

SPRING 2011 NONHUMAN ANTHROPOLOGIES

A. SEMINARS

For each session there is a small number of set texts. You will be expected to read these, preferably all, and come prepared to discuss one of them in detail during the seminar. For the text you are preparing, I suggest you summarise the argument to yourself and note down whatever questions, observations and critiques you have. None of these texts are beyond criticism, some of them are downright strange, and it is in your interest to figure out how they may or may not fit with your understanding of anthropology and the anthropological project.

I have also included a collection of supplementary readings, which you may find useful to engage with as you go through the primary texts for the course.

1. INTRODUCTION

Kirksey & Helmreich, "The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography"

Latour *We Have Never Been Modern*, Chapter 1

Haraway *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, Chapter 8

2. POTATOES

Ries, "Potato Ontology"

Hobart, *An Anthropological Critique of Development*, Chapter 10

3. THINGS

Latour, "Sociology of a Door-opener"

Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things"

Henare, *Thinking Through Things*, Chapter 2

4. HUMAN REMAINS I: BLOOD

Copeman, *Veinglory*

Mol and Law, "Regions, Networks and Fluids"

5. HUMAN REMAINS II: ORGANS

Lock, *Twice Dead*, Introduction and Chapter 1

MacClanly, *Exotic No More*, Chapter 2

6. HUMAN REMAINS III: UNDEAD

Kwon *Ghosts of War*, 'Introduction' and one chapter of your choice.

Comaroff & Comaroff, *Alien-Nation*

7. MIND THE GAP

Willerslev, *Soul Hunters*, Chapter 1

Willerslev, "Spirits as Ready To Hand"

8. FURRY FRIENDS I: HORSES (LOOKING)

Cassidy, "Falling in Love with Horses"

Berger, "Why Look at Animals?"

Burt, "John Berger's Why Look at Animals"

9. FURRY FRIENDS II: DOGS AND SHEEP

Haraway, *When Species Meet*, Chapter 1

Kohn, "How do Dogs Dream"

Goodman, *Genetic Nature/Culture*, Chapter 5

Law & Mol, *The Actor-Enacted*

10. BIRDS

van Dooren, "Death of a Vulture"

Lorimer, "Counting Corncrakes"

11. MICROBES

Lowe, "Viral Clouds"

Paxson, "Post-Pasteurian Cultures"

Helmreich, *Alien Ocean*, Chapter 1

12. INSECTS AND ROBOTS

Parikka The Politics of Swarms

Zerner, "Stealth Nature"

Vidal, "Anthropomorphism or sub-anthropomorphism?"

Morris, *Insects and Human Life*, Introduction and Chapter 1

13. POSTHUMAN?

Boelstorff, *Coming of Age in Second Life*, Chapter 1

Falzon, *Multi-sited Ethnography*, Chapter 11

B. COURSEWORK

Your principal assignment for the course is to select a nonhuman "something" that interests you: preferably something that relates to your everyday environment or experiences, perhaps also to your other coursework (e.g. MA research project). It could be anything: an object, a place, a creature or entity, a process, an environment, even an abstract concept. During the course your aim will be to think, in a sustained manner, about what it would mean to approach this "something" anthropologically. Why is it interesting, and to whom? What does it mean, what does it do, who cares about it? What sort of questions can you ask of it? How will you go about getting the answers?

A key aspect of scholarship is that it participates in a community of work, within which each project draws on and contributes to the research of others. Has anyone else written about your chosen subject? How have they approached it? Can you use what they have said, or improve on it, or do something entirely different? If no one has written about it, why not?

Based on your own answers to these and other related questions, you will then design and conduct for yourself a brief programme of ethnographic fieldwork investigating the "something" you have selected. You are free to choose your own methods, approach and framework for this, but you must be able to justify your choices with reference to the work of other scholars: in other words, as you work through the readings, keep an eye open for things that might be relevant to your chosen subject. Be as experimental or inventive as you like: this is a challenging assignment, but you are welcome to have fun with it. The aim of the exercise is to get you thinking creatively about the potential (and limits) of anthropological methods, as well as their possible applicability to everyday phenomena.

At the end of the course you will produce and be assessed on a piece of scholarly work based on your research project (approximately 5000 words). The text may be in any format, as long as it follows the appropriate academic conventions (e.g. citations and bibliography). The only requirement is that it combine an experiential dimension (something you have done) with a theoretical discussion that draws in at least some of the readings and issues we have covered over the course of the semester. As the course proceeds, you are welcome to bring to the seminars for discussion any issues you encounter with your project.

As mentioned above, each session involves a number of readings, intended to introduce you to some of the general issues in this field of inquiry. For each seminar, you should come prepared to discuss at least one of the readings in depth: the discussion will be more useful

to you if you can link the readings to your class project. Each session also includes time for discussing any issues or questions you may have regarding your project. The set readings may also change, depending on the interests of the class.

The seminars run through the first half of the semester. At some point in the second half, we will organise a one-day event. Here, each of you will chair a short session presenting a paper about your project to the rest of the group: what is interesting about your subject, why did you choose it, how are you approaching it and why, what are you hoping to find out, what sort of problems or challenges have you encountered and so on. The aim here is to give you the opportunity to offer and receive constructive feedback within your peer-group. Each of you will also act as a discussant to the paper of another class participant. In this role you will prepare and deliver a commentary on their paper, raising questions, identifying problems and (perhaps) making suggestions for improvement: you are all in the same boat here, so try to be helpful.