

TENTATIVE: Details may change prior to start of Winter 2021 Semester

Anthropology 355: Theories of Culture and Society

McGill University, Winter 2021

Lecturer: Jonathan Wald (jonathan.wald@mcgill.ca)

Lectures: Tuesday and Thursday, 8:35am to 9:55am EST

Zoom URL: <https://mcgill.zoom.us/j/89689265073>

Office Hours: After classes and by appointment

Zoom URL: <https://mcgill.zoom.us/j/85060101612>

Teaching Assistant: TBA

Course Description: This course explores social and cultural theory, especially with regards to its history and contemporary application. Besides introducing students to some of the most widely referenced theorists in anthropology and related disciplines, we will also engage with the debates which emerge between these texts and their critics. In general, this course approaches theory through three questions: First, what questions does a particular theory seek to address? Second, what are the practical and historical conditions that led to the creation of this theory? And finally, how might these theories enrich current anthropological inquiry? This course is designed for undergraduate students who have already been introduced to the core concepts of sociocultural anthropology (e.g. ethnography, culture, society), but we will explore these topics in greater depth by situating them within broader theoretical discussions.

Course Objectives: By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- Understand the core questions and concepts of social theory.
- Express a general understanding of these theories in clear language.
- Apply these theories to current events and/or personal experiences.

Course Content:

Readings to be completed each day before class.

The assigned readings are either published articles or chapters from books. While they are relatively short, they can be quite dense. Please read them carefully before class. Each day's assigned reading includes "key questions" intended to help you focus your attention.

Lectures which will review and expand upon the readings. You are encouraged to attend lectures in order to have an opportunity to ask questions and join discussions. Questions are *highly* encouraged during class. However, all lectures will be recorded and uploaded in both video and audio formats. You will not be penalized for following the course through recordings.

Statement on Online Teaching: Teaching during COVID-19 is an unprecedented for most of Canada's universities. This is a learning process for all of us as we adjust to changes in our daily life and move our classes online. These new challenges will require flexibility and understanding from all of us. This class has been designed with these demands in mind.

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Evaluation (More details on MyCourses)

Question Formulation: 25 January (15%)

In 1-2 pages, you will formulate an anthropological question or problem which will serve as the basis for the other assignments.

Response Paper: Due 12 February (15%)

In 1-2 pages, you will respond to another student's question formulation.

Midterm Analysis Paper: Due 12 March (25%)

In 3-4 pages, you will address your question using ideas from 2 authors presented in the first half of the course.

Rough Draft of Final Analysis Paper: Due 13 April

In 5-6 pages, you will address your question using ideas from 3 authors presented in the second half of the course. The final draft is due 23 April.

Peer Review: Due 16 April (10%)

You will be asked to give feedback on another student's final analysis paper.

Final Draft of Final Analysis Paper: Due 23 April (35%)

Your final draft of your paper should incorporate feedback from your peer review. You cannot submit your final paper until you have given feedback to your partner.

Email Policy: I will do my best to respond to your emails in a timely manner. To help me do this, I ask that you please include "ANTH355" in the subject lines of your emails. This will help me find your questions amidst my other emails and respond to them faster.

Mental Health Resources: Please take care of yourselves. Take walks, drink water, eat healthy, or do whatever else you need to feel well. It is also okay to feel unwell, especially now. If you feel that you need support, please reach out. You can access support through the McGill Wellness Hub (<https://www.mcgill.ca/wellness-hub/>) or by contacting your local Integrated Health and Social Services Centre (CLSC) (<https://sante.gouv.qc.ca/en/repertoire-ressources/votre-cisss-ciuss/>). Keep.meSAFE is available to all MCGill Students 24/7 through the MySSP app (<https://ssmu.ca/blog/2020/03/mental-health-resource-available-keep-mesafe/>). Crisis support is available 24/7 through various crisis centers (<https://santemontreal.qc.ca/en/public/support-and-services/crisis-centres/>) or from Suicide Action Montreal, which you can find at <https://suicideactionmontreal.org/en/> or by calling 1 866 277 3553.

General Accommodations Policy: My goal is to ensure that everyone is able to engage with the course material as thoroughly as possible. If events external to the class make this unduly difficult, please feel free to let me know so that we can create a strategy to allow you to continue to engage with the course.

Notice for Students with Disabilities: I will do my best to accommodate students with disabilities. If this pertains to you, I encourage you to contact the Office for Students with Disabilities (514-398-6009, disabilities.students@mcgill.ca) as soon as possible so that we can provide necessary accommodations.

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Land Acknowledgment: McGill University is located on unceded indigenous lands. The Kanien'kehá:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters on which we gather. Tiotiá:ke/Montreal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations. Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples. We respect the continued connections with the past, present and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Montreal community. I encourage you to think of the history of the land on which you are living now as part of this course. (This territorial acknowledgement was adapted from Concordia University's Indigenous Directions Leadership Group [2017]. To read the entire territorial acknowledgment and to learn more about how it was written, please visit <https://www.concordia.ca/about/indigenous/territorial-acknowledgement.html>.)

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/students/srr/honest/ for more information) (approved by Senate on 29 January 2003)

Assignment Languages: In accordance 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.

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté.

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Course Schedule

Schedule may shift due to unforeseen circumstances.

7 January: Introduction

Read syllabus on MyCourses

Email Jonathan with preferred name, time zone, what you hope to gain from this course, and previous anthropology courses.

12 January: Why Theory?

Evans-Pritchard, E. E. 1976. Appendix IV, part 1 in *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, 140-143. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Fortun, Kim. 2012. "Ethnography in Late Industrialism." *Cultural Anthropology* 27 (3): 446-64.

Key Questions: How do anthropologists use and make theory? What is the relationship between fieldwork and theory?

14 January: Limits of Theory

Tuck, Eve. 2010. "Breaking up with Deleuze: Desire and Valuing the Irreconcilable." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 23 (5): 635-50.

Key Questions: How does Tuck think *with* a theorist? How can anthropologists recognize the limits of theoretical reflection?

19 January: The Question of Anthropology

Landmann, Michael. 1974. "The Meaning of Philosophical Anthropology" in *Philosophical Anthropology*, translated by David J. Parent, 17-23. Philadelphia: Westminster Books.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 1991. "Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness." In *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, edited by R.G. Fox, 17-44. Sante Fe: School of American Research Press.

Key Questions: What were the central questions anthropology historically sought to address?

21 January: The Cultural Answer

Herder, Johann Gottfried. 1993. "Ideas Toward a Philosophy of History" in *Against Pure Reason: Writings on Religion, Language, and History*, translated by Marcia Bunge, 48-58. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Boas, Franz. 1948. "The Aims of Ethnology" in *Race, Language and Culture*, 626-638. New York: The MacMillan Company.

Key Questions: What is "culture?" How does its development as a concept address the questions of anthropology?

QUESTION FORMULATION DUE 25 JANUARY

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26 January: Marx 1 – Historical Materialism

Excerpts from Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. “The German Ideology” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert C. Tucker, 146-200. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.

Key Questions: What is ideology? How do Marx and Engel’s propose understanding it?

28 January: Marx 2 – The Work of Capitalism

Marx, Karl. “The Labour Process and the Valorization Process” in *Capital, Volume One*, translated by Ben Fowkes, 283-306. London: Penguin Books

Key Questions: What is “labour?” What is “surplus value?”

2 February: Weber 1 – Interpretive Sociology

Excerpts from Weber, Max. “Politics as a Vocation” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, 77-128. New York: Oxford University Press.

Key Questions: What is “legitimacy?” How does it compare or contrast with Marx’s concept of “ideology?”

4 February: Weber 2 – Studying Science

Weber, Max. “Science as a Vocation” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, 129-158. New York: Oxford University Press.

Key Questions: How does Weber analyse science? What is “disenchantment?”

9 February: Sociologizing Thought

Excerpts from Durkheim, Émile. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, translated by Karen E. Fields, New York: The Free Press.

Key Questions: How does society impact thought? What can anthropology or sociology say about abstract reasoning?

11 February: Structural Functionalism

Radcliffe-Brown, Alfred Reginald. 1940. “On Social Structure.” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 70 (1): 1-12.

Key Questions: What is “society structure?” How is it comparable to an organism?

RESPONSE PAPER DUE 12 FEBRUARY

16 February: Structuralism and Myth

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1963. “The Structural Study of Myth” *from Structural Anthropology*, translated by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf, 206-231. New York: Basic Books.

Key Questions: How does Lévi-Strauss analyze myth? What does the study of myth reveal?

18 February: Structure, Agency, and Practice

Ortner, Sherry B.. 1984. “Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26 (1): 126–66.

Key Questions: What are “Symbolic Anthropology” and “Cultural Ecology?” How do the theorists we have discussed so far contribute to an idea of “practice?”

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23 February: Foucault 1 – Poststructuralism

Foucault, Michel. 2010. "What Is Enlightenment?," in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, 32-50. New York: Vintage Books.

Key Questions: What is the "present" for Foucault? What methods and questions do he propose for analysing it?

25 February: Foucault 2 – Biopower

Foucault, Michel. 1978. "Right of Death and Power over Life," in *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley, 135-159. New York: Vintage Books.

Key Questions: What is "biopower?" How is it distinct from traditional sovereignty? What implications does it have for science and subjectivity?

9 March: Postmodern Transformations

Excerpts from Lyotard, Jean-François. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Key Questions: What is "postmodernism?" What is a "narrative?"

11 March: The Reflexive Turn

Clifford, James. 1986. "Introduction: Partial Truths" in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, 1-26. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Key Questions: How is ethnography reliant on writing? What does it mean for anthropology to become "reflexive?"

MIDTERM ANALYSIS PAPER DUE 12 MARCH

16 March: Society versus Actor-Networks

Latour, Bruno. 2005. "Introduction: How to Resume the Task of Tracing Associations," from *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*, 1-17. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Murphy, Michelle. 2017. "Alterlife and Decolonial Chemical Relations." *Cultural Anthropology* 32 (4): 494-503.

Key Questions: In what ways does Latour critique the concept of "society?" How do Latour and Murphy consider "objects" in their theories?

18 March: The Ontological Turn

Descola, Phillippe. 1996. "Constructing Natures: Symbolic Ecology and Social Practice," from *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives*, edited by Philippe Descola and Gísli Pálsson, 82-102. London: Routledge.

Key Questions: What is the relationship between "nature" and "culture" or "society?" What alternative relationships are possible?

23 March: Posthuman Cyborgs

Haraway, Donna. 1991. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," from *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, 149-181. New York: Routledge.

Key Questions: What happens to personal identity in postmodernism? How does Haraway address the breakdown of grand narratives?

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25 March: Decolonizing the Ontological Turn

Todd, Zoe. 2006. "An Indigenous Feminist's Take On The Ontological Turn: 'Ontology' Is Just Another Word For Colonialism." *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29 (1): 4-22.

Key Questions: What might it mean to "decolonize" anthropology? How does Todd critique scholars like Latour and Descola?

30 March: Identity and Recognition

Coulthard, Glen. 2014. "The Politics of Recognition in Colonial Contexts," from *Red Skins, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, 25-50. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Key Questions: What is "recognition?" How is identity related to political contestation?

1 April: Race, Racism, and Racialization

Beliso-De Jesús, Aisha M. and Jemina Pierre. 2019. "Introduction to Special Section: Anthropology of White Supremacy." *American Anthropologist* 122 (1): 1-11.

Key Questions: How has anthropology struggled to address racism theoretically or practically? What tools might anthropology use to address this shortcoming?

6 April: The Anthropocene

Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt and Andrew S. Mathews and Nils Bubandt. 2019. "Patchy Anthropocene: Landscape Structure, Multispecies History, and the Retooling of Anthropology." *Current Anthropology* 60 (20): S186-S197.

Key Questions: What is the Anthropocene? How does it require "retooling" anthropological concepts?

8 April: Where Do We Go from Here?

Jobson, Ryan Cecil. 2020. "The Case for Letting Anthropology Burn: Sociocultural Anthropology in 2019." *American Anthropologist* 122 (2): 259-271.

Key Questions: What are some potential directions for anthropology to improve? What theoretical traditions could be challenged or embraced?

13 April: Wrap-Up

ROUGH DRAFT OF FINAL ANALYSIS PAPER DUE 13 APRIL

PEER REVIEW DUE 16 APRIL

FINAL DRAFT DUE 23 APRIL