Co-Chairs Report: Minutes of the FOSAP Business Meeting at the 103rd AAA meetings
Atlanta, Georgia, Dec. 17, 2004

In attendance:
Matthew Amster, Gettysburg College,
Clare Boulanger, Mesa State College,
Cate Cameron, Cedar Crest College,
Mike Coggeshall, Clemson University,
Pam Frese, College of Wooster,
John Gatewood, Lehigh University,
Jen Jones, University of Minnesota - Duluth,
John Lowe, Cultural Analysis Group,
Bob Myers, Alfred University,
John Rhoades, St. John Fisher College

The meeting was attended by 10 people, an exceptional turnout given the low attendance overall at the AAA. The meeting was brought to order at 6:30 by the co-chairs, Bob Myers and Cate Cameron. Minutes from 2003 were approved as amended. Cate and Bob reported on the 2004 GAD Board Meeting on Thursday December 16, 2004: Cate reported that GAD members approved $800 for two issues of the FOSAP Newsletter and $400 for travel to regional meetings.

This year, John Rhoades invited Kathleen Terry-Sharp of program services at the AAA to the business meeting to talk about how the AAA could better serve small programs. There was discussion of two topics: How the Departmental Services Program (DSP) of the AAA could be better adapted to those of us in small programs; and, Whether the AAA could generate materials that would help advertise anthropology as a major and minor for small (and large programs).

Discussion of Departmental Services Program
The AAA advertises Departmental Services Program (DSP) to departments for a variety of functions. Its main use seems to be for advertising academic positions: placing departmental job ads in the AN, and electronically, as well as providing a booth at the national meetings for interviewing.
Kathleen noted that AAA offers to community colleges a modified and lower cost ($100) plan than “regular” departments. For this fee, they can use the AAA list serve and they get a discount on ads. She is willing to consider a fee reduction to small programs and, importantly, adapt the timing of signing up for DSP to later in the summer. She said the current cost to non-community colleges is $250. She asked FOSAP to generate a reasonable estimate for its members.

The DPS budget is already set for 2005, but she will take our requests to the AAA for 2006. FOSAP is willing to establish a policy with the AAA on DSP regarding the appropriate fee, application date, and the best kind of modified service, but needs some feedback from members on this. [Please send comments to the c-chairs: Cate Cameron ccameron@cedarcrest.edu, or Bob Myers myers@alfred.edu]

Discussion of materials to advertise anthropology:
Kathleen was asked if the AAA has any recent materials in the form of brochures or posters that would be useful for promoting anthropology as an undergraduate major or minor. She said that the AAA does not have much recent material, but would be willing to produce print material, which could then be distributed as requested. Because her department is under-staffed, she asked if AAA members could generate the content for brochures or posters. Posters or highly appealing visual material should be developed which explain “What is Anthropology?” and “What are job opportunities for an anthropology major?” Marketing our discipline ought to be one of the high priority roles of the AAA-DPS. FOSAP can help co-ordinate the effort, to some extent. If you
have produced materials that would be useful to others or are willing to put together some text and images, or generally, have some ideas for the marketing of anthropology, contact Kathleen Terry-Sharp or the FOSAP co-chairs, Myers and Cameron. [Ed. note: Kathleen has reported that many suggestions have been received and to keep them coming.]

Brainstorming ensued. Some suggestions: Compiling quotes from famous people who majored in anthropology would be an eye-catching, effective way to market anthropology. FOSAP members are requested to send in names, quotes and suggestions to the DSP (for example, Michael Crichton, Jon Krakauer, Kurt Vonnegut, George Lucas, etc).

Kathleen left the meeting and new matters were discussed. Those present considered how to publicize what FOSAP does. FOSAP members could represent and publicize the committee at regional meetings. The committee should have a plan for how to do this. It was discussed that perhaps Mike Coggeshall could represent FOSAP at the Southern Meetings and Cate Cameron and John Gatewood might attend the Northeastern meetings.

Suggestions for panels for the AAA in DC in 2005:

[These were suggestions, not necessarily offers to organize. Organizers are requested to step forward for 2005 or 2006]
Clare Boulanger
- Strategies of Survival for Small Departments.
- How to Create a Major
Cate Cameron and John Gatewood:
- Anthropology Field School Experiences;
- Institutional Review Boards in Anthropology.
John Rhoades:
- Workshop on Student Outcomes Assessment (the one from this year which was cancelled)
John Gatewood:
- How to Market Anthropology
- How to create a brochure for anthropology majors.
Jen Jones and John Rhoades:
- Creative Labs in Small Spaces
Bob Myers and Paul Grebinger:
- Among Our Exotic Selves: Teaching and Reflexivity for Usan Students
Offices were discussed.
Cate will contact Peter Peregrine to see if he will continue as secretary this year and consider serving as chair or co-chair next year [ed note: Peter told Cate he is willing]. Jen Jones agreed to serve as secretary next year. Paul and John graciously agreed to continue the newsletter.

The name of the newsletter was changed to Anthro-at-Large Bulletin of the Federation of Small Anthropology Programs.

Respectfully submitted,
Bob Myers and Cate Cameron

BEYOND THE EXOTIC OTHER: POPULAR CULTURE AND CRITICAL THINKING IN TEACHING ANTHROPOLOGY
Organizers: Paul Grebinger (RIT) and Bob Myers (Alfred)
Chair: Bob Myers (Alfred)

Those of us who teach service courses for students committed to careers in technology and business, often find it easier to engage them in the critical insights of anthropology through use of popular culture. Many of us have found, and research with student audiences demonstrates, that anthropological documentaries often reinforce negative stereotypes about “the exotic other,” especially if there is insufficient context for understanding the subjects as fellow humans. In getting beyond the exotic other through popular culture we are able to engage students on what they regard as their own turf. This panel was catalyzed by the discussions emerging from the Committee on Teaching (GAD) Teaching Roundtable at AAA Chicago, 2003. When AAA San Francisco 2004 was rescheduled in Atlanta, we decided to go forward with the panel, nevertheless. Panelists Michael Billig and Karen Porter and Discussants Conrad Kottak and David McCurdy were unable to attend. Three of us presented our papers, and we read Billig’s in his absence. In lieu of prepared discussion, we opened dialog with the audience of thirty. There was lively exchange and a feeling among several of us that such open discussion should be a regular feature of sessions at the AAA Annual Meetings. The papers presented in this issue of “Anthro-at-Large” have been edited to meet constraints of space. Where large segments of text have been deleted, the deletion is indicated by ellipsis. Contact information is provided for readers who would like the full text of these papers, or to engage in dialog about the topics discussed.
American Pie: Good To Eat, Good To Think?
Clare L. Boulanger (Mesa State)

Professors who teach courses on Usan culture know how difficult it is to exoticize the familiar. Usan college students are frequently aware there is such a thing as ethnocentrism, but they recognize it only in its obvious manifestations, which they are often careful to avoid, at least in an anthropology class. But ethnocentrism is a powerful aspect of habitus, à la Bourdieu (e.g., 1977)—one does not have to pronounce one’s own way of life correct and all others wrong to feel profoundly uncomfortable when an unfamiliar language is spoken or an unfamiliar food served. One extraordinary aspect of Usan ethnocentrism is its resilience even in the face of a display meant to undermine it. In his introductory textbook, Robbins (2001: 21-26) deliberately lays an analysis of the Balinese cockfight (Geertz 1972: 1-37) alongside one of Usan football (Arens 1976, Montague & Morais 1976), and still I have had students complain to me that there is really no comparison to be had and they are frankly somewhat insulted to see their favorite sport abused in this manner.

If football has attained something of a sacred status among Usans, the film genre known as “teen sex comedy” is certainly profane, and few Usans would be disturbed if an anthropologist were to analyze such a film. They might, however, regard the exercise as useless—what profound meaning, after all, can be wrung out of this sort of movie? A teen sex comedy, they might say, is just supposed to be funny. Note that whether Usans see the object of analysis as sacred or profane, they seldom recommend further inquiry. Doubtless they fear what all human beings, on some level, fear—the stark realization that their cultures are absurd (Henry 1963). As primarily a Malaysianist, I have always been struck by the fact that in the Malay language, there is no word that means “to analyze” that does not also mean “to break apart,” with “breaking” in this instance referring to irremediable destruction, as in the loss of Humpty Dumpty. As audacious as Usans have been in turning an analytical eye thither and yon, they are no more willing than any other people to subject their own mythology to scrutiny.

Indeed, many Usans would squirm at the above application of the term, “mythology.” Even though football games, according to Montague and Morais, tell us the same “success story” again and again, Usans fail to recognize this story as a myth. Similarly, teen sex comedies are often referred to as “formula pictures”—but what is a formula in this instance if not an arrangement of what Lévi-Strauss (1963: 211) has called “mythemes”? Even Lévi-Strauss might blanch at the prospect of analyzing the structure of an Usan teen sex comedy. I do not carry out my analysis with the aim of pleasing the Master, but merely to convince Usan students that they are immersed in myth, and that myth in the United States, no less than in ancient Greece or the modern First Nations of Canada, fashions and continuously supports a version of reality for its devotees.

The film I analyze for my US culture course is American Pie, released in 1999. The uncut version I show in my class came out in 2000. Lévi-Strauss would claim that plot is only a framework on which to hang mythemes, but the average Usan, whose tastes are oriented to plot, likely needs to know that American Pie concerns four high school seniors—Kev, Oz, Finch, and James—who resolve to lose their virginity before they graduate.

Lévi-Strauss tells us to be watchful for plot elements that are repeated, though they may be altered in the process, through, for instance, inversion or substitution. The plot of American Pie is set in motion by what appears to be an insignificant event—the fact that Sherman, possibly the most undesirable teen male in existence, claims to have had sex. Though a minor character, Sherman is the structural fulcrum of the movie, because the other young men feel challenged to duplicate his achievement. From the start, however, the four who have undertaken this quest are bifurcated—Kev and Oz have certain advantages over Finch and James with respect to achieving the desired end. Kev already has a girlfriend, and Oz, even though his sexual exploit prior to the pact turns out badly, demonstrates early on in the quest that he has an inkling as to how to go about this. Finch and James, however, are nearly hopeless. Finch, who fancies himself erudite and urbane, is too garrulous for female high-schoolers, while James cannot talk to women at all.

Sherman is in and of himself a bifurcated character, since the viewer is immediately inclined to doubt his tale of all-night sex. Does he deserve his heroic stature in the eyes of the others, or is he a sham? For the movie-going audience, this question is leading.

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Kev and Oz, though similar in terms of the likelihood of their success, are different in how they achieve it. Kev’s girlfriend Vicki would like to have sex, but she wants the experience to be “perfect,” complete with that famous Usan panacea, love. If Kev can speak the words “I love you” convincingly, his quest will be fulfilled. Oz, on the other hand, does not need to falsify his feelings. His love for Heather grows to the point that sex becomes secondary. Kev and Vicki emerge from their tryst recognizing that despite all they have said and done, they are not in love, but Oz is close-mouthed about his night with Heather, willing to forego the pact given that their relationship has gone well beyond casual sex.

In the meantime, Finch and James struggle with attaining what might be called the Goldilocks equilibrium, a common progression in myth where one course leads to one extreme, another to its opposite, while the third is just right. The dilemma at hand is control—when and how should a man relax it? What happens to Finch and James is instructive along these lines. Each young man experiences an Untimely, Public, Lack of Control over a bodily emission. In Finch’s case, his plan to portray himself as a “chick magnet” goes awry when another student secretly feeds him a laxative. Finch is forced to rush into the women’s bathroom, where he relieves himself mightily, much to the disgust of the women who enter. James, on the other hand, finds himself in bed with a beautiful classmate and ejaculates prematurely—twice. Unbeknownst to either of them at the time, the misadventure has been broadcast, via the Internet, to every computer in town.

While Kev and Oz approach prom with the sense that they may in fact fulfill their quest, Finch and James are resigned to retaining their virginal status. Finch attends prom stag; James invites Michelle, a chatty “band geek” who seems utterly asexual. Before the dance breaks up into post-prom parties, Sherman’s lie is exposed by the furious woman with whom he allegedly slept, and Sherman then has an Untimely, Public Lack of Control over a urinary emission, as he wets himself in front of everyone at prom. Sherman, Finch, and James are thus shown to be structurally aligned, but will Finch and James fail equally as dramatically at losing their virginity? They do not fail, but clearly they require extra help.

American Pie is obviously a movie about masculine maturity. Maturity in Usan men is achieved through control, even of those moments when they lose control, either physically, via orgasm, and/or emotionally, via love. Both orgasm and love are depicted in Usan culture as occasions where one must loosen, even if only momentarily, the ordinary strictures of life—orgasm is often described as a “release,” a “letting go,” while one “falls in” love, an event popularly represented as one that is neither planned nor easily managed after the fact (Bean 1976). Orgasm and love can occur in tandem, but this is not essential, since Kev and Vicki tumble out of love even as their night of lovemaking wanes, and Finch and James are hardly “in love” when they respond to the urges of their dominant female partners. Even so, orgasm and love teach the same life lesson to an Usan man: that while under most circumstances a man must maintain control, he must also learn to recognize when to relinquish it, for his own good (orgasm) and the good of others (love).

The quest of the four high-schoolers to lose their virginity has all the hallmarks of a rite of passage, though not one guided by the tutelage of elder men—James’ father, who tries to advise even though he has no idea what is going on in his son’s life, is clearly not up to the task. Instead, true to the ideal of Usan individualism, each young man forges his own path. Following the pattern observed by van Gennep (1960 [1906]), rites of passage comprise three stages: separation, transition, incorporation, with transition the most perilous phase (see also Turner 1969: 94–130). In American Pie, the friends separate themselves from others by forming a pact, and advance into a period of transition that is fraught with danger—even Kev and Oz, with all their advantages, face pitfalls, and Finch and James (and eventually Sherman) are subjected to the rigors of public humiliation. Separation and transition would thus seem to be readily identifiable in the film, but incorporation is somewhat fuzzier.

With the conclusion of a rite of passage, individuals who have completed the rite are brought back into society as new beings, transformed via ritual from, for instance, boys to men. But the four friends are not mature when American Pie ends. They have learned something about being an Usan man, but they are hardly ready to assume the manly mission that Gilmore (1990) identifies as a ubiquitous ideal: potency, provision, protection. Instead, the movie implies that the achievement of middle-class Usan manhood is greatly attenuated—after the first sexual experience there is still college ahead, and work and marriage thereafter.
Here, then, is where we must depart from Lévi-Strauss. (In his later years Lévi-Strauss allowed for the particularizing influence of history—see The Story of Lynx, 1995.) His thinking has helped to draw out mythemes from American Pie, but altogether these components do not constitute a human universal, or even a human ubiquity. Kev, Oz, Finch, and James have gone through a rite of passage, but have retained their youth. The transition offered by the rite has evidently been refused. This motif, which occurs across the gamut of Usan popular culture, I have elsewhere dubbed an abortive rite of passage.

Why undergo the trials of a transitional phase if no transition actually takes place? Rites of passage are also rites of renewal, where a sense of cultural rightness is ultimately reinforced. To toy with transition while taking advantage of its restorative effects is audacious beyond measure. Youth is not left behind; it is revitalized, with no one being called to account for this outrageous behavior.

However, even this apparent rebellion against what culture would justly demand of men is culturally planned. Many Usan men do in fact take up the tripartite task of potency, provision, and protection, and likely perform as well (or as poorly) at this type of manhood as men from societies where these activities are lionized. It is not as though this sort of man has no place in Usan mythology, but there is clearly a place reserved, as well, for the Eternal Boy. “Grown men are little boys writ big,” we say, or “The only difference between men and boys is the price of their toys.” Kev, Oz, Finch, and James can dabble in and subsequently reject manhood without inviting the scorn Gilmore sees in most other societies.

This is puzzling. Why do Usans harbor a sneaking admiration for the iconic Eternal Boy? He is a symbol of youth, certainly, a stage in the life cycle Usans have long prized above others. Economically speaking, where Gilmore’s man is a symbol of production, the Eternal Boy is a symbol of consumption—he not only avoids potency/provision/protection but actively inverts them. In capitalist societies, the rate of consumption must always increase for the economy as a whole to be sustained, and in our society currently, with so many productive activities farmed out globally, consumption has become an economic mainstay. In one sense, the Eternal Boy speaks to Usan affluence, in that we can afford to support such a seemingly useless figure, but he also speaks to the root of that affluence—the driving need to promote more and more consumption in the face of a worrisome human potential to settle for what one has. And paradoxically, the Eternal Boy’s enthusiasm for consumption may be turned back toward production, in that, unencumbered by the triple burden of manhood, he has a full acquaintance with the tastes of his fellow consumers and the leisure to establish innovative enterprises (like, e.g., search engines) that are in tune with those tastes in terms of both responding to them and shaping them. In real life, the Eternal Boy may inspire feelings of indulgence and exasperation, all at once, in those close to him, but as an icon, he may actually, especially nowadays, be more than earning his keep.

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Anthropology Versus The Liberal Arts?: Culture And Being Cultured
Michael S. Billig (Franklin and Marshall)

I would guess that not a single person attending this conference would deny the contention that anthropology is or should be one of the cornerstone subjects of contemporary liberal arts education. At the superficial level, we argue that anthropological engagement adds much needed non-Western breadth to liberal arts curricula that are still overwhelmingly focused on Europe and North America. More profoundly, we assert with great passion that learning anthropology helps students to view their own lives within comparative perspective, to scrutinize critically the values and beliefs that they take for granted, and to appreciate the extent to which those values and beliefs are forged within particular historical and cultural contexts. These are arguments I myself make constantly to colleagues in other departments, to administrators, and to fellow members of my college’s Curriculum Committee.

For many years I have felt this ambivalence without being able to articulate its source. But as is often the case with scholars who spend so much of their time being teachers, only when I designed and taught a course that explicitly examined the history and purpose of liberal education did I begin to see clearly why I was feeling this discomfort and to make the effort to articulate the reasons for my own internal conflict.

I think perhaps the main contradiction may be represented by the two entirely different senses of the word “culture” that come to us from 18th and 19th-century roots. The first sense, the one with which anthropologists are most familiar, is itself, of course, the subject of enormous contention and debate, the entering into which is completely irrelevant to my purpose here. This is the Herder-Tylor-Boas-Kroeber-Geertz tradition, if you will: the total life way of a people, the prevailing values, the symbolic web that we ourselves have spun. The details vary, but the assertion that culture is a property of a specifically delineated group of people is an important common thread. The second sense, more British than German Romantic, is the one associated with Matthew Arnold: (using his famous words) the pursuit of perfection, sweetness and light, the best that has been thought and said. This is the sense we employ when we refer to an individual (not a group) as “cultured,” meaning not “common,” “boorish,” or (and this is our least favorite) “ill-bred.” While we anthropologists despise the Arnoldian conception, it would be disingenuous not to admit to its ubiquity and cultural (in the former sense) importance as a marker of class, education, status, and refinement.

Interestingly, the word “class” is a strikingly parallel dual-sense legacy of the 19th-century. We refer to a “class” of people as a group with a common economic situation, and we may refer to individuals with good manners or taste as having “class,” implying that some individuals have none.

The first sense of the word culture is consistent with cultural relativism in that all people have culture and all cultures have developed historically to be as they are. Under this conception we may assert that it is not our place to judge one culture from the moral, aesthetic, or even epistemological perspectives of another. The second sense, of course, is entirely incompatible with relativism. It is explicitly judgmental and hierarchical, if not downright snobbish. When we anthropologists profess within a liberal arts context, we are teaching our students about culture in the group property, relativist sense. But I would submit that the whole of the liberal arts experience for our students—and for most of us when we were in college—is also about becoming cultured in the individualist, absolutist sense. And this is the central tension that I feel and about which I am speaking. To an extent we ourselves are subverting the liberal arts mission of bringing students to a greater appreciation for the best that has been thought and said by decentering its absolutist, timeless, and culturally biased pretensions. And yet, we ourselves are not free of such elitist biases and pretensions by virtue of our own elite status, cultural embeddedness, and (ironically) liberal educations.
Perhaps my own narrative is completely idiosyncratic, but here it goes. I grew up in a lower-middle class neighborhood in Queens, the grandchild of immigrants from Eastern Europe. My parents grew up in Harlem and the South Bronx, respectively, so they thought of Queens as the suburbs. I attended New York City public schools in the 1960s and 70s, receiving (I think) a quite non-rigorous education. I applied only to SUNY and CUNY schools at first, but much to my amazement, found myself being recruited by private universities for the minor sport in which I participated. Thanks to fencing and a generous financial aid package (including a lot of work-study hours), I became an Ivy Leaguer with a heavy New York accent, a completely unearned swagger, and not the slightest idea what the term “liberal arts” even meant. Like most of my classmates, I assumed that I would be able to select my courses from the wide array of subjects based on the topics that interested me. I knew at least reasonably well what interested me and what did not, what I was good at and what I was not, and I was quite sure that I was fully prepared to make these choices for myself. Looking back, it is astonishing that neither I nor most of my classmates knew the most basic and important fact about the curriculum of the college we had chosen to attend: it had one of the last remaining highly prescriptive Core curricula in the nation (and it still does). For our first two years, the college—not we—would be selecting three quarters of the courses we would be taking, and each of us would be taking the same ones. Oh, so that’s why I got that letter over the summer instructing me to read the first six books of the Lattimore translation of the The Iliad prior to arriving on campus. They have got to be kidding!

I got over my initial grumpiness quickly. I realized that these Core courses were exposing me to a world of ideas, experiences, and pleasures that I did not have the educational capital, so to speak, to choose on my own. I don’t know of a single graduate of my alma mater who is not thankful that the educated people chose for us so brilliantly. No one is or was so naive to envision the experience of the Core as a finite canon; in fact, we were hammered constantly with the opposite message, how the choices were reasonable, judicious, but ultimately arbitrary in the sense that some choices had to be made among a vast universe of ideas, readings, paintings, and musical compositions. Plato, Aristotle, the Renaissance humanists, the Enlightenment philosophers, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Voltaire remain old friends. If you would have told me when I was in high school that I would become a life-long opera fan, I’d have laughed, but such is very much the case. There are several paintings at the Metropolitan Museum in New York that I still regard as my personal property having mixed my labor with them by writing freshman papers. But far more important than the specific content of what I learned was the road toward voracious learning that this magnificent new world opened up for me. I knew as a freshman that I wanted to be a college professor, to spend the rest of my life in the environment of learning and teaching, but it took a longer time to figure out what exactly I wanted to be a professor of. Anthropology was my seventh major, and I referred to it then as my “Peter Pan subject.” Since it was a discipline that embraced natural scientific, social scientific, and humanistic elements, choosing anthropology enabled me not to commit myself too soon to one sphere or another, which felt as if I could delay growing up. The fact that I am still at it after thirty years says a lot about my level of maturity.

The Core was decidedly and intentionally Eurocentric. There were, famously, popular parallel courses on the Asian philosophical, artistic, and literary traditions, but these were not required. The Core courses, however, inspired a significant number of students to pursue non-Western subjects to round out their experiences. I would guess that graduates of my alma mater on average receive greater exposure to non-Western cultures than most American college students. I myself read Confucius, Lao-Tzu, the Bhagavad-Gita, Ramayana, the translated Koran, and the Epic of Gilgamesh as an undergraduate. Still, I think the end result of the liberal education I received was a spirit of awe toward the great tradition of the West; a sense that this is my culture, and I should embrace it wholeheartedly. Not that this tradition is better than any other, but only that it is great and it is, in a real sense, mine. This culture is defined not just by its content or substantive material. It also entails such skills and habits of mind as critical thinking, precise writing, sound argument, quantitative literacy, and sophisticated use of language.

The anthropological part of my education also accomplished its quite different aims successfully. Here I learned to be skeptical about absolutist claims of superiority, and I came to appreciate the cultural, historical, and political nature of all moral and
aesthetic judgments. I knew even then—vaguely and in my gut—that this message was at some level contradictory to the broader liberal arts message I was internalizing. I was leaning to make judgments about ideas, works of art, and moral claims. And I was learning that those judgments must always be interrogated, contextualized, and tentative.

I have come to believe that herein lies the central contradiction of anthropological relativism: It does not take culture all that seriously. The Trobrianders, the Nuer, and the Kwakiutl are suspended within their own taken-for-granted cultures: but we, uniquely, have the capacity to be chameleon-like relativists, to wear our culture lightly, and even to zip it off at will like Halle Berry in the Pepsi commercial. This is much like the Enlightenment conceit of being able to rid one’s mind of all habit, superstition, and error in order to stand before the world completely open to the Truth. And not only do we have the capacity to suspend culture, but we also see the task before us as using what we learn about other cultures as a vantage point to criticize our own. We want and expect those Trobrianders, Nuer, and Kwakiutl to defend and be loyal to their beliefs, values, and practices, and we rarely see the irony in our using their beliefs, values, and practices to criticize our own. No, of course I am not advocating a nihilistic provincialism or cultural chauvinism. I am merely pointing out that anthropological knowledge and certain aspects of the anthropological perspective subvert an important aspect of the liberal arts mission: to bring students into the “great tradition” of Western philosophy, literature, science, and art and to foster the skills needed to discriminate between the truly enduring and the merely popular within that specific cultural heritage. We want our students to argue with Plato and Aristotle, but do we really want them to view Plato and Aristotle as dead, white, European men whose ideas are completely irrelevant to modern life and modern education?

American multiculturalism, which represents a further sliding down the slippery slope toward applying relativism within the borders of a single nation-state, has had a similarly subversive effect on the liberal arts mission, and may, in fact, be a major reason for the growing perception that the liberal arts ethos is an elitist, phallocentric instrumentality of white male hegemony. In my nearly two decades of teaching at a liberal arts college, I have witnessed a growing hostility among these mostly upper middle students toward anything that smacks of elitism and a growing sense that the purpose of college education is to accrue credentials for résumé building in the search for career success. Students increasingly view the “life of the mind” as an ethereal, impractical indulgence. As another apposite example, could you imagine Americans electing the likes of a Woodrow Wilson or nominating an “egg-head” like Adlai Stevenson today?

As a significant figure in my college’s recent overhaul of the general education component of its curriculum, I have felt increasingly conflicted about anthropology’s role in liberal education. Finally I decided that these issues were occupying so much of my mental energy that it was time I taught a course about them. Last semester I taught an upper-level seminar with both of the dual-meaning concepts in its title, Class and Culture. We read Matthew Arnold and T. S. Eliot, but we also read Gans’s relativistic Popular Culture and High Culture, and two social histories that contextualize American cultural distinctions within relations of class and power, one privileging strategies by the producers and peddlers of popular art forms, the other focusing more on changing consumer tastes. We read a social history of NASCAR. We had fascinating discussions about Britney Spears, Ebonics, reality TV, Wal-Mart, rap, Shakespeare, opera, Super Bowl half-time shows, and, of course, the nature and purpose of liberal education. In my research, writing, and teaching about South and Southeast Asia, I rarely feel the tension between my anthropological and my liberally educated sensibilities. But in my Class and Culture seminar that tension was constantly present. The issue of Ebonics is a good example. My anthropological self tells me that Ebonics is a language to be respected and understood within the historical context of the marginalization of Americans of African descent. Added to this historical context are important issues of class and the formation of subcultural distinctions. But, still, there is that other side of me that insists that my students, no matter what their class or ethnic backgrounds, speak and write in grammatical, stylish, standard American English. I have read arguments to the effect that the rules of grammar and style are culturally constructed instruments of white male power. Perhaps I bristle at such arguments because I am a white male, but I will continue to impose my elite power on my students until I retire from teaching, because I do believe that good writing is better than poor writing.
Some of the students in my class argued fervently that we have no standard to evaluate Britney Spears as artistically inferior, especially considering her great popularity. Since all aesthetic judgments are cultural constructs, we must take a relativistic stance toward art forms. Doesn’t the fact that opera, for example, has a small audience with a fairly narrow class and race profile suggest that opera could disappear without much being lost? People like reality TV, so what’s the problem? Only elitists would assert that “high culture” is objectively better than popular culture. Again, a part of me has sympathy for these arguments, but they make the other part of me cringe. As the great Latin cliché states: De gustibus non est disputandum (taste is not debatable). But that other self tells me that Britney and rap will not ever enter the ranks of “the best that has been thought and said,” and we do a disservice to our students when we suggest otherwise.

I suppose Emerson had a point when he referred to “a foolish consistency” as “the hobgoblin of little minds.” Living with contradictions and managing them pragmatically is better than trying to render them completely compatible and consistent—so long as we understand that that is what we are doing. I for one hope and believe that the liberal arts are sufficiently vibrant and strong to be able to withstand the subversion that we anthropologists impose.

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The Black Market and Global Capitalism: Drug Wars in the Movies
Paul Grebinger (Rochester Institute of Technology)

The context for this exercise in the use of popular culture in critical thinking is a course that I teach on Cultures in Globalization. For some time I have explored the black market cocaine trade in Colombia as a case study under the title “Labyrinth of Cocaine: Colombia and the U.S. in an Age of Drugs.” I am able to apply my own direct experience of the country, explore dimensions of the capitalist world system from the perspective of its underbelly, and take advantage of a topic that is perennially current in both news and popular media. Further, this is a topic into which students can easily project themselves, because they have perhaps used drugs, know the story of someone who has, or have been consumers of popular media about the drug trade such as the films “Traffic,” “Blow,” and most recently “Maria, Full of Grace.” At the very least students are familiar with marijuana, and so have opinions, pro and con, about drug use. My goal is to decenter the students from their limited knowledge as consumers to a thorough understanding of the drug trade from the point of view of a producing country. This strategy is essential as all succeeding topics in the course are, in one way or another, a critique of consumer driven global capitalism in terms of impacts on indigenous peoples, peasant populations and women.

The course text, Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism, by Richard Robbins, provides the essential historical setting for the capitalist world system. The opening chapter focuses on the construction of the consumer and emergence of commodity consumption as the deus ex machina of the system. In the second chapter on the laborer, Robbins presents a “Primer on the Economic Elements of Capitalism” (2005: 40-45). Commodities, for instance natural capital, are transformed through means of production and labor power into commodities with exchange value. The money earned from the latter is profit, the cash nexus of the system. Robbins ends this discussion with an analogy to the concept of the “black box.” Most of us have only partial knowledge about how the capitalist system works in terms of the economic, social, political, environmental and ideological inputs that produce the desired profits as outputs. Therefore, the objective of my case study on the “Labyrinth of Cocaine” is to assist students in uncovering the mysteries of the “black box” through an exploration of the black market drug trade.

In advance of the most recent iteration of this case study, I asked students to write a paragraph on their knowledge of the “drug wars.” Some were aware of violence associated with the drug business, that drug lords fight one another for power and territory, that Colombia is a center of cocaine production, and that drug money is involved in funding terrorist groups. Others professed no knowledge other than through popular media. When asked about the film “Blow,” half were familiar with the story line and could name the stars, Johnny Depp and Penelope Cruz. Also, half responded positively to my question about the value of employing a film such as “Blow” in developing this case study.
My decision to use “Blow” (2001: New Line Productions, Inc.) rather than “Traffic” (2000: USA Films) was based on three criteria of pedagogical importance. (“Maria Full of Grace” was not yet available in DVD format in the fall term 2004.) First, the film is based on the biography of the well-known drug dealer, George Jung. There are several good sources of information about Jung, including the “Frontline” documentary “Drug Wars” (1999: WGBH Educational Foundation) and associated Web site, as well as interviews with Jung that Ted Demme, the director of “Blow,” included in the DVD.

Second, “Blow” is chronological, organized in three acts. The first is exposition, in which characters are introduced and their relationships developed in the story of George Jung as creative marijuana smuggler. The second act is complication in which intensity, conflict and danger in relationships among characters is explored as George Jung graduates to the cocaine trade. The third act or climax chronicles the disintegration of Jung’s life following business reversals and marital troubles (dramatic structure categories from Boggs: 40-41).

Third, the DVD version of “Blow” contains two features of pedagogical value: “Addiction: Body and Soul” on the physical and psychological dimensions of cocaine addiction, and “Lost Paradise: Cocaine’s Impact on Colombia.” The latter is especially valuable. About 25 minutes in length, it was entirely produced in Colombia in Spanish with subtitles. Through visual images and talking-head commentary it provides an emic perspective on the impact of drugs in Colombia. I have spent considerable time in Colombia with the journalist Patricia Gomez, who appears in the documentary, and can attest to her probity. In general, the DVD version of “Blow” provides much of value in revealing the negative impacts of the cocaine trade, both consumption and production. It stands as Ted Demme’s valedictory as it was his last film. He died within the year, an apparent victim of cocaine abuse (http://www.imdb.org).

Popular media such as film may be employed in the classroom for different pedagogical reasons. For instance, in American Dreamtime (1996), Drummond submits selected films to cultural or anthropological semiotic analysis, in effect approaching the film as myth. Elsewhere I have described my use of film as an alternative for gender role-play, for example, pairing student responses to a measure of psychological androgyny such as the Bem Sex Role Indicator with the film “When Harry Met Sally” (Grebinger 1996). With “Blow” my purpose has been unabashedly to generate student interest, a “hook.”

In using any film, however, it is important to be clear about its dramatic structure and careful in selecting those scenes of value in the classroom. Selective use of scenes is easier where students are already familiar with the film. The straightforward biographical structure of “Blow” makes scene selection relatively easy and my objective is to present George Jung’s story as both consumer and distributor of cocaine. For that purpose scenes 9-16 from “Diego” to “No More Brothers,” or a shortened sequence 9-12 “Diego” to “Pablo” work effectively. In discussion with students following these scenes there is clear recognition that violence is a cost of distribution because the product is not regulated and the profits are enormous. Further, the “Diego” scene is shot in prison, which is portrayed as a school for crime. Diego is actually Carlos Lehder, with whom George Jung shared a bunk in Danbury Prison, and from whom he learned the mysteries of the cocaine trade. The “Pablo” scene is set in Colombia and portrays the Colombian Pablo Escobar as the quintessential amoral drug lord. As with many another capitalist before him, profit is the thing. In an unregulated system Don Pablo is the law and makes life and death decisions about his associates. Playing as background to his negotiations with George Jung is a scene within a scene, the chilling execution of a business “associate.” The message of the second act, or complication, is that there is no fooling around and for George Jung increasingly less fun in the cocaine trade.

I play the scenes described above without pause, followed by discussion with students for their understanding of characters and events portrayed. At this point I introduce the “Frontline” documentary “Drug Wars” (Tape 1) in which an aging George Jung is being interviewed in prison. He presents his own views of the drug trade along with those of other players such as Carlos Toro and Jorge and Juan David Ochoa, all members of the so-called Medellín Cartel. Jung looks wasted, hardly the glamorous image projected by Johnny Depp. His commentary, however, combined with Toro, the Ochoas, key DEA and other U.S. Government officials, as well as film footage from the golden age of the cocaine trade, are quite dramatic. Especially notable is the
discussion of Carlos Lehder’s innovation in transshipment of cocaine from Norman’s Cay in the Bahamas. Lehder took control of the island and made it a landing platform, receiving large shipments from Colombia and then breaking them down to be flown by small planes into Florida. Renssalaer Lee (1989: 107) has referred to Lehder as the Henry Ford of drug trafficking. Also riveting is the four or five minute segment on Tranquilandia, a drug-processing factory hidden in the jungles of southern Colombia. Former DEA agents and the Ochoa Brothers describe the operation to seize and destroy the facility in 1984 (shown on film footage). Over 22 tons of cocaine hydrochloride were seized with absolutely no increase in the price of cocaine in the U.S. market. As the Ochoas point out, Tranquilandia was one of several large production facilities operating at the time.

From the “Drug Wars” footage students begin to comprehend the scale of the cocaine business. Carlos Toro describes the business in terms of the day-to-day problems of meeting orders and deadlines. Further, he points out that profits are not only invested back into the business, but that the Medellín Cartel diversified into real estate, sports teams, ranching and a variety of other legitimate businesses. Students finally begin to understand that the black market operates like any other capitalist enterprise and that the economic, social, and political impacts on a country like Colombia are enormous. At this point George Jung begins to recede into the background as his role appears less significant in the global enterprise. More importantly, I have moved the focus of discussion from consumption and distribution to production in Colombia. Up to this point I have not lectured. The approach has been to solicit student input and student response, primarily to visual prompts provided by “Blow” and the visual and narrative content of the “Frontline” documentary “Drug Wars.”

The lecture “Labyrinth of Cocaine” begins with an attempt to personalize the topic. I describe connections with Colombians assassinated for their roles in extraditing drug traffickers to the U.S. Targeted violence against prominent Colombians who opposed the Medellín Cartel was endemic in the 1980s and early 1990s. At this point I make explicit the metaphor implied in the title of the case study. Colombia has been sending its finest citizens in sacrifice to the Minotaur at the center of the labyrinth. The Minotaur is the monster of demand for cocaine in the U.S. and, now European and Asian countries as well. The problem is that neither politicians nor citizens in our culture of consumption understand the context of production. This is the “black box” to which I referred earlier.

What do students need to know to think critically about this problem? The following is an abbreviated list of the elements that I bring into the discussion:

- Colombia is a culture with a 4000-year history of coca production, an herbal with positive health benefits and a central feature of adult social interaction, especially among indigenous people such as the Kogi.
- There are many varieties of coca including new ones that produce more leaves or that are resistant to herbicides. Coca can be grown almost anywhere over a wide expanse of Andean South America.
- Without adequate road systems and other infrastructure poor campesinos can double their incomes growing coca instead of more perishable vegetables and fruits.
- Colombians are more creative in imagining and implementing means for shipping cocaine than the DEA and the Colombian National Police are in interdicting it. For example, in the year 2000 a 100 ton submarine was discovered, under construction, in a warehouse just outside Bogotá (that is at about 8,300 feet in elevation and 200 miles from the nearest seacoast).
- There is no capitalist enterprise on earth where profits typically run to 5,000 percent. Therefore, there is no end of individuals eager to enter the business. Today even las FARC, the largest guerilla army in the Western Hemisphere, and the paramilitaries organized to defend against las FARC are all involved in drug production. Drug money buys weapons and recruits. The focus of the drug wars in Colombia has shifted to the Department of Putumayo and ordinary citizens, indigenous people and campesinos, are its main victims.
- Drug monies have corrupted all Colombian Institutions from the $6 million provided by the Cali Cartel to help elect Ernesto Samper President of the Republic in 1994 to the absolutions purchased by drug hit men at the shrine of the Virgin of Sabaleta.
- Finally, Plan Colombia initiated by past President Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002) has failed in its major objective to pacify the
guerilla and the paramilitaries. Instead, it has become a magnet for almost $3 billion in U.S. foreign aid in the form of military hardware, such as helicopters to fight guerillas, crop duster planes, and Roundup the Monsanto herbicide to eradicate coca. (Interested readers are encouraged to access the Caroline Werner Gannett Lecture Series Website <www.rit.edu/~gannett> for a streamed video version of this lecture.)

The interpretative basis for the above lecture is largely etic, or from the outside looking in. It is helpful for students to see the problem from the point of view of Colombians. The documentary "Lost Paradise: Cocaine's Impact on Colombia" provides this insider's view. It is hard hitting, both in its visual images and its analysis. Students see and hear thoughtful Colombians struggling to come to grips with the problems facing the country. These include a history of political violence exacerbated by the influx of narco-dollars, and other corrosive impacts of narco-dollars at all levels of Colombian society, and pervasive inequality and lack of social reform as the proximate cause for guerilla activity and the thriving drug trade. An alternative recent documentary is "Welcome to Colombia" (First Run Icarus Films, 2003) in which Catalina Villar, a Colombian living abroad in Europe, returns to film events leading to the presidential election of 2002. She makes clear that Colombians had grown weary of the impacts of the drug trade and were willing to elect Álvaro Uribe, a politician whose dour demeanor mirrors his resolve to combat, through force of arms, the guerillas and drug traffickers.

On completing this case study I asked students to write a brief essay detailing their understanding of the "drug wars." Several used words like "complicated," "many levels," and "huge industry" to indicate the scale of activities. All described in detail the context and means of production in Colombia and distribution to the U.S., often mentioning the difficulties of interdiction. Students describe impacts on ordinary Colombian citizens in terms of alienation from land and decline in productivity of food crops in favor of coca.

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Gunspeak: the Influence of America's Gun Culture on Everyday Communication

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... My goal is to describe the linguistic ways that an aspect of United States culture, guns, gun-attachment, and gun ownership, considered important by significant numbers of citizens, appears in familiar speech. In putting common linguistic elements of the world's third largest society in my sights, I am attempting a small contribution to what Marcus and Fischer call a "repatriated anthropology" in which "the most important subject for cultural criticism... is not these conventionally defined topics [of kinship, migrants, public rituals, and ethnic minorities, for example], but the study of mass-cultural forms, and... mainstream middle-class life... [including] the formation of public consciousness..." (1986:152).

According to Traube, anthropologists have shied away from studying American popular culture, regarding it as an "impoverished object," without the "exoticism inscribed in the anthropological culture concept" (1995:128).

... To frame this description in sociolinguistics terms, I use the concept of "cultural
presupposition,” meaning “participants in speech interaction come to encounters with an array of knowledge and understandings (models) of their culture as expressed and transmitted through language” (Bonvillain 2003:61). The cultural presuppositions underlying gunspeak are taken for granted by its users, and as is normally the case with cultural bases, applied automatically, without conscious reflection or decision-making. As such, the pervasive presence of guns in American culture, in history as mediated by film and story, and through all forms of entertainment and boy enculturative practices, is as familiar and influential as camels in traditional Bedouin society or cattle among the Nuer.

Gunspeak appears as a diverse semantic field. Similes abound, such as “Written words are like bullets. I'm shooting at death” (W.T. Vollmann, Rising Up, Rising Down (2003 HarperCollins), NPR, “Bookworm,” 11/27/04). Metaphor and metonymy, types of semantic transfer, permeate gunspeak. Metaphor, for example, exists with the common attribution of someone as a “big gun,” “big shot,” or “hot shot,” in which the entire person is identified as prominent or powerful in terms of firearms or firepower. Metonymy, “the substitution of one entity by another based on their shared occurrence in context rather than similarity of their attributes” (Bonvillain 2003:66), is a more limited form of substitution than metaphor. For example, in two references to body parts as “guns,” a gun refers only to a specific part of the person. In recent years the fitness and body building craze has boys saying, “Look at my guns” or “show me your guns,” meaning muscles, particularly biceps. Over the preceding century, the penis has often been referred to as a “gun.” In his novel Battle Cry, Leon Uris describes the humiliating instruction of a marine private being taught not to call his rifle a gun: “Jones then stood there, holding his ‘gun’ in his right hand and his rifle in his left and recited: ‘This is my rifle./ This is my gun./ This is for fighting./ This is for fun” (1954:53). This same usage appears in at least five other sources (Lighter 1994:990; Wentworth and Flexner 1967:235). When considered in its fullest presence and richness, gunspeak is one of our most familiar and useful ways of expressing ourselves, revealing a relationship with firearms so strong it may surprise some.

In their slender volume Metaphors We Live By, Lakoff and Johnson examine the profound relationship between metaphors and culture, asserting that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action (1980:3). Gunspeak metaphors describe varied relationships with guns, firearms, and their qualities or projectiles. In some cases people speak of themselves as firearms (a loose cannon; a straight shooter; to target something; to take a shot at something, as having a hair-trigger), or describe themselves as having attributes of a gun (hair-trigger; to be out of bullets or ammunition), or feel shaped by a firearm (to be armed, to feel under the gun). Metaphors of gunspeak suggest cultural attitudes about power and hierarchy embedded in competition. Over and over the influences of firearms, seen through the action-based words and images of gunspeak, bespeak a contentious society based on ranking, aggression, and conflict. The relationship between culture and metaphor as described by Lakoff and Johnson sounds not unlike the ideas expressed above by B. L. Whorf: “The most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:22).

U.S. Gun Culture

According to sociologist Gary Kleck, the United States “almost certainly has more firearms in civilian hands than any other nation in the world” (1997:63). Exact numbers of civilian firearms are arguable and difficult to ascertain, but in 1994 they numbered upwards of 235 million, of which 80 million were handguns (Kleck 1997:64). Data suggest that gun-owning households often own more than one. “Among households with a handgun, the average number of handguns owned is about 2.8” (69). Cross-nationally, the proportion of U.S. households with guns is “extraordinarily high,” with Norway a close second at 32% (Kleck 1997:68). Switzerland and Israel are other industrial societies with high rates of gun ownership, yet among these four countries, only the U.S. has a significant problem with gun-related violence and might be described as gun-obsessed, judging by the high emotions generated by gun-control debates. The social vigor and political lobbying of the “nearly three million” members of the National Rifle Association (www.nramembership.org/history.htm), and the fame of its recent leader Charlton Heston’s “not from my cold, dead hands” speech, are but one prominent example of gun-addiction in the United States.

Although the number and rate of firearm-caused deaths in the U.S. has been declining since a high of
39,595 in 1993, the number killed by guns in 2001, the most recent year available, was still 29,573 (CDC 2003), a figure not approached in any other industrial nation. In addition to those killed by guns, an estimated 3 to 4 times as many suffer non-lethal wounds, numbering perhaps as many as 200,000 (medlib.med.utah.edu), although these data are not systematically collected. As many as 2.6 million children live in 1.4 million homes where firearms are kept loaded or stored with ammunition (Schuster, Franke, Bastian, Sor, Halfon 2000). Another phenomenon of U.S. firearm deaths is that the percentage of those killed as suicides has steadily grown to 57 percent of all gun deaths in 2001. A gun provides the most common means of suicide, and the most successful. Perhaps most striking of all is the accumulation of gun deaths over time. In the last twenty-five years in the U.S., a period of remarkable affluence and domestic "peace," more than 830,000 people have died in gun violence, about 14 times the number of Americans who died in the Vietnam War. Therefore, it is not surprising that an impressive number of words, phrases, and non-verbal gestures pertain to the culture of firearms and provide us with familiar metaphorical grounding.

Gunspeak

We define our honesty and trustworthiness with gunspeak when we call someone a straight-shooter, or our willingness to try something when we agree to take a shot at it. If the chances of success are low, it is a long shot, but regardless of the difficulty or obstacles, we should stick to our guns and not be gunshy. If something is definite, it is a sure shot; if unfocused, it is a scattershot. If I want to try out an idea, I'll run it up the flag pole and see if it gets shot down. If we feel strongly, we'll stick to our guns. We might take pot shots at someone who annoys us, and if really annoyed, give them both barrels. He shot a glance at his rival and took a parting shot before leaving the room. If we become psycho, we "go postal," or "go ballistic."

Gunspeak seems to be everywhere. The headline "5 Young Guns Who Nearly Took Memphis" is about an international bridge tournament, not an armed assault (Truscott 2001:A21). "Young guns shine at Hollywood premier" (USA Today 8/31/00, p. 2D). Many corporate hot shots rose through the ranks faster than a speeding bullet to become big shots.

TV shows may attract viewers with their pseudo-news natures in CNN's "Crossfire," MSNBC's "Firing Line" or AMC's "Shootout," and William Buckley's "Firing Line" was on for 33 years, but I would rather watch the sitcom, "Just Shoot Me." The title of the letters-to-the-editor page of the The New York Times' Circuits section is "Incoming."

Some gunspeak has a particular history. When Andy Sipowicz on NYPD Blue said, "You just be keeping your powder dry," he was encouraging his partner to act cautiously and prudently, to be on the alert. He echoed Oliver Cromwell's centuries-old advice to his troops, as did Margaret Mead in her only book on American culture, Keep Your Powder Dry (1942). Moving anything completely, lock, stock, and barrel, refers to the three basic parts of a rifle, and was used by Sir Walter Scott in 1817. Surprise, registered as "son of a gun!", may derive from children registered as such who were conceived or born among the cannon of a sailing ship.

Gunspeak thrives in the hypercompetitive world of U.S. sports. Pitcher Roger Clemens is 40 years old, and "he's still throwing bullets out there" (The New York Times 7/5/01, p. C10). And "AL West reloads for 2002" (---3.27/02, p. 4C). "Mets try to turn season around minus big guns" (NYT 7/1/01, p. 3SP). From a football headline and article: "Shootout. Two quarterbacks winging passes as if they were gunslingers firing bullets at each other in dusty Dodge City" "Favre shoots himself in the foot in a showdown that fizzles" (NYT 1/21/02, p. D5). NASCAR Winston Cup driver Joe Memechek was a "hired gun" for the race at Watkins Glen (NYT 7/1/01, p. 3SP).

Bullets are everywhere. "He asked me if I had any bullets in my tank" i.e., whether I had any energy (NYT 10/19/04, p. 1SP). "PowerPoint has become a generic term for any bullet-ridden [riddled?] presentation" and "when [PowerPoint] bullets are flying, no one is safe" (Schwartz 2003:12WK). The anti-missile defense system is described as a system to "hit a bullet with a bullet." Investors are always looking for "funds that can dodge tax bullets" (Braham 2001:78). "This budget shoots with real bullets," asserted a Congressman on NPR (4/25/01). But if a man is infertile or has a low sperm count, he is said to be shooting blanks.

The legacy of the imagined Wild West lives on in gunspeak. A popular lottery game is called "Quick Draw." Stagecoaches are long gone, yet we refer to sitting in the front passenger seat as riding shotgun,
or as one student said, “shottie.” “Bush and Rumsfeld may have to holster guns,” according to one headline (NYT 6/3/01, p. 20). When Canon advertises, “Shoot first. Edit later,” it is playing on stereotypical constructions from the Old West (NYT 5/31/01, p. D5). Or it may be used in association with historic individuals. Extended StayAmerica uses Annie Oakley in its series of “Famous Road Warriors” quoting her, “I only wanted a hotel room. I wasn’t planning to shoot the whole budget,” adding “Aiming for a comfortable hotel at an affordable price? Bulls-eye!” (USAT, Sept. 27, 2000, p. 12A).

Guns lurk in our gestures as well as our words, as parents of boys know well. The single-handed finger-gun gesture frequently used toward other cars while traveling has become more complex. Now boys use both arms and hands, pretending to chamber a round in a rifle and aim it, often with sound effects: if they are “shooting” a finger pistol, they use both hands to steady it, as they have seen in police dramas. Three years ago, two New Jersey kindergartners were suspended for pointing their finger “guns” at each other. Adults use the gestures too. After scoring a direct conversational hit, someone might pretend to blow smoke from the barrel of an index finger, or having made a foolish statement, might hold a finger gun to his head in mock suicide.

So embedded is gun culture that my son’s keyboard offers “gunshots” as one of the instrumental modes of choice. He can play “Ode to Joy” completely with gunshot sounds. In the popular adolescent world of PaintBall, however, an interesting reversal has taken place. The weapons used to shoot paint globules are called “markers,” not pistols or guns, and therefore can be sold over the Internet.

Conclusion

“Gunspeak” is generalized throughout the language. As such it becomes an unself-conscious complement to violent non-gunspeak language which also laces our speech, whether we say we “bombed” a test, or in our “culture wars,” political “wars of words,” our wars on terror, cancer, or drugs, discussion of “battleground” states and the “voter-drive ground war” (NYT 10/20/04, p. A1) in the fall election, or in the speech of adolescent boys (and college students) as they endlessly play videogames, shouting, “Die. Die. I killed you.”

Gunspeak is reminiscent of Toni Morrison’s passionate view of violent language expressed in her Nobel acceptance speech:

The systematic looting of language can be recognized by the tendency of its users to forgo its nuanced, complex, mid-wifery properties, replacing them with menace and subjugation. Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge (1994:15-16).

Less vehemently, at the very least, gunspeak is a “fashion of speaking” supporting Whorf’s assertion that “there are connections but not correlations or diagnostic correspondences between cultural norms and linguistic patterns. . .” (Whorf 1941:93). Hoijer might as well have had gunspeak in mind when he described “a functional interrelationship between socially patterned habits of speaking and thinking and other socially patterned habits” (1964:148).

Catching up on a newspaper I had a gunspeak moment when I read the headline, “An Itchy Trigger Finger Draws Lethal Return Fire” (Byrne 2002), but the article was about a chess match. At one of my sons’ Little League games I snapped awake fearing the worst when I heard the coach shouting to the batter, “Pull the trigger, Sam! Pull the trigger!” But he was only urging a cautious child to swing the bat, not to shoot anyone. Frankly, all this gunspeak just blows me away. If cartoonist Walt Kelly had been an anthropologist examining U.S. culture, he might have had Pogo say, “We have met the [Exotic Other], and they are us.”

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