

# Teaching *Star Trek* as Anthropology

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The original *Star Trek* television show is a “natural” for teaching anthropology. Like all science fiction, the show is a reflection of contemporary concerns—a form of mythology. Beyond this, the original show relied extensively on anthropological theory and ethnography in the construction of its plots. The author’s undergraduate course, described in this paper, aims to make students aware of these and also of the concerns of the nineteen-sixties (Viet Nam, the Cold War, civil rights, Hippies) that motivated many of the episodes. In the process, it illustrates how popular culture texts can be used in the classroom to engage students in ongoing anthropological debates and to demonstrate anthropology’s enduring perspectives and concepts.

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A good few years ago now, I was taking an introductory anthropology class through a review for their final examination. They were frustrated and so was I. Like many undergraduates they could not fathom “what I wanted,” while I thought what was wanted was perfectly plain. In this stymied state I said that I wished I could be like that scientist in “The Ultimate Computer” who impressed his engrams on the computer he built. Then I’d impress mine on their brains, and we’d all be happy. “I’ve often thought,” I added, “that I’d like to teach a course in the anthropology of *Star Trek*.” Instantly I had their attention. I had spoken lightly, but they took the idea seriously—and in a year I was, in fact, teaching that very course.

The *Star Trek* to which I was referring, and which I use in my course, is the original show. I yield to no one in my admiration for Patrick Stewart’s Jean-Luc Picard, and I like his crew and his adventures too; but *Star Trek: The Next Generation* is psychological, not anthropological. The later iterations of *Star Trek* are increasingly political. These shifts almost certainly reflect more widespread changes in what Americans think has explanatory value. Tracing the relationship between the focus of the show and the interests of the public generally would itself be a fascinating study; but it is not one I have undertaken, so I cannot pursue it here. The important point is that the original show, with William Shatner, Leonard

Nimoy, DeForest Kelley, Nichelle Nichols, George Takei, and Walter Koenig, relies extensively on anthropological theory and ethnographic information for plots and characterisation of other cultures, and so it gives me a good basis for discussing a variety of anthropological topics. I designed the course to be a kind of introduction to anthropology, but one that relied on *Star Trek* episodes as well as anthropological sources. This does put some limitations on what one includes in the course, and so it is not as comprehensive as a normal intro course would be. Still, we manage to cover a lot of ground.

The course has two main parts. In the first, a survey of elementary anthropology, we focus on ethnographic method, ethnographic data, anthropological theory, and two particular anthropological topics. The second of these topics, the definition of the person, makes a transition between the halves, since it is important both to anthropology and to American culture, which is the focus of the second half of the course. It relies on episodes that refer to the culture of the sixties, and we approach the episodes as if they were mythic--that is, that they tell us metaphorically about America rather than being factual accounts. Each week we see one or two of the old episodes, and the students read relevant texts. Discussion is a *sine qua non* for the class as well.

The tripartite division is, obviously, arbitrary to a degree. Each episode has many aspects that merit attention in a course like this. The way I deal with the multiplicity of themes is to focus on each in turn but also, as the semester progresses, structure discussion so that we look back to established themes--as in one of those memory games (What Janey has in her Pocket, for example) where each player has to remember all the items the previous players have said and then add another. I also anticipate themes yet to come. Thus the class learns that the focus in any given week is just that, and not its entire relevance to anthropology.

A truism about science fiction is that it is really about the present, which is undeniably the case with *Star Trek*. As anyone familiar with the show knows, a major recurrent theme is its valorising a certain idea of the United States. It is implicit in pretty much all the episodes we watch in my class. Recognising the outright celebration of America (as in "The Omega Glory," for example) is easy, even for those who find chauvinism objectionable. More challenging--and more interesting to an anthropologist--is the complementary representation of the non-American, the alien--or, rather, representations, since for any given positive there are innumerable negatives. This, too, is a theme I stress throughout the course, since the episodes give us good visual examples of representations of "the Other." The *Trek* images, obvious and even crude as they are, allow students to recognise more refined and subtle representations of "savagery" in their ethnographies.

### ***Star Trek* as introduction to ethnographic methods, data, and issues**

Since representation of the Other is central both to the show and to anthropology, we begin with that topic, and we approach it by four avenues: ethnographic method; ethnographic reporting; and ideas of savagery and civilization including cultural evolution which, of course, employs both concepts in its schemata.

As is well known, Gene Roddenberry designed the original show to be what we would now call multicultural. Daringly for the time, the bridge crew of the *Enterprise* included a black woman and a Russian. Having an alien as a significant officer was another expression of Roddenberry's determination to challenge racial and gender prejudices. In the same spirit, he invented the "prime directive" that the Federation, including the *Enterprise*, should interfere not at all in the new lives and civilizations they discovered. All this is exactly the kind of thing we insist on when we talk about ethnographic method: take them at their own valuation, figure out what's going on, don't make judgements, and don't interfere.

Ethnographic research--in however simplified a form--figures in almost all the episodes. Even when the crew are not in danger from the other life forms, the success of their mission depends on ethnography: how well, and how expediently, can the crew members figure out the situation and fit into it? Either someone knows the culture of the planet already (for example, in "Friday's Child"), or one or more of the principal characters must ask the right questions and use the answers to make the right choices--not unlike ethnography. Having established this point--how we collect our data--we can refer to it repeatedly without further elaboration.

But these shows are instructive in another way. Despite the prime directive, the captain and crew more often act like arrogant colonials or zealous missionaries than humble anthropologists. My first task in the course is to focus on the requirements of field work and its difficulties, and to compare the anthropological standard with the actions of the *Enterprise* crew in this regard. The most satisfactory episode for this lesson, I think, is "The Gamesters of Triskelion," although I have also used "The Corbomite Maneuver" and "Space Seed." "Gamesters" begins with Kirk, Uhura, and Chekhov being whisked away from their transporter to a previously unknown planet, Triskelion, where they become slaves to mysterious beings called Providers. Their refusal to obey the commands of these masters results in physical assault and paralyzing pain of a mystical nature. In order to escape, Kirk tries to find out as much as he can about the culture of the planet, questioning his "drill thrall," Shahna, until she too is punished, for answering him. Eventually Kirk secures their release by using the rules of their own culture to defeat the inhabitants.

In terms of ethnography, the insistence of the local people that the *Enterprise* officers conform to their way of doing things is very much like what the anthropologist goes through in the field, as the students learn from the assigned readings: a chapter from Margaret Mead's autobiography, *Blackberry Winter* (1972),<sup>1</sup> in which she describes going to Samoa--how unprepared she was for field work, how hard it was to find informants and to be accepted; and the passage from Napoleon Chagnon's *The Fierce People* (1968) that describes his unsettling introduction to the Yanomamo and his life among them. Both accounts describe situations analogous to those we see in "Triskelion." True, neither Mead nor Chagnon experienced mystically-delivered excruciating pain when they committed solecisms, but they did feel the chill of disapproval and even ostracism. The scenes between Kirk and Shahna have the character of interviewing an informant, and both reading selections mention the mixed blessings of such conversations. On

1 Full references to the required readings will be found at the end of this paper.

one occasion, Shahnna's explanation is that "that is the way," a common answer in field work. She refuses to discuss the Providers, like an informant refusing to reveal cultural secrets--another problem in field work. For his part, Kirk has to explain alien concepts to a local person, which is something the anthropologist is frequently called upon to do.

It is interesting to compare Chagnon, for instance, with Kirk in this episode, since by his own admission Chagnon initially found the Yanomamo appalling. He did his best to isolate himself from them, even to the point of refusing to give them gifts; and he found that he had to adopt what he thought of as an unprofessionally aggressive manner in order to get along with them. Mead's situation was quite different, Samoans not being inclined to thrash each other at the drop of a hat, but she had analogous problems in making contact and being trusted. These professionals' difficulties and successes contrast nicely with Kirk's actions: each throws light on the other. As the class usually observes, his constant criticism of the Triskelian culture is not acceptable, but they also question Chagnon's reluctance to share and Mead's readiness to advise.

But "Gamesters" offers good opportunities to discuss representations of the Other, also, in that it depicts a society composed of captives from all over the galaxy, no two alike. They are ruled by entities whose form is glowing brains without bodies, a construct that epitomizes a certain image of the future, which is a different kind of Other. Kirk's bombastic challenge to these cerebral types implicitly insists on the rightness of the ideal American way of life: that people should be informed, independent, and usefully occupied. "Gamesters" has relevance also for our later discussion of ideas of the person in that it implicitly presents a whole person as one with both an active body and an informed mind.

One way to develop the theme of the Other is by discussing the concept of savagery. Here again, images of savagery are easy to find in the corpus; indeed, the show comes close to conflating "Other" with "savage." In episodes such as "Let that be your last Battlefield," "A Taste of Armageddon," "A Piece of the Action," and "Patterns of Force," where the *Enterprise* crew do not explicitly call the planet's indigenous population savage, nevertheless we can claim that they are because they identify might with right, a position the Federation opposes. In other episodes the identification is more obvious: the Yangs of "The Omega Glory," the miners of "The Cloud Minders," the Native Americans of "Paradise Syndrome," even the "bad" version of Kirk that appears in "The Enemy Within"-- all are verbally identified as savage, whether noble or ignoble. For the most part, though, these plots hinge on something other than the fact that some of the characters are savage. "Friday's Child" and "Galileo Seven," which I use in connection with this topic, do hang the action on the savagery of the indigenes.

"Friday's Child" has the *Enterprise* in an encounter with noble savages, the inhabitants of Capella IV, where the Federation hopes to establish a mining treaty. The mining deal with the Capellans is threatened by competition from the Klingons, who (unlike the Federation) are sneaky and duplicitous. Class discussion of the episode is devoted to identifying the "noble" savage characteristics of the

Capellans, based on the discussion in Bernard Sheehan's book *Savagism and Civility* (1981). These include a commitment to their own laws, a social hierarchy, and a deep sense of honor. What prevents them from being fully civilized are a preference for fighting instead of for more peaceful pursuits, a tribal rather than a state form of political organization, and a Frazerian notion of succession to high office by murdering one's predecessor together with his spouse(s) and child(ren).

"Galileo Seven," by contrast, explores the idea of ignoble savagery in a couple of ways. In this episode Spock and Sulu lead an away team to the inhospitable surface of a planet in a shuttlecraft called the *Galileo*. Among the crew members with them is an African-American man named Boma, who is both a sound scientist and a gracious humanitarian. In the course of the excursion tension develops between Mr Boma, who is too sentimental for Spock, and Mr Spock, who is too logical for Boma. (The significance of having a black man be the more "civilised" of the two would not have been lost on 1960s audiences.) Boma comes close to calling Spock a savage for the way he reacts to the death of one of the crew. At the same time, the crew are beset by true ignoble savages: creatures who communicate in grunts and cries, who seem to be governed solely by rage, and who hurl huge crude spears tipped (incongruously) with giant Folsom points. The episode plays off their seeming indifference to the fate of their fellows--their lack of social morality--against the humanity of Boma and the cold logic of Spock. As with "Friday's Child," the class relates these representations to Sheehan's discussion of savagery--ignoble, in this case--and to Mead's autobiographical description of the Arapesh, Mundugumor (Biwat), and Tchambuli (Chambri). Her disapprobation of all three groups is obvious; in fact, she strongly implies that they are themselves ignoble savages.

Ethnographic method and representations of the Other require a discussion of ethnographic data as well. The show does, admittedly, draw more heavily on history than on anthropology, but there is a sense in which both historical narrative and ethnographic reporting are the same thing. As an example of borrowing ethnographic material "Paradise Syndrome," which incorporates material from the ethnography on Native North America, is an obvious choice. But I also have them watch "A Piece of the Action," which, although ostensibly about Chicago under gang rule in the 1920s, owes a good deal to Japanese history. The intent here is to have the students be able to pick up on references to real cultures, past or present, even when heavily disguised. So, in this connection, we also discuss "Friday's Child," which we have already debated as an example of savagery, because of its close resemblance to the Bedouin and to ancient Sparta. We return to the issue in discussion of "The Apple," in which the culture owes a good deal to Polynesia.

"Paradise Syndrome" begins with a small landing party on a planet very like the northern hemisphere of the Americas, where they find inhabitants who turn out to be American Indians. This is not a case of parallel planetary evolution. The dialogue identifies them as coming from the Navajo, the Delaware (Lenape), and the Mohican, which Spock says are "peaceful" and "advanced" tribes although "too primitive" to understand space flight. They are on this planet because some vaguely

identified interplanetary group rescued them from probable extinction on Earth and put them in an environment where they can prosper and improve themselves. Our emphasis is on how the show has amalgamated material culture from different Native groups and, more generally, about how justifiable is their representation of such cultures. In fact, Navajo culture is not evident in this episode, and the only Northeastern Woodlands cultural items are one long-house and a birch-bark canoe. Most of the culture is Plains: tipis, buckskin clothing, geometric designs, the cradleboard, and so on. In order to give the students some idea of the original cultures on which the show is based, I have them read Curtis's short work on the Sioux (1975). We talk about reasons for adopting a generic Plains culture for this show and identify the origins of non-Plains cultural forms. A more ambiguous point is whether a show like *Star Trek* can, or even should, try to educate its viewers about real Native American life.

The other episode I use in this context is "A Piece of the Action." In this, the *Enterprise* goes to the planet Iotia to correct what they call cultural contamination brought by the Starship *Horizon* years before, when the Prime Directive had not been established. Reports have come to the Federation suggesting that this earlier visit interfered with the "normal" cultural evolution of these people, who are described as being "imitative." The *Enterprise* landing party finds that the gang culture of 1920s Chicago now dominates this planet. During the course of the episode they find that the "contamination" is some books about the period left behind by the *Horizon* crew. The real ethnographic parallel in this case, I argue, is not Gangland USA but Japanese history. At least twice, the Japanese have completely reorganised their culture by borrowing extensively from another culture. The first time that we know about was in A.D. 645, when they remade themselves in the image of China; the second, in 1887, when their inspiration was the western military-industrial complex. "A Piece of the Action" allows the class to talk about these radical changes in Japanese culture, which are addressed in the two readings for this week. One is the third chapter of Sansom's *A History of Japan to 1334* (1958); the other, an essay entitled "Japan and Western Civilisation," by Kuwabara Takeo (1983). And, like "Paradise," this episode provides material for talking about the nature of culture change and cultural evolution. At this point, we ask simply whether a thorough remaking of a culture is possible. In the Japanese case we have evidence that it is not. With that as a guide, the class are able to identify in this *Star Trek* episode evidence to suggest that it did not happen on Iotia, either.

### ***Star Trek's* lessons in anthropological theory**

But talking about culture change is only a step away from talking about cultural evolution. *Star Trek* writers implicitly accept the validity of a Victorian cultural evolutionary model and, less obviously, a Radcliffe-Brownian functionalism as well. Most of the episodes we watch in the class show this, so that even without the two episodes we watch in connection with the specific topic of cultural evolution

we would have a good deal of material for discussion. I have two motivations in devoting so much attention to these theories in this class. One is to assist in that difficult task, getting undergraduates to recognise the theoretical framework of a narrative, whether academic or not. Even to students who have had a theory class, the theoretical assumptions of the *Trek* episodes are not as obvious as, say, the use of Plains Indians culture or the Biblical story of Eden, or references to the Vietnam and the Civil Rights movement. My other reason for drawing attention to evolutionary anthropology in the show is to counter some prevailing notions about culture promulgated by popular media generally: that it evolves in a predestinate way, that deviation from that path will spell disaster for somebody, that when one part of a culture changes the whole thing changes, that cultures “progress” and that those less “advanced” may justly be called “savage,” and “improved,” that culture is best understood either organically or mechanistically.

“Bread and Circuses” and “Patterns of Force,” which are the main episodes for this topic, accept the Victorian cultural evolutionary model, and Radcliffe-Brown’s functionalism may be discerned there as well. To help the students recognise the implicit theory, I have them read excerpts from Morgan’s *Ancient Society* and Tylor’s *Anthropology*, and Radcliffe-Brown’s paper “On the Concept of Function in Social Science” (1935). Usually I give at least one lecture on anthropological theory as well. The two episodes have similar plots. In each, the crew encounters a planet with a culture remarkably like that of a period of earth history--ancient Rome in one case, and Nazi Germany in the other--both characterised by marked social stratification. On each planet an outsider has come to the indigenous culture--the captain of a wrecked merchant ship on one, a cultural historian on the other--with unacceptable results. The merchant captain has seen his crew enslaved and sacrificed in the Roman games because he would not surrender his ship to the despot of the planet, while the cultural historian has introduced Nazism to his planet in an effort to create harmony and has instead brought about an oppressive dictatorship. On each planet, the dominant party decides that the *Enterprise* crew are dangerous and forces them into hiding, where they are befriended by the disadvantaged party. In “Patterns,” the minority helps the crew overthrow the dictatorship; in “Bread and Circuses,” the end of despotism is implied by the crew’s discovery that the minority practice a form of early Christianity.

“Bread and Circuses” sets the action on a planet physically very much like Earth. According to “Hodgkins’ law of parallel planetary development,” which Captain Kirk invokes, physically similar planets produce similar cultures that evolve in the same ways. The dialogue might almost have been written by Morgan or Tylor (except they would have used four times as many words). When they arrive on the surface, Kirk asks Spock what era the people have reached, and Spock responds with a diagnostic list--no atomic energy yet, he says, but they do have radio communication, power transportation, and an excellent road system. Morgan’s way of characterising cultural levels in terms of a list of items is apparent. Likewise, in “Patterns of Force,” the inhabitants of the planet Ekos are described as having leapt several stages of cultural evolution, and the *Enterprise* crew conclude that

they must have had help to do so. As it turns out, they have. The visiting historian, Dr Gill, has remade their culture in the likeness of the Nazis, with disastrous results. The lesson is clear. Like the Victorians, the Federation (which is to say the writers, of course) regards cultural evolution as a kind of individual writ large, who must go through childhood and adolescence before becoming an adult. Skip a stage, and you have something unnatural.

A functionalist understanding of culture--which Morgan and Tylor themselves implicitly accept--is evident in these episodes, too, since both old-fashioned evolutionary anthropology and functionalism assume a necessary, i.e., functional, interrelationship among all the things present in a culture at any one time (e.g., radio communication, power transport, etc.), such that introducing one of these into a culture must result in the rest appearing also. In "Patterns," moreover, this idea is made explicit. Dr Gill's take on society is that it is like a biological entity in which "each cell...works for the good of the whole."

As it is never wise to create a vacuum and not provide some substitute for it, I spend some time talking about structuralism, which to me is a more than adequate replacement for the theories we have dismissed. To introduce this way of thinking, I have us watch "The Cloud Minders" because there is a structural analysis of *Star Trek*, which the class reads, that uses this episode in particular to make its point (Claus 1976); they also read Lévi-Strauss's essay about the structural analysis of myth (1968). A major point in my own lecture about this is the great difference between this kind of analysis, that relies on indigenous categorical definitions and the relations among categories, and the schemata of Morgan and Tylor or the functionalism of Radcliffe-Brown, which ignore indigenous meanings in favor of an Aristotelian system of classification. I try to have them see that despite the dubious excesses of Lévi-Straussian structuralism it really is a better way to understand cultural phenomena than evolutionism or functionalism.

We pursue this point further by considering a special case of structuralism, the symbolic representation of time. Time has always fascinated writers of fantasy and science fiction, and so it is hardly surprising to find several episodes about it in the *Trek* corpus. My concern is not the consequences of time travel or the literary challenge of resolving the paradox implicit in the idea, but rather the ways in which people codify a non-material aspect of existence and, in doing so, make it collectively comprehensible. "The Apple" and "The Return of the Archons" provide good examples for this topic. The class reads Leach's classic work on the subject, "Two Essays on the Symbolic Representation of Time" (1961), and an essay by Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf that explores the relationship between the temporal and the atemporal in the Judaeo-Christian concept of Eden.

"The Apple," loosely based on the Genesis story of the Fall of Humankind, demonstrates the point in the first part of Leach's essay, "Cronos and Chronos." He argues that for many cultures time is neither unidirectional nor cyclical but oscillating, moving from one pole to another. This was true for the ancient Greeks, for whom time began with the establishment of contraries--most particularly, female as wife and male as husband. They saw time as a series of linked oppositions such

as busy-ness and idleness, night and day, sowing and harvest. With differentiation come movement from one pole to another and the consequent dialectical change without which there can be no time, and vice-versa. This sequence of events forms the plot structure of "The Apple." The *Enterprise* crew encounter the people of Gamma Trianguli living in a seemingly perfect, timeless place where sex, ageing, and death are unknown--a paradise like Eden. The static culture provokes an argument between McCoy and Spock, one that resonates with the issues of evolutionism that we discuss in other contexts. The doctor argues that something should be done because the culture inhibits growth; Spock responds that since the people are happy and healthy, they should be left alone. He loses the argument, though. Through the medium of sex--two of the local people observe Chekhov and his girl-friend necking, and begin to imitate them--time and change are introduced into the culture. The people's god, Vaal (probably a reference to the Canaanite god Baal), condemns eroticism. He orders the death of the visitors, who respond in the usual way by destroying the god. They justify this action--contrary to the Prime Directive, as Spock insists--partly on the ground that all people deserve the chance to make their own choices.

As with the Greeks, the people of Gamma Trianguli have not established that crucial--sexual--differentiation, and they so they experience no changes, whether physical or cultural. The first thing that happens when they take a step in that direction is death, or the threat of death. This point is part of Leach's argument; the essay by Fürer-Haimendorf makes it even more pointedly. He shows that the message of the expulsion from Eden--that is, if people engage in sexual intercourse they must necessarily die--is found in other, unrelated cultures as well. Both he and Leach contend that most, if not all, people equate sexual activity with the origin and the continuation of time and of change. Whether consciously or not, the writer of this episode has accepted these associations also.

The plot of "The Return of the Archons" also plays with an idea of oscillating time, and it illustrates the point that Leach makes in the second part of his essay, "Time and False Noses." He begins this essay by asking why people all over the world "mark out their calendars by means of festivals" (1961:132)--anything from the weekly Sunday roast to the annual, all-out inversions of Saturnalia or Carnival. Just such a festival seizes our attention at the beginning of this episode, which finds the *Enterprise* crew on Beta-3 trying to discover what has reduced Mr Sulu to a vacuously grinning automaton. Like Gamma Trianguli, this is a culture with no changes, no hostilities, no aggression or quarrelling, only harmony and peace. But there is a difference. Periodically there is what the Betans call the "Red Hour," during which the younger persons, at least, are required to commit every kind of mayhem. They go in an instant from insipid amiability to violence, destroying everything in their way and assaulting each other with a will. At the end of the period they all return to "normal," and it is as if none of it had ever happened. From an American cultural point of view this is equivalent to "venting," without which (it is widely, if erroneously, supposed) a person will become neurotic and probably suffer a psychosomatic disorder. The anthropologist sees this, though,

as an admirable example of the symbolic representation of time. The alternation between ordinary humdrum time and the periodic ceremonial reversals, like Hallowe'en and Mardi Gras, confirms the passage of time; in a way, it also creates it, in cases where the ritual is held to be the impetus for time to continue (as, for instance, among the Aztec).

### **Teaching anthropological approaches to power, authority, and freedom**

These episodes provide material for discussion about two other important topics in this course: the opposition between *gravitas* and *celeritas*, and the proper relationship between the individual and society. The most extensive academic examination of the first of these, *gravitas-celeritas*, is that by Georges Dumézil, part of which I have the students read in connection with this discussion (Dumézil 1988). As he sets it out, *gravitas*, which may also be called authority, is the ordered, calm, predictable, social side of life, associated with the elders of society; but it is sterile and incapable of generating its own energy. For that, it relies on *celeritas*, which may also be called power: a violent, mad, dangerous, fecundating, energizing irruption of brief duration, accomplished by the youth of the group. Because that which is *celeritas* is dangerous if unchecked, *gravitas* limits it and, in the process, turns the energy to useful productive ends rather than destructive ones.

This relationship, one of the most important discoveries of anthropology, is a cultural universal; and as such it merits inclusion in any anthropology course. Its relevance to this course, though, lies not in its universality but in the fact that Americans have difficulty understanding authority and power and the relationship between them. Not surprising, then, that this ideological conflict finds expression in many of the episodes in the *Trek* series, even though it is never addressed explicitly. "Return of the Archons" is an excellent illustration of Dumézil's argument in that it contrasts the wild festival--obligatory for the young people of this planet, but not the elders--with the calm and order of what Kirk calls "normal" life. While a psychologising interpretation takes the "Red Hour" as a way of letting off steam repressed by the totalitarian rule, the anthropologist familiar with Dumézil's formulation will understand that this is a necessary revitalisation of the system. Without that brief violence, the whole world would succumb to entropy, slowing asymptotically to a near standstill.

The plot of "The Apple" represents this dyad in a slightly different way. For one thing, it emphasizes the relationship between authority and power more than that between rule and disorder. Vaal is clearly the authority, initiating action on the part of his followers, who therefore constitute the power in this relationship. At the same time, Vaal is himself powerful, punishing the wayward with bolts of lightning and nearly destroying the *Enterprise*. This conforms to Guénon's observation that authority encompasses power, since it must both authorize and bring into effect what it has authorized (Guénon 2001). In stressing the fact that the people of

Vaal have lived unchanging for millennia, the episode confirms the postulate that without periods of disorder, a society cannot reinvigorate itself. The *Enterprise*, in this case, provides the violent, fecundating irruption, first by demonstrating the pleasures of physical intimacy, then by removing the barrier to their enjoyment among Vaal's people, finally by assuring them that before long they will have "replacements" to look after. (The Captain, cravenly, does not warn the people of Vaal that with replacements comes death.)

Other episodes with obvious examples of these relationships include "Gamesters of Triskelion," where the Providers authorize combats and the Thralls carry out their wishes; "The Cloud Minders," where a similar relationship obtains between the people of Cloud City and the Troglite miners on the planet's surface; "The Enemy Within," in which the Captain is beamed up split into two opposed parts, or personalities--one "good," one "bad"--each in a different but identical body; "The Way To Eden," in which the young renegades who hijack the *Enterprise*--individualistic and adamantly opposed to regimentation and direction--represent the *celeritas* to the crew's *gravitas*; and "The Trouble with Tribbles" and "I, Mudd," both of which show the dire consequences of power unregulated.

But more generally we observe that the hierarchy of the officers aboard the *Enterprise* represents these dyads also--or it should. Ostensibly, Captain Kirk is the authority, and he does indeed authorize everything that his crew does. The crew, including the deck officers, are the power to the Captain's authority, carrying out his orders with--usually--no questions asked. As my students are quick to point out, though, Kirk is a bad example of authority, always insisting on doing himself what he should delegate to others. No wonder that Americans have difficulty understanding the relationship between the two aspects of governance. In another regard, the triad Kirk-Spock-McCoy represents the relationship between *gravitas* and *celeritas*. Spock is, of course, the very model of the first. McCoy, the most emotional of the three, is his opposite if only for that reason. In this case, Kirk's effective moderation of rationality with sentiment, logic with emotion, mediates these extremes and justifies his status as Captain.

The other important theme relevant to "Archons" and "The Apple," the relationship between the individual and society, is another major concern of Americans. As such, it finds repeated expression in *Star Trek*. The worlds in these two episodes promote the collective at the expense of the individual. On Beta-3, everyone is "absorbed" into "the body," lofty language for brainwashing to rid a person of any tendency to individual action. The servitors of Vaal find themselves punished for attempts to do other than what Vaal has ordained. People on both planets seem to think that their own desires and interests--if they have any--are not only unimportant but may be positively dangerous to the good of the whole. And, predictably, both episodes challenge this totalitarian idea. During the Cold War, when *Star Trek* was conceived and aired, a critical difference between the Russians and the Americans was that we encouraged people to be themselves--"it's a free country," we were fond of saying, ignoring the fact that all that means is that Britain no longer rules us--and the Russians prohibited it. That made us great,

and them the losers. This kind of jingoism runs through the *Star Trek* episodes, of course. It is surprising, though, how often students claim to have been unaware of it.

### Exploring the concept of the person

The relationship between individual and society is one aspect of the concept of the person, another important theme in this course. Many of the *Star Trek* episodes concern this very issue--in fact, it is common in science fiction generally, not to mention other literary genres. And it is certainly a subject of great importance to Americans, as the debates over stem-cell research, abortion, sex-changing, long-term coma, and human euthanasia show. We pick these up in our discussion of the four episodes we watch in connection with this topic: "By Any Other Name," "Spock's Brain," "Mirror, Mirror," and "The Enemy Within." Each plot hinges on some drastic modification to the person and its consequences, but in each case the modification differs radically from the others, so that as a set they provide interesting variety for argument.

The action of "By Any Other Name" begins with the *Enterprise* responding to a distress call. When the away team beams down to help, they find two human-looking people--Kelvans--who demand the surrender of the ship. Naturally the Captain refuses, and the crew discover that the Kelvans can interfere with the human voluntary nervous system and--when truly thwarted--reduce humans to fist-sized truncated cubes of something that might be mineral but looks like styrofoam. The Kelvan leader describes them as "the essence of all they were. Flesh, and brain, and what you call the personality distilled down into these compact shapes. Once crushed...this person is dead." He suits action to word, shockingly. The Kelvans themselves are in borrowed bodies, as the crew soon discover. They have cultivated their intellectual powers by deliberately suppressing emotion and sensory impressions. But now, in human bodies again, they are assailed by a variety of both, with predictable results including a fist-fight between the Kelvan leader and the Captain. In short, the episode presents a materialist view of the person in saying that the body and the senses inform the workings of the mind, and that even non-material qualities like emotions and personality can be reduced to a chemical compound.

As the title suggests, "Spock's Brain" also explores the relationship between mind and body. Here again there is an alien attack on the physical integrity of a member of the crew, in this case Mr Spock. They remove his brain surgically, leaving his body still alive--but not for long. Dr McCoy warns the Captain that without a brain to keep it going a Vulcan body will die within 24 hours, and so the *Enterprise* sets off in pursuit of the brain. They discover that the thieves have taken it to run their society and maintain the physical plant on which they depend. Spock's brain is alive and well, and it is also unquestionably Spock, even without the ears. It communicates with the crew in Spock's voice and with his unemotional logic. The episode suggests that a body without a brain is no longer a person,

since Spock’s body is dying. We get the same idea presented metaphorically in that the society of underground women who installed Spock as their governor was also “dying” without a “brain” to direct it. But the show also suggests that the brain sans body--or, anyway, its original body--is still the person; more, that Spock himself has not changed as a person despite his brain now being part of a completely different “body.”

“The Enemy Within” gives us yet another point of view, presenting the person as an alloy of virtuous and wicked rather than a conjoining of brain and body. At the beginning of the episode Kirk is beamed up split into two parts, or personalities, each in a separate but identical body. One comes up facing the camera, and is his “good” aspect; the other, his “bad” side, comes up with his back to us. Spock remarks with his customary acuity that this is “an unusual opportunity to examine the human mind.” He might have observed with equal pertinence that Robert Louis Stevenson had anticipated these events by some centuries in “Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde,” which also examines the relationship between the will to do right and the innate resistance to that inclination. Throughout the episode the two Captains perform appropriate activities: the “good” one keeps the log, obeys all the rules, and is generally a good example of Ruth Benedict’s Apollonian man and Dumézil’s *gravitas*. The “bad” one is destructive, hostile, violent, and in all respects Dionysian, or *celeritas*. The differences are so clear-cut that we can arrange them in classic dichotomous style:

“real” Kirk	“alter ego” Kirk
good	bad
virtuous	vicious (drunken, rapacious, violent)
rational	emotional (furious, savage)
selfless	selfish
social	egotistical
courageous	paranoid, cowardly
indecisive	decisive
physically weak	physically strong
slow	fast

The episode argues that both aspects are necessary to being an effectual person. The good, virtuous aspect is useless without the strength and decision of the bad, vicious aspect, which in turn is unproductive without the control and guidance given it by the good side. The argument represents a person as a microcosm of the forces that, according to Dumézil, influence the course of history and the structure of governments. Authority must control power, power must revitalise authority, or both will cease to exist.

“Mirror, Mirror” treats the question of the person in yet a different way. In this episode, a transporter malfunction causes the landing party to slip into a parallel universe, bringing their opposite numbers simultaneously aboard the *Enterprise*. The parallel universe is an evil Empire where intimidation and treachery rule and advancement depends on assassinating one’s superior officer. It is in every way the opposite of the democratic United Federation of Planets. The “real” *Enterprise* crew members manage to blend in--Kirk even hoodwinks the mirror-Captain’s mistress--and to ward off attempts upon their lives. The misplaced mirror crew, however, cannot adapt to the democratic, fair-play culture of “our” *Enterprise* and quickly find themselves in the brig. The situation is resolved by the mirror Spock, who realises that these three are not his own people and devises a way to reverse the transfer occasioned by the faulty transformer.

The action in this episode gives us a starting point for talking about the relationship between culture and personality--that is, in a sense, the person. Ostensibly these two universes have the exact same people in them--presumably their DNA is the same--but because their societies have evolved differently, they are themselves different. But how different? Kirk is still the captain on both ships; Spock too has the same position, and he is equally logical in both worlds; Sulu is still the helmsman--and so on. Drawing the contrast with the idea presented in “By Any Other Name,” where the attitudes and reactions of the person are entirely a function of their physical characteristics and their senses, we usually have a very lively debate about nature vs nurture, sociobiology, and materialist vs rationalist approaches to understanding human beings.

To complement what these episodes say about American ideas of the person, the class read what some anthropologists have said about the definition of the person in other cultures. Readings include selections from Maurice Leenhardt’s classic work, *Do Kamo*, which treats of the idea of the person in a New Caledonian society. The Canaques among whom Leenhardt lived had a very different understanding of the relation of brain, mind, soul, and body. Another study, also from the Pacific, is Simon Harrison’s paper “Concepts of the Person in Avatip Religious Thought” (1985). In emphasising the power (efficacy) of the person as a creator and maintainer of social relations and, therefore, society, Sepik River societies are similar to American society. But, as Harrison’s paper shows, we differ considerably in our ideas about what constitutes a person. While we think of personhood as monolithic, consistent from one context to another, the Avatip think of the person as multi-faceted, each facet appropriate to a different social context. I also have the class read the introduction to Louis Dumont’s *Homo Hierarchicus*, which offers challenging ideas about equality, hierarchy, and the relationship of person to society. Countering both American individualism and the imagined totalitarian states of *Star Trek*, he argues that the person is “a more or less autonomous point of emergence of...a society” (1970:39). Christopher Crocker’s paper about Bororo identity, “The Mirrored Self” (1977) which analyzes the relationship between the formation of a personal identity in a culture with “rigorous categorical limits on meaning, personal choice, and conceptual position” (1977:129)--very different from either the Sepik River or the modern United States. My intent in making

these assignments is to make the students aware of some of the anthropological literature on this subject and to throw into relief their own unexamined ideas about the nature of the person and realise that those ideas are cultural, not natural.

The study of ideas of the person bridges the two halves of the course. In the first part, we looked for what the show took from anthropology; in the rest of the semester, we talk about how it made use of contemporary American events: the Cold War, Viet Nam, the hippies, and the Civil Rights movement. My take on these is that we should understand them in the same way that we look at mythology. The original *Star Trek* is about the 1960s in the same way that mythology is about the culture that generates it, even when the mythic narrative includes events physically impossible, morally repugnant, or both. Like mythology, *Star Trek* is a collective representation. It deals metaphorically with American culture, and America in turn has made *Star Trek* so much a part of its culture that references to it may now go almost unnoticed.

### ***Star Trek* as mythical representation of U.S. culture and politics**

The sixties talked about making love not war, tuning in and dropping out, going to San Francisco with flowers in your hair. But it was not all about irresponsibility. John F. Kennedy's inaugural exhortation to "ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country" got a positive response. People adopted the motto "*Give a damn*," and they turned their attention to social work, the Peace Corps, inner-city schooling, and similar means of improving the lives of the unfortunate. Nowadays people like to recall the sixties as a halcyon time before things really started to fall apart. The reality, of course, is quite other. It was a violent decade and a frightening one. The Cold War and the real fear of Communism as a malignant force produced the Vietnam war, ruinous in many ways. This in turn contributed to the emergence of the hippies, who saw no point in trusting an authority that could embroil the country in such a mess and who refused to follow conventions that now seemed hypocritical. At the other end of the social spectrum, the Civil Rights movement also expressed profound dissatisfaction with authority and the status quo, insisting that rights were for all American citizens, not just those whose ancestors came from Europe.

*Star Trek* incorporated these concerns in its plots. I have several objectives in devoting much of the course to this material. One, which I have mentioned, is to have them see these episodes as mythology and, in so doing, come to appreciate my insistence that what we call myth, other cultures call history. Another aim is to make the decade more immediate for my students, who by this time are not just the children but sometimes the grandchildren of people who came of age then. Being so removed from that period, they do not appreciate what an exciting, anxious, dismaying time it was. The other objective is to have them recognise the serious side of the series. The students are naturally aware that current TV shows refer to contemporary issues, frequently of a trivial nature. They are inclined to see *Star*

*Trek* as almost a parody of itself--with good reason, I have to admit--and so they do not see the consideration of important and disturbing matters underlying the amours of Kirk and the verbal sparring of Spock and McCoy.

I begin the whole consideration of American culture with the Cold War because it was a contributing cause of the other topics we cover in this part of the course. The first episode we watch is "A Taste of Armageddon," in which two neighboring planets have been at war for over five centuries. Or so they inform the landing party from the *Enterprise*. The *Enterprise* people find this puzzling, as there are no signs whatever of fighting or destruction. The situation becomes clear quite quickly, however: the two planets attack each other by means of computers, which register a certain number of deaths after each attack. A treaty binds each government to ensure that that number of people is actually destroyed in "disintegration chambers." The most fearful sanction--that a real attack will occur--keeps both sides true to the terms of the treaty. The ruler of the planet explains that the system satisfies the innate predator in humans but does no damage to the infrastructure, so the survivors can continue to live prosperous lives.

The inhabitants of the planet, like the planet itself, have names ending in numbers, suggesting what is in fact the case: that they are all subject to the commands of their government in favor of the greater good (in this case, reporting to disintegration chambers when ordered to do so). Such a society recalls Russia, or what was popularly supposed to occur in Russia: a dictatorship with callous disregard for the suffering of its subjects, who must obey its every order without question. The war between these planets, in turn, recalls the Cold War itself--not that the U.S. and Russia ever came to blows directly, although the threat was always there. But like these two planets, they achieved a perpetual stand-off, each constructing yet more nuclear arms in order to deter the other from making the first strike. Kirk violates the treaty so that both sides will actually suffer the horrors of war, and consequently bring it to a speedy end. Indirectly the show offers a criticism of the posturing of the U.S. and Russia, for which there was no excuse. Both sides had been through a particularly bloody time not long before, and the Russians in particular had suffered grievous losses of life and damage to property. The episode suggests that the two countries ought to take a lesson from that and cease their constant sabre-rattling.

The reading for the Cold War is the first chapter of Stephen Whitfield's *The Culture of the Cold War* (1996), which describes well the atmosphere of suspicion and paranoia that pervaded the 1950s after the realization that the Russians too had atomic weapons. The threat that there would be a World War III, following this discovery, and the resulting arms race affected the country well into the sixties--as "A Taste of Armageddon" makes clear.

From the Cold War it is an easy segue to the Vietnam War. In connection with that engagement, we watch two episodes, "A Private Little War" and "Omega Glory." The first of these is one of the most thoughtful of all the episodes. The action takes place on an Earth-like planet that Kirk had visited years before as a lieutenant. In describing its character to Spock and McCoy, the other members

of the landing party, he calls it a Garden of Eden and notes particularly that the inhabitants never fight among themselves, although they have arms for hunting. The *Enterprise* has come to the planet to try to secure exploratory rights, since it promises to be what McCoy calls a "medical treasure house." They soon learn, though, that things have changed since Kirk's first visit. Some of the population have abandoned nomadic foraging in favor of village life. They are armed now with flintlock guns that they have been given by the Klingons, who have also taught them how to make the weapons and supplied them with the raw materials. The intent is to have the villagers overcome and wipe out the hill people, who still follow the old peaceful way of life. Kirk decides that to allow this to go forward is intolerable even if his actions do contravene the Prime Directive. In order to redress the balance, he arranges for the Federation to provide the hill people with flintlocks too. Although they are initially reluctant to change their way of life, they come to see that it is necessary. It is a decision neither Kirk nor the hill people take lightly; as the Captain says in the closing scene, it is not what he wants, but what has to be.

The dialogue makes an explicit mention of Southeast Asia in the twentieth century, linking this episode to the Vietnam War. Initially the United States supported the South Vietnamese against the Communist North, backed by Russia, China, or both. The U.S. feared that the better-armed Viet Cong would crush the (allegedly) pro-democracy southerners unless the latter also had up-to-date weapons and military training, which we decided to provide. The results were disastrous for the United States, and not much fun for the Vietnamese either. The dialogue of this episode conveys the opinion that although participating in this kind of escalation is necessary, it is a wretched business--as we now know.

"The Omega Glory" is intellectually the opposite of "A Private Little War." So far from being thoughtful, it is chauvinistic to the point of kitch; and it gives a completely different opinion about the Vietnam war. The plot is not unlike those of "Bread and Circuses" and "Patterns of Force": the *Enterprise* arrives at the planet Omega-4 to find that the captain of another starship, the *Exeter* (whose crew have all died of a local infection), has violated the Prime Directive by interfering in the culture of the planet. There are two societies on this planet: one an Asian-looking people called Kohms and the other a northern-European-looking folk called Yangs. These two have been at war for generations. Until recently, the Kohms had dominated the Yangs, but when Capt. Tracey arrived that balance was shifting. He provided the Kohms with phasers to help them maintain their superiority. At this point Kirk and his party appear and express disapprobation of Tracey's actions. He explains that the Yangs are true savages, incapable of speech, rationality, affection, or loyalty; their overcoming the Kohms would be unnatural. The Yangs eventually attack the Kohm village and overcome it, and apparently the whole Kohm polity too. The Yang leader, having discovered Kirk's finer points whilst they shared a prison cell, invites him and his people to the audience chamber, where they are allowed to see the Yang holy relics. The first is the American flag. The Yang leader begins to mutter mystic-sounding words which turn out to be a garbled version

of the pledge of allegiance. Kirk realizes that the Yangs are Yankees, the Kohms Communists--only on this world, the Communists won the conflict in Southeast Asia. He discovers also that the Yangs have largely forgotten the true meaning of the flag, the pledge, and above all the Constitution, access to which they limit severely. In a fine patriotic speech (until one remembers that Shatner is not himself American, but Canadian), Kirk explains that the core American tenet, democracy, means that the Constitution is meant for *all* the people, not just the leader and his inner circle. We are left to assume that the Yangs will remain dominant on this planet because of their renewed awareness of equality and the American way.

The reading about Vietnam is Book II of Neil Sheehan's gripping *A Bright Shining Lie*, in which he traces the growing awareness that those in charge of the war were duping the American public about the course of the war and its prospects. Sheehan discusses the strengths of the Viet Cong versus the weaknesses of the South Vietnamese, and offers explanations for why the attempt to contain Communism in Southeast Asia was a failure. This first chapter gives an historical context for the conflict, beginning with the Chinese occupation of the area, moving on to its settlement by the French, to the determination of Ho Chi Minh to rid his country of the French presence after the disappointing results of the Treaty of Versailles, the consequent entanglement once again with the Chinese and the Soviets and, eventually, the confrontation with the United States.

Concurrent with the escalating war abroad was the burgeoning internal conflict over civil rights in this country. "Let that be Your Last Battlefield" is an episode manifestly about the Civil Rights movement--or, more accurately, about the utter futility of racial hostility. Here again aliens invade the *Enterprise*: two men, each of whom has a completely white side and a completely black side. They appear separately. The first identifies himself as coming from the planet Charon, which Kirk says is in the "southern part of the galaxy"--a subtle sign that we are, indeed, talking about the Civil Rights movement. The newcomer emerges almost at once as a racist himself, condemning the white and the black members of the crew for being "monotone." Shortly after his arrival a second black-and-white man appears. The crew's assumption that they are friends receives a rude correction when the second says that he has been pursuing the first, who is a fugitive from justice. The arguments they let fly at each other are full of the rhetoric of contemporary black/white dialogue: that those who enslave do so to benefit the slaves, that slavery can benefit neither slaves nor owners. Asked why they are so bitterly inimical when they're just the same, one of the men refutes the suggestion by saying that the other is obviously inferior because he is white on his right side instead of being black, as a superior person would be. This is the *reductio ad absurdum* of the race issue, and it makes a good point. But the two men do not see it so. They manage to transport themselves down to their own planet, which the ship's sensors discover to be barren of life except for these two men. Although the episode ends there, it gives us to understand that they, too, will shortly perish. The lesson is clear. Without racial co-existence, we too will destroy ourselves.

"Last Battlefield" gives us a lot of material to discuss. Naturally, we talk about

persistent racial discrimination in the country. But first, I spend some time telling them about the nonviolent civil rights movement, and I ask them to read three chapters from Taylor Branch's brilliant study of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Parting the Waters*, in which he describes King's move towards non-violent civil disobedience. I also point out that although we still have some considerable way to go in eradicating race as a way of thinking about people, nevertheless half a century has seen some significant changes. As I write this, Barak Obama--who describes himself as bi-racial, although the media call him African-American--has been elected the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States with a clear majority of the popular and the electoral votes. In the fifties and sixties, some people wished that this might happen, but who seriously thought that it would happen this quickly? Changes that are closer to home for my students are evident, too. They remember the election of the Honorable Douglas L. Wilder to the governorship of Virginia, the nation's first elected black governor. In many Virginia cities, including Richmond, city governance is both black and white, black often dominating. On the Mary Washington campus, African-American students and white mingle freely; there are interracial friendships and even couples. The students take this kind of thing for granted, which is heartening. They also complain, with justice, that we should be more diverse than we are. But I remind them that only forty years ago the campus was lily-white and interracial marriages were illegal in Virginia. As we work for further improvement we must not lose sight of the real changes that have occurred.

"The Way To Eden," *Star Trek's* treatment of the hippie movement, is a good contrast to the civil rights episode. The latter is unremittingly grim and despairing and the end is tragic. "Eden" has lighthearted moments and suggests the possibility of reconciliation between the hippies and authority. The plot has a group of young renegades under the leadership of a somewhat older man hijacking the *Enterprise* and making the crew fly them to a planet they call Eden, where they can do their own thing and not be bothered by social expectations or disapproval. Their leader, Dr Severin, who is based on Dr Timothy Leary, preaches a hedonistic anarchy. The hijackers are in all ways the opposite of the *Enterprise* crew--they are apparently unregimented, they wear loose revealing garments no two of which are alike, they keep no regular hours, they abhor bureaucracy and hierarchy, and they seem to have no notion of duty. Some of the crew find them appealing, but the Captain considers them regrettable, and not just because they have taken his ship. He can do nothing to thwart them, though, and eventually they arrive at their destination: a beautiful planet that is fatally toxic to anyone who ventures on to its surface. Dr Severin dies almost at once. The *Enterprise* crew manage to rescue his shaken followers, and promise to take them somewhere they can be looked after. If nothing else, we learn that a lack of discipline leads one to a sticky end.

Part of the discussion of this episode involves talking about what real hippies and their way of life were like. The episode, I have to say, is not very informative on that score. The actors are self-conscious and awkward, and the music fails to achieve a true sixties rock sound. *Hair* is a much better representation of life among the drop-outs. And so is Joan Didion's revealing essay "Slouching Towards Bethlehem," which I have them read. One of the things we talk about is the extent

to which this kind of life really gives people “freedom” to “do their own thing”; another is whether we can call this a society, or a sub-culture, if the rule is that nobody has to pay attention to anyone else, ever. Do we, can we, find Durkheim’s moral person in Haight-Asbury? The episode allows us to revisit earlier themes as well, such as the representation of the “other” (in this case not fearsome aliens, but revolutionaries) and the relationship between *gravitas* and *celeritas* that we touched on in connection with “The Enemy Within,” “The Apple,” and “Return of the Archons.” The article “Social Hair,” by Christopher Hallpike, considers these matters, if somewhat obliquely. I ask them to read it because of the long loose hair--especially for men--that was the hallmark of the hippies. Hallpike’s analysis argues that a tight, constrained hairstyle--e.g., the tonsure, braids--indicates that one is an obedient member of a society; while a loose, formless hairstyle identifies one as a rebel, someone outside society. Interesting discussions result from what is, for many of the students, a novel revelation.

### Coda

For the last two episodes we watch, “I, Mudd” and “Trouble with Tribbles,” I identify no anthropological or American theme in the syllabus. As episodes, they seem to be intended to amuse rather than point a moral, and they make an agreeable finish to the semester. But they do have anthropological messages for those who will see them, and on the final exam one question asks the students either to offer a feminist critique of “I, Mudd” or to analyse “Tribbles” in terms of Mauss’s theory of exchange. Whether I get any responses to the second depends on whether the students have had economic anthropology, since I do not discuss Mauss in this class--that would give away the answer. “Tribbles,” afflicted as it is with pawky humor, nevertheless does illustrate Mauss nicely. The crew of the *Enterprise* adopt the tribbles, who then take over the ship, feeding on everything edible. They appear to be entirely parasitical until they reciprocate by revealing--however unwittingly--that the grain intended for the relief of a new colony has been poisoned and that one of the “Federation” people is a Romulan spy. In “I, Mudd,” Harry Mudd, of “Mudd’s Women,” has got himself on to a planet populated entirely by robots programmed to serve human masters. When the *Enterprise* arrives, he is the only human they have to serve. He has caused innumerable female robots to be made, most of them completely interchangeable, to respond to his lecherous whims. They are themselves under the control of a male robot named Norman. It is a feminist’s nightmare, in spite of the fact that by the end of the episode we learn that the robots actually have a good deal of control over their “master.”

The course is a lot of fun to teach and--I think, and hope--to take. The more experienced students get practice at applying what they already know; those less familiar with anthropology learn about it in a way perhaps more memorable than the standard lecture-and-discussion class. But beyond wanting to enlarge the anthropological knowledge of my students in this course, I hope that they will realise that one may be as it were habitually anthropological, not just about the grand aspects of their lives but equally about something as seemingly trivial as an old television series.

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