

Anthropology Section
Date: March 22, 2010
Time: 7:00 P.M.

Location: Wenner-Gren, 470 Park Ave. South, 8th fl.

Panel in Honor of Eric R. Wolf

Organizer: Maria-Luisa Achino-Loeb

The life and work of Eric R. Wolf have been celebrated widely; most recently in an inspiring double session at the American Anthropological Association national meetings in December. All have noted the wide arc of Wolf's anthropological scholarship and the depth of its lasting influence. He has opened-up history for us providing us with a guiding light for grounding our theoretical concerns –be they with the material or ideational dimensions of human life. With this panel, we intend to sketch the multi-layered, multi-directional influence that his work and teaching have had for a younger generation, especially within the New York anthropological community. He has been our colleague, mentor, friend and an outstanding member of this organization which he served as advisor and co-chair of the Anthropology Section. In recognition of this, The New York Academy of Sciences inducted him as Fellow in 1978. As our speakers will show, Eric Wolf's legacy has touched and continues to touch seasoned anthropologists and up-in-coming scholars alike.

SPEAKERS:

Jane Schneider, *Introduction*

Sharryn Kasmir and August Carbonella *The Anthropology of Labor: A consideration of Eric R. Wolf's legacy*

Ken Guest, *From Meaning to Power: Rethinking Culture in our Introductory Textbooks*

Andrew Newman, *Envisioning history, empire, and power: Eric Wolf's legacy for the next generation of anthropologists*

Antonio Lauria-Perricelli *Concluding Remarks*

ABSTRACTS:

Sharryn Kasmir and August Carbonella *The Anthropology of Labor: A consideration of Eric R. Wolf's legacy*

In retrospect it seems fair to say that two intersecting questions about power animated Eric Wolf's research and writing throughout his long and illustrious career:

1. In what ways do global systems of power and influence shape everyday life for seemingly disparate people around the world?
2. And what “forms of consciousness, creativity, institutionalized power, and justice” can we create to bring about social change and secure a different kind of future?

These questions are remarkable for their simultaneous brevity and vast theoretical, historical, and geographical reach. As we'd expect, Wolf developed and deployed a relational approach to these questions, grounding them in the search for previously overlooked global interconnections of economy, culture, social organization, and power. Wolf's incisive questions and relational approach have greatly influenced our own studies of labor histories and geographies. In a forthcoming book, we examine the impact of recurrent dispossession and the accompanying production of difference on laboring populations over time and across space. Drawing on these findings for our joint presentation, we will discuss the multiple and profound ways in which Eric Wolf's legacy is shaping an emergent anthropology of labor.

Ken Guest, *From Meaning to Power: Rethinking Culture in our Introductory Textbooks*

Perhaps our largest "public" audience for anthropology is the tens of thousands of college students who each year take Introduction to Cultural Anthropology courses. In my paper I will review the current presentation of "Culture" in the leading introductory texts and suggest how Wolf's thinking about Culture and Power could transform the way we teach our introductory course and the way we introduce anthropology to our largest public audience.

Andrew Newman, *Envisioning history, empire, and power: Eric Wolf's legacy for the next generation of anthropologists*

For many anthropologists trained in the last decade, problems of power, geopolitics, and history have moved to the theoretical foreground – due in no small part to the continuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Eric Wolf's engagement with these questions (which the “peasant wars” of an earlier, post-war global order helped to inspire) remains essential for anthropology in the contemporary moment. Today more than ever, there is an accepted understanding that anthropological inquiry is incomplete without addressing connections to historically rooted forms of domination and resistance, across local and global scales. In this respect, Wolf's broader efforts to forge a historically minded anthropology of power are indispensable. However, Wolf's work (and the debates it has engendered) merits further rethinking as we attempt to situate anthropology amidst a changing global regime that is already very different from the one which motivated his engagement. This paper is an effort to envision a Wolf inspired approach in a time when the global remains more relevant than ever, even though power is increasingly de-centralized, and debates on the nature of empire (both past and present) have a renewed, yet changed significance for anthropology.