhtin’s Rabelais and His World and Huizinga’s Homo Ludens. Ethnographic and historical accounts, supplemented by musical and film resources, will introduce representative carnivalesque observances: Holi in India, Holy Week in Guatemala, the World Renewal movements of Edo-period Japan, the Diggers and Levelers of early modern England, and of course Carnival in Brazil and Trinidad.

For a religion course, this offering will perhaps seem appropriately untraditional. The readings draw heavily from the ethnographic literature, and the three books that form the analytic core of the course each represent a distinct and influential orientation in social theory. I will provide lecture-style exposition as appropriate, but most class sessions should come to follow a loose discussion format. I will expect everyone to offer critical contributions in class discussion. A more structured way to participate in teaching the class to yourselves is provided in the group presentation assignment, in which teams of students will collaborate in researching and presenting information on diverse cultural and historical case studies that can help us understand carnivalesque practices in a variety of contexts and perspectives—historical, religious, critical, and ethnomusicological.

This too shall pass, so raise your glass
To change and chance
And freedom is the only law
Shall we dance....
Required Texts

M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*

Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*

James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*

*Reading assignments taken from sources outside of these books will be placed on e-reserve. Films and other visual media will also be made available as reserve materials.*

Course Requirements

1. Class participation: 15%
2. Film essay, 5–6 pp.: 10%
3. Midterm essay, 7–8 pp.: 25%
4. Group presentation: 15%
5. Final research paper, 10+ pp.: 35%

Boilerplate

1. Eating in class bugs me, so please don’t bring in anything solid to chow down on while class is in session. If you feel you have to, for blood sugar–related reasons or anything else, tell me about it before we begin.

2. I reserve the right to make fun of you if your cell phone goes off.

3. Please turn in all written assignments to me (or my office mailbox) on paper. It’s up to you to print it out in time, not up to me. And when I grade papers, I mark them up with comments, so make sure you pick them up!

4. Late assignment policy: In principle, pretty mellow. As far as I’m concerned, there’s one cardinal rule: *If you need more time than what I’ve indicated, get in touch and clear it with me.* I promise to be accessible—by e-mail, by office phone, and in person before and after class and at the office. Don’t be a stranger: if you need help with the assignments—whether your concerns are time-related, text-related, or anything else—consider me your first stop.

5. Reading assignments on this syllabus are subject to change. There’s no dearth of scholarly material on the theme of our class; the trick will be to see how our discussions develop and what sources seem to be most promising. I’ll be sure to announce any revisions or augmentations well ahead of time in class and through e-mail.

Course Schedule

**week 1—Introductions**

Mar. 30 (M)
introductions of: members of the class; the general scheme of the class; its goals, materials, requirements, and standards

assignment of brief one-paragraph written/oral exercise

Apr. 1 (W)

3 (F)
reading: Herbert Marcuse, “The Conquest of the Unhappy Consciousness: Repressive Desublimation” (e-reserve)

week 2—Brazil: Carnaval

6 (M)
readings: John Cowley, “Carnival in Trinidad: Evolution and Symbolic Meaning” (online at <http://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/trinidad.htm>); Roberto DaMatta, “Carnivals, Military Parades, and Processions,” “Carnival in Rio and Mardi Gras in New Orleans: A Contrastive Study” (e-reserve)

8 (W)
readings: Roberto DaMatta, “The Many Levels of Carnival” (e-reserve); Victor Turner, “Carnaval in Rio: Dionysian Drama in an Industrializing Society” (e-reserve)

9 (Th)
screening: Black Orpheus (dir. Marcel Camus, 1959)

10 (F)
reading: Daniel Touro Linger, “Fateful Encounters” (e-reserve)

Group Presentation I: Brazil: Carnaval

week 3—Japan: Matsuri

13 (M)
reading: Daniel Touro Linger, “The Violence in Carnival,” “Anything Goes!” “Playing to the Limit” (e-reserve)

15 (W)
readings: Victor Turner, “Social Dramas and Stories about Them” (e-reserve); Bruce Lincoln, “Myth” (e-reserve)

16 (Th)
17 (F)
*reading*: Winston Davis, “Pilgrimage and World Renewal” from *Japanese Religion and Society* (*e-reserve*)

*Group Presentation II: Japan: Matsuri*

**week 4—*Homo Ludens***

20 (M)
*reading*: Huizinga, *Homo Ludens, part 1*

22 (W)
*reading*: Huizinga, *Homo Ludens, part 2*

24 (F)

*film paper due*

**week 5—*Rabelais and His World***

27 (M)
*reading*: Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World, part 1*

29 (W)
*reading*: Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World, part 2*

May 1 (F)
*reading*: Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World, part 3*

*assign midterm paper*

**week 6—*Ncwala***

6 (W)
*readings*: Max Gluckman, “Rituals of Rebellion in South and South-east Africa” (*e-reserve*); Andrew Apter, “In Dispraise of the King: Rituals ‘against’ Religion in South-east Africa” (*JSTOR*)

*midterm paper due*

8 (F)
*readings*: Bruce Lincoln, “Ritual” (*e-reserve*)
week 7—The Caribbean: Carnival and Creolization

11 (M)  
reading: Elizabeth McAlister, “Work and Play, Pleasure and Performance,” “Rara and ‘the Jew’” (e-reserve)

13 (W)  
reading: Frank J. Korom, “Building the Tadjah, Constructing Community,” “Maintenance and Transformation via Cultural Creolization” (e-reserve)

Group Presentation III: The Caribbean: Carnival and Creolization

14 (Th)  
screening: Brass Unbound (dir. Johan van der Keuken, 1993)

15 (F)  
reading: Gage Averill, “Anraje to Angaje: Carnival Politics and Music in Haiti” (JSTOR); Timothy Rommen, “Home Sweet Home: Junkanoo as National Discourse in the Caribbean” (JSTOR)

week 8—Domination and the Arts of Resistance

18 (M)  
reading: Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance, part 1

20 (W)  
reading: Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance, part 2

22 (F)  
reading: Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance, part 3

week 9—India: Lila

Mar. 25 (M)  
readings: Stanley J. Tambiah, “A Performative Approach to Ritual” (e-reserve); Ranajit Guha, “Negation” (e-reserve)

27 (W)  
readings: Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts” (e-reserve); Norvin Hein, “Lila” (e-reserve); David L. Haberman, “Playing Around” (e-reserve)
readings: McKim Marriott, “The Feast of Love” (e-reserve); Lawrence Cohen, “Holi in Banaras and the Mahaland of Modernity” (e-reserve)

Group Presentation IV: India: Lila

week 10—American Carnivalesque?

June 1 (M)
readings: Bruce Lincoln, “Classification” (e-reserve); Jeremy Biles, “Sunday! Sunday! Sunday! The Monster Trucks’ Black Sabbath” (through e-mail)

2 (T)
screening: The Order of Myths (dir. Margaret Brown, 2007)

3 (W)
concluding discussion

Group Presentation V: American Carnivalesque?

8 (M)
Final Paper Due: 9:30 PM IN MY MAILBOX, RELIGION DEPARTMENT
Guidelines for Group Presentations

Group presentations are scheduled for the following class sessions: April 10, April 17, May 13, May 29, June 3. Presentation crews should meet with me for a brief after-class discussion of recommended themes, questions, and sources at least a week before the scheduled presentation.

What’s the task of this assignment? It’s to help teach the class by bringing in resources from off the syllabus to enrich our collective understanding of five case studies in carnival: Brazil, Japan, the Caribbean, India, and the contemporary United States. Ideally, presentation crews will be made up of members whose talents and interests are complementary and can offer coverage of the case study from a variety of angles. For example, a crew might consist of a musician, a history major, a person with primary-language skills, a graphics expert, and a theoretically minded student interested in discussing the topic in critical engagement with some of the assigned readings.

The presentation format is flexible, but remember: The point is to draw your fellow students into a closer encounter with the material you’re covering. All, some, or just one of the crew members may do the talking part. I strongly encourage you to incorporate some AV component that can effectively share with your classmates some of the music and spectacle of the case study you have chosen. You are welcome to stage a public debate and present differing viewpoints if you wish, or incorporate creative moves such as performing in costume or character, or otherwise have fun with the format.

There will be a research component to the presentation assignment, i.e., extra reading on top of the reading material the whole class has covered. Again, how the various tasks—research, production, delivery—are shared out within each crew is entirely up to its members. When you incorporate research material into your presentation, it is not necessary to give formal citation, but if you’re borrowing someone else’s ideas and interpretations it’s good to give a shout out to the author; it’s a way of demonstrating to me that you’ve done the research and it has the effect of giving your performance some professional cred.

The one formal constraint is the time limit. Presentations should not exceed a half hour. Seriously: The biggest challenge you are likely to face is that of delivering all the information you find important within the allotted time. I will bring an egg timer into the classroom and time it to go off at the thirty-minute mark, so be prepared. Also, make sure that at least one of your members gets to the room early in order to make sure everything’s set up to launch when class begins. At the presentation’s conclusion you should be prepared to respond to questions from your fellow students. Question time will not count against the time limit.

Every member of the team will receive the same grade, which I will issue along with a brief writeup of comments. With the efforts of five people going into a single thirty-minute project, I’m expecting presentations that are competently put together and that demonstrate a conscientious, sensitive, and collaborative engagement with the material. Any effort that meets those baseline criteria will receive a B+. Of course, I’m open to awarding higher grades to outstandingly skillful or sophisticated work, but before you knock yourselves out consider these
factors: 1) group projects can be tricky; 2) at 15% of your grade, this project should not be the primary focus of your ambitions to ace this class.