

**San José State University
Anthropology Department**

Anth 131, Theories of Culture, Fall 2022

Contact Information

Instructor:	John Marlovits
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Office Hours:	T/Th 12-1 https://sjsu.zoom.us/j/92340427867?pwd=U3llyk95U2tKZU1qS1FsREg0TjNvZz09
Class Days/Time:	Tuesday/Thursday, 3:00-4:15
Classroom:	Clark 202
Prerequisites:	Upper division standing; Anthropology 11 or Instructor's consent

Course Description

This course provides a general introduction to theories of culture that animate contemporary anthropology. The course emphasizes the changing meanings of culture, society, and biology in the context of colonialism, the Cold War, corporate globalization, and other contemporary phenomena. We will also examine the diffusion of the culture concept—from American anthropology, across academic disciplines, and out into the general public. By the end of the course you should have an understanding of the development of cultural anthropological thought, the most influential theoretical approaches of the 20th and 21st century, and the political and economic circumstances under which anthropological ideas emerge.

The course is non-linear in organization, moving between present and past, past and present, and between multiple contemporary points from around the globe – thus eschewing presumptions of unilinear temporality and progression that often organize the history of anthropological theory. The course does not assume an agreed-upon canon of cultural theory, nor does it presume that theory is the fulfillment of a narrative of progress. Instead it presumes that there are many simultaneous, sometimes contradictory, and often mutually-oblivious conversations in circulation. It presumes that ideas become embedded in common sense disciplinary practices that might outlive their theoretical cache – and even consciousness of their presence. It presumes that there is no one history of cultural theory. Instead the course offers students entry into the echoes, layering, and polyphony spurred by theoretical concepts as they are reframed and embedded in the unique fieldwork and writing practices that animate anthropology.

Course readings will echo and reverberate between key theorists, theorizations of contemporary

problems, and the always slightly obtuse and local ways that these concepts alter, appear in, and generate ethnographic texts. Thus, the object of the course is an attunement to this layering: scuttling back and forth between the messy and productive space connecting big ideas and ethnographic description and analysis. It asks how ethnographic writing and practice might generate a kind of “low theory” in dialogue with, but distinct from “high theory.” Students are invited to make use, find their own path, and weave their own text out of this polyphony.

Course Format

Technology Intensive, Hybrid, and Online Courses

This course adopts a hybrid online course strategy. It requires that students have access to Zoom, Canvas, and various web-based media platforms. Students will also need to download lockdown browser technology for exams.. See [University Policy F13-2](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F13-2.pdf) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F13-2.pdf> for more details.

Faculty Web Page and MYSJSU Messaging

Course materials such as syllabus, handouts, notes, assignment instructions, etc. can be found on Canvas. You are responsible for regularly checking with the messaging system through [MySJSU](#) on [Spartan App Portal](#) <http://one.sjsu.edu> (or other communication system as indicated by the instructor) to learn of any updates. For help with using Canvas see [Canvas Student Resources page](http://www.sjsu.edu/ecampus/teaching-tools/canvas/student_resources) (http://www.sjsu.edu/ecampus/teaching-tools/canvas/student_resources)

Learning Outcomes

Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Articulate different theories of culture and society developed by British, French, US, and other anthropologists from the late 19th century to the present
2. Explain how historical, political and economic contexts shaped and impacted these theories
3. Trace relationships between anthropological theories and methods and relationships between anthropological theories and practices
4. Compare and contrast classic ethnographies from the past and the present
5. Analyze and discuss the relationship of anthropological knowledge and the general public
6. Conduct library research and prepare an academic term paper.

Required Texts

Jason Pine, *The Alchemy of Meth: A Decomposition*. University of Minnesota Press.

Students *may* also be required to purchase an additional ethnography of their own choosing in preparation for their final paper.

Students may be required to purchase access to online documentary or feature films.

Students are encouraged to get a student subscription to the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, or both — newspapers that may be used to supplemental purposes

Other Readings

Additional readings will be distributed by the instructor or will be available through the MLK Jr. Library.

Course Requirements and Assignments

SJSU classes are designed such that in order to be successful, it is expected that students will spend a minimum of forty-five hours for each unit of credit (normally three hours per unit per week), including preparing for class, participating in course activities, completing assignments, and so on. More details about student workload can be found in [University Policy S12-3](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S12-3.pdf) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S12-3.pdf>.

Course Requirements and Assignments

Research Cluster Short Answer Questions (10 over semester: 60%)

Each student must join a research cluster of roughly 5 other students. Each research cluster will be responsible for answering a set of weekly questions provided by the professor.

Participation (15%)

Students will also be required to provide a participation grade for themselves and for each member of their research cluster at the end of the semester which will be factored into their participation grade. Students will be given a participation grade for their engagement in class, on class bulletin boards, and in required 3-minute presentations of weekly topics in class.

Critical Exegesis Paper (25%)

Students are required to write a 6-7 page, double-spaced, term paper that performs an exegesis of an ethnography in order to demonstrate how a particular anthropologist has utilized a theory or theorist.

Students may approach this topic in multiple ways. But should be sure to consult with the Instructor (beginning in week 8) about the appropriateness of their topic and in regard to choosing the ethnographic text(s) they plan to focus on.

Students may choose to write a paper 1) comparing the theoretical approaches to a particular question that anthropologists took in different eras. For instance, how did anthropologists write about indigenous groups before 1970 in contrast to how they describe indigeneity today? 2) Students may also choose to explore the role of theory in the analysis of a particular issue, or may pursue a theoretical school or question. 3) Finally, students can also choose to write about ethnography and ethnographic texts as a particular mode of theorizing that raises questions about representation, storytelling, (literary) description with it's own unique set of forms, possibilities, and types of knowledge.

All assignments must be completed in order to pass. I do not accept late assignments without a documented excuse from a doctor, etc. All assignments must be turned in over Canvas.

NOTE that [University policy F69-24](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F69-24.pdf) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F69-24.pdf> states that “Students should attend all meetings of their classes, not only because they are responsible for material discussed therein, but because active participation is frequently essential to insure maximum benefit for all members of the class. Attendance per se shall not be used as a criterion for grading.”

Grading Information

Grading Distribution is as follows:

100-97 = A plus

96-93 = A

92-90 = A minus

89-87 = B plus

86-83 = B

83-80 = B

79-77 = C plus

76-73 = C

72-70 = C minus

69-67 = D plus

66-63 = D

Below 63 = F

Determination of Grades

Grades will be determined on the basis of points. See descriptions above for point breakdown of individual assignments.

There will be no extra credit.

LATE PAPERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED AND WILL RECEIVE A GRADE OF ZERO. A DOCTOR'S NOTE WILL BE REQUIRED FOR LATE PAPERS TO BE CONSIDERED, AND STUDENTS REQUESTING EXTENSIONS WILL NEED TO CONTACT THE PROFESSOR IN ADVANCE OF THE DEADLINE AND PROVIDE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE EXTENSION.

PLAGIARISM WILL RESULT IN AN AUTOMATIC "F" GRADE FOR THE ENTIRE COURSE. NO EXCEPTIONS.

Final Examination

The Final examination will test students grasp of course concepts through essay and short answer questions.

[University policy S17-1](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S17-1.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S17-1.pdf>) which states that "Faculty members are required to have a culminating activity for their courses, which can include a final examination, a final research paper or project, a final creative work or performance, a final portfolio of work, or other appropriate assignment."

Classroom Protocol

Students are required to attend and participate in online lectures and work collaboratively with other students in an assigned research cluster.

Email Etiquette

Please write "Anth 131" followed by the subject of your email in the Subject line of your email. I will respond to your email as quickly as possible, however students should expect to wait at 24-hours for a response – and should not expect text messaging-like access via email. Students should also begin emails with appropriate formality, e.g., "Dear/Hi Professor Marlovits," and should conclude with a salutation and their name (at least for the first in a string of emails).

Please do not ask me questions that can be answered by reading the syllabus. I cannot answer questions over email about missed lectures – students are required to come to lecture, and if they can't make it, ask classmate in your research cluster to share notes.

University Policies (Required)

Per University Policy S16-9, university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc. will be available on Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs' [Syllabus Information web page](http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/>

Readings and assignment dates may change with fair warning.

Anthropology 131 / Theories of Culture, Fall 2022, Course Schedule

		Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
1	8/19	Course Introduction Ghassan Hage, "Towards an Ethics of the Theoretical Encounter"
2	8/23 & 25	Structure and Function, Process and Meaning, Parts and Wholes: On Essentialism and the Culture Concept T: Hyllert Erikson and FS Nielsen, "Four Founding Fathers" and "Expansion and Institutionalization" in <i>A History of Anthropology</i> Th: Caroline Levine, "Raymond Williams, <i>Marxism and Literature</i> " in <i>Public Culture</i> Paul Farmer, "An Anthropology of Structural Violence"
3	8/30 & 9/1	Dismantling Essentialist Visions of Culture T: Sherry Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties" Th: Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, "Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference" Roberto Gonzalez, "Counterinsurgency in the Colonies" in <i>Militarizing Culture</i> Recommended: Edward Said, <i>Orientalism</i>
4	9/6 & 9/8	Marx and Freud T: Karl Marx, "The Economic and Philosophic Manuscript of 1844" https://genius.com/Robert-c-tucker-the-marx-engels-reader-chapter-18-economic-and-philosophic-manuscripts-of-1844-annotated Recommended Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory" Viewing: "What is Marxism?" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFEEHPYp7sg Th: Adam Phillips, "Contingency for Beginners" Viewing: <i>Zizek!</i>

5	9/13 & 15	<p>Disciplinary and Everyday Life: Selfhood and Capitalist Reproduction</p> <p>T: Alice Kaplan and Kristin Ross, “An Introduction to Everyday Life” Mari Ruti, “The Creed of Pragmatism”</p> <p>Th: Eleanor Leacock, “Introduction to <i>Origins of Family, Private Property, and the State</i>” Jack Halberstam, pp 1-11 in <i>A Queer Time and Place</i></p> <p>Viewing: Situationist International documentary</p>
6	9/20 & 22	<p>Poststructuralism: Disciplinary Power, Normalization, and Anti-Humanism</p> <p>Michel Foucault, excerpts in “The Body of the Condemned” Michel Foucault, excerpts in <i>The History of Sexuality, vol 1</i> Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”</p> <p>Recommended: Ian Hacking, “Making Up People”</p>
7	9/27 & 29	<p>Ethnographic Interlude: Nationalism, Technoscience, and Multi-Sited Research Imaginaries</p> <p>T: Joseph Masco, “Mutant Ecologies” Th: Hugh Raffles, “Chernobyl” George Marcus, “Ethnography in/of the World System”</p>
8	10/4 & 6	<p>Historical Ontology, Non-Human, and Multispecies Ethnography</p> <p>T: Susan Harding, “Religion: Not What it Used to Be”</p> <p>Recommended: Arturo Escobar, excerpts in <i>Designs for the Pluriverse</i></p> <p>Th: Anna Tsing, “Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species” John Merrick, “Jason Moore: Anthropocene or Capitalocene?” https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2360-jason-w-moore-anthropocene-or-capitalocene Viewing: Jason Moore: Anthropocene or Capitlocene? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q1YZym_abPU</p> <p>Recommended: Donna Haraway, <i>When Species Meet</i> Eben Kirksey and Stefan Helmreich, “The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography”</p>
9	10/11 & 13	<p>Reading the Popular: Narrative Politics, Globalization, and Analysis of <i>Endless Summer</i></p> <p>Viewing: <i>Endless Summer</i></p> <p>Krista Comer, excerpts in <i>Surfer Girls in the New World Order</i> Scott Laderman, “A World Made Safe for Discovery, Travel, Cultural</p>

		<p>Diplomacy, and the Politics of Surf Exploration”</p> <p>Research Cluster conferences and Instructor Advising Students should work in research cluster or in meetings with Instructor to establish a term paper topic</p>
10	10/18 & 20	<p>Anthropology and the Epistemology of the Liberal Settlement T: Ryan Jobson, “The Case for Letting Anthropology Burn” Leith Mullings, “Interrogating Racism: Toward an Anti-Racist Anthropology” Susan Harding in <i>Cultural Anthropology</i> about Fundamentalism and Illiberalism</p> <p>Th: William Mazzarella, “The Anthropology of Populism: Beyond the Liberal Settlement” Kristin Lawler, “Free Ride: The Food-Stamp Surfer”</p> <p>Viewing: Ta-Nehisi Coates "Black Boy Interrupted" talk</p>
11	10/25 & 27	<p>Dispossession, Racial Capitalism, Colonialism T: Anna Tsing, “Frontiers of Capitalism” View David Harvey, short clips on primitive accumulation</p> <p>Th: Christina Sharpe, “The Wake” Adom Getachew, “Colonialism Made the Modern World. Let’s Remake It,” <i>New York Times</i> July 27, 2020: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/27/opinion/sunday/decolonization-statues.html</p> <p>Viewing: <i>Capitalism, a Six-Part Series Episode 1</i></p> <p>Recommended: Andrew Ross, excerpts in <i>Creditocracy</i></p>
12	11/1 & 3	<p>Infrastructure and the Anthropocene T: Keller Easterling, “El Ejido” Kregg Hetherington, “Introduction: Keywords of the Anthropocene”</p> <p>Th: Jeffrey Insko, “How to Dream Beyond Oil” Gretchen Bakke, “The Big Picture: Coalthink”</p> <p>Recommended: Gaston Gordillo, “The Metropolis: Infrastructure of the Anthropocene”</p>

13	11/8 & 10	<p>Genre and Experiments in Ethnographic Writing Jason Pine, <i>The Alchemy of Meth: A Decomposition</i>, entire book Kathleen Stewart, “The World that Affect Made” Walter Benjamin, “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century” and excerpts in “Convolute N: On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress”</p> <p>Viewing: Dziga Vertov, <i>Man with a Movie Camera</i></p> <p>Recommended: Sasha Su-Ling Welland, “List as Form” Literary, Ethnographic, Long, Short, Heavy, Light” in <i>Writing Anthropology</i></p>
14	11/15 & 17	<p>Bodies: Ability, Disability, Debility Viewing: <i>Crip Camp</i> Viewing: Judith Butler and Sunuara Taylor https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOHZaPkF6qE Julie Livingston, “To Heal the Body, Heal the Body Politic” Jasbir Puar, excerpts in <i>The Right to Maim</i></p> <p>Recommended: Faye Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp, “Anthropology and the Study of Disability Worlds”</p>
15	11/22 Thanksgiving – no class Thursday 11/24	<p>Living and Futures on a Damaged Planet Yen-Ling Tsai, “Farming OddKin in Patchy Anthropocenes”</p> <p>Research Cluster conferences: Ethnographic Reflection</p>
16	11/29 & 12/1	Research Cluster conferences and Instructor Advising
Final Exam	12/9	<p>Friday, December 9 2:45-5:00 PM</p> <p>Critical Exegesis Paper Due</p>