Anthropology 319

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE INCREDIBLE:
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND THE LIMITS OF THE HUMAN

Wednesdays 1:00-4:00, Location 109 K-J

Instructor: Chris Vasantkumar, 244 K-J, cvasantk@hamilton.edu
Office Hours: Wednesdays 4-6 (drop-ins) and 6-7 (by appointment).


Description: How have advances in scientific knowledge and technological innovation reshaped common understandings of what it means to be human? How have they reshaped ideas of the boundaries between human and nonhuman realities? This course combines an attention to key texts on the study of scientific practice and the uses of technology with an attention to recent work in the discipline of Science Technology and Society (STS) studies. It employs provocative case studies (including, but not limited to, conjoined and other non-normative anatomies, ufology and exobiology, early modern automata and artificial life, emergent concepts of nonhuman agency, topographies of monstrousness and invasion biologies) to suggest parallels between extraordinary contexts and everyday life.

Books (Available for purchase at College Bookstore):
REQUIRED (7):

RECOMMENDED (2):

Other readings will be made available on-line via Blackboard/Electronic Reserve.

**Expectations and Requirements:**

1. **Show up.** Attendance at all class meetings is required. If you must miss a class meeting it is your responsibility to provide me with documentation of an unavoidable absence *ahead of time*. Students who have more than 2 unexcused absences from class will get a 0% in attendance. This is not a good thing.
2. **Be prepared and engaged.** Be prepared to talk and devote your full attention to discussion (i.e. be caffeinated if necessary). Also, please silence all cell phone ringers. Vibrate is fine.
3. **Don’t Cheat**: Cheating is defined as fraud, deceit, or dishonesty in an academic assignment, or using or attempting to use materials, or assisting others in using materials which are prohibited or inappropriate in the context of the academic assignment in question. Here are some examples:

   * Copying or attempting to copy from others during an exam or on an assignment.
   * Communicating answers with another person during an exam.
   * Using unauthorized materials, prepared answers, written notes, or concealed information (i.e. on a cell-phone) during an exam.
   * Allowing others to do an assignment or portion of an assignment for you, including the use of a commercial term-paper service.
   * Submitting the same assignment for more than one course without prior approval of all the instructors involved.
   * Collaborating on an exam or assignment with any other person without prior approval from the instructor.
   * Taking an exam for another person or having someone take an exam for you.

**Plagiarism** is defined as use of intellectual material produced by another person without acknowledging its source, for example:

   * Wholesale copying of passages from works of others into your homework, essay, term paper, or dissertation without acknowledgment.
   * Using the views, opinions, or insights of another without acknowledgment.
   * Paraphrasing another person's characteristic or original phraseology, metaphor, or other literary device without acknowledgment.
Y’all have an **HONOR CODE** here and I expect you to follow it.

4. Complete all assignments on time. I will **NOT** accept late work. I will cheerfully accept early work, however.

**Grading and Assessments:** Your grade in this class will be based on the following ingredients:

1. Attendance and Participation 30%
2. Response Papers and Portfolio of written work 25%
3. Two take-home mid-terms (25% each)
4. Final Paper (20%).

**Important Dates:**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>Friday March 4</td>
<td>Take Home #1 Due</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 12-27</td>
<td>SPRING BREAK</td>
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<td>Wednesday March 30</td>
<td>AAS Meetings; No Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday April 2</td>
<td>Take Home #2 Due</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday May 6</td>
<td>Portfolio due</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday May 11</td>
<td>Final Paper Due</td>
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**The Response Papers:** You will be expected to submit **at least eight** (8) Response Papers over the course of the semester.

We will be kickin’ it old school this semester. I expect you to **print out** (yes, really) enough hard copies (2-sided please) for each of your classmates plus one for me and **BRING THEM TO SEMINAR ON WEDNESDAY afternoon.** We will spend the first 15-20 minutes of each meeting reading each other’s notes. In order to receive credit for a response paper, you **MUST** have it finished in time to distribute it at the beginning of class.

There are a total of 12 possible Response Papers due during the semester. If you submit fewer than 8 your grade will be negatively impacted.

The Response Papers consist of **two** parts:

**First,** a 2-3 page written response that incorporates a critical response (not just summary of) to the week’s reading(s). There are several ways to approach this task: raise questions prompted by the readings or lectures, identify especially difficult or generative passages, respond to specific questions that I may give you ahead of time, relate the readings to what you observe around you, link the readings to something happening in the real world, struggle with a particular concept or respond personally. As I mentioned, I do not want summaries of the week’s reading. Rather some form of critical reflection should be the goal. You should treat these as mini-essays. Feel free to be creative, but please organize your arguments carefully.

And **Second,** a section comprised of **a sentence or two on each of these 6 topics:**

1. The main argument of the reading(s)/film(s) in question (What is the author saying?)
2. The impact or importance of this argument (Why should we care?)
3. The relationship of this piece to other readings for the week or class as a whole (How does it fit?)
4. What quotation (or scene/moment) from this piece sums up its contribution/impact most succinctly? (Give us the quote and tell us where it’s from)

5. How do you feel about this reading/film (Was it compelling? Was it intelligible? Couldn’t keep your eyes open?)

6. Propose two thoughtful discussion questions to be covered in class.

I will note receipt of these responses but will not grade them until I receive your response portfolio at the end of the class. Especially good Response Papers will be good candidates for course reward points; see below. Students who are leading discussion will also be expected to read and draw upon these Response Papers.

The Portfolio of Written Responses is composed of two parts. First, of the response papers you submit over the course of the semester, choose the best 4. You may rewrite the responses for submission in the portfolio if you wish. Second, write a three page (double-spaced) reflection on the process of writing and selecting the responses. Use this essay as an opportunity to reflect on the effect of the course on your intellectual trajectory. Your portfolio is due by email by the end of the last week of classes.

Oral Assignments

1. Participation in class discussion. This class is based on active, engaged and constructive participation by all members of the seminar. It is the responsibility of everyone in class to know their classmates’ names and to make each other feel comfortable with expressing themselves to the group. Participation is a major component (30%) of your grade. You will be assessed not simply on the amount of participation, but on the relevance and insightfulness of your contribution to discussion.

2. Leading Discussion: After the first couple sessions, students will be responsible for leading discussion. Each student should lead discussion at least two times over the course of the semester. Facilitators have lots of freedom in how they approach things. You can devise small group activities, debates, skits, show and comment upon videos from Youtube or of your own making, or you can analyze and pose questions about key points in the reading, the lectures or the links between the two. The goal is not to talk for the whole time but to provide the framework for discussion. Rather you must draw others out of their shells and into an interesting discussion.

Course Rewards Program:
Based on entirely subjective criteria, the Course Rewards Program™ allows you to earn points which can be redeemed for prizes with absolutely no cash value but which may be of some use in boosting your self esteem or earning valuable free time. It is my way of acknowledging notes and presentations that go above and beyond the usual. Especially thoughtful, creative or well argued work may be awarded 50-150 points. There is no limit to the number of possible winners per week. Rewards are on the following basis (points are cumulative; i.e. they don’t go away after you use them):

300 POINTS: 1 week off Response Papers (to be used whenever you want).
700 POINTS: 2 day extension on any assignment (must be used in advance).
900 POINTS: 1 excused absence from class.

COURSE PLAN:
UNIT I:
FREAKS
OR
THE LIMITS OF THE BODY

Week 1
1/19  Introduction and Logistics; [Twilight Zone: “Eye of the Beholder”]

Week 2
1/26  Extra/ordinary Anatomies
Readings:
1. A. Dreger, One of Us: Conjoined Twins and the Future of Normal.

Week 3
2/2  Ontologies of Bodily Experience
Readings:

Week 4
2/9  Bodies in Practice
Readings:
1. Mol, The Body Multiple.
UNIT 2:

CYBORGS
OR
THE LIMITS OF THE SELF

c.1738 image of the Duck of Vaucanson from Wikimedia commons.

Week 5
2/16 It’s Alive!!!!? – 1
Readings:
1. Genesis Redux, Selections.

MIDTERM #1 HANDED OUT

Week 6
2/23 Avatars and Second Selves
Readings:
1. T. Boelstorff, Coming of Age in Second Life, Selections.

Week 7
3/2 Them! (Non-Human Agency)
Readings

MIDTERM #1 DUE Friday March 4, 11:59 PM by email
UNIT 3:

MONSTERS
OR
THE LIMITS OF THE SPECIES

From Schedel'sche Weltchronik, Nuremburg, 1493, page XIIr — from Wikimedia Commons

Week 8
3/9  The Topography of Wonder
     Readings:
     1. Park and Daston, Wonders, 13-66, 329-368(rec.).

✦ MIDTERM #2 HANDED OUT

SPRING BREAK 3/12-3/27

Week 9
3/30  AAS Meetings in Honolulu; no class.

SATURDAY, APRIL 2, 11:59PM, TAKE HOME #2 DUE by email

Week 10
4/6  The Promises of Monsters
     Readings:
     4. J.J. Cohen, “Monster Culture: Seven Theses”

Week 11
4/13  Taxonomy at the Limits
     Readings:
     1. Ritvo, The Platypus and the Mermaid, Remainder
UNIT 4:

ALIENS
OR
THE LIMITS OF LIFE ITSELF

Week 12
4/20  It’s Alive!!!!? – 2
Readings:

Week 13
4/27  Alien Invasion
Readings:

Week 14
5/4  Space Invaders
Readings:

WEDNESDAY MAY 11, 2011 5PM FINAL PAPER DUE

To Science

Science! true daughter of Old Time thou art!
Who alterest all things with thy peering eyes,
Why preyest thou thus upon the poet’s heart,
Vulture, whose wings are dull realities?
How should he love thee? or how deem thee wise,
Who wouldst not leave him in his wandering
To seek for treasure in the jewelled skies,
Albeit he soared with an undaunted wing?
Hast thou not dragged Diana from her car?
And driven the Hamadryad from the wood
To seek a shelter in some happier star?
Hast thou not torn the Naiad from her flood,
The Elfin from the green grass, and from me
The summer dream beneath the tamarind tree?

--E. A. Poe

In the Microscope

Here too are dreaming landscapes,
lunar, derelict.
Here too are the masses
tillers of the soil.
And cells, fighters
who lay down their lives
for a song.

Here too are cemeteries,
fame and snow.
I hear murmuring
the revolt of immense estates.

--M. Holub