

Anthropology and Sociology of Development (ANSO)

Academic year 2016 - 2017

Anthropology of Things

ANSO078 - Spring - 6 ECTS
Tuesday 14:15 – 16:00 (room S2)

Course Description

While the website of the American Anthropological Association defines anthropology as “the study of humans, past and present,” Anthropology has from the outset always embraced more than that. Things, in particular, have been at the center of anthropological attention from the discipline’s very beginnings. From Mauss’ Gift, island New Guinea’s KULA made famous by Malinowski, and the totems of Australian aborigines at the heart of Durkheim’s Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, to the competitive potlatch of Northwest America’s coastal peoples described by Boas or, beyond anthropology, Marx’s work on the commodity, many of the discipline’s privileged tropes derive from theoretical and methodological insights and inquiries into the productive capacities, political import, affective provocations, and aesthetic power of things including the ways they pattern and texture the lives of humans, today and in the past. This course explores the significance and effects of things in and on human life through theoretical readings and ethnographies that focus, among others, on thing theory, the social lives and biographies of things, theories of materiality and material culture, fetishism, matters of circulation, global objects, ruins and art.

> PROFESSEUR

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Syllabus

Evaluation: Active student participation is expected. Each week 2 students will be responsible for presenting the material in class (guidelines will be provided). The main assignment of the class is to choose a thing or class of things to study ethnographically and/or historically in relation to what you are learning in the course. Your choice must be formulated early and a journal must be kept about your research on your thing(s) in relation to class readings and

discussions. The final paper will analyse your thing or class of things, using perspectives offered in the course.

The final grade will be based on the following assignments:

In-class presentation(s) on course readings	20%
Response paper to Bodmer exhibition	20%
Oral presentation on your thing project	20%
Final paper on your thing(s) (incl. proposal)	40%

The assignments will be posted on Moodle.

Lecture Topics and Assigned Reading:

- ** Watch Olivier Assayas' *Summer Hours* (2008) in preparation for first class!!!**
- Tuesday February 21 *Introduction*
- Tuesday February 28 *Thing Theory*
Bill Brown (2001) "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28(1) Things (Autumn), pp.1-33
Jane Bennett (2010) "The Force of Things" in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp.1-19
- Tuesday March 7 *Fetishism & Anti-Fetishism*
Sigmund Freud (1963) "Fetishism" in *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*. New York: Collier Books/Macmillan Publishing, pp.204-209
Bruno Latour (1999) "The Slight Surprise of Action: Facts, Fetishes, Factishes" in *Pandora's Hope*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Pp.266-292
Webb Keane (1998) "Calvin in the Tropics: Objects and Subjects at the Religious Frontier" in Patricia Spyer, ed. *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces*. London: Routledge, pp.13-34
- ** Brief description of thing(s) due in class**
- Tuesday March 14 *Gift*
Marcel Mauss (1988) "Gifts and Return Gifts" in *Highpoints in Anthropology*, 2nd edition, Paul Bohannan and Mark Glazer, eds. New York: McGraw Hill, pp.266-71
Marcel Mauss (2004) "Excerpts from the Gift" in *Anthropological Theory: An Introductory History*. R. Jon McGee and Richard L. Warms, eds. New York: McGraw Hill, pp.102-114
Annette Weiner (1985) "Inalienable Wealth" *American Ethnologist* 12(2): 210-27
Hirokazu Miyazaki (2010) "Gifts and Exchange" in *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, eds. Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.246-264
- Tuesday March 21 *Commodities*
Karl Marx (1967) "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof" in *Capital*, Vol.1, ed Frederick Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling. New York: International Publishers, pp.71-84
Peter Stallybrass (1998) "Marx's Coat" in Patricia Spyer, ed. *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces*. London: Routledge, pp.183-207
- Tuesday March 28 *Consumption*

Adela Pinch (1998) "Stealing Happiness: Shoplifting in Early Nineteenth-Century England" in Patricia Spyer, ed. *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces*. London: Routledge, pp.122-149
 Carla Jones (2010) "Materializing Piety: Gendered anxieties about faithful consumption in contemporary urban Indonesia" *American Ethnologist* 37(4): 617-637
 Elizabeth Chin (2016) *My Life with Things*. Durham: Duke University Press (selections)

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Watch *The Bling Ring* in preparation for class

Tuesday April 4 *Consumption II: Guest Lecture Prof. Thomas Abercrombie (NYU)*
 Heather Paxson (2008) "Post-Pasteurian Cultures: The Microbiopolitics of Raw-Milk Cheese in the United States," *Cultural Anthropology* 23(1): 15-47

Tuesday April 11 *Bodies*
 Peter Brown (1981) "Praesentia" in *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp.86-105
 Margaret Lock (2005) "Twice Dead: Organ Transplants and the Reinvention of Death" in *The Body Reader*, eds. Marian Fraser and Monica Greco. London: Routledge, pp.262-66

Tuesday April 18 **NO CLASS – Easter break**

Tuesday April 25 *Iconoclasm*
 Marie-José Mondain (2000) "Iconic Space and the Rule of Lands" *Hypatia* 15(4): 55-75 (includes introduction by Rico Franses)
 Finbarr Barry Flood (2016) "Iconoclasm: Idol-breaking as Image-Making in the 'Islamic State'" *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 7: 116-138
 Kenneth George (2009) "Ethics, Iconoclasm, and Qur'anic Art in Indonesia" *Cultural Anthropology* 24(4): 589-621

Tuesday May 2 **NO CLASS**
Students visit the Martin Bodmer Foundation in Cologne
 Mary Murrell (forthcoming, 2017) "The Open Book: The Orphans of Mass Digitization" *Current Anthropology*

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Response paper due on Bodmer Foundation visit

Tuesday May 9 *Global Objects*
 Robert J. Foster (2008) "Introduction: Cola Connections and Worldly Things" in *Cola-Globalization: Following Soft Drinks from New York to New Guinea*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, pp.ix-xxiv
 Nira Wickramasinghe (2014) "Fashioning a Market: The Singer Sewing Machine in Colonial Lanka" in eds. Daniel T. Rodgers, Bhavani Raman and Helmut Reinitz. *Cultures in Motion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp.134-164

Tuesday May 16 *Art and Material Culture Studies*
 Fred Myers (2004) "Unsettled Business: Acrylic Painting, Tradition and Indigenous Being" *Visual Anthropology* 17: 247-271
 Haidy Geismar (2011) "'Material Culture Studies' and other Ways to Theorize Objects: A Primer to a Regional Debate" *Comparative Studies in Society & History* 53(1): 210-218

Tuesday May 23 *Debris, Ruins, Waste*
 Tim Edensor (2005) "Waste Matter – The Debris of Industrial Ruins and the Disordering of the Material World," *Journal of Material Culture* 10(3): 311-332
http://lepo.it.da.ut.ee/~cect/teoreetiline%20seminar%202021.05.2013/Edensor_2005.pdf

Peter Schwenger (2006) "The Dream Narratives of Debris" in *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/gallery/2014/feb/27/agbogloboshie-worlds-largest-e-waste-dump-in-pictures>

May 30 **Students present on their Thing(s)**

June 6 **Final papers due!**