

**HUMA5780 – CRITICAL APPROACHES TO CULTURAL  
ANTHROPOLOGY  
SPRING 2018**

**Instructor:** Guangtian Ha ([hmgth@ust.hk](mailto:hmgth@ust.hk); [hanguangtian@gmail.com](mailto:hanguangtian@gmail.com))  
**Time:** Wednesday 10:30 am – 1:20 pm  
**Room:** 5508

**I. COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Anthropology is at a crossroad; in the twilight of the human as the nuclear bomb increasingly replaces the nuclear family in defining who we are and how we feel, anthropologists are claiming for the venerable discipline a special status in explaining why the end of the human sciences spells new promises for all creatures, living or otherwise. In this course we walk – totter down, more precisely – the path of modern anthropology to trace the intended shifts and unexpected turns that mark this young – and notorious – discipline from its early days to the present. Texts are chosen primarily for their innovative and rounded arguments; but accessibility – even enjoyability – is also considered. The order of their arrangement is not necessarily chronological, though a cursory look will reveal a rough chronology. The ethnographies are chosen for their demonstration of the breath-taking diversity of the anthropological enterprise; they show an impressive variety of the approaches adopted by anthropologists in the study of societies, cultures, and more often than not, the limit of humanity. How can we come to grips with the present by engaging with the past? How do we explain death in the age of atomic and H-bombs using theory fashioned us by the Zuni and the Guayaki? Does anthropology teach us how to live, or how we cannot not die?

**II. COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Upon the completion of the course students will have acquired

- 1) A broad as well as solid comprehension of the core concepts and debates in modern anthropology;
- 2) A strong ability to engage critically with classical social and anthropological theories;
- 3) A capacity to use anthropological concepts to analyse global social issues and bring theories of the past to bear upon present concerns;
- 4) Basic skills in sophisticated academic writing in the social scientific and humanistic traditions.

**III. COURSE ASSESSMENT**

- **10%**            **Attendance & in-class participation**
- **90%**            **Assignment**

The assignment comprises two parts:

- 1) **Weekly Response Paper.** Each student is required to submit a short paper summarizing the reading of that particular week. The due date for the paper is 5 pm on the Tuesday before the class. It should be no more than 500 words, and should cover the main points/arguments of the relevant reading. The papers count 40% towards the final grade (each one thus counts about 3%).
- 1) **Final Essay.** Moderate length (1,500 – 2,000 words). In it the student is expected to constructively bring two to three lectures together (e.g. language and war, gender and gift, religion and death, etc.), and examine their specific connections based on ethnographic examples. The ethnographies could be from the course readings; or students can draw on other relevant sources. The essay counts 50% towards the final grade.

***\*All assigned reading materials are posted on Canvas, with the full-length books placed on reserve in the library under this course code.***

#### IV. CLASS SCHEDULE

##### ***7 Feb. – This is How It Began***

- Malinowski, Bronislow. (1932). "Introduction," "III. The Essentials of the Kula," "XVII. Magic and Kula." in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. London: George Routledge & Sons, LTD. Online copy available at <https://archive.org/stream/argonautsofthewe032976mbp#page/n7/mode/2up>
  - Objects, Artefacts, and the Kula Ring (But how did the anthropologists acquire such relics?). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97yph803DzQ>
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E. (1976). Chapters I – IV. in *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
  - The Disappearing World Documentaries. The Granada Series. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rmug\\_qvO15s&list=PLmOV3j0gi7kiY00griJcNmYNqvzCwrEE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rmug_qvO15s&list=PLmOV3j0gi7kiY00griJcNmYNqvzCwrEE)

##### ***14 Feb. – Thinking Out Loud***

- Boas, Franz. (1889). "On Alternating Sounds." *American Anthropologist*. Vol. 2, No. 1 (Jan 1889), pp. 47-54.
- Sapir, Edward. (1927). "The Unconscious Patterning of Behavior in Society." in *The Unconscious: A Symposium*. E.S. Dummer ed. New York: Knopf, pp. 114-142.

- Whorf, Benjamin Lee. (1956). "Language, Mind, and Reality." in *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, John B. Carroll ed. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 246-70.
  - *First Language: The Race to Save Cherokee*. Emmy Award-winning documenting the efforts of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians to save the endangered Cherokee language. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9y8fDOLsO4>

### **21 Feb. – What They Say and How We Think**

- Malinowski, Bronislaw. (1923). "The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages." in *The Meaning of Meaning*. C.K. Ogden and I. A. Richards eds. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, pp. 296-336.
- Silverstein, Michael. (1976). "Shifters, Linguistic Categories, and Cultural Description." in *Meaning in Anthropology*. K. Basso and H. Selby eds. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, pp. 11-55.

### **28 Feb. – The Gift of Death**

- Mauss, Marcel. (1990). *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. W. W. Norton.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. (1987). *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
  - Other references:
    - Derrida, Jacques. (1995). *The Gift of Death*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
    - Sahlins, Marshall. (1972). *Stone Age Economics*. London: Taylor & Francis.
    - Bataille, George. (1988). *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*. New York: Zone Books.

### **7 Mar. – Between Having and Being**

- Rubin, Gayle. (1975). "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex." in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, Rayna R. Reiter ed. Monthly Review Press, pp. 157-210.

### **14 Mar. – The Courage of Interpretation**

- Clastres, Pierre. (1998). *Chronicle of the Guayaki Indians*. Translated by Paul Auster. New York: Zone Books.

- Other references:
  - Clastres, Pierre. (1994). *Archeology of Violence*. Semiotext(e).
  - Freud, Sigmund. (1963). *Three Case Histories: The "Wolf Man," The "Rat Man," and The Psychotic Doctor Schreber*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
  - Lévi-Strauss, Claude. (1963). "The Sorcerer and His Magic," "The Effectiveness of Symbols," "The Structural Study of Myth." in *Structural Anthropology* (Vol. 1). New York: Basic Books.

### **21 Mar. – The War that Never Ends**

- Masco, Joseph. (2014). *The Theater of Operations: National Security Affect from the Cold War to the War on Terror*. Duke University Press.
  - Wars of Perception. Virilio, Paul. (1989). *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*. London: Verso.
  - Dialectic of Intimacy and Detachment. Podcast on the Cultural Anthropology website. Drone: Anthropology, Poetry, Military. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/1197-drone-anthropology-poetry-military>

### **28 Mar. – The End that Never Arrives**

- Lepselter, Susan. (2016). *The Resonance of Unseen Things: Poetics, Power, Captivity, and UFOs in the American Uncanny*. University of Michigan Press. Open access ebook available via Knowledge Unlatched: [https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=ku01.r2\\_3;view=1up;seq=2](https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=ku01.r2_3;view=1up;seq=2)
  - Compare Stewart, Kathleen. (1996). *A Space on the Side of the Road*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

### **11 Apr. – Life, Death, and the Undying**

- Biehl, João. (2005). *VITA: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment*. Photographs by Torben Eskerod. University of California Press.
  - Compare Povinelli, Elizabeth. (2011). *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism*. Duke University Press.

### **18 Apr. – The Stories that Kill**

- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. (1963). "The Sorcerer and His Magic." in *Structural Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books, pp. 167-85.
- Favret-Saada, Jeanne. (2015). *The Anti-Witch*. Translated by Matthew Carey. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Other references:
  - Siegel, James. (2006). *Naming the Witch*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
  - Blanchot, Maurice. (1993). "The Narrative Voice (the 'he' the neutral)." in *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
  - Benjamin, W., & Zohn, H. (1963). "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nicolai Leskov." *Chicago Review*, 16(1), 80-101.

## **25 Apr. – Faust in South America**

- Taussig, Michael. (1980) *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*. University of North Carolina Press.

## **2 May – You Are What You Eat**

- Mintz, Sidney. (1986). "Food, Sociality, and Sugar," "Power," "Eating and Being." in *Sweetness and Power*. Penguin Books, pp. 3-18, 151-214.
- Tsing, Anna. (2015). "Part II: After Progress: Salvage Accumulation." in *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton University Press, pp. 55-144.
- Popular reading. Collingham, Lizzie. (2017). *The Hungry Empire: How Britain's Quest for Food Shaped the Modern World*. Random House.

## **9 May – Beyond the Human**

- Kohn, Eduardo. (2013). *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. University of California Press.
- Other references:
  - Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. (2015). "Part III. Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere." in *The Relative Principle: Essays on Indigenous Conceptual Worlds*. Chicago: Hau Books.
  - Haraway, Donna. (2007). *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
  - Nadasdy, Paul. (2007). "The Gift in the Animal: The Ontology of Hunting and Human-Animal Sociality." *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 34, No. 1, (Feb., 2007), pp. 25-43.