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.
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-ciss-iciusss/). 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.
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 if 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.
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?
Key Questions: How do anthropologists use and make theory? What is the relationship between fieldwork and theory?

14 January: Limits of Theory
Key Questions: How does Tuck think with a theorist? How can anthropologists recognize the limits of theoretical reflection?

19 January: The Question of Anthropology
Key Questions: What were the central questions anthropology historically sought to address?

21 January: The Cultural Answer
Key Questions: What is “culture?” How does its development as a concept address the questions of anthropology?

QUESTION FORMULATION DUE 25 JANUARY
26 January: Marx 1 – Historical Materialism
Key Questions: What is ideology? How do Marx and Engel’s propose understanding it?

28 January: Marx 2 – The Work of Capitalism
Key Questions: What is “labour?” What is “surplus value?”

2 February: Weber 1 – Interpretive Sociology
Key Questions: What is “legitimacy?” How does it compare or contrast with Marx’s concept of “ideology?”

4 February: Weber 2 – Studying Science
Key Questions: How does Weber analyse science? What is “disenchantment?”

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

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

RESPONSE PAPER DUE 12 FEBRUARY

16 February: Structuralism and Myth
Key Questions: How does Lèvi-Strauss analyze myth? What does the study of myth reveal?

18 February: Structure, Agency, and Practice
Key Questions: What are “Symbolic Anthropology” and “Cultural Ecology?” How do the theorists we have discussed so far contribute to an idea of “practice?”
TENTATIVE: Details may change prior to start of Winter 2021 Semester

23 February: Foucault 1 – Poststructuralism
Key Questions: What is the “present” for Foucault? What methods and questions do he propose for analysing it?

25 February: Foucault 2 – Biopower
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
Key Questions: What is “postmodernism?” What is a “narrative?”

11 March: The Reflexive Turn
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
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
Key Questions: What is the relationship between “nature” and “culture” or “society?” What alternative relationships are possible?

23 March: Posthuman Cyborgs
Key Questions: What happens to personal identity in postmodernism? How does Haraway address the breakdown of grand narratives?
TENTATIVE: Details may change prior to start of Winter 2021 Semester

25 March: Decolonizing the Ontological Turn

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

30 March: Identity and Recognition

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

1 April: Race, Racism, and Racialization

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

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

8 April: Where Do We Go from Here?

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