

ANTHROPOLOGY 255

CINEMATIC PORTRAITS OF AFRICA

Fall Term 2012

Thursdays 1-4 in Pettengill G21

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Most Americans have "seen" Africa only through non-African eyes, coming to "know" about African society through such characters as Tarzan and such genres as the "jungle melodrama" or the "nature show." In this course, films from the North Atlantic are juxtaposed with ethnographic and art films made by Africans in order to examine how to "read" various cinematic texts. Related written texts help to answer central questions about the politics of representation: what are some of the differences in how African societies are depicted; why might particular issues and points of view become privileged? Let's be very clear up front that this is not a class about Africa, Africans, or about African culture—this is a course about *representations* of African culture, altogether quite another story. My winter term classes (AN228 and INDS100) would be places to learn directly about various African values, beliefs, and cultural practices.

Small groups will regularly lead carefully prepared class discussions, details to be worked out by the group in advance of a required planning meeting with Professor Eames.

Although the bulk of the "texts" for this course are the films themselves, you will have regular reading assignments as well. Available at the bookstore are: Bordwell and Thompson Film Art, Nichols Introduction to Documentary and Pieterse White on Black. Most of your shorter reading assignments will be on Lyceum, a few are handouts. Please be aware that this syllabus may be subject to change as the term unfolds (check lyceum). It is front loaded with reading to provide you with the tools to perform screen analysis. Also take note that class attendance is expected; debits begin to accrue after you miss *one* class because this is a once a week seminar.

The highest level of academic integrity is expected here and everywhere. Fair warning: I serve as Chair of the Student Conduct Committee!

REQUIREMENTS (note that term—each and every item listed is *required* to pass AN 255)

- 20% = consistent, thoughtful, active, constructive, in-class participation**
- 20% = first half of term's in-class group presentation, self and group evaluations**
- 20% = first half of term's short essay**
- 20% = second half of term's in-class group presentation, self and group evaluations**
- 20% = second half of term's short essay**

2011 CINEMATIC PORTRAITS... SCREENING & READING PROGRAM

- 9/6 COURSE ORIENTATION: in class screening of Adichie's *The Danger of the Single Story* as well as two "firsts" in African cinematic portraiture: *Africa Speaks!* and *Borom Sarret*
- 9/13 "Reading" Film
Viewing: *Tarzan the Ape Man* (1932 version with Weismuller and Sullivan)
Reading: Pieterse White on Black Intro & Part I (skim first chapters, then read chapters 4 & 5 and *study chapter 7*)
Lutz and Collins "The Photograph as an Intersection of Gazes"
Dunn "Lights...Camera...Africa"
- 9/20 Wild Life, Wild Death
Viewing: *Congo*
Reading: Bordwell and Thompson Film Art (read chapters 1 & 3; *study chapter 2*)
Krasznewiez "Round Up the Usual Suspects"
Wainaina "How to Write about Africa"
Conrad "Heart of Darkness" excerpts (here for those to whom it is new)
Achebe "An Image of Africa"
- 9/27 Wildlife, Wild Death, continued
Video: *Blood Diamond*
Reading: Bordwell and Thompson Film Art Part Three, Chapters 4 and 5
Pieterse White on Black Part III
- 10/4 Growing Up Colonial
Viewing: *Chocolat* (the one by French dir. Claire Denis not the one with Johnny Depp)
Reading: Bordwell and Thompson Film Art Part Three, Chapters 6 and 7
Pieterse White on Black Part II (focus especially on chapters 8 and 12)
Long Pauses website entry on *Chocolat*
Bekolo "No one would be able to tell my story except me"
- 10/11 Introduction to African Feature Film: Acquiring a Voice
Viewing: *Wooden Camera*
Reading: Hondo "What is Cinema for Us?"
Diawara "African Cinema—Foreign Aid as Tarzanism"
Bordwell and Thompson Film Art Part Three, Chapter 8

****10/15** special event: Attend the Global Lens Series Screening of *Grey Matter* in Olin 104.**

YOUR FIRST SHORT PAPER WILL BE DUE BEFORE THE END OF OCTOBER

BREAK

N.B.: YOUR FIRST SHORT PAPER WILL BE DUE BEFORE THE END OF OCTOBER

- 10/25 African Feature Film, *Acquiring a Voice*, continued
Viewing: *Ezra*
Reading: Korman's "African Cinema: Comparative Look at *Blood Diamond & Ezra*"
Aduaka "Look, I'm not Francophone"
- 11/1 Issues in Documentary Production
Video: *Bye Bye Africa*
Reading: Achebe "Anthills of the Savannah" (excerpt)
Nichols Introduction to Documentary Chapters 1-3
- 11/8 Issues in Documentary Production, continued
Viewing: *Awaiting for Men*
Reading: Nichols Introduction to Documentary Chapters 4-6

BREAK

- 11/29 Documentary Production, continued
Viewing: *Blood in the Mobile* and *The History Channel's Blood Diamonds*
Reading: Nichols Introduction to Documentary Chapters 7-8
- 12/6 Conclusion
Viewing: *War/Dance*

SECOND SHORT PAPER IS DUE IN MY OFFICE BEFORE THE END OF TERM

Cinematic Portraits of Africa Fall 2012

Discussion Questions

Borom Sarret (translated as either The Cart Driver or The Wagoneer)

1. What was the experience of viewing this film like for you, given your personal context? Explain. How might the experience vary depending upon viewers' various "subject positions"?
2. Were you to tell a friend about this film, what words would you use to convey its technique, its meaning or its impact?
3. What background knowledge might help viewers better grasp or appreciate this film?
4. What seem to be Sembene's big themes? How are they conveyed cinematically? Think of a striking scene and consider how it encodes its meanings. Sembene is known as a highly political filmmaker. How does the camera work encode his critique? How has editing added to this message? What about his use of sound?
5. Can we discern a distinction between the driver and the director's ideas? What might we say is the point of view of this film?
6. Try to put yourself in the position of the colonized Senegalese worker at the center of the piece. What does Sembene assert the donkey cart driver thinks of The Heights? Traffic lights? Money? Class? Religion? Race? Gender?
7. What do you make of the ending?
8. What genre of film were you watching? How can you tell?

AN255 CINEMATIC PORTRAITS OF AFRICA
SHORT PAPER ASSIGNMENT #1 FALL 2012
DUE IN MY OFFICE BEFORE THE END OF OCTOBER

All clarifying examples use the porters in Tarzan as one 'for instance'

1. **Symbolic Analysis:** Choose *one* common or shared image, trope, icon, representation, symbol, portrayal, depiction, or stereotype from our material and relate it to *one* North Atlantic fantasy about sub-Saharan Africa discussed in our readings. You may choose to deal with more than one film in prompt #1, but be sure to **focus on only one fantasy and on only one image**. Cite course material copiously. [*ex: Discuss how porter encapsulates layered notion of white man deemed worthy and yet burdensome*]
 2. **Montage:** Explicate the manner in which power & dominance (or better yet: power, dominance and resistance) are encoded in *one short sequence of shots from one (only one) of our films*. In your analysis of editing choices cite course material constantly. [*ex.: Message in depiction of nameless porter falling off cliff*]
 3. **Mise-en-Scene:** Explicate the manner in which the problematics of dominance are encoded in *one shot* selected from our film material. In your analysis of a frame, cite cite cite. [*ex.: How/why dangling porter encodes 'lynching'*]
 4. **Politics of Representation:** Make up a well focused question of your own concerning encoded messages about inequality and difference (or, possibly, equivalence and likeness); then also answer it. Be sure to include the written formulation of your question or prompt in the final submission as well as your own answer to it. You should create a question that allows you to cite a variety of course material, including those on film structure and technique.
- Answer one prompt; tell me which one you think it is (don't make me guess). Important: Note that your choice should minimize overlapping content with what you or your group covered as class discussion leaders.
 - To me, "short" means approximately four pages, but say what you have to say, do not focus on length.
 - Only hard copies will be accepted—that means in my hand or under my door.
 - This is NOT a research paper—you are to dig deep and pull an array of course material together for your analytical purpose. Pepper your paper with quoted or paraphrased citations; use time codes for film shots.
 - When grading assignments I will take writing mechanics into consideration, as well as the clarity of your writing at both the structural and sentence levels.
 - Most important of all will be the extent to which you demonstrate an ability to perform cultural analysis. Cultural analysis is neither review nor plot summary, but rather rests upon well-argued and persuasive assessment of powerful underlying symbolic meanings coded in—for our purposes here—popular film texts.
 - While in some ways 20% of your grade is at play as I assess the quality of your written submission, note that *if you do not turn in this paper, you cannot pass the course*. You have had 8 weeks' warning. Nonetheless, should you need extra time, contact a dean (not me). If you cannot obtain a dean's excuse, consider dropping AN255. I mean it.