

Abstract

This seminar engages with the work of a wide range of scholars – anthropologists, historians and philosophers – who have collectively grappled with what history and how it is cultural constituted. With the rejection of the ‘ethnographic present’, anthropologists have realized the necessity of looking at social processes and events historically. In so doing, the contemporary conditions of non-western societies are understood to fit within long-term developments and cross-cultural entanglements. The untangling of these histories has begun to break down various binaries Western/Non-Western History/Non-Historical divide, with all their implied inequities, that have long informed understandings of difference. Focusing on theories of history, we will also read ethnographies on how history is made, told, contested and translated in a variety of medium in the Caribbean (Haiti & Jamaica), Central and South Asia (India & Tibet), Europe (Romania), Oceania (Banaba & Hawai’i), South East Asia (Sumba) and West Africa (Guinea). Taught at the National Museum of Natural History, we will use Smithsonian collections to think critically about how history is, and is not, materialized in different things (documents, places, objects, and still and moving images) and methodologically how these stories can be engaged with. This seminar is held on Friday mornings and is open to upper-level undergraduates with permission of the instructor.

The course is intended to explore the multiple dimensions of what is labelled history and how museum collections and specifically objects materialize these stories and events.

Materials contributed by Joshua A. Bell

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This is a course that I teach for graduate students and upper-level undergraduates by request for the anthropology department at George Washington University: *ANTH 3991/6591: Anthropological Histories: The Politics and Poetics of the Past*. This version of the seminar is the third iteration that I have taught and the seminar engages the anthropology collections at the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH). This seminar draws on core concepts that I have developed over the last decade of my teaching for SIMA. The seminar is intended to help students see and understand how to think about the many forms that the past takes, and how to engage with collections as one of a range of data sets to understand the making and telling of histories. The students gain primary and secondary research skills as well as the ability to engage a wide-array of material forms. The course is focused on readings and in-seminar discussions but the final project is focused on museum collections and is aimed to help teach students a variety of methods around object-focused research.

The seminar meets over the course of fifteen weeks for thirteen sessions (two breaks occur over the spring semester) each of which last for 110 minutes. Normally this seminar met within the National Museum of Natural History but during the 2020 seminar we were disrupted by the pandemic. The course has ranged in size from 8-12. This was the first time that I have offered it as a mixed upper undergraduate-graduate course. The majority of the students are anthropology majors with a variety of minors in museum studies, and then some students from American studies, Biology, Dance and International Studies.

As with other seminars I teach each iteration of the course engages with a new set of readings particularly in the second half which is focused on monographs. A major aspect of the seminar is in-class discussions which is facilitated by the questions that are required to be posted via blackboard prior to the seminar. This helped students demonstrate their engagement with the readings and helped to seed in-seminar discussions. An integral aspect of the seminar cultivating the understanding that the seminar is a safe space to ask any and all questions about the readings, and that we as a group are here to debate ideas but be respectful of each other. As with other seminars I teach, I use teaching as an opportunity to read things I have wanted to read. As a result, there is usually a 50% or more set of the readings that I have not read (other than skim) prior to the seminar. While this can mean that some of the readings fall flat, the upshot is that everyone is engaging the readings together for the first time. This helps to create a mutual sense of discovery and some equality in that we are all new to the material.

Alongside activity participating, the students co-lead a seminar in which one of the monographs is discussed. Students are encouraged to be creative in their seminars both in terms of how they engage the class in the discussion and in the ways in which they review the text using power-point and other media. Presenters are also asked to do a three-page critical analysis of the work.

The main assignment of the course is the *Thrice Told Tale project* which draws its inspiration from Margery Wolf's 1992 monograph *A Thrice Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism & Ethnographic Responsibility*. Through three sections each of which are a specific genre of writing – creative fiction, fieldnotes and an article – Wolf's explores events surrounding a Tawianese mother, while also exploring postmodernism and feminist ethnography. While I have assigned the book in the first iteration of the course (and I recommend reading the text if one has not done so), in subsequent seminar iterations of the seminar I shifted it to explaining the book as part of the overall assignment. Keeping the theme of having overlapping but different textual explorations of an entity – in this case a museum object – students are asked to write three five-page papers. The first is an Exploded Object Essay, the second Contextual Essay and the last an Interpretative Essay. Each of these essays are designed to explore aspects of the object not otherwise examined by the other essay.

Before reflecting on each of these essays, it is important to note that if one is using museum objects a key part of the instructor's role is to locate objects that 1) are culturally appropriate to engage with as researchers. The importance of this cannot be stress enough, along with the fact that the definitions of what is appropriate and not shifts; 2) the object ideally will be composed of a variety of materials such that the students will have a range of supply-chains and materialities to explore in the first essay; 3) the object ideally will also have some level of contextual material in its accession documentation so that the students have material to delve into for the second essay. What constitutes as substantial varies and I have suggested objects for which there is little direct material about but the larger accession material or donor has substantial information about. I always work to get at least two objects more than there are students enrolled so that they have some options to select from. It should be noted that one can modify this assignment to address any and all objects.

The *Exploded Object Essay* builds upon a lesson that I have developed within SIMA and explored further at NMNH. As I detail in my other course *Materiality: The Anthropology of Things* in the repository, this is a lesson in close-looking, networks of makers, tools and materials and silences

within objects (for examples of this method see Bell 2020; Bell, Popson & Webster 2022).¹ A key aspect of this session is having time for the students to meet and engage their object. I have done this over one and two sessions, with part of the session devoted to lecture and discussion. If limited to the one session then I have encouraged the students to take photographs which inform their diagram and essay. A key challenge in this assignment is helping the students push past their reticence to draw. As part of a prep for their own project, I have typically modelled the assignment by having them do the exploded diagram with another object in small groups. This allows them to try out the assignment and for me to guide them through doing.

By contrast, the *Contextual Essay* is more straightforward involving as it does primary source material in the form of museum accession records, catalogue cards and an accompanying archival material at the Smithsonian and beyond. In my experience students have more practice critically reviewing textual materials. This said, as with the other assignment the goal is to get the students to think about the silences in their primary sources. For this essay the students examine how the object they are focusing on came to the museum and its broader collection history. As part of this they address who collected the object, something about the collector and then discuss what you can about the contexts of collecting.

The final component of this project, the *Interpretive Essay* is open in terms of format but is meant to provide students with a creative outlet and address silences in the other two essays. I have had students do everything from a short story from the objects point of view, a podcast where the object in question was interviewed, a speculative history about the object.

MATERIALS POSTED (from Fall 2020)

00 Syllabus

01 Thrice Told Tale assignment

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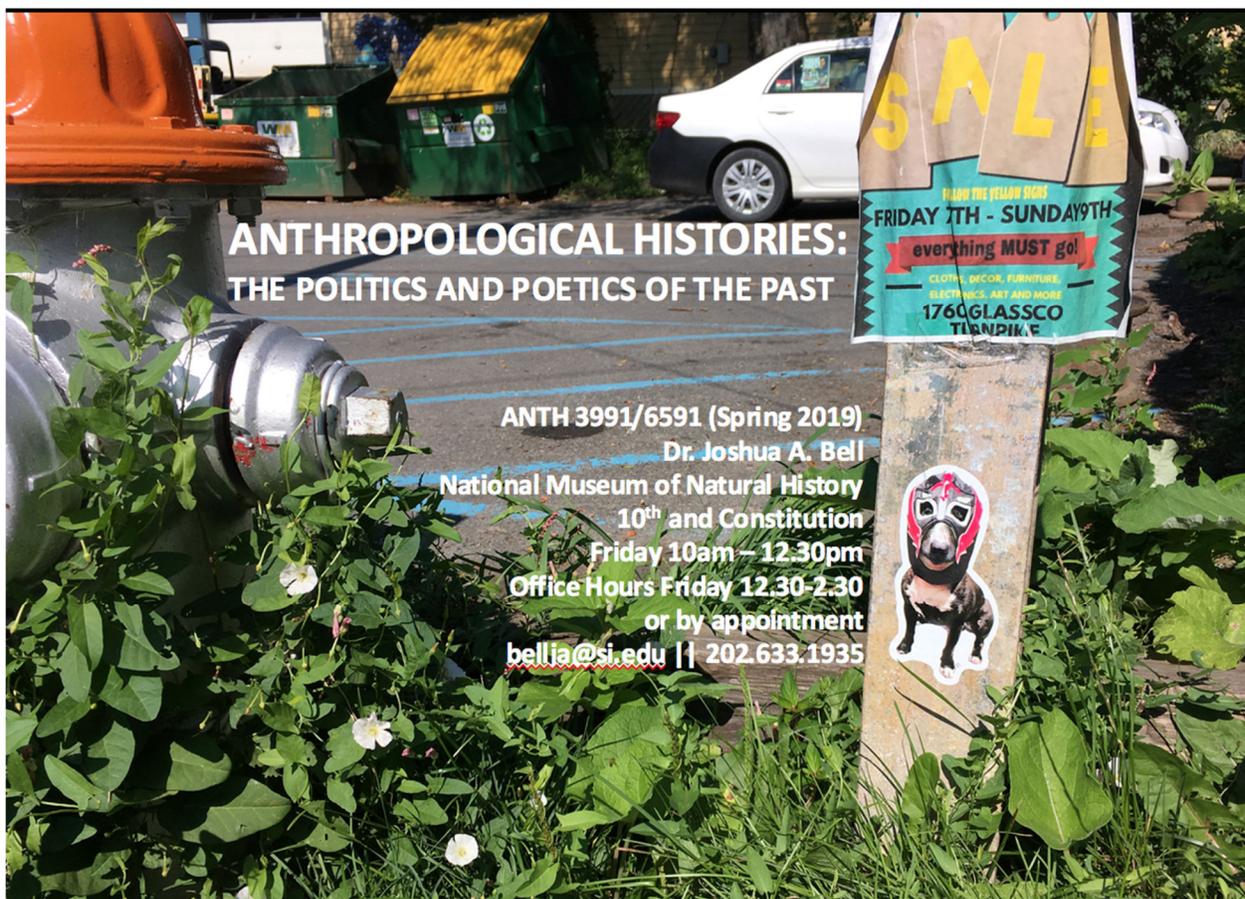
The Collections Research Practicum in Cultural Anthropology course materials described above and shared here were produced by Joshua A. Bell in the United States of America. They are shared under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

¹ Bell, Joshua A. 2020. "Exploding Objects – Teaching with Everyday Things." Webinar part of NMNH's Teacher Tuesday Series, June 9, 2020

<https://naturalhistory.si.edu/education/professional-development/webinar-exploding-objects-teaching-everyday-things>; Bell, Joshua A., Popson, Colleen, Webster, Nicole. 2022. "Unseen Connections: Thinking Routines and Exploding Objects" Webinar as part of the Smithsonian National Educational Summit, July 27, 2022

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzd1hp2y8B0>; Slides -

<https://www.dropbox.com/transfer/AAAAALc9Un0abGlcVzETAYrY1XMutSPp7KCdI363Xq4zCcx1ldvYUF8>



This seminar engages with the work of a wide range of scholars – anthropologists, historians and philosophers – who have collectively grappled with what history and how it is cultural constituted. With the rejection of the ‘ethnographic present’, anthropologists have realized the necessity of looking at social processes and events historically. In so doing, the contemporary conditions of non-western societies are understood to fit within long-term developments and cross-cultural entanglements. The untangling of these histories has begun to break down various binaries Western/Non-Western History/Non-Historical divide, with all their implied inequities, that have long informed understandings of difference. Focusing on theories of history, we will also read ethnographies on how history is made, told, contested and translated in a variety of medium in the Caribbean (Haiti & Jamaica), Central and South Asia (India & Tibet), Europe (Romania), Oceania (Banaba & Hawai’i), South East Asia (Sumba) and West Africa (Guinea). Taught at the National Museum of Natural History, we will use Smithsonian collections to think critically about how history is, and is not, materialized in different things (documents, places, objects, and still and moving images) and methodologically how these stories can be engaged with. This seminar is held on Friday mornings and is open to upper-level undergraduates with permission of the instructor.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this seminar students will:

- be conversant about different anthropological understandings of history;
- be conversant about the role of different medium (artifacts, documents, places, oral histories and images) in the making and presentation of history;
- be about to engage with museum collections more critically and constructively;

- develop an awareness of different ways in which histories are integral to constructions of the person and thus aspects of our collective and individual identities
- have developed more critical speaking, reading, image making and writing skills
- have developed skills to engage with archival and museum collections

Assignments

1. **Class Participation and Engagement with the Readings – 20%** Students will participate in each seminar discussion – this means you will do two things: (1) share with the seminar by midnight before the seminar, ***five questions and or points you would like to explore about the readings***. These are questions meant to demonstrate you have done the readings and need to be about content and or theoretical issues that the readings raise; (2) It means that you are expected to speak in class by saying well thought-out things that demonstrate that you have done and thought about the assigned readings. I strongly advise you to, use the questions you have sent me in the seminar.
2. **Leading Seminar Discussion – 25%** In groups of 2 student will co-lead a seminar discussion (Weeks 8 to 15). This does not mean that you will summarize the readings for the seminar, rather you will (1) prepare a set of discussion questions that will be the basis for the seminar discussion which you will co-lead. These questions are to be e-mailed to the entire seminar ahead of time or brought to the seminar. *Please feel free to create a power-point, hand-out or bring something to help lead the discussion. I encourage you to be creative and critical about the readings.* You will also (2) prepare a 3 page response to the book that you will be discussing. This is due the morning that you present. As with your discussion this is mean to be a critical analysis of the book not a factual summation.
3. **Final Project – Thrice Told Tale 55%** Each of you will choose a museum object at the National Museum of Natural history from a selection and write three 5 page essays about the object. The model for this assignment is Margery Wolf's 1992 monograph *A Thrice Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism & Ethnographic Responsibility*. Each of these essays are designed to explore aspects of the object not otherwise examined. The essays will be due over the course of the semester. I will elaborate this assignment's components.
 - a. Exploded Object Essay – for this essay assignment you will parse out the materials that compose an object, the processes by which the object is made and the various actors involved. You will make a diagram of your object and then discuss the implications of this diagram in your essay. **DUE Week 8 (March 2nd)**
 - b. Contextual Essay – drawing on museum records, this essay will parse out how this object came to the museum and its broader collection history. You will address who collected the object, something about the collector and then discuss what you can about the contexts of collecting. **DUE Week 13 (April 3rd)**
 - c. Interpretive Essay – for this final essay I encourage you to be creative. You can write an essay that is from the object's point of view, from the view of a maker, etc. The point of this essay is to think about narrative and history telling creatively. **Due Week 17 (May 10th)**

For all of these essays I am more than happy to meet with you. I encourage you to include images in your essays – drawings, photographs, etc - with the caveat that the papers need to be 5 pages without the images.

General guidelines for written assignments: Please submit assignments on time. Late work will not be accepted. All written assignments should be typed in standard fonts (12 point Calibri or Times New Roman are recommended) with 1-inch margins. **All essays are to be 1.5 spacing.** Please follow the citation/bibliographic format used in *Current Anthropology*. **Please email me all your assignments as word documents.**

I strongly advise you to read Orwell's 1946 essay "Politics and the English Language" before you begin this and the other written assignment. Good writing takes time and thought:
<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/orwell46.htm>

4. Attendance to this seminar is mandatory and absences must be accompanied with a valid excuse (e.g. death in the family, documented illness, natural disaster). **If you need to attend a religious holiday please let me know 2 weeks in advance of the date.**

Other Information

Email Policy: Email is a necessary evil, but it creates a false sense of social relations and allows us to become increasingly alienated from our colleagues and students. Please make every effort to call me or come by my office hours if you have questions about this seminar, and its assignments.

Required texts are available for purchase and are available in the **GWU library**. Assigned articles and chapters will be available via e-mail as PDFs on blackboard. The readings are divided between **required** and **further reading**. **Further readings** are intended to help provide further context for the seminar.

- McGuire, R. 2014. *Here*. New York: Pantheon Graphic Novels.
- Trouillot, MR. 1995. *Silencing the past: power and the production of history*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Camp, Tina. 2017. *Listening to images*. Durham: Duke University Press.*
- Teaiwa, KM. 2014. *Consuming Ocean Island: stories of people and phosphate from Banaba*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.*
- McGovern, Mike. 2013. *Unmasking the state: making Guinea modern*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.*
- McGranahan, C. 2010. *Arrested histories: Tibet, the CIA, and memories of a forgotten war*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.
- Thomas, Deborah A. 2019. *Political life in the wake of the plantation : sovereignty, witnessing, repair*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Finkelstein, Maura. 2019. *The Archive of Loss: Lively Ruination in Mill Land Mumbai*. Durham: Duke University Press.*
- Verdery, K. 2018. *My Life as a Spy: Investigations in a Secret Police File*. Durham: Duke University Press.

***Available online**

Expectations: I expect you to come to the seminar having done the readings and ready to actively discuss the topics at hand.

Week 1 (Jan. 17) Orientations

SECTION I: POLITICS OF HISTORIES

Week 2 (Jan. 24) Time-Space-Narrative: Benjamin, Bakhtin and McGuire

How do we narrate the relation between time and space? What forms do these relations take?

We will consider answers to these questions in light of the work of Benjamin, Bakhtin and McGuire.

Required Reading

- Benjamin, W. 1974. "On the Concept of History." *Gesammelten Schriften I:2*. Suhrkamp Verlag. Frankfurt am Main, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm> **12 pages**
- Bakhtin, M. 1981. "Form of Time and Chronotope in the Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Austin: UTP. Pp. 84-258. **174 pages**
- Wendt, A. 2000 [1980] "Inside Us the Dead." In Robert Borofsky (ed.), *Remembrance of Pacific Pasts: An Invitation to Remake History*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii. Pp. 35-42. **7 pages**
- McGuire, R. 2014. *Here*. New York: Pantheon Graphic Novels.

Week 3 (Jan. 31) Events: Sahlins, Strathern, Hau'ofa & Hereniko

Discussing the debates around the death of Captain Cook, we will think about how events have been conceived by anthropologists, what role structure plays in shaping shift and how social change can and should be understood.

- Sahlins, M.D. 1985. *Islands of history*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Intro, Chapters 1, 4-5. Pp: vii-31; 104-156. **96 pages**
- Strathern, M. 1990. "Artefacts of History: Events and the Interpretation of Images." In J. Siikala, ed. *Culture and History in the Pacific*. Helsinki: Finnish Anthropological Society. Pp. 25-44. **19 pages**
- Hau'ofa, E. 2000. Pasts to remember. In R. Borofsky (Ed), *Remembrance of Pacific pasts.*' An invitation to remake history. pp. 453—472. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. **19 pages**
- Hereniko, V. 2000. "Indigenous Knowledge and Academic Imperialism." In Robert Borofsky (ed.), *Remembrance of Pacific Pasts: An Invitation to Remake History*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii. Pp. 78-91. **13 pages**

Further Reading

- Obeyesekere, G. 1992. *The apotheosis of Captain Cook: European mythmaking in the Pacific*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Prefaces, Chapter 1-4 & Chapter 8 (xiii-xxi, 3-101 & 177-191) **116 pages**
- Denning, G. 1997. 'Empowering Imaginations.' *The Contemporary Pacific* 19(2):419-429. **10 pages**
- Ballard, C. 2014. "Oceanic Historicities." *The Contemporary Pacific* 26(1): 94-124. **30 pages**

Week 4 (Feb. 7) Silences: Trouillot & Spivak (MSC)

Engaging with the work of Trouillot and Spivak we will consider the following questions: What are the politics of history making? Who speaks for whom? What are the ethics in writing histories?

- Trouillot, MR. 1995. *Silencing the past: power and the production of history*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Spivak, GC. 1988. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg. (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Pp. 271-313. Basingstoke: Macmillan Education. **42 pages**

Further Reading

- Fabian, J. 1983. "Time and Writing About the Other." In *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Objects*. Pp. 71-86. New York: Columbia University Press. **15 pages**
- Comaroff, J.L., and Comaroff, J. 1992. "Ethnography and the Historical Imagination." *Ethnography and the historical imagination*. Pp. 3-48. Boulder: Westview Press. **45 pages**
- Tallbear, K. 2019. "Caretaking Relations, Not American Dreaming." *Kalfou: A Journal of Comparative and Relational Ethnic Studies* 6(1): 24-41. **17 pages**

SECTION II: POETICS OF HISTORY

Week 5 (Feb. 14) Things I: Exploding Objects (MSC)

Focusing on the method of *chaîne opératoire* we will consider the historicity of artifacts, that is the materials which compose them, and what one can learn by focusing on materials. Doing so we will also discuss the relations which informed the making and movement of these artifacts into a museum.

- Ingold T. 2012. "Toward an Ecology of Materials." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41:427-442. **15 pages**
- Martínón-Torres, M. 2002. "Chaîne opératoire: the concept and its applications within the study of technology." *Gallaecia* 21:29-43. **14 pages**
- Coupaye, L. 2009. "Ways of Enchanting: Chaînes Opératoires and Yam Cultivation in Nyamikum Village, Maprik, Papua New Guinea." *Journal of Material Culture* 14 (4):433-458. **25 pages**
- Munn, ND. 1977. "The spatiotemporal transformations of Gawa canoes." *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 33 (54-55):39-51. **12 pages**
- Bell, JA. 2017. "A Bundle of Relations: Collections, Collecting and Communities." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 46(1): 241-259. **18 pages**

Further Reading

- Kopytoff, I. 1986. 'The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process.' In A. Appadurai (ed.) *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. pp. 64-94. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. **30 pages**
- Crawford, K. and Joler, V. 2018. "Anatomy of an AI System: The Amazon Echo As An Anatomical Map of Human Labor, Data and Planetary Resources," *AI Now Institute and Share Lab*, (September 7, 2018) <https://anatomyof.ai>
- Barad K. 2003. "Posthumanist performativity: toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter." *Signs* 28:801-31. **30 pages**

Mother Tongue Film Festival (Feb. 21 – 24) <https://mothertongue.si.edu/>

Week 6 (Feb. 21) Things II: Visualizing Histories

How do photographs tell histories on their own terms? What histories do and can images tell? What silences are inherent to this medium? How can images be used to tell new histories which work to undue legacies of colonialism? We will consider these questions in relation to still and moving images.

*From 11-12.30 we will be attending the Mother Tongue Film Festival morning screening of *Felicia (2019 11min, Dir Jose Carlos Pons)*

N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman (1980 59 min, Dir. John Marshall and Adrienne Miesmar)

- Campt, T. 2017. *Listening to images*. Durham: Duke University Press. **Available online**
- Tsinhanahjinne, H.J. 2003. 'When Is a Photograph Worth a Thousand Words?' In *Photography's Other Histories* (eds) C. Pinney & N. Peterson, Pp. 40-52. Durham: Duke University Press. **8 pages**

Further Reading

- Edwards, E. & J. Hart. 2004. 'Mixed Box: The Cultural Biography of a Box of 'Ethnographic' Photographs.' In *Photographic Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images* (eds) E. Edwards & J. Hart, Pp. 47-61. London: Routledge. **15 pages**
- Bell, Joshua A. 2010. "'Out of the Mouths of Crocodiles: Eliciting Histories with Photographs and String Figures.'" *History and Anthropology* 21 (4):351-373. **22 pages**
- Tomaselli, K. G. 2007. 'At the Other End of the camera': Film through history in John Marshall's documentaries. *Studies in Documentary Film* 1(2): 123–136. **13 pages**

Week 7 (Feb. 28) Things III: Biographical Objects

How do people constitute their biographies through objects? How are these relationships cultural constructed? How are these relationships narrated? We will examine these questions primarily in relation to Hoskins' ethnography of the play of objects among the Kodi of Sumba, Indonesia.

- Hoskins, J. 1993. *The play of time: Kodi perspectives on calendars, history, and exchange*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Intro, Chapter 4 Pages 1-28 and 118-141. **23 pages**
- Hoskins, J. 1998. *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of People's Lives*. London: Routledge. Chapters 1-3 Pages 1-82. **82 pages**
- Weiner, Annette B. 1994. " 'Cultural Difference and the Density of Objects.' " *American Ethnologist* 21 (2):391-403. **12 pages**

Further Reading

- Keane, W. 2003. 'Semiotics and the social analysis of material things.' *Language and Communication* 23:409-25. **19 pages**
- Bolton, L. 2001. 'Classifying The Material. Food, Textiles and Status in North Vanuatu.' *Journal of Material Culture* 6 (3):251-268. **17 pages**
- Morton, C. 2007. "Remembering the House: Memory and Materiality in Northern Botswana." *Journal of Material Culture* 12(2):157-179. **22 pages**

EXPLODED OBJECT ESSAY DUE

Week 8 (Mar. 6) Things IV: Dispossession and Landscapes

How do we tell global stories that do not overwhelm the local? How do you translate different ontological positions at various temporal and spatial scales? How is place reconfigured over time? We will explore these questions through reading Teaiwa's monograph *Consuming Ocean Island*.

- Teaiwa, K. M. 2014. *Consuming Ocean Island: stories of people and phosphate from Banaba*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. **Available online**

Further Reading

- Tsing, AL. 2005. "A History of Weediness." *Friction : an ethnography of global connection*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Pp. 171-202. **31 pages**
- de la Cadena, M. 2015. "Uncommoning nature" in e-flux August 2015 <http://supercommunity.e-flux.com/texts/uncommoning-nature/>
- Stoler, AL. 2016. "Imperial Debris and Ruination." *Duress : imperial durabilities in our times*. Durham: Duke University Press. Pp. 336-380. **44 pages**

Week 9 (Mar. 13) Things V: Unmaking and Making

How do nation states make themselves? How does iconoclasm create relations anew? How do such acts help form national identity? We will consider these questions through reading McGovern's chronicle of the Republic of Guinea's Demystification Program that emerged after the country became independent in 1958.

- McGovern, M. 2013. *Unmasking the state: making Guinea modern*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. **Available online**

Further Reading

- Taussig, M. 1984. "History as Sorcery." *Representations* 7: 87-109.
- Bessire, L. and Bond, D. 2014. "Ontological Anthropology and the Deferral of Critique." *American Ethnologist* 41(3): 440-56.
- Mbembe, A. 2017. "Requiem for the Slave." *Critique of Black Reason*. Durham: Duke University Press. Pp. 129-150. **21 pages**

Week 10 (Mar. 20) No Seminar Spring Break

Week 11 (Mar. 27) Things VI: Sovereignty and Repair

How does one narrate histories of rupture and dispossession of the near past and present? What does repair of these ruptures look like? What is the role of the anthropologist in translating these stories across cultural difference? We will investigate these issues through reading Thomas' monograph, *Political life in the wake of the plantation*.

- Thomas, Deborah A. 2019. *Political life in the wake of the plantation : sovereignty, witnessing, repair*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Further Reading

- Bad Friday ~ Rastafari after Coral Gardens (2011; dir. Deborah A. Thomas, John L. Jackson Jr., and Junior "Gabu" Wedderburn) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkQyiBQbRMI>
- Four Days in May: Kingston 2010 (2017; dir. Deanne M. Bell, Deborah A. Thomas & Junior "Gabu" Wedderburn) <https://vimeo.com/307132557>
- Farmer, P. 2004. "An Anthropology of Structural Violence." *Current Anthropology* 45 (3):305-325. **20 pages**
- Runia, E. 2014. "Spots of Time." In *Moved by the Past: Discontinuity and Historical Mutation*. Pp. 84-105. New York: Columbia University Press. **21 pages**

Week 12 (Apr. 3) Things VII: Dislocation and War

How and through what means is history made and unmade? How does the struggles around history play out in everyday life and politics of displacement and subjugation? We will explore these issues through reading about the forgotten war at the heart of McGranahan's book *Arrested Histories*.

- McGranahan, Carole. 2010. *Arrested histories: Tibet, the CIA, and memories of a forgotten war*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.

Further Reading

- Harris, C. 2001. "The Politics and Personhood of Tibetan Buddhist Icons." In Pinney, Christopher, and Nicholas Thomas, eds. 2001. *Beyond aesthetics : art and the technologies of enchantment*. Pp. 181-200. Oxford: Berg.
- Carsten, J. 2007. "Introduction: Ghosts of Memory." In Carsten, J. (ed) *Ghosts of Memory: Essays on Remembrance and Relatedness*. Pp. 1-35. London: Blackwell.
- French, BM. 2012. "The Semiotics of Collective Memories." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41(1):337-353.

CONTEXTUAL OBJECT ESSAY DUE

Week 13 (Apr. 10) Things VIII: Cities and their Archives

Reading Finkelstein's *The Archives of Loss*, we will examine how textile mills are ethnographic archives which speak to histories of labor, bodies and deindustrialization in Mumbai. Doing so we will consider what pasts, presents and futures can be read within urban infrastructure, and how one can narrate these dynamics.

- Finkelstein, Maura. 2019. *The Archive of Loss: Lively Ruination in Mill Land Mumbai*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Further Reading

- de Certeau, M. 1984. "Walking in the City" and "Spatial Stories." *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pp. 91-110 and 115-130. **34 pages**
- Low, SM. 1996. "The Anthropology of Cities: Imagining and Theorizing the City." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25(1): 383-409. **26 pages**
- Larkin, B. 2013. "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42(1):327-343. **16 pages**

Week 14 (Apr. 17) No Seminar

Week 15 (Apr. 24) Things IX: Archives and Anthropology

What is the relationship between surveillance, anthropology and archives? What is the power dynamic of fieldwork and its subsequent entextualizations? What is entailed in chronicling one's life? We will consider these questions reading Verdery's monograph *My Life as a Spy*.

- Verdery, K. 2018. *My Life as a Spy: Investigations in a Secret Police File*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Further Reading

- Derrida, J. 1995. "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression." *Diacritics* 25(2): 9-63.

- Hull, M. 2012. "Documents and Bureaucracy." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41(1): 251-67.

INTREPRETATIVE OBJECT ESSAY DUE

THRICE TOLD TALE PROJECT

This assignment consists of three segments, each of which is a five-page paper. It takes its inspiration from Margery Wolf's 1992 monograph *A Thrice Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism & Ethnographic Responsibility*. Another critically important text for this assignment is Michel-Rolph Trouillot's 1995 monograph *Silencing the past: power and the production of history*. This book is a critical aspect of the syllabus and its main themes are explored throughout each essay by having the students critically reflect on how and what the first two engagements help answer regarding these particular objects.

I have discussed the first process of exploding objects in two webinars which I encourage instructors to watch (see ee Bell 2020; Bell, Popson & Webster 2022).²

- a. Exploded Object Essay – for this essay assignment you will parse out the materials that compose an object, the processes by which the object is made and the various actors involved. You will make a diagram of your object and then discuss the implications of this diagram in your essay.

This essay is guided by the question of where objects begin and end (see Ingold 2012; Bell 2020), and thinking of objects as bundles of relations (Bell 2017) and processes (Bell & Geismar 2009; Bennett 2010). It is also guided by an interest in materials, makers and places – that is pushing students to think with the biographical approach to objects but to get them to think more widely to account for making. In this way, the assignment is very much influenced by scholars interested in *chaine operatorie* (operational sequence) (see Coupaye 2020). A critical aspect of this assignment is getting the students to map out in their essay the following questions:

- What materials are used to make this object?
 - Where are these materials from?
 - What processes brought them to the locality in which they were used to make this object?
 - What tools were used?
 - Who made this object? (Gender/Professions)
 - What are the silences?
- b. Contextual Essay – drawing on museum records, this essay will parse out how this object came to the museum and its broader collection history. You will address who collected the object, something about the collector and then discuss what you can about the contexts of collecting.

² Bell, Joshua A. 2020. "Exploding Objects – Teaching with Everyday Things." Webinar part of NMNH's Teacher Tuesday Series, June 9, 2020

<https://naturalhistory.si.edu/education/professional-development/webinar-exploding-objects-teaching-everyday-things>; Bell, Joshua A., Popson, Colleen, Webster, Nicole. 2022. "Unseen Connections: Thinking Routines and Exploding Objects" Webinar as part of the Smithsonian National Educational Summit, July 27, 2022
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzd1hp2y8B0>; Slides -
<https://www.dropbox.com/transfer/AAAAALC9Un0abGlcVzETAYrY1XMutSPp7KCdI363Xq4zCcx1ldvYUF8>

This essay follows a more standard historiographic approach and is very much influenced by work that has worked to map out the biography of objects and collections (Appadurai 1986; Bell 2017;), as well as map the movement objects once they are in institutions (Harrison, Byrne & Clarke 2013; Turner 2020; Nicols 2021).

- c. Interpretive Essay – for this final essay I encourage you to be creative. You can write an essay that is from the object’s point of view, from the view of a maker, etc. The point of this essay is to think about narrative and history telling creatively.

This essay is mean to be a creative response or exploration of the silences of the other two essays.

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