

Department of Anthropology  
Princeton University  
Fall 2019

## **UNFINISHED: ETHNOGRAPHIC THEORY**

**ANT 503a | Tuesdays 9:00-11:50 AM | 216 Aaron Burr**

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### **Course Description**

This seminar explores the unfinishedness of human subjects and lifeworlds, advancing the conceptual terrain of an anthropology of becoming. People's plasticity troubles and exceeds ways of knowing and acting, opening new channels for research, creative expression, and critical theory. As we consider the array of affects, ideas, forces, and objects that shape contemporary modes of existence and dissect past and present-day regimes of veridiction and falsification, we will explore how ethnographic subjects can become alternative figures of thought and restore a sense of movement, surprise, and possibility to ethics and political practice.

### **Requirements/Grading**

The success of the seminar depends on your commitment to closely reading the texts assigned for each session (about 250-300 pages), to writing and posting weekly reading reports, and to actively participating in discussions. Students will do group presentations and will workshop ethnographic vignettes and visual materials in small groups (guidelines will follow).

#### **Grading will be based on:**

1. Attendance and participation, group presentation, and seminar workshopping (35%).
2. Weekly reading responses, with critical reflections on the sessions' required readings (one page, no more than 500 words). Each week the instructors will send questions to guide your reading. Reports should be posted on the Blackboard's Discussion Board every Monday by 6:00 pm the latest (30%). Please peruse through each other's postings before the Tuesday morning seminar.
3. Book review: Choose a book not read in the seminar and write a short review (6-8 double-spaced pages) problematizing the ways the author theorizes ethnographic experiences/materials (35%). Please draw from and allude to seminar themes and insights. The short paper is due on Dean's Date, January 14, 2020, at 5:00 pm. Please post your book review as a pdf on the course's Blackboard under Assignments.

The following required books will be on reserve at Firestone Library. These books will also be available for purchase at Labyrinth Books (122 Nassau Street). Articles and book chapters can be downloaded from Blackboard's electronic reserve.

- Biehl, João & Locke, Peter. *Unfinished: The Anthropology of Becoming*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.
- De León, Jason. *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015.
- Didi-Huberman, Georges. *Survival of the Fireflies*. Translated by Lia Swope Mitchell. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.
- Frazier, Latoya Ruby. *The Notion of Family*. New York: Aperture, 2016.
- Reynolds, Pamela. *The Uncaring, Intricate World: A Field Diary, Zambezi Valley, 1984-1985*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.

## ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE WAY OF THEORY

- **Book: Reynolds, Pamela. *The Uncaring, Intricate World: A Field Diary, Zambezi Valley, 1984-1985*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.**
- Menand, Louis. "How Cultural Anthropologists Redefined Humanity," *New Yorker*, 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/08/26/how-cultural-anthropologists-redefined-humanity>
- Boas, Franz. "Foreword" to *Mules and Men*. In *Folklore, Memoirs, & Other Writings*, Penguin Books, 1995, p. 3.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. "Introduction" of *Mules and Men*. In *Folklore, Memoirs, & Other Writings*, Penguin Books, 1995, pp. 9-12.
- Benedict, Ruth. "Anthropology and the Abnormal." *An Anthropologist at Work: Writings of Ruth Benedict*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959, pp. 262-283. [Focus on pp. 262-263 and 275-283]
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. "The Notion of Witchcraft Explains Unfortunate Events." *A Reader in Medical Anthropology: Theoretical Trajectories, Emergent Realities*. Edited by Byron J. Good, Michael M.J. Fischer, Sarah S. Willen, and Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pp. 18-25.
- Fanon, Frantz. "Colonial War and Mental Disorders." In *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 2004, pp. 181-219. [Focus on pp. 181-201]
- Clastres, Pierre. "Of Torture in Primitive Societies." In *Society against The State: Essays in Political Anthropology*. New York: Zone Books, 1989, pp. 177-188.
- Asad, Talal. "Afterword: From the History of Colonial Anthropology to the Anthropology of Western Hegemony." In *Colonial Situations: Essays on the Contextualization of Ethnographic Knowledge*. Edited by George Stocking. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991. Just read the opening paragraphs: <https://instruct.uwo.ca/anthro/301/asad.htm>
- Biehl, João. "Ethnography in the Way of Theory." *Cultural Anthropology*, 2013, 28(4): 573-597.

### Supplementary Readings:

- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. "A Writing Lesson," "Men, Women and Chiefs," "A Canoe Trip" in *Tristes Tropiques*, Penguin Books, 2012, pp. 294-329.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. "Prologue." In *Saudades do Brasil. A Photographic Memoir*. University of Washington Press, 1995, pp. 9-23.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. "Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness." In *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*. Edited by Richard G. Fox. School of American Research Press. Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1991, pp. 17-44.
- Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. 2010. "The Untimely, Again." In Pierre Clastres. *Archaeology of Violence*, pp. 9-51. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).
- Fassin, Didier. "Why Ethnography Matters: On Anthropology and Its Publics." *Cultural Anthropology* 2013, 28(4): 621-646.

**Draft and bring to class an ethnographic vignette based on an encounter in the field or a personal experience (no more than 200 words). Add one sentence on why you chose this encounter/experience and one sentence on how it speaks to our present moment. Please also add three conceptual keywords.**

Session Two | September 24  
**PEOPLING CRITICAL THEORY**

- **Book: Didi-Huberman, Georges. *Survival of the Fireflies*. Translated by Lia Swope Mitchell. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.**
- Deleuze, Gilles. "Having an Idea in Cinema." In *Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy, and Culture*. Edited by Eleanor Kaufman and Kevin Jon Heller. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, pp. 14-19.
- Deleuze, Gilles. "Desire and Pleasure." In *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995*. New York: Semiotext(e), 2006, pp. 122-134.
- Said, Edward and Jean Mohr. *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*. Columbia University Press, 1999, pp. 30-50.
- Stewart, Kathleen. "In the World that Affect Proposed." *Cultural Anthropology*, 2017, 32(2): 192-198.
- Berlant, Lauren. "Introduction: Affect in the Present." *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011, pp. 1-21.
- Simpson, Audra. "The Ruse of Consent and the Anatomy of 'Refusal': Cases from Indigenous North America and Australia." *Postcolonial Studies* 2017, 20: 18-33.

Supplementary Readings:

- Aretxaga, Begoña. "Dirty Protest: Symbolic Overdetermination and Gender in Northern Ireland Ethnic Violence." *Ethos* 1995, 23(2): 123-148.
- Said, Edward. "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors" *Critical Inquiry*, 1989, 15(2): 205-225.

Session Three | October 1  
**THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF BECOMING**

- **Book: Biehl, João and Peter Locke. "Foreword: Unfinished," "Introduction: Ethnographic Sensorium," "The Anthropology of Becoming," "Meantime," and "Hereafter." In *Unfinished: The Anthropology of Becoming*. Edited by João Biehl and Peter Locke. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017, pp. ix-xiii, 1-38. 41-89, 269-291.**
- Deleuze, Gilles. "Literature and Life," and "What Children Say." In *Essays: Critical and Clinical*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, pp. 1-6, and 61-67.
- Deleuze, Gilles. "Control and Becoming." In *Negotiations*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, pp. 169-176.
- Gary Hurst. *CAtArINa's Dictionary*.  
<https://anthropology.princeton.edu/programs/vize-lab/projects/catarinas-dictionary>
- Rancière, Jacques. "Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man?" *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 2004, 103(2-3): 297-310.

Supplementary Readings:

- Arendt, Hannah. "We Refugees." In *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile*. Edited by Marc Robinson. Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994, pp. 110-119.
- Arendt, Hannah. "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of the Man." In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1951, pp. 267-302.

- Butler, Judith. "Introduction." In *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015, pp. 1-23.
- Biehl, João. "Care and Disregard." In *A Companion to Moral Anthropology*. Edited by Didier Fassin. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, pp. 242-263.
- Povinelli, Elizabeth. "The Child in the Broom Closet." In *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011, pp. 1-46.

**Place ethnographic characters of João Biehl's and Peter Locke's works in dialogue with a character from your own field research or from an anthropological book that captured your imagination and reflect on them as alternative figures of social thought (no more than 200 words).**

*Session Four | October 8*  
**ETHNOGRAPHIC OPEN**

- Ralph, Laurence. "Becoming Aggrieved." In *Unfinished: The Anthropology of Becoming*. Edited by João Biehl and Peter Locke. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 93-110.
- Garcia, Angela. "Heaven." In *Unfinished: The Anthropology of Becoming*. Edited by João Biehl and Peter Locke. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 111-129.
- Dave, Naisargi. "Witness." In *Unfinished: The Anthropology of Becoming*. Edited by João Biehl and Peter Locke. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 151-172.
- Schwarcz, Lilia M. "I Was Cannibalized by an Artist." In *Unfinished: The Anthropology of Becoming*. Edited by João Biehl and Peter Locke. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 173-196.
- Elizabeth A. Davis. "Time Machines." In *Unfinished: The Anthropology of Becoming*. Edited by João Biehl and Peter Locke. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 217-243.
- Petryna, Adriana. "Horizoning." In *Unfinished: The Anthropology of Becoming*. Edited by João Biehl and Peter Locke. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 243-269.
- Harney, Stefano and Fred Moten. "Politics Surrounded." *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*. Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2013, pp. 17-20.
- **Book: Frazier, Latoya Ruby. *The Notion of Family*. New York: Aperture, 2016.**

Supplementary Readings:

- Purcell, Bridget. "Rebellious Matter." In *Unfinished: The Anthropology of Becoming*. Edited by João Biehl and Peter Locke. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 133-150.
- Bessire, Lucas. "On Negative Becoming." In *Unfinished: The Anthropology of Becoming*. Edited by João Biehl and Peter Locke. Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 197-214.

**Choose one image from Latoya Ruby Frazier's book *The Notion of Family* and describe it in relation to larger realities (social, political, economic, medical, environmental) (no more than 200 words). Please also bring to class a photograph that you took (or a photo someone shared with you in the context of ethnographic research) and add three conceptual keywords.**

Session Five | October 15

## HUMAN/NON-HUMAN BORDERLANDS

- **Book: De León, Jason. *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015.**
- Bennett, Jane. "Preface." In *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, pp. vii-xix.
- Appadurai, Arjun. "Mediants, Materiality, Normativity." *Public Culture*, 2015, 27(2): 221-237.

### Supplementary Readings:

- Taussig, Michael. *Palma Africana*. University of Chicago Press, 2018, pp. 1-40.
- Tsing, Anna T. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton University Press, 2015, pp. 1-54.
- Benjamin, Ruha. "Racial Fictions, Biological Facts: Expanding the Sociological Imagination through Speculative Methods." *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience*, 2016, 2(2): 1-28.

Session Six | October 22

## INSURGENT ARCHIVES & STORYTELLING

- Foucault, Michel. "Lives of Infamous Men." *Power (The Essential Works of Foucault, Vol. 3)*, edited by James Faubion. New York: The New Press, 2000, pp. 157-175.
- Trouillot, Michel Rolph. "Preface" and "The Power in the Story" in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995, pp. xvii-xix, 1-30.
- Farge, Arlette. "Traces by Thousands." In *The Allure of the Archives*. Translated by Thomas Scott-Railton. Yale University Press, 2013, pp. 1-18.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Storyteller." In *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 1968, pp. 83-109.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *The Fire and the Tale*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017, pp.1-10.
- Stoler, Ann. "Prologue in Two Parts" in *Along the Archival Grain Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, Princeton University Press, 2010, pp. 1-16.
- Sebald, W.G. "Dr. Henry Selwyn." *The Emigrants*. New York: New Direction Book, 1996, pp. 1-23.
- Biehl, João. "Traces-of-What-One-Does-Not-Know." Manuscript.
- Günay, Onur. "In War and Peace: Shifting Narratives of Violence in Kurdish Istanbul." *American Anthropologist*, 2019, 121(3): 554-67.

### Supplementary Readings:

- Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." In *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 1968, pp. 253-264.
- Steedman, Carolyn. "Stories." In *Landscape for a Good Woman*. London: Virago, 1986, pp. 3-25.
- Morimoto, Ryo. "Message without a Coda: On the Rhetoric of Photographic Records." *Signs and Society*, 2014, 2(2): 284-313.

Describe an encounter you had with an archive or with 'archivable' materials and add three conceptual keywords (no more than 200 words).