

**San José State University  
Anthropology Department**

**Anth 131, Theories of Culture, Fall 2021**

**Contact Information**

<b>Instructor:</b>	John Marlovits
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<b>Office Hours:</b>	Tuesday 11-12 <a href="https://sjsu.zoom.us/j/92340427867?pwd=U3llyk95U2tKZU1qS1FsREg0TjNvZz09">https://sjsu.zoom.us/j/92340427867?pwd=U3llyk95U2tKZU1qS1FsREg0TjNvZz09</a>
<b>Class Days/Time:</b>	Tuesday/Thursday, 4:00-5:15
<b>Classroom:</b>	Clark 202
<b>Prerequisites:</b>	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 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> 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) <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](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.

Julie Livingston, *Self-Devouring Growth: A Planetary Tale as Told from Southern Africa*, Duke University 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**

#### Bi-Weekly Research Cluster Exegesis Papers (5 over semester: 50%)

Each student must join a research cluster of roughly 5 other students. Each research cluster will be responsible for writing and posting a short 1-2 page (single-spaced) exegesis paper to student bulletin boards.

#### Thursday Seminar Facilitation (5 over semester) + Participation (15%)

Research clusters will be responsible for preparing at least three questions to facilitate discussion in Thursday lectures. Questions may ask the professor for clarification — or may ask for reflecting and discussion from fellow students

#### Participation (10%)

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 and on class bulletin boards.

Students must engaged at least twice over the semester on discussion boards that address weekly topics. Students should respond to this prompt: what did you find intriguing in this week's readings, and what did you take away?

#### Critical Research Paper (25%)

Students are required to write a 7-8 page, double-spaced, term paper that addresses some question of theory in anthropology.

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 its own unique set of forms, possibilities, and types of knowledge.

All assignments must be completed in order to pass. I will not accept late assignments nor will I administer makeup exams unless documents can be presented as evidence of illness, death in family, jury duty, etc. No assignments will be accepted via e-mail—I must receive hard copies of all assignments.

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).

I will not answer questions over email that can be answered by reading the syllabus. I will not answer questions over email about missed lectures – students are required to come to lecture, and if they can’t make it, ask a classmate to share notes. Substantial questions cannot be answered over email and students should come to my office hours instead. I cannot answer email queries about papers, such as: “I don’t know what to write about for the paper, can you help me?” The answer is that I can help you, but you must come to office hours, and you also must do more than say “I don’t know” and begin to formulate at least a vague attempt at a topic. I do not accept electronic papers, and will not edit or grade rough drafts via email. If you would like me to look at a rough draft, you must come to office hours or set up an appointment with me.

**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 2020, Course Schedule**

		<b>Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>8/19</b>	<b>Course Introduction</b>
2	8/24 8/26	<b>Structure and Function, Process and Meaning, Parts and Wholes: On Essentialism and the Culture Concept</b> T. Hyllert Erikson and FS Nielsen, “Four Founding Fathers” and “Expansion and Institutionalization” in <i>A History of Anthropology</i> Caroline Levine, “Raymond Williams, <i>Marxism and Literature</i> ” in <i>Public Culture</i>

3	8/31 9/2	<p><b>Deconstructing Culture: “Postmodernism” and the Crisis of Representation</b></p> <p>T: Dismantling Essentialist Visions of Culture, Confronting Post-war Geopolitics</p> <p>Sherry Ortner, “Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties”</p> <p>Reading: George Marcus, “Ethnography In/Of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography” (read for multi-sited fieldwork strategies)</p> <p>Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, “Beyond ‘Culture’: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference”</p> <p>Roberto Gonzalez, “Counterinsurgency in the Colonies” in <i>Militarizing Culture</i></p> <p>Recommended: James Clifford, Interview 1 in <i>On the Edges of Anthropology</i></p> <p><b>Exegesis papers due for groups 1-3</b></p>
4	9/7 9/9	<p><b>Big Theories of Subjectivity: Historical Materialism, Psychoanalysis, Poststructuralism</b></p> <p>Karl Marx, excerpts in “The German Ideology” and “Theses on Feuerbach”</p> <p>Sigmund Freud, excerpts in <i>Introductory Lectures in Psychoanalysis</i></p> <p>Michel Foucault, excerpts in “The Body of the Condemned” in <i>Discipline and Punish</i></p> <p>Michel Foucault, pp. 78-85 in “Two Lectures” in <i>Power/Knowledge</i> (on subjugated knowledge and genealogy — non-totalizing “theory”)</p> <p>Recommended: Raymond Williams, “Ideology”</p> <p><b>Exegesis papers due for groups 4-6</b></p>
5	9/14 9/16	<p><b>Narrative, the Dialogic Imagination, and Subjectivity</b></p> <p>Narullah Mambrol, “Key Theories of Mikhail Bakhtin,” available here: <a href="https://literariness.org/2018/01/24/key-theories-of-mikhail-bakhtin/">https://literariness.org/2018/01/24/key-theories-of-mikhail-bakhtin/</a></p> <p>Susan Harding, “Convicted by the Holy Spirit: the Rhetoric of Fundamental Baptist Conversion” <i>American Ethnologist</i></p> <p>Roland Barthes, excerpts in <i>Mythologies</i></p> <p>Gloria Anzaldua, excerpts in <i>Borderlands/La Frontera</i></p> <p>Susan Lepselter, excerpts in <i>The Resonance of Unseen Things</i></p> <p><b>Exegesis papers due for groups 1-3</b></p>
6	9/21 9/23	<p><b>Historical Ontology and Human/non-human Assemblages: Beyond Subject and Object</b></p> <p>Susan Harding, “Religion: Not What it Used to Be”</p> <p>Donna Haraway, excerpts in <i>The Companion Species Manifesto</i></p> <p>Bruno Latour, excerpts in <i>We Have Never Been Modern</i></p> <p><b>Exegesis papers due for groups 4-6</b></p>

7	9/28 9/30	<p><b>Multispecies Ethnography, Nature/Cultures, Anthropocene</b>  Anna Tsing, "Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species"  Julie Livingston, <i>Self-Devouring Growth</i> pp. 1-60 &amp; 84-127  <b>Exegesis papers due for groups 1-3</b></p>
8	10/5 10/7	<p><b>Research Cluster conferences and Instructor Advising</b>  Students should work in research cluster or in meetings with Instructor to establish a term paper topic</p>
9	10/12 10/14	<p><b>Bodies: Ability, Disability, Debility</b>  Viewing: <i>Crip Camp</i>  Julie Livingston, "To Heal the Body, Heal the Body Politic"  Wolf-Meyer and Marlovits, excerpts in "Beyond Psychotics"  Jasbir Puar, excerpts in <i>The Right to Maim</i>  Faye Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp, "Anthropology and the Study of Disability Worlds"  <b>Exegesis papers due for groups 4-6</b></p>
10	10/19 10/21	<p><b>Memory, Haunting, Ruins, Repression</b>  Alan Klima, excerpt in <i>Ethnography #9</i>  John Marlovits, "Mental Health as Ruination"  Marita Sturken, Introduction to <i>Tangled Memories</i></p> <p><i>Recommended: Avery Gordon, excerpts in Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination (pp. 72-102)</i>  <b>Exegesis papers due for groups 1-3</b></p>
11	10/26 10/28	<p><b>Dispossession, Capitalism, Colonialism</b>  Eric Wolf, excerpts in <i>Europe and a People without History</i>  Marx and Engels, <i>The Communist Manifesto</i>  David Harvey, short clips on primitive accumulation  Viewing: <i>Capitalism, a Six-Part Series Episode 1</i>  Ta-Nehisi Coates "Black Boy Interrupted" talk</p> <p>Halberstam excerpt in <i>In a Queer Time and Place</i>  Adom Getachew, "Colonialism Made the Modern World. Let's Remake It," <i>New York Times</i> July 27, 2020:  <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/27/opinion/sunday/decolonization-statues.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/27/opinion/sunday/decolonization-statues.html</a></p> <p><i>Recommended: Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, excerpts in On Decoloniality</i>  <b>Exegesis papers due for groups 4-6</b></p>

12	11/2 11/4	<p><b>Infrastructure, Reification, Things</b>  Keller Easterling, "El Ejido"  Kregg Hetherington, "Introduction: Keywords of the Anthropocene"  Jeffrey Insko, "How to Dream Beyond Oil"  Gretchen Bakke, "The Big Picture: Coalthink"</p> <p>Recommended: Karl Marx, <i>Economic and Philosophic Manuscript of 1844</i>  Gaston Gordillo, "The Metropolis: Infrastructure of the Anthropocene"  <b>Exegesis papers due for groups 1-3</b></p>
13	<p><b>11/9</b>  No class  9/11  Veteran's  Day holiday</p>	<p><b>The Ordinary and the Everyday: Affect, Attachment, Cruel Optimism</b>  Kathleen Stewart, "The World that Affect Made"  Lauren Berlant, "Nearly Utopian, Nearly Normal: Post-Fordist Affect in <i>La Promessa</i> and <i>Rosetta</i>"  Shaylih Muehlmann, "The Narco Uncanny"  Viewing: Berlant lecture video  Viewing 2: <i>La Promessa</i>  <b>Exegesis papers due for groups 4-6</b></p>
14	11/16 11/18	<p><b>Genre in Ethnographic Writing</b>  Jason Pine, <i>The Alchemy of Meth: A Decomposition</i>, entire book</p> <p>Recommended: Stuart McLean and Anand Pandian, "Prologue" and Kathleen Stewart, "Epilogue" in <i>Crumpled Paper Boat: Experiments in Ethnographic Writing</i>  Sasha Su-Ling Welland, "List as Form" Literary, Ethnographic, Long, Short, Heavy, Light" in <i>Writing Anthropology</i></p>
15	11/23 11/25 no class for Thanksgiving	<p><b>Research Cluster conferences: Ethnographic Reflection</b></p>
16	11/30 12/2	<p><b>Research Cluster conferences and Instructor Advising</b></p>
Final Exam	12/9 2:45-5	<p>Thursday, December 9  2:45-5:00 PM  Critical Research Paper Due</p>