

Syllabus for Anth S423

Title: The Anthropology of Possible Worlds, Summer 2022 (Session A: May 31-July 31)

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

Time: Monday, Wednesday, Friday (9-11:15)

Place: In Person

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. Weekly reading responses (1 page long for undergraduate students), due at the beginning of the class 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.
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 three 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%).
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 one week after the last day of class.
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 (preliminary) readings follows, 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.

Required Readings for Each Week (5 weeks, meeting three times a week, so 15 classes)

1) Physics of Possible Worlds

Max Tegmark (2003): Parallel Universes
Max Tegmark (2007): The Multiverse Hierarchy

2) Fiction of Possible Worlds

Marie-Laure Ryan (2006): From Parallel Universes to Possible Worlds: Ontological Pluralism in Physics, Narratology, and Narrative

3) Philosophy of Possible Worlds

David Lewis (1986): On the Plurality of Worlds (selections)
Saul Kripke (1980): Naming and Necessity (selections)
Nelson Goodman: Ways of Worldmaking (selections)
*David Lewis (1973): Counterfactuals (selections)

4) Linguistics of Possible Worlds

Hilary Putnam (1975): The Meaning of Meaning
David Kaplan (1977): Demonstratives
*Angelika Kratzer (1991): Modality.
*Jaako Hintikka (1969): Semantics for Propositional Attitudes.
*Kai von Fintel and Irene Heim (2011): Intensional Semantics (chapter 1-3).
*Gottlob Frege (1970): On Sense and Reference

5) Linguistic Anthropology of Possible Worlds (Part 1)

Michael Silverstein (1977): Language and Cultural Description
Benjamin Lee (1997): Talking Heads (selections)

6) Linguistic Anthropology of Possible Worlds (Part 2)

Paul Kockelman: On Modal Operators (and Possible Worlds) in Q'eqchi'-Maya
Paul Kockelman: On Propositional Attitudes (and Mental States) in Q'eqchi'-Maya

7) Virtual, Real, and Actual Worlds

Gilles Deleuze (1968): Difference and Repetition (selections)
Charles S. Peirce (1902): Entry on 'Virtual'
Manuel Delanda (2011): Philosophy and Simulation (selections)
Brian Massumi (2002): Parables for the Virtual (selections)

8) Digital Virtual Worlds

Julian Dibbell (1999): My Tiny Life (selections)

Richard A. Bartell (2004): Designing Virtual Worlds (selections)
Celia Pearce and Artemesia (2009): Communities of Play: Emergent Cultures in Multiplayer Games and Virtual Worlds (selections)

9) Psychological Anthropology of Virtual Worlds

Jerome Bruner (1987) Actual Minds, Possible Worlds (selections)
James Stigler,, Richard A. Shweder, and Gilbert Herdt. (1999): Cultural Psychology: Essays on Comparative Human Development (selections)

10) Cultural Anthropology of Possible Worlds

Richard Shweder (1989): Nietzschean Anthropology: The Idea of Multiple Objective Worlds
Elizabeth Povinelli (2001): Radical Worlds: Anthropology of Incommensurability and Inconceivability
Martin Hébert (2017): Worlds Not Yet in Being: Reconciling Anthropology and Utopianism

11) Anthropology of Worlding (Part 1)

Kathleen Stewart (2011): Atmospheric Attunements.
Kathleen Stewart (2011): A Life, a List, a Line.
Kathleen Stewart (2017): In the World that Affect Proposed

12) Anthropology of Worlding (Part 2)

Stephen Helmreich (2001): Silicon Second Nature (selections)

13) Anthropology of Worlding (Part 3)

Lisa Messeri: Placing Outer Space (selections)

14) Anthropology of Worlding (Part 4)

Graham M. Jones: Magic's Realism

15) Summary and Conclusion