

## **Anthropology Beyond the Human**

### **ANTH 501**

How does the ethnographic study of the interactions humans have with other living beings change the nature of anthropology? How does it change what it might mean to be human? The analytical toolkit currently available to sociocultural anthropologists, based as it is on what makes humans distinctive (language, society, history, culture), does not allow us to understand our immersion in worlds that extend beyond the human. The result is a sort of ontological dualism: we know how to study human-made worlds and human ways of knowing but we lack the conceptual grounding necessary to understand how these emerge from and relate to a broader nonhuman realm, which we can only seem to treat as irreducibly separate. This course, accordingly, is concerned with developing another kind of toolkit, one that can help us make sense of the continuities we share with other kinds of beings, and the emergent worlds we might inhabit with them, without losing sight of those important ways in which we are also “all-too-human.” To get at this anthropology “beyond the human” we will draw on and discuss a number of diverse works. We will seek to develop this analytical approach via an exploration of the instructor’s ethnographic research on the ways in which an Upper Amazonian community relates to the tropical forest. The kinds of solutions that these people have found to the challenges of living in a world peopled by many different kinds of beings speaks to certain general “philosophical” problems. These include: the relation of language to the world; what it means to be a self and to know and be recognized by other selves; the problem of finitude and its relation to living; the relationship between indistinction and difference; and the ontological status of general phenomena (such as patterns, souls, and futures). We will seek to place the approach developed here in polite but also critical conversation, with contemporary anthropological treatments of “the animal,” “the body,” materiality, biosociality, and the ever-increasing technoscientific proliferation of all sorts of “natural-cultural” hybrids. This course would be of interest to students concerned with the anthropology of materiality, ecological anthropology, self and personhood, medical anthropology, science and technology studies, the history of anthropological thought, and anthropological and social theory.

### **General Information**

Title: Anthropology Beyond the Human (ANTH 501)

Instructor: Eduardo Kohn, [eduardo.kohn@mcgill.ca](mailto:eduardo.kohn@mcgill.ca)

Date & Time: Wednesdays: 14:35-17:25

Zoom Link: <https://mcgill.zoom.us/j/92543711220>

Prerequisites: Consent of the Instructor

Office Hours: Mondays 14:30-16:30

## Course Goals and Objectives

Students will be introduced to some key debates at the cutting edge of contemporary anthropology, through critical engagement with readings, class discussions, and individual research projects. By the end of this course students should improve their analytical and expressive skills they should also deepen their understanding of the field of anthropology and learn to situate anthropological questions within broader interdisciplinary realms of inquiry.

## Instructional Method

Lectures and discussion via Zoom and discussion on MyCourses. This is a small class and will be taught in a manner similar to an in-person seminar. If you have difficulty connecting due to time zone or internet access issues, please let me know and we will make alternative arrangements. Students participating asynchronously will not be penalized.

## Course Materials

*Readings will be posted on My Courses.*

Recommended Background Texts:

Tsing, Anna (2015) *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. Princeton  
 Haraway, Donna (2008) *When Species Meet*. Minnesota.  
 Latour, Bruno (2018) *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*  
 Descola, Philippe. (2013) *Beyond Nature and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

## Assignments and Evaluation

Undergraduates taking this class will write a research paper or an extended book review (for titles please discuss with the instructor) (**Due on the last day of class**). Graduate students will arrive at an appropriate method of evaluation in discussion with the instructor, which fits with their research program.

In addition to this paper, active informed participation via MyCourses discussion and if possible, class participation, are very important. Papers will be evaluated according to the following criteria: clarity of writing, ability to synthesize the ideas and positions of the authors we are reading, and ability to develop one's own ideas. Students have the right to write in French. In arriving at a final grade, I will be weighting the different student responsibilities as follows:

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Participation, weekly discussion posts: | 40% |
| Research paper:                         | 60% |

## Syllabus

The following is a general outline of the course. Some modification may occur throughout the course of the semester.

### 1) **Forest for the trees**

Wednesday, September 2

### 2) **Orientation**

Wednesday, September 9

Reading:

Forest for the Trees (FFT), Pitch  
FFT, Introductory Chapter, Orientation

The Ecuadorian Constitution,

[Spanish Version](#)

[English Version](#)

Rights of Nature, TBA

Heather Anderson, Deconstitution

### 3) **We are who we eat**

Wednesday, September 16

Reading:

FFT Chapter One Long Summary

Additional Readings TBA

Anthropophagy Manifesto

### 4) **A thinking forest**

Wednesday, September 23

Readings:

Forest for the Trees Chapter Two Long Summary  
Kohn, How Forests Think, Chapters Intro, chapters 1, 2.

Cosmic Diplomacy

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2007) Crystal Sky

Latour, Intro AIME

**5) A thinking forest, *continued***  
Wednesday September 30

Readings:  
Peirce  
-“Logic as Semiotic”  
-“Phanerescopy”

**6) A psychedelic science**  
Wednesday, October 7

Readings:  
FFT Chapter Three Long Chapter Summary  
Peirce on Abduction

**7) A psychedelic science, *continued***  
Wednesday, October 14

Readings:  
FFT Chapter Four Long Chapter Summary  
Peirce on Ethics

**8) A direction from a shape**  
Wednesday, October 21

Readings:  
FFT Chapter Five Long Chapter Summary  
Zoe Todd, on weaponized fossil kin

**9) A direction from a shape, *continued***  
Wednesday, October 28

Readings:  
TBA

**10) Anachronisms**  
Wednesday, November 4

Readings:  
FFT Chapter Five Long Chapter Summary  
Liza Lim TBA  
Pauline Oliveros TBA

**11) Anachronisms, *continued***

Wednesday November 11

Reading:  
TBA

**12) Spirit politics**

Wednesday November 18

Readings:  
FFT Chapter Six Long Chapter Summary  
Kohn, How Forests Think, Chapter 6  
Sarayaku, Kawsak Sacha  
Nacion Sapara, Naku, Kamunguishi  
Cuencas Sagradas

**13) Spirit politics, *continued***

Wednesday, November 25

Readings:  
TBA

**14) The forest within**

Wednesday, December 2

Readings:  
FFT Conclusion chapter Summary  
Additional Readings TBA

***Papers Due*****Disability Issues:**

If you have a disability please contact the instructor to arrange a time to discuss the situation. It would be helpful if you contact the Office for Students with Disabilities at 398-6009 (online at "<http://www.mcgill.ca/osd>" [www.mcgill.ca/osd](http://www.mcgill.ca/osd)) before you do this.

**Right to submit in English or French written work that is to be graded:**

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

**Statement on academic integrity:**

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the code of student conduct and disciplinary procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity) for more information).

L'université McGill attaché une haut importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site [www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity)).

**Statement of exception:**

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.