

Reading Questions  
Week Seven HCW

**Geertz: Deep Play**

Deep Play is essentially the most well-known and widely read piece of writing in anthropology as well as in cultural studies and literary criticism. Your task as a reader is to decipher Geertz's claim that Balinese cockfight is a form of "deep play." So the main question is why the Balinese cockfight is deep? (Hint: what meanings are being ascribed to the whole process?) The answer to this question is scattered throughout the text. It is not summarized in a particular place, which is why also this article may be titled "deep play." Go over the description and analysis of the cockfight and make a list that shows the depth of a deep play. Shall we have a contest on who came up with the longest list, in our class?

Some guiding questions

1. How do Balinese deal with outsiders? How did Geertz and his wife become accepted by the Balinese in the village? What does this tell you about their cultural values and symbols?
2. What does the actual fight look like based on Geertz's description? And what are the events that take place surrounding the fight? What do they reveal about the Balinese society?
3. How might betting influence the fights?
4. What is the meaning of money in relation to cockfight for the villagers?
5. Why is the cockfight important even though "...no one's status really changes" (p.443)? (italics are in the original)
6. What is Geertz trying to convey by citing a passage from Aristotle on page 450?
7. What are your personal reactions and thoughts regarding the cockfight and Geertz's analysis? Do you agree or disagree with Geertz? Why? Do you have a criticism regarding Geertz's analysis?

**Gary Alan Fine: The Depth of Deep Play**

Here is an article that engages with Geertz's Deep Play from a different angle.

1. What is Fine's main criticism of Geertz's work? How does he go about it?
2. Is Fine's critique of Geertz valid or unfair? Why?

Note: The phrase "rhetorical analysis" means a study of the speech and language of a particular group on a certain topic.

## **Susan Millar: On Interpreting Gender in Bugis Society**

I assigned this article primarily to introduce you to the notion of gender in a cross-cultural setting. There are three main premises to absorb from this article.

One, gender is an analytical category that prescribes a particular social and cultural system of values, rights, and practices. Two, gender is separate from biological characteristics (sex). Three, gender is not an isolated system, but constituted in a mutual connection with kinship and social status.

In order to explore these premises, please skim through (pp. 477-481) and read the remainder of the article paying a particular attention to the marriage pattern, expectations in male and female behavior, and descriptions of domestic life and decision making.

1. Do you agree or disagree with the interpretations that the author is making on Bugis gender system?
2. What do you find interesting and convincing?
3. Do you find anything missing from the analysis? How would you go about analyzing the Bugis gender system if you were to rewrite this article?

## **Martha Kaplan: Panopticon in Poona**

Here is an article that challenges one of Foucault's ideas about power that he makes in his chapters on discipline as well as on panopticism. Foucault argues that the transformation of power from traditional (public, violent, and monarchical) to panopticism (subtle, capillary, and omnipresent technology) reflected the historical transition from the era of kings and lords to modern European states. Your task is to trace the argument made by Kaplan. This article is important for us at least in two ways. Methodologically, it teaches you to engage with theories in a critical way and teaches you how to expand on existing theories based on individual research. Theoretically, it points to theoretical and other limitations of Foucault's work.

1. What is the main argument of the article? (You might have to come back to this question (after reading the article, but obviously, keep it in mind while reading).
2. What is Kaplan's argument regarding the knowledge that colonial administration collected on the local tribes, migratory groups, and forest-dwellers? What purposes did such knowledge serve?
3. What kind of panopticons did Elphinstone build in India and to what extent they had been successful?
4. What were the forms of control and power in Poona before the arrival of the British (the Peshwas, Moghuls, etc)?

5. What kinds of documentation were used by different powers throughout Indian history?
6. How do you understand the connection between knowledge and power made by Foucault?  
How does Kaplan question his argument?

MIT OpenCourseWare  
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

21A.01 How Culture Works  
Fall 2012

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.