

Anth S423

Title: The Anthropology of Possible Worlds, Summer 2021

Instructor: Paul Kockelman (paul.kockelman@yale.edu)

Time: Monday, Wednesday, Friday (1:00-3:15)

Place: Canvas/Zoom

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1:00-3:00, via Canvas/Zoom

Teaching Fellow: TBD

Description: This course focuses on the nature of possible worlds. That is, worlds different from (what is taken to be) the actual world in various respects. Such possible worlds include not only literary worlds (Narnia, the world of Winnie the Pooh), ideological worlds (the world according to liberals or conservatives), psychological worlds (what someone remembers to be the case, wishes to be the case, or believes to be the case), environmental worlds (niches, habitats, possible environmental futures), virtual worlds (the World of Warcraft), physical worlds (various portions of the putative multiverse in accordance with the laws of physics), and--most of all--ethnographic works in which the actual and possible worlds of others are represented (the world according to the ancient Maya). We won't be focused on the contents of such worlds per se, but rather on the range of resources agents have for representing, regimenting, residing in and, most generally, worlding such worlds; and the roles such resources play in mediating cultural values, social relations, semiotic practices, and physical processes.

Requirements for Students (Undergraduates or Graduates):

1. Do the readings and be active in discussing them each class (20% of grade);
2. **Reading responses** (1 single-spaced page long for undergraduate students), due MWF each week: one hour prior to the beginning of the class in which we discuss them (20%). These are not graded for writing style. But they must constitute clear evidence that the student carefully did the reading, and so is ready to actively participate in the seminar. Reading notes can thus take whatever form is most useful for the individual student: e.g. notation form ("bullet points"); more of a prose style, etc.; or some combination of the two; also, feel free to include descriptive tables, charts, and/or conceptual maps. Finally, student notes should address all of the readings on the syllabus for that particular day.
3. **Midterm project:** students should choose a possible world, something the student wants to focus on and think through using the readings and concepts developed in the class. This is a way of concretizing and centering the otherwise relatively abstract and potentially diffuse ideas we

will be dealing with. Such an object can come from your fieldwork, everyday life, more general interests, etc. In place of a midterm, students should prepare a two page summary of the kind of possible world, and types of resources for representing and regimenting such a world, they are interested in writing their final paper on. This should include a short discussion of the world itself, the resources they are interested in (and why these are relevant to that world), the core readings they will focus on, and a glimpse of the core arguments they would like to make (20%). Due Monday July 20th.

4. Final essay: careful summary, synthesis, extension, and critique of 4-5 readings in class (40%) in relation to one or more possible worlds (as outlined in the midterm project). Papers should be about 10 pages long. These are due by NOON, on Tuesday, August 4th. This is a hard deadline; there are no exceptions.

5. Be able to connect to, and participate in, virtual learning environment.

Additional Notes:

0. Be connected on time, and be present in all classes. No exceptions.

1. No engaging in other activities (phone conversations, texting, etc.) during seminar.

2. No exceptions to assignment due-dates.

3. Students will formulate their final essays in dialogue with other students during class, and in consultation with me. The paper will turn on readings and topics discussed in class, but can take into account issues and events outside of class readings if relevant. Students are expected to start formulating a topic and thesis at least three weeks before the due date. As the course is underway, and through our close analysis of each of the readings, we will discuss strategies for topic-choice, the relation between evidence and argument, conventions of scholarly citation, strategies for generating and assessing novel formulations, and various genres of the essay form itself. Through these step-by-step processes, students will produce demonstrably singular essays, while learning the craft of essay writing, the ethics of academic integrity, and the pleasures of creative scholarship.

4. For students unsure about Yale's stance on plagiarism, please see the following link: <http://writing.yalecollege.yale.edu/advice-students/using-sources/understanding-and-avoiding-plagiarism>

5. List of readings will follow, organized by classes (of which there are 15). Some of the readings are quite long and dense by themselves. I will guide students to particular sections and concepts in these readings as course progresses. I reserve the right to add and/or prune readings as we go. Starred readings (*) are optional.

6. All readings will be posted on Canvas.

The live discussion sessions will be held through the *Zoom* virtual classroom tool. To access the live sessions, click "Zoom" on the left side of this page. Once you click the link, you may be prompted to install a small application necessary for *Zoom*. Once you do so, you will be taken directly into the *Zoom* meeting room. You can then use the audio and video settings menu (bottom left corner) to ensure the correct input/output sources are chosen. For more detailed information of *Zoom* operation, refer to the user guide in the Technical Support page in the "Modules" tab of the upper left column. Remember: a headset with microphone is recommended in the live sessions, this will help reduce audio feedback from participants. Additionally, be sure you are in a quiet location for the live sessions allowing you to focus on the discussion.

Readings Follow (by Week and Day: Monday, Wednesday, Friday)

Week 1 Introduction to Possible Worlds

Monday: Possible Worlds as Imagined Worlds

Butler: Speechsounds

Kockelman: Huckleberry Finn Takes the Turing Test

Wednesday: Social Relations and Modality

Linton: Status and Role

Kockelman: Huckleberry Finn Takes the Turing Test (Continued)

Friday: Ethnographic Worlds and their Critiques

Evans-Pritchard: Witchcraft among the Azande

W2: Tense and Modality

Monday: Shifting Events and Displacing Worlds

Roman Jakobson: Duplex Categories (focus on shifters)

Charles Hockett: Design Features of Language

Tomasello: Origins of Human Communication (ONLY pages 1-12)

Wednesday: Must, Can, and other Modals

Handout on set logic

Angela Kratzer: The Notional Category of Modality (selected sections)

Kai Von Fintel and Irene Heim: Intensional Semantics, Chapter 1 (selections)

Friday: Case Examples

Kockelman: Modal operators in a Mayan languages

W3: Literary Exploration of Possible Worlds (with 'Realistic' Worlds)

Monday: Physics and Possible Worlds, in Physics and Literature

Gamow (Mr. Tomkins in Wonderland: chapter 1-3);

Chiang (Exhalation)

Tegmark: Parallel Universes

Wednesday: Literary Ethnography, Biology and Possible Worlds

Samuel Butler (Erewhon: Selections);

Gould: It's a Wonderful Life

Friday: Literary Ethnography and Revisionist History

Borges (Garden of Forking Paths)

Bacon (finish New Atlantis)

Chiang (Story of Your Life)

W4: Modes of Existence, Intuition/Analysis, Animal Worlds

Monday: Modes of Existence--rethinking possibility

Latour on Souriaou

Wednesday: Animal Worlds and Environmental Worlds

Gibson: Affordances

Uexkull: Theory of Meaning

Friday: Analysis and Intuition

Bergson on Time and Free Will (selection)

Alternately: read Bergson: introduction to metaphysics (shorter, and somewhat less dense)

W5: Worlding Precarious Worlds; Worlding Livable Worlds

Monday: Kathleen Stewart: Precarity's Forms, New England Red

Wednesday: Elizabeth Grosz: Feminism, Materialism, Freedom., Natasha Meyers: How to Grow Livable Worlds

Friday: Octavia Butler: The Book of Martha