

## INTRODUCTION TO SOCIO-CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

ANTH S110 01 (Summer 2024)

CLASS DAYS: Tuesdays & Thursdays, July 1 - August 2, Yale Summer Session B

INSTRUCTOR: Matthew L. O'Malley

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### BRIEF OVERVIEW OF COURSE:

An introduction to the central ideas, methods, and debates that make up the anthropological study of human thought and behavior. Survey of dynamic ways of life in many different societies; outline of the ways anthropologists have tried to understand societies. Hands-on ethnographic research provides insight into how cultural anthropologists do what they do—what problems they encounter and what tools and techniques they use for research and analysis.

### EXTENDED DESCRIPTION:

“The shared past is precious, not for itself, but because it is the basis of consciousness, of knowing, of being.”

—CEDRIC ROBINSON

“In writing the present book I desired to show that some of the most firmly rooted opinions of our times appear from a wider point of view as prejudices, and that a knowledge of anthropology enables us to look with greater freedom at the problems confronting our civilization.”

—FRANZ BOAS, *ANTHROPOLOGY AND MODERN LIFE*, 1928

This course provides students with an introduction to the themes, concepts and methods of **socio-cultural anthropology**—the study of diverse human societies around the world (including ourselves and our contemporaries), *and how they are related*, through analysis of humanity’s various languages, religions, political-economic structures, and everyday ways of living. We will learn about the development of the discipline of cultural anthropology, and examine its characteristic research problems: from classic debates about kinship, prohibitions, racial difference, exchange, and cultural diversity, to current questions about markets, political life in a precarious and changing environment, racism and

antiblackness, rural America, conspiracy theories, and how people grapple with global systems in their individual lives.

We will analyze particular forms of human thought, expression, and social order in their cultural and historical context, and then put our understanding of difference, variation, and relativity to work, exploring how diverse perspectives and experiences can help offer a better-grounded and more comprehensive understanding of contemporary events and processes. Among the questions we will address are: What is culture, and how it is created and maintained across generations? How and why do human societies exchange goods, organize consumption and celebration, and how do these activities provide both material goods and meaningful order for everyday life? How does individual experience relate to broader ideas about race, gender, and culture? And, how have recent technological and political transformations transformed the experiences and expectations of ordinary life?

## **READING LIST FOR 2024 JULY SUMMER COURSE:**

### **WEEK 1 • ANTHROPOLOGY AS THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF POSSIBLE WORLDS**

*The Telling*, a speculative science fiction novel by Ursula Le Guin (Ace, 2001) AND “Ursula K. Le Guin, Interplanetary Anthropologist” by Anand Pandian, from his book: *A Possible Anthropology: Methods for Uneasy Times* AND “Storytelling Events, Violence, and the Appearance of the Past” by Michael Jackson

### **WEEK 2 • BEGINNINGS OF A DISCIPLINE (CLASSIC SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY)**

Marcel Mauss, from *The Gift: An Essay on the Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* AND more contemporary, supplemental articles on Mauss’s classic work and the social and anthropological theory of the gift vs. the commodity, etc.

### **WEEK 3 • ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE STATE**

James Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (Yale UP 1999) AND Group Fieldwork Exercise: Seeing Like a State in New Haven

### **WEEK 4 • ETHNOGRAPHY**

*Black Gods of the Asphalt: Religion, Hip-Hop, and Street Basketball*, by Onaje X. O. Woodbine (Columbia University Press) paperback—ISBN-10 : 0231177291; hardcover—ISBN-10 : 9780231177283

## WEEK 5 • RACE, REFUSAL, & THE NARRATIVE OF ARCHIVAL PHOTOGRAPHY

*Listening to Images* by Tina M. Campt (Duke University Press 2017)

### REQUIREMENTS:

1. Participation is crucial and of utmost importance for this class. Do the readings and be active in discussing them each class. Attendance required.
2. Weekly reading responses, 1-2 pages long, due at the beginning of the class we discuss them. Must constitute clear evidence that you carefully did the reading, and so are ready to actively participate in the seminar.
3. Midterm essay/project: careful summary, synthesis, use (and possibly critique) of 2-3 readings in first half of class, potentially using student's own ethnographic data, 10 (double-spaced) pages long. Due Monday, July 16th.
4. "SEEING LIKE A STATE IN NEW HAVEN," **A fieldwork exercise** for ANTH S110B:

In lieu of our usual classroom meeting for Friday, July 21, you will have the opportunity to take your study of James Scott's anthropology of modern statecraft out into the field, locally, here in New Haven. "The great city commands everything," Le Corbusier once wrote—the authority of the master planner is that hierarchy prevails in all (urban) directions. Is this true, ethnographers? "The state, of all institutions," writes Scott, "is best equipped to insist on treating people according to its schemata...the authoritative tune to which most of the population must dance."

Your task is to go out into the City of New Haven—in pairs, groups, or by yourself—with a state space in mind, and investigate it observationally and ethnographically. The idea is to take your reading for the week and test out some of Scott's theories and his own data right here, on the ground, in New Haven.

5. Several **short Writing-Thinking-Sharing workshop pieces** that will be shared in class. Like a writing workshop format / style.

6. **Final essay/project:** careful summary, synthesis, use (and possibly critique) of 2-3 readings in first half of class, using student's own ethnographic data,<sup>10</sup> (double-spaced) pages long. Due Monday, August 6th.

NOTES:

1. Cellphones must be turned off during class.
2. No exceptions to assignment due-dates.
3. Students will formulate both their midterm and final essays/projects in dialogue with other students, and in consultation with me. The papers will turn on readings and topics discussed in class, but can take into account issues and events outside of class readings if relevant. For both papers, students are expected to start formulating a topic and thesis at least two weeks before the due date. As the first-paper 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, the methods of ethnographic research, and the techniques of ethnographic writing. Through these step-by-step processes, students will produce demonstrably singular essays, while learning the craft of ethnographic research and writing, the ethics of academic integrity and scholarship, and the pleasures of creative inquiry
4. **Academic Integrity:** Yale College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the College Academic Integrity Procedures. 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. **Disability Statement:** In compliance with the American Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Yale College is committed to ensuring educational parity and accommodations for all students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions. It is recommended that all students with documented disabilities (Emotional, Medical, Physical, and/or Learning) consult the Office of AccessABILITY, to secure necessary academic

accommodations. For further information and assistance, please contact the Yale Summer Session

6. Re: the list of readings above, I reserve the right to add and/or prune readings as we go.

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to 1) Identify key anthropological thinkers and concepts; 2) Explain their contribution to understandings of culture, power, and difference; 3) Produce persuasive arguments about key public issues using anthropological understandings of cultural relativity; and 4) Analyze systems of differentiation including gender, ethnicity, and class.