

Language and Desire
Anthropology & Linguistics M241
UCLA, Spring Quarter 2002

Time and place: Th 2–4:50 PM, Haines Hall 310
Instructor: Niko Besnier
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Aims of the seminar

Desire in all its forms is an act of social communication. This seminar explores selected aspects of the social and cultural constitution of desire through verbal interaction, and seeks an understanding of the relevant socio-cultural and communicative dynamics that complements the psychoanalytic tradition. The readings and discussion will focus primarily on sexual and gender-focused identities, experiences, and acts. However, the boundary between sexual desire and other forms of desire is permeable and unstable, as we have known since the early days of psychoanalysis; we will therefore attempt to explore the relationships between different forms of desire, and the role of language in mediating boundaries between them.

Readings and discussion are inter-disciplinary, almost by necessity: the amount of work on language and desire available to us remains small, although recent efforts might make this statement obsolete in a few years. However, I have tried to identify research that at least tacitly recognizes the value of the ethnographic analysis of lived experience. Some readings demonstrate a greater sophistication in the analysis of language than in the analysis of social context, while other authors will prove themselves to be more confident writing about context than about language. In all cases, we will seek to establish bridges between traditions of inquiry, areas of expertise, and ways of framing questions, seeking methodological connections and intellectual cross-fertilization.

Neither linguistic anthropology nor socio-cultural anthropology has a clearly developed theory of desire. Part of our goal is to contribute to the development of such an object. We will try to explore the various avatars that desire can take on (e.g., fantasy, pleasure, longing, fear, repression, obviation), and seek to develop a program for future exploration of some of the issues that the readings will raise.

Required readings

Individual readings, to be found in the Department of Anthropology's William Lessa Reading Room, Haines Hall 352.

Assessment

Seminar participants enrolled for a letter grade are expected to fulfill all three assessment requirements. Participants auditing the seminar or enrolled for a P/NP grade are expected to fulfill only the first and third requirements.

- *Commentary on weekly readings (40%)*

Participants in the seminar will be divided into two “shifts.” Members of each shift are expected to submit individually, on alternative weeks, a (double spaced) 2- to 3-page commentary raising one or more issues about the readings, upon which we will base class discussion.

In composing your commentaries, you are encouraged to evaluate critically the ideas, methodologies, findings, and theoretical context of the readings. You are also encouraged to find connections between readings for the course and any other materials of relevance, particularly if these materials relate to your own research or research plans, your own experience, and other scholarly interests that you may have. Do not hesitate to challenge and question what you read in a critical and constructive manner. What is important is your ability to convey and defend your own thoughts about key issues raised in the readings. Please bear in mind that the primary purpose of your commentary is to facilitate discussion in class, and to help you bring to seminar meetings a proactive orientation. Your active participation in seminar meetings is essential to the success of the course.

It is not necessary to provide a list of the readings covered in each commentary. Simply refer to authors by their last name in the body of your commentary, as needed. Please remember to provide your name and the date of the class meeting in the header of your commentary. Unless you make other arrangements with me ahead of time, I expect you to submit your commentaries as e-mail attachments to reach me no later than 24 hours ahead of the seminar meeting. If you are using a commercial server, please take into account that transmission may take longer than 24 hours. You should give your attachment a clearly identifiable name (e.g., “Anthro241 Your-name Week 2”), and make sure that it is readable with standard software for PCs (if you have any doubt, save your file in RTF).

- *Research proposal (50%)*

Your final paper will be a research (grant) proposal to conduct research on a topic of your choice relevant to the topic of the seminar. You are at liberty to choose the topical area, the ethnographic context, and the particular theoretical approach. However, you should design your proposal so that your proposed research is intellectually and professionally convincing. I will evaluate it using the same criteria that I employ when refereeing research proposals that granting foundations send to me periodically for evaluation.

A research proposal is a genre of its own, and we will take time during the course of the quarter to familiarize ourselves with the expectations of this genre. I strongly encourage you to obtain,

early in the term, copies of the brochures and forms produced by the more visible granting foundations in anthropology (National Science Foundation, national agencies from other countries, Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, etc.), as well as, if possible, copies of grant applications submitted by more senior scholars or advanced students that have been successful in securing funding. There are also manuals put out by various bodies that provide tips and guidelines for writing grant proposals, and we will endeavor to locate copies of these documents. Please share all relevant documents you find among yourselves. For your paper, you may choose to follow the proposal format templates of any appropriate foundation.

I am encouraging you to work on a research proposal that will be of direct relevance and use to your intellectual and professional endeavors, rather than merely remaining a pedagogical exercise. Your proposal is due on June 10, 2002.

- *Active participation in seminar meetings (10%)*

You are expected to contribute actively to the discussion in meetings of the course, expanding on your written commentaries if you have composed one for the meeting, or offering constructive and critical comments when it is not your turn to submit a written commentary.

Locating further readings

There is currently no critical review of research focusing on the range of topics we will cover in this course. However, a number of critical overviews have appeared in the last dozen volumes of the *Annual Review of Anthropology*, which survey areas of research that overlap partially with our concerns. You should think of these as useful sources for an overview of current thinking on the relevant subject, and as systematically organized sources of bibliographic information (all references are to volumes of *ARA*):

- Bauman, Richard and Charles L. Briggs. 1990. Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life. 19:59-88.
- Besnier, Niko. 1990. Language and Affect. 19:419-451.
- Eckert, Penelope and Sally McConnell-Ginet. 1992. Think Practically and Look Locally: Language and Gender as Community-Based Practice. 21:461-490.
- Gal, Susan. 1989. Language and Political Economy. 18:345-367.
- Ginsberg, Fay and Rayna Rapp. 1991. The Politics of Reproduction. 20:311-343.
- Goodwin, Charles and John Heritage. 1990. Conversation Analysis. 19:283-307.
- Guttman, Matthew C. 1997. Trafficking in Men: The Anthropology of Masculinity. 26:385-409.
- Kulick, Don. 2000. Gay and Lesbian Language. 29:243-285.
- Lock, Margaret. 1993. Cultivating the Body: Anthropology and Epistemologies of Bodily Practices and Knowledge. 22:133-155.
- Miller, Daniel. 1995. Consumption and Commodities. 24:141-161.
- Morris, Rosalind C. 1995. All Made Up: Performance Theory and the New Anthropology of Sex and Gender. 24:567-592.
- Ochs, Elinor and Lisa Capps. 1996. Narrating the Self. 25:19-43.
- Ong, Aihwa. 1991. The Gender and Labor Politics of Postmodernity. 20:279-309.
- Sharp, Lesley A. 2000. The Commodification of the Body and its Parts. 29:287-328.
- Weston, Kath. 1993. Lesbian/Gay Studies in the House of Anthropology. 22:339-367.
- Worthman, Carol M. 1995. Hormones, Sex, and Gender. 24:593-616.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

The following list looks very long, but many of the articles can be read quickly. Guest speakers will be invited to present their work during some seminar meetings, and will be announced as the quarter progresses.

Introduction: Embedding language and desire in linguistic and socio-cultural anthropology

- Rubin, Gayle. 1984. Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality. *In* *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*. Carol Vance, ed. Pp. 267-319. Boston: Routledge.
- Rubin, Gayle with Judith Butler. 1997. Sexual Traffic: Interview. *differences* 6:68-108.

Testing the boundaries of desire: From harassment to flirting

- Gardner, Carol B. 1980. Passing By: Street Remarks, Address Rights, and the Urban Female. *Sociological Inquiry* 50:328-356.
- Salzinger, Leslie. 2000. Manufacturing Sexual Subjects: 'Harassment', Desire and Discipline on a Maquiladora Shopfloor. *Ethnography* 1:67-92.
- Waldinger, James. 1998. Online Values: Sex in Chat Rooms. *In* *Engendering Communication: Proceedings of the Fifth Berkeley Women and Language Conference*. Suzanne Wertheim, Ashlee C. Bailey, and Monica Corston-Oliver, eds. Pp. 589-600. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Women and Language Group.
- Yelvington, Kevin A. 1996. Flirting in the Factory. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2(n.s.):313-33.
- Osella, Caroline and Filippo Osella. 1998. Friendship and Flirting: Micro-Politics in Kerala, South India. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4(n.s.):189-206.

Desire demanding to be heard: insults, histrionics, lament

- Dundes, Alan, Jerry W. Leach, and Bora Özkök. 1972. The Strategy of Turkish Boys' Verbal Dueling Rhymes. *In* *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*. John J. Gumperz and Dell Hymes, eds. Pp. 130-160. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Kulick, Don. 1993. Speaking Like A Woman: Structure and Gender in Domestic Arguments in a New Guinea Village. *Cultural Anthropology* 8:510-541.
- Hall, Kira. "Go Suck Your Husband's Sugarcane!": Hijras and the Use of Sexual Insults. *In* *Queerly Phrased: Language, Gender, and Sexuality*. Anna Livia and Kira Hall, eds. Pp. 430-460. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kulick, Don. 1996. Causing a Commotion: Public Scandal as Resistance Among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes. *Anthropology Today* 12:3-7.
- Briggs, Charles L. 1992. "Since I am a Woman, I Will Chastise my Relatives": Gender, Reported Speech, and the (Re)Production of Social Relations in Warao Ritual Wailing. *American Ethnologist* 19:337-361.

Desiring in the work of globality & modernity

- Gal, Susan. 1978. Peasant Men Can't Get Wives: Language and Sex Roles in a Bilingual Community. *Language and Society* 7:1-16.
- Besnier, Niko. 2002. Transgenderism, Locality, and the Miss Galaxy Beauty Pageant in Tonga. *American Ethnologist* 29(3). Prepublication version.
- Rofel, Lisa. 1999. Qualities of Desire: Imagining Gay Identities in China. *GLQ* 5:451-74.
- Gaudio, Rudolf P. 2001. White Men Do It Too: Racialized (Homo)sexualities in Postcolonial Hausaland. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 11:36-51.
- Bowman, Glenn. 1996. Passion, Power and Politics in a Palestinian Tourist Market. *In The Tourist Image: Myths and Myth Making in Tourism*. Tom Selwyn, ed. Pp. 83-103. Chichester: John Wiley.
- Gilsenan, Michael. 1989. Word of Honour. *In Social Anthropology and the Politics of Language*. Ralph Grillo, ed. Pp. 193-221. *Sociological Review Monographs*, 36. London: Routledge.

Narrating desire on the body: transgenderism, intersex, modern primitives

- Nakamura, Karen. 1997. Narrating Ourselves: Duped or Duplicitous? *In Gender Blending*. Bonnie Bullough, Vern Bullough, and James Elias, eds. Pp. 74-86. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Press.
- Johnson, Mark. 1998. Global Desiring and Translocal Loves: Transgendering and Same-Sex Sexualities in the Southern Philippines. *American Ethnologist* 25:695-711.
- Rosenblatt, Daniel. 1997. The Antisocial Skin: Structure, Resistance, and "Modern Primitive" Adornment in the United States. *Cultural Anthropology* 12:287-334.
- Valentine, David and Riki Anne Wilchins. 1997. One Percent on the Burn Chart: Gender, Genitals, and Hermaphrodites with Attitude. *Social Text* 15:215-222.
- Moriel, Liora. 1998. Diva in the Promised Land: A Blueprint for Newspeak? *World Englishes* 17:225-237.

The marketing of fantasy: Romance, films, phone sex lines

- Radway, Janice A. 1984. The Act of Reading the Romance: Escape and Instruction. *In Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. Pp. 86-118, 251-253. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Modleski, Tania. 1992. The Disappearing Act: Harlequin Romances. *In Gender, Language, and Myth: Essays on Popular Narrative*. Glenwood Irons, ed. Pp. 20-45. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Talbot, Mary M. 1997. 'An Explosion Deep Inside Her': Women's Desire and Popular Romance Fiction. *In Language and Desire: Encoding Sex, Romance, and Intimacy*. Harvey, Keith and Celia Shalom, eds. Pp. 106-122. New York: Routledge.
- Derné, Steve and Lisa Jadwin. 2000. Male Hindi Filmgoers' Gaze: An Ethnographic Interpretation. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 34(n.s.):243-269.
- Hall, Kira. 1992. Women's Language for Sale on the Fantasy Lines. *In Locating Power: Proceedings of the Second Berkeley Women and Language Conference*. Pp. 207-222. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Women and Language Group.

Longing from afar

- Cohen, Erik. 1986. Lovelorn Farangs: The Correspondence between Foreign Men and Thai Girls. *Anthropological Quarterly* 59:115-127.
- Ahearn, Laura. 2001. Invitations to Love; Meeting By Way of a Letter. *In Invitations to Love: Literacy, Love Letters, and Social Change in Nepal*. Pp. 3-26, 119-145. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Constable, Nicole. 1999. At Home and Not at Home: Filipina Narratives of Ambivalent Returns. *Cultural Anthropology* 14:203-228.
- Mills, Mary Beth. 1997. Contesting the Margins of Modernity: Women, Migration, and Consumption in Thailand. *American Ethnologist* 24:37-61.

Creating an imagined object of desire: Personal advertisements

- Lumsing, Wim. 1995. Japanese Gay Magazines and Marriage Advertisements. *In Gays and Lesbians in Asia and the Pacific: Social and Human Services*. Gerard Sullivan and Laurence W.-T. Leong, eds. Pp. 71-87. New York: Haworth Press.
- Livia, Anna. 2001. *Camionneuses s'abstenir*: Lesbian Community Creation Through the Personals. *In Language and Sexuality: Contesting Meaning in Theory and Practice*. Kathryn Campbell-Kibler, Robert J. Podesva, Sarah J. Roberts, and Andrew Wong, eds. Pp. 191-206. Stanford, CA: Center for the Study of Language in Interaction.
- Shalom, Celia. 1997. That Great Supermarket of Desire: Attributes of the Desired Other in Personal Advertisements. *In Language and Desire: Encoding Sex, Romance, and Intimacy*. Harvey, Keith and Celia Shalom, eds. Pp. 186-203. New York: Routledge.
- Thorne, Adrian and Justine Coupland. 1998. Articulations of Same-Sex Desire: Lesbian and Gay Male Dating Advertisements. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 2:233-257.

Disclosing, withholding, and regulating danger and fear: Sex talk and HIV talk

- Treichler, Paula. 1988. AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epic of Signification. *In AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*. Douglas Crimp, ed. Pp. 31-70. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Leap, William. 1991. AIDS, Linguistics, and the Study of Non-Neutral Discourse. *Journal of Sex Research* 28:275-288.
- Sobo, Elisa J. 1997. Self-Disclosure and Self-Construction among HIV-Positive People: The Rhetorical Uses of Stereotypes and Sex. *Anthropology and Medicine* 4:67-87.
- Solomon, Harris. 2001. Skirting Around: Towards an Understanding of HIV/AIDS Educational Materials in Modern Israeli Hebrew. *In Language and Sexuality: Contesting Meaning in Theory and Practice*. Kathryn Campbell-Kibler, Robert J. Podesva, Sarah J. Roberts, and Andrew Wong, eds. Pp. 225-247. Stanford, CA: Center for the Study of Language in Interaction.
- Pigg, Stacy Leigh. 2001. Languages of Sex and AIDS in Nepal: Notes on the Social Production of Commensurability. *Cultural Anthropology* 16(4):481-541.

Desire, language, and the fieldwork experience. Conclusion and future directions

- Kulick, Don. 1995. The Sexual Life of Anthropologists: Erotic Subjectivity and Ethnographic Work. *In Taboo: Sex, Identity, and Erotic Subjectivity in Anthropological Field Work*. Don Kulick and Margaret Willson, eds. Pp. 1-28. London: Routledge.
- Markowitz, Fran. 1999. Sexing the Anthropologist: Implications for Ethnography. *In*

Sex, Sexuality, and the Anthropologist. Fran Markowitz and Michael Ashkenazi, eds.
Pp. 161-74. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

- Nakamura, Karen. 2002. Morals, Sexuality, and Fieldwork: Ethical Currents.
Anthropology News 43(3):24.