Course Syllabus

anth 4755 & 5755 | the anthropology of stuff & things
spring 2023 | MWF 11:00 - 11:50am
BLB 075

Course Description and Learning Objectives

- Explore human relationships in and with the material world using an array of anthropological and multidisciplinary perspectives.
- Engage and apply provocative theory and methods to consider at an intellectual and visceral level humanity's entanglement with material(s) ranging from arts and architecture, industry and infrastructure, technology and transportation.
  - Methods will include sensory and digital ethnography
- Our locus of study concerns how human consider, create, consume, contest, dwell and discard in a world of stuff and things.

Course Structure

This course is face-to-face. With the exception of Week 1, (please see the 1/16 course announcement) we will meet in BLB (Business Learning Building) Room 075. We will meet via Zoom to host guest speakers. Zoom links will be posted in course announcements and made available through Canvas. There are 14 weeks of content that you will move through. I will open up a new module each week.

Prerequisites to success

This is an advanced upper-level undergraduate "meets-with" all-level graduate course. This course exceeds the UNT CORE curriculum standards. There are no required prerequisites for this course. However, in order to be successful in this course students will benefit from the following:

- College Writing I & II, or equivalent
- Language, Philosophy and Culture
- Communication &/or Digital Skills
- Life &/or Physical Science
- History &/or Political Science
- Creative Arts (recommended)
- Time management skills

Success in this course necessitates:

- Regular, reliable access to webcam-enabled PC, laptop, or mobile device + secured, reliable internet connection
- Proficiency using Zoom videoconferencing software, including screenshare features;
- Proficiency using MS Office (Word, Ppt. etc.) and familiarity with basic Adobe Acrobat (pdf);
- Proficiency using UNT's Canvas platform to submit assignments;
- Proficiency using UNT's Library resources (there is an entire page dedicated to this req)

This course will also require:

- Proficiency describing the scope of cultural analysis along with the foundation that theory sets for the field (this you will learn!)
- Proficiency citing sources using discipline-appropriate citation style, giving credit to where you obtain information.
- Proficiency networking with others and utilizing tact when offered differing perspectives.
- The ability to locate expert makers - preferably online, in-person if safely accomplished - for an observation assignment
- To make the commitment to spend at least 10 hours a week reading the assignments, reflecting on the material covered, and participating in other activities throughout the course.

Required Texts

There are no required textbooks, although I recommend purchasing Tim Ingold's (2011) Being Alive through the UNT Bookstore. All materials will be made available in Canvas or through the UNT Library.

Communication

- Instructor: Dr. Jamie K. Johnson | Department of Anthropology
- Office Hours for students in this class: Friday 12:00 p.m. or online by appointment
- Phone: (940) 369-5403 (email is the best way to reach me)
- Please email me through the Canvas email tool, or at: jamie.johnson@unt.edu

While I want to make myself as available as possible to each of you, I do have to place some limitations on when I can be contacted. I would prefer that most general questions go through the Q & A forum in the Discussion Board area. If you have a general question about the course or assignments, please post it there. Either I will answer it, or, one of your classmates will. This way we can all benefit from questions asked, and they can be answered in a venue that the whole class can see. You may also want to find someone in class to be a "buddy" with. This will give you at least one other person who you can email with questions.

If you have a private question, please contact me via email and I will respond within 24 hours on weekdays (usually sooner). Please do not expect a response over the weekend. Please use my office phone number as a last resort - but, also, please use it if you need to!

Normally, I will return feedback on all written assignments within 1 week of the due date. However, if I see that I will be unable to return your feedback that quickly I will post an Announcement to let everyone know when it can be expected.

Activities and Exercises:

My Pet Rock

Objective: This in-class exercise in observation, transcription, and descriptive writing will prime you for your first writing assignment: The Sensory Observation, due Thursday in Zoom Lab.

"The Story of Our Electronics" - Digital Story Survey

https://digitalgarbology.maps.arcgis.com/apps/GeoForm/index.html?appid=bd424d462ed44488b461819ea8da04df Links to an external site.

Objective: Surveys on household e-waste in countries such as the United States (Saphores et al. 2009) reveal that a significant portion of electronic waste is stored in basements, attics, outdoor sheds, and other domestic living spaces. Rather than assuming that people are unaware of their options to reduce, reuse, or recycle e-waste, this survey asks you to imagine the object biography (Kopytoff 1986) and the potential afterlife/afterlives of an electronic device that has been particularly meaningful to you. By reflecting on our shared memories, experiences, and behaviors, we can better understand why people may choose to store (rather than recycle or discard) the electronics they are no longer using, what these objects mean/ meant/ or could mean to us, and whether or not these objects should be classified as "e-waste".

Proprioception Observation – Sensing the World

Objective: This activity is designed to engage your powers of observation and to hone your field note writing skills. It is also an exercise to discover and reflect upon how our physical senses structure our perceptions of the world, and thus, affect our interpretations and representations of it.

Guest Speaker Reflection 1

Objective: This exercise will help students gain experience observing and writing richly-detailed, descriptive fieldnotes narrating the construction process of an expert maker and to communicate your overall understanding and informed commentary on the construction process.

'Meet the Maker' Observation and Interview

Purpose: To investigate and understand the interplay between human creativity, skill, materiality, and culture by conducting an ethnographic observation and interview with an expert "maker".

Objectives:

- To conduct an observation of a skilled practitioner at work;
- To interview that person about their experience;
- To transcribe that observation & interview into a richly descriptive narrative and analysis;

- To share excerpts with your peers during classroom discussion.

Construction Project and Presentation

Purpose: To investigate and understand the interplay between human creativity, skill, materiality, and culture by designing and executing your own construction project.

Objectives:

- To conceptualize, design, and create a "thing";
- To locate and gather the materials for your project, then, actively observe the process of creation, with a focus on your sensory interaction with the chosen materials;
- To reflect on the construction experience in a richly descriptive narrative and analysis;
- To share excerpts from #3 with your peers during classroom discussion.

Guest Speaker Reflection 2

Our second guest speaker will be digital garbologist and data scientist Dr. Gideon Singer, who will be live streamed on Zoom. Dr. Singer will be sharing results and insights from his doctoral work and recent work on crowd-sourced litter mapping with Litterati.

Your assignment will be to reflect upon the guest speaker's talk using an anthropological perspective. Think holistically; write critically.

The reflection should incorporate *at least* two relevant readings from the second half of the semester, and should follow the general guidelines below. Beyond these guidelines, your observations, interpretations and descriptions are your own.

Repair Project Assignment

Purpose: To confront consumer culture by contemplating incentives and obstacles to repair, while experiencing first-hand the affective nature of socio-material entanglements.

Objectives:

- To reflect on how things fall apart;
- To conceptualize, strategize, and execute a repair;
- To actively observe the repair process and transcribe the experience into a richly descriptive narrative and analysis;
- To share excerpts of that experience with your peers.

Final Research Project & Presentations

Objectives: 1) Examine the human relations involved in the production, exchange, consumption, and discard of material culture, in particular, a cherished personal belonging 2) Track the item geographically and socially, reflecting on the processes of making meaning in a material world, and translating those processes in a critical, scholarly, creative and useful manner. 3) By reflecting on our shared memories, experiences, and behaviors, we can better understand why

people may choose to save or store (rather than recycle or discard) things that are meaningful to them, what these objects mean/ meant/ or could mean to us, and what will happen to these things in the event of their obsolescence or when they are no longer of use.

Activities: 1) assigned course readings, 2) an initial reflection, 2) an initial observation, 3) production, exchange and consumption, discard research, 4) a final observation and 5) quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Deliverables: The finished product will be typed and submitted in Canvas and will also be presented in class.

Grades....

Proprioception Observation   - 34,024 points
Digital Story Survey   - 11,341.33333 points
Guest Speaker Reflection 1   - 11,341.33333 points
Observation and Interview   - 45,365 points
Construction Project   - 39,064.03703 points
Guest Speaker Reflection 2   - 11,341.33333 points
Repair Project   - 39,064.03703 points
Digital Story Project   - 74,048 points
Attendance and Stuff   - 26,932 points

_____

Total Points: 292,521.0740*

*all grades will be assigned on a +/- A, B, C, D or F scale and will be weighted accordingly. rubrics will be provided.