

## Issues in Anthropological Theory (A)

Sociology and Anthropology 451

Section: E100

Term: 2010 Spring

Instructor: Dara Culhane

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Discussion Topics: This course will be held in the evening at Burnaby Campus.

"...ethnography is simultaneously a critical theoretical practice, a quotidian ethical practice, and an improvisational practice."

-\x09Cerwonka, Allaine and Liisa H. Malkki (2007) IMPROVISING THEORY: PROCESS AND TEMPORALITY IN ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 164.

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This is a course in ethnographic methodology conceptualized as a process of inquiry, and taught from the perspective of a history of the present. An enduring set of questions revolving around exchange and reciprocity that has been at the centre of the discipline of anthropology since its beginnings forms the scaffolding for this course. Believing that ethnography can best be learned through doing, and through studying the work of those who have done it, the course will run along three intersecting paths: a set of brief but intense ethnographic exercises, a series of readings and film viewings, and a biography project where each student selects an ethnographer in their specific area of interest and investigates their significant contributions to the field, and the contexts in which they work(ed).

Empirical, Ethical and Improvisational:

The course will explore Cerwonka and Malkki's description of ethnography and debates about research methodologies across the humanities and social sciences. As a practice central to our discipline, anthropologists have long wrestled with the problems and promises of practicing ethnography in diverse and ever changing contexts. Ethnographic methodology is also a subject of interest to researchers in many other disciplines, offering as it does the potential to participate in original, unique research in a wide range of settings, to work closely with people in diverse circumstances, and to communicate knowledge through conventional and creative modes of representation. The question why to do ethnography will be considered as inseparable from the question how to do ethnography.

Gifts, Commodities, Exchange and Reciprocity:

Questions about exchanges of animate and inanimate objects, goods, services, territory, people, arts, conversations, and knowledge between and among human beings, and natural and supernatural entities, have always intrigued anthropologists. Marcel Mauss 1923 essay, *The Gift: forms and functions of exchange in archaic societies*, remains a classic text on the complex social and cultural practices of exchange and reciprocity in human relationships, and the manipulations and implications of power therein and thereof. While interest in Mauss' essay has waxed and waned over time, in the contemporary moment re-readings of *The Gift* proliferate. This course will begin with Mauss.

Anthropologists, for the most part, have focussed on describing and analyzing exchange relations among the people we study whether at home or abroad, and asking how changing historical and political contexts affect those relations.

Our attention in this course, however, will focus on the practice of ethnographic methodology itself. Considering ethnography as a methodology inextricably embedded in human social relations and interactions, and practiced in historically specific times and places, by fleshy, embodied beings, we will ask, How can we understand exchange relationships in ethnographic research?

Anthropology is a diverse and lively field where definitional debates abound. This course will take as a working position the idea that ethnography begins in telling stories about

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stories we and others tell about ourselves and other people. Ethical/political/theoretical and methodological questions that will shape our inquiry are: when is a story a gift and when a commodity? Can it be both? Or neither? What is the relationship between gifts, commodities, ethics, politics, and reciprocity in ethnographic relationships? What might reciprocity (general and specific, positive and negative, offered and withheld, accepted and refused, direct and indirect, immediate and delayed) consist in, in the context of ethnographic research, historically and contemporarily, and according to whom? What might exchange and reciprocity look like? Feel like?

This is a required course for Anthropology graduate students. Graduate students from other departments are welcome to enrol, and contribute to making this a stimulating interdisciplinary seminar. Please contact the instructor (culhane@sfu.ca) to discuss permission to register. ALL students wishing to take this course MUST contact the instructor BEFORE DECEMBER 1st, to prepare the independent project. The class will meet weekly for five hours. Class meetings will be divided between lecture/seminar and workshop.

Grading: (1) Short comments (10%)  
(2) Ethnographic exercise 1 (observant participation) (20%)  
(3) Ethnographic exercise 2 (interview) (30%)  
(4) Ethnographic exercise 3: (Independent project) (20%)  
(5) Final paper: Why (or why not) Do Ethnography? (20%) (Review of Frank, and Ebron)

All the assignments in this course must be completed for a final grade to be assigned. The Department of Sociology and Anthropology follows SFU policy in relation to grading practices, grade appeals (Policy T 20.01) and academic dishonesty and misconduct procedures (Policy T 10.03). It is the responsibility of students to inform themselves of the content of these policies (available on the SFU website under Administration, SFU Policies & Procedures).

Required Texts: PRE-READING (read before first class)

(1) Hecht, Tobias (2007) AFTER LIFE: an ethnographic novel. Durham, SC: Duke University Press. 183 pages.

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(2) Cerwonka, Allaine and Liisa H. Malkki (2007) IMPROVISING THEORY: PROCESS AND TEMPORALITY IN ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 187 pages.

(3) Mauss, M. (1969) THE GIFT. London: W. W. Norton. 83 pages

(4) Stewart, Kathleen (2007) ORDINARY AFFECTS. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 133 pages

(5) Meneley, Ann and Donna J. Young (eds) (2005) Auto-ethnographies: The Anthropology of Academic Practices. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press.

(6) Frank, Geyla (2000) Venus on Wheels: two decades of dialogue on disability, biography, and being female in America. Berkeley: University of California Press.

(7) Ebron, Paula (2002) Performing Africa. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

(8) 5 articles available on line.

(9) 3 book chapters on reserve in Bennett Library.

All required readings are available in Bennett Library, and, where possible are on reserve in Bennett Library.

If you are interested in taking this course please make arrangements to meet with the instructor prior to registration to discuss preparation of independent project.  
culhane@sfu.ca

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Recommended Texts:

Materials/Supplies: None

Prerequisite/Corequisite: For SA 451-4: minimum of 72 units including SA 301, a GPA of at least 3.25 and consent of the instructor. For SA 874-5: SA 870, or equivalent, or permission of instructor.

Notes: All students are expected to read and understand SFUs policies with regard to academic dishonesty (T 10.02 and T 10.03). These policies are available at the following web addresses: <http://www.sfu.ca/policies/teaching/t10-02.htm> and <http://www.sfu.ca/policies/teaching/t10-03.htm>

This outline is derived from a course outline repository database that was maintained by SFU Student Services and the University's IT Services Department. The database was retired in 2014 and the data migrated to SFU Archives in 2015.