

Contemporary Anthropological Theory

Lecture: NAH 12, Thu 3:30–5:15pm
Tutorial: NAH 12, Thu 5:30–6.15pm

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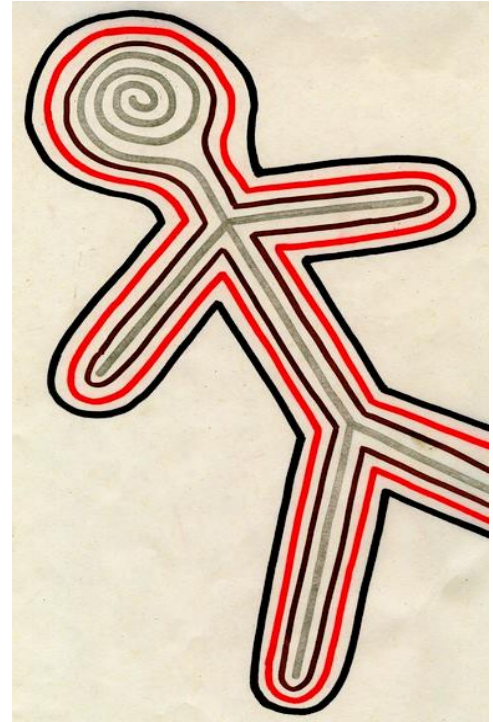


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The second half of the 20th century was marked by critical challenges to anthropological practice and theory by breaking away from “grand,” generalizing, objectivity-focused, modernist, and Eurocentric theories towards questioning the biases and power relations embedded in representation of the others and the researcher’s positionality in anthropological accounts. As a result, there emerged an array of theories that critically account for the salience of gender, class, ethnicity, race, and nationality, not only among the people studied by anthropologists but also among anthropologists themselves.

Although not a comprehensive overview of all contemporary theories, this reading-intensive and discussion-intensive course will serve as a map for this theoretical diversity. We will begin by reviewing the late 20th century developments in postmodernism, postcolonial theory, the influence of Marx and Foucault, practice theory, embodiment, feminist anthropology, and globalization. Then we will proceed to the texts published in the 2000s on a range of issues from media, science and technology, violence, affect, migration and citizenship to engaged anthropology, ontology, and personhood. We will discuss major theoretical debates and ongoing controversies that emerge from different scholarly views on how to make sense of the changing world and what should be the position of anthropologists within it. Thus, we will learn how anthropologists think and write about social formations and human experience and describe the complexity of everyday and exceptional forms of life.

ANTH 2111 complements ANTH 2110’s historical perspective on anthropological theory.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to do the following:

- name key theorists in anthropology and other disciplines who have influenced the development of anthropology in the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century
- identify major anthropological theories, concepts, genres, and debates of this period
- explain the strengths and weaknesses of the examined theories and theoretical concepts
- provide examples of the application of the examined theories to ethnographic studies and the everyday life

Learning material

Prior to each lecture you are required to read an assigned Textbook Chapter and at least one Primary Text, as indicated in Class Schedule.

Textbook chapters are NOT posted on Blackboard but are available electronically:

- **Routledge Companion to Contemporary Anthropology**, edited by Simon Coleman, Susan B. Hyatt and Ann Kingsolver. London and New York: Routledge, 2017. E-book <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/cuhk-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4748641>
- **Schools and Styles of Anthropological Theory**, edited by Matei Candea. London and New York: Routledge, 2018. E-book <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/easyaccess1.lib.cuhk.edu.hk/books/e/9781315388267>

Primary Texts are posted on Blackboard. I strongly encourage you to read or skim all assigned Primary Texts, especially if you have not read the works of the assigned scholars previously. However, for the tutorials, you will need to know only one Primary Text in detail; the rest of the texts are optional and are marked with an asterisk*.

Useful resources

- The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology (CEA) is a great teaching and learning resource hosted at the University of Cambridge. It has comprehensive articles on key anthropological concepts, theories, and scholars <http://www.anthroencyclopedia.com/articles-a-to-z>
- If you need concise definitions of the concepts that you encounter in readings and lectures, check out this glossary of theory terms: <http://www.utpteachingculture.com/teaching-theory/glossary-of-theory-terms/>

Assessment

Discussing Theory: Blackboard Forum: 20%

For any ten weeks of your choosing (except Week 1), you will need to submit one forum post and at least one response to your classmates' comments, both pertinent to the assigned readings. It can be a brief summary of key arguments, your analysis of and reflection on the readings, or questions and doubts. The posts should not be long—two-three sentences will do.

Due: your own comment should be posted by midnight before the class to allow substantial time for your classmates to reply and for me to go over the discussion.

YouTube theory analysis: 10%

Find a short video clip that explains a contemporary theory/concept covered in class and write a critical summary of it. Post it on Blackboard at any time before the last lecture, November 28.

Mid-term exam: 30%

To ensure that you are familiar with the main scholars, theories and concepts, we will have an in-class exam which will include multiple-choice, true-or-false, and fill-the-gap questions. The midterm exam will last 50 minutes, and we will continue the class after a break.

October 17 in class. NO MAKE-UP EXAM

Final exam: 40%

The take-home final examination will include short-answer questions based on the entire material of the course. The questions and the guidelines will be handed out on the last day of class.

Due December 12, 23:59 via VeriGuide

Grade descriptors

Grade	Course Achievements
A	<i>Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes:</i> your written work and class participation demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the introduced concepts, factually accurate information, and convincing argumentation. All work is original, of required length and format, and submitted on time.
A -	<i>Generally outstanding performance on all (or almost all) learning outcomes:</i> most of your written work and class participation demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the introduced concepts, factually accurate information, and convincing argumentation, even if occasionally contain minor errors. All work is original, of required length and format and submitted on time.
B+	<i>Substantial performance on all learning outcomes, OR high performance on some outcomes which compensates for less satisfactory performance on others:</i> your work and class participation show an overall good understanding of class material but may vary in clarity, contain a lot of minor factual errors, or slightly deviate from required length and format. All work is original and submitted on time.
B	
B -	
C +	<i>Satisfactory performance on the majority of learning outcomes, possibly with a few weaknesses:</i> your work and class participation show an overall acceptable level of understanding of class material but it somewhat lacks clarity, contains major factual errors, and/or often deviate from required length and format. You written assignments are original but occasionally submitted late.
C	
C -	
D +	<i>Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes:</i> your work and class participation show a low level of engagement and persistent distraction by the use of mobile phones or other technology. Your written assignments are original, but they show minimal understanding of class material, lack of clarity, major factual errors, considerably deviate from required length and format, and/or are submitted late.
D	
F	<i>Unsatisfactory performance on most learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements.</i> Most of your assignments are submitted late or not submitted at all, they are extremely short, factually incorrect, and/or contain instances of plagiarism.

Policies and Support

Educational Technology

This class relies on the use of Blackboard. All class communications, announcements, assignment guidelines, and homework submissions will be done through it. Note that it uses the email address assigned to you by the University, so it is your responsibility to have an electronic mail forwarded to your main email address.

Academic Integrity

The University has recently updated its policy on Academic Integrity and the penalties for plagiarism and cheating: http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng_hkm_files_%282013-14%29/p06.htm Read it carefully: every student is expected to comply with the policy; otherwise, if you are suspected of violating these obligations you will be subject to the outlined sanctions. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to ask me or your TA about this!

Special Accommodation

If you need special accommodations or classroom modifications, you need to notify both me and the University's Wellness and Counselling Center (<https://www2.osa.cuhk.edu.hk/disability/en-GB>) no later than the third week of class.

Technology and Cell Phones

Although I recognize the value of technology in aiding the learning process, I also understand that it can be a major hindrance to learning, when used inappropriately. Therefore, the use of laptops and mobile phones is not permitted in class (unless it is necessary for class activities). Mobile phones must be kept in your bags, turned off, or on silent mode (NOT on vibrate) as to avoid distracting your peers. E-readers and tablets are allowed only during tutorials when we discuss assigned articles and you need the texts in front of you. Remember, browsing Facebook or any other website during the class distracts not only you but also persons sitting next to you, and such conduct is disrespectful to me and your classmates. Therefore, disruptions caused by phone calls, texting, emailing, or the use of any other communication technologies during a class will result **in the reduction of your final grade**. If you are expecting an important call, you should talk to me before the class.

Classroom Recording

To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, **you may not record** lectures and/or activities during the class or tutorials without my permission in advance, solely for your own private use.

Late Work and Absence

Late or incomplete assignments will be marked down: a grade will be subtracted **for each late day**. Class attendance is not required, but if you miss a class, it is your responsibility to copy class notes and go over the powerpoint presentations, otherwise, it will most likely result in poor understanding of class material and, ultimately, in a low grade. You are welcome to come to my office during office hours to go over the missed lectures!

Discussion Rules

We will discuss many interesting, important and potentially controversial topics. I expect you to be **polite and respectful** of your classmates' opinions, limit your statements to academic (not emotional) arguments, and not use offensive language or judgmental statements.

Grade Review

If you want to discuss and contest your grade, you can send me an email to set up an appointment during my office hours when we will go over your exam/written work and decide on a grade together. During this process, I can both mark your original grade up, if you demonstrate evidence that you know the material well, or mark it down.

Independent Learning Center

If you need help with communication and learning skills, the University has a great resource for you. You can schedule a consultation or attend workshops on various strategies for improving learning outcomes <https://www.ilc.cuhk.edu.hk/EN/mission.aspx>



Coffee with the Teacher

To facilitate your success in this class, I will organize two informal sessions before the midterm exam and before the finals when you can meet with me to talk about any course-related questions outside the classroom, over coffee. The date and time TBD.

Class schedule

Week 1. September 5. Contemporary Anthropological Theory and Its Roots

- James Laidlaw "Interpretive Cultural Anthropology: Geertz and His 'Writing-Culture' Critics." In *Schools and Styles of Anthropological Theory*, edited by Matei Candea, Chapter 8

Primary texts

- James Clifford (1986) "Introduction: Partial Truths." In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, James Clifford and George E. Marcus. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 1-26. Also available in *Readings for a History of Anthropological Theory*, Chapter 35. Erickson, Paul A. and Liam D. Murphy. Fifth Edition 2017

Week 2. September 12. Postmodernity: Historical Context, Theory, and Method

- Mark Moberg (2019) "Claims and critiques of anthropological knowledge." In *Engaging Anthropological Theory: A Social and Political History*, Second Edition, Chapter 2
- *Deborah Reed-Danahay "Participating, observing, witnessing." In *RCCA* – Chapter 3

Primary texts

- Rosaldo, Renato (1989) "Introduction: Grief and a Headhunter's Rage." In *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993, pp. 1-21
- *George Marcus & M. J. Fischer (1986) "Taking Account of World Political Economy." In *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, pp. 77-111
- *Lila Abu-Lughod "Writing Against Culture." In *Anthropology in Theory: Issues in Epistemology*, edited by Henrietta Moore and Todd Sanders, Chapter 38

Week 3. September 19. Postcolonial Theory

- Susan Bayly (2016) "Colonialism / Postcolonialism." In *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, edited by F. Stein, S. Lazar, M. Candea, H. Diemberger, J. Robbins, A. Sanchez & R. Stasch

Primary texts

- Talal Asad (1973) "Introduction." In *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*. London: Ithaca Press, pp. 9-20
- *Edward Said (1989) "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocuters" *Critical Inquiry* 15: 205-225
- *Chandra Mohanty (1988) "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Feminist Review* 30: 61-88

Week 4. September 26. Power and Knowledge

- James Laidlaw "The Anthropological Lives of Michel Foucault." In *Schools and Styles of Anthropological Theory*, edited by Matei Candea, Chapter 10

Primary texts

- Michel Foucault (1976) "The Incitement to Discourse." In *Anthropological Theory: An Introductory History*, edited by McGee, R. Jon and Richard L. Warms, 2017. Boston: McGraw-Hill, pp. 513-531

- *Rabinow, Paul and Nikolas Rose (2006) "Biopower Today." *BioSocieties*, 1: 195–217

Week 5. October 3. Body and Embodiment

- Maryon McDonald "From 'The Body' to 'Embodiment', with Help from Phenomenology." In *Schools and Styles of Anthropological Theory*, edited by Matei Candea, Chapter 11

Primary texts

- Thomas Csordas (1993) "Somatic Modes of Attention." *Cultural Anthropology*, 8 (2): 135–156
- *Michael Jackson "Knowledge of the Body." In *Anthropology in Theory: Issues in Epistemology*, edited by Henrietta Moore and Todd Sanders, Chapter 27
- *Emily Martin "The End of the Body?" In *Anthropology in Theory: Issues in Epistemology*, edited by Henrietta Moore and Todd Sanders, Chapter 28

Week 6. October 10. Gender and Intersectionality

- Jessica Johnson "Feminist Anthropology and the Question of Gender." In *Schools and Styles of Anthropological Theory*, edited by Matei Candea, Chapter 12

Primary texts:

- Floya Anthias (2012) "Hierarchies of social location, class and intersectionality: Towards a translocational frame." *International Sociology*, 28: 121–138
- *Katherine Lutz (1995) "The Gender of Theory." In *Women Writing Culture*, edited by Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon, pp. 249–266
- *Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí "The Invention of Women." In *Anthropology in Theory: Issues in Epistemology*, edited by Henrietta Moore and Todd Sanders, Chapter 44

Week 7. October 17. Capital, Neoliberalism and Globalization

Mid-term exam today

- Mark Moberg (2019) "Postmodern political economy and sensibilities." In *Engaging Anthropological Theory: A Social and Political History*, Second Edition, Chapter 14
- *Lavenda, Robert H. and Emily A. Schultz (2000) "Globalization and the Culture of Capitalism." In *Core Concepts in Cultural Anthropology*, pp. 169–183

Primary texts:

- Arjun Appadurai (1990) "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy." *Public Culture*, 2(2): 1–24
- *Arjun Appadurai (1986) "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value." In *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, edited by Arjun Appadurai, pp. 3–63
- *Aiwha Ong (2007) "Neoliberalism as a Mobile Technology." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 32(1): 3–8

Week 8. October 24. Science and Technology

- Matei Candea "No Actor, No Network, No Theory: Bruno Latour's Anthropology of the Moderns." In *Schools and Styles of Anthropological Theory*, edited by Matei Candea, Chapter 13

Primary texts:

- Bruno Latour (2005) "Introduction" to *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-17
- Bruno Latour (1996) "On Actor-Network-Theory: A Few Clarifications." *Soziale Welt*, vol. 47, pp. 369-381
- *Jane Bennett (2005) "The Agency of Assemblages and the North American Blackout." *Public Culture* 17(3): 445-465

Week 9. October 31. Engaged and Public Anthropology

- Rachael Kiddey "Hand in Hand: Homelessness, heritage and collaborative approaches to the material past." In *RCCA*, Chapter 6
- *Merrill Singer "Health and Anthropology in the Era of Anthropogenic Climatic and Environmental Change." In *RCCA*, Chapter 22

Primary texts:

- Nancy Scheper-Hughes "The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology." In *Anthropology in Theory: Issues in Epistemology*, edited by Henrietta Moore and Todd Sanders, Chapter 30
- Roy D'Andrade "Moral Models in Anthropology." In *Anthropology in Theory: Issues in Epistemology*, edited by Henrietta Moore and Todd Sanders, Chapter 41

Week 10. November 7. Media and the Digital Field

- Anna Stewart: Anthropology and the Internet. *RCCA* - Chapter 5

Primary texts:

- Ileana Gershon (2010) "Breaking Up is Hard to Do: Media-Switching and Media Ideologies." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 20(2): 389-405
- *Bambi Schefflin and G. Jones (2009) "Talking Text and Talking Back: "My BFF Jill" from Boob Tube to YouTube." In *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 14(4): 1050-1079

Week 11. November 14. Ontology

- Paolo Heywood "The Ontological Turn." In *Schools and Styles of Anthropological Theory*, edited by Matei Candea, Chapter 14

Primary texts:

- Eduardo Kohn "Introduction" to *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013
- *Soumya Venkatesan, 2010 "Ontology is Just Another Word for Culture," *Critique of Anthropology* 30(2): 152-200

Week 12. November 21. Citizenship, Migration, and Global Connection

I am away at a conference. This class will be rescheduled

- Mattia Fumanti “Interdisciplinary Approaches to Cultural Citizenship and Migration.” In *RCCA*, Chapter 26

Primary texts:

- Aiwha Ong (2006) “Mutations in Citizenship.” *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23(2-3): 499-505
- *Anna Tsing (2004) “Introduction” to *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press

Week 13. November 28. Persons, Hybrids, Relations

- Marilyn Strathern “Persons and partible persons.” In *Schools and Styles of Anthropological Theory*, edited by Matei Candea, Chapter 15

Primary texts:

- Lesley Sharp “Hybridity: Hybrid Bodies of the Scientific Imaginary.” In *Anthropology in Theory: Issues in Epistemology*, edited by Henrietta Moore and Todd Sanders, Chapter 29
- *Susan McKinnon “Doing and Being: Process, Essence, and Hierarchy in Making Kin.” In *RCCA*, Chapter 9

December 12 Final Exam Due