

UCL ANTHROPOLOGY  
**READING AND RESEARCH  
GROUPS**

October 2019

## ***Reading and Research Groups at UCL Anthropology***

All the way from undergraduate, Masters', PhD and through to postdoctoral research, our students form a vital part of the intellectual life of UCL Anthropology. In addition to their relationship to individual dissertation supervisors and other teachers and research mentors, and as well as attending one or more of the Department's five weekly research seminars, students conducting research at any level are encouraged to participate in regular Reading and Research Groups (RRGs). Bringing students and staff together to exchange ideas on themes of mutual interest, our RRGs draw their membership from all parts of the Department, as well as welcoming participants from other UCL Departments and other London Colleges.

Conceived as open spaces for the exchange of ideas in groupings that cut across divides between Biological Anthropology, Material Culture Studies and Social Anthropology, the RRGs are designed also to enliven the collective intellectual life of the Department and the wider College by organising regular public events, such as workshops, conferences and debates. They are also intended as fora for the development of scholarly publications, as well as applications for the funding of collaborative research projects.

Below are listed the RRGs that will be running in the Department this year. Further groups may emerge during the year, as students and staff develop common interests in particular fields and directions in interaction with each other. If you wish to set up your own RRG (which you are more than welcome to do), **please contact Martin Holbraad** ([m.holbraad@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:m.holbraad@ucl.ac.uk)), who is responsible for their co-ordination.

To join one or more RRGs you need to logon to the Departmental 'Moodle' system (<http://moodle.ucl.ac.uk>) and enrol in the corresponding Moodle module. Either search for the individual title in which you are interested, or search 'ANTH RRG' to view all of the options available. The same enrolment key, 'RRG', is needed to complete enrolment in each of the modules.

For more information about the Reading and Research Groups you can also visit the Departmental web-pages, at:

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/research/reading-research-groups>

# *List of Groups*

## **AFFECT, CRISIS AND TEMPORALITY**

(Convenors Ben Epstein & Rosalie Allain)

**WHERE AND WHEN:** TERMS 2 & 3, Fortnightly, Staff Common Room

**MOODLE DETAILS:** ANTH RRG: Affect, Crisis and Temporality (ACT)

This RRG seeks to deepen our understanding of recent trends in contemporary studies of society through the intertwining of emotions and affect (e.g. Povinelli 2009; Berrios 2017), disaster, war, and crisis (e.g. Roitman 2013) and approaches to temporality and chronicity (e.g. Vigh 2008; Bear 2014).

Through a series of fortnightly discussions, we will engage with authors whose work moves beyond the 'miserabilist tradition' of ambulance chasing anthropology (Han 2013; Ortner 2016), but whose focus on decay, ruination and sometimes bleak atmospheres of mood and affect—which may become ordinary to people who live them day to day—raises enduring questions concerning embodied cultural particularities of living with, and alongside, rupture, transformation, and collapse. This includes an attention to permanence, endurance and the unexceptional (e.g.: Ringel, 2014) and how instances of sociomaterial innovation and creativity can give rise to the appearance of social (dis)continuity (Wastell and Demian, 2005)

Members with a range of interests are invited to suggest possible readings, but a list of texts will be provided, available on moodle. Participants will also have the opportunity to circulate work in progress based on their own research. Each session will aim to think critically about how anthropology can move beyond the discussion of 'themes' towards a more empirical, methodological and conceptual critical engagement with social process.

All welcome!

Please contact Ben Epstein ([ben.epstein@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:ben.epstein@ucl.ac.uk)) or Rosalie Allain ([rosalie.allain.10@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:rosalie.allain.10@ucl.ac.uk)) for more information.

# AFRI-TECH - African Techniques & Technologies

(Organised by Rosalie Allain)

**WHERE & WHEN:** Terms 2 & 3, fortnightly, UCL Anthropology

**FIRST MEETING:** January 2020, TBC

This RRG will focus on the study of African techniques and technologies and their intersection with political economic and cosmological forces. Whilst this RRG is ethnographically focused, it is also conceptually driven by theoretical frameworks that seek to de-essentialise understandings of “technology” whilst studying the fundamental embeddedness of technical activities and objects in socio-cultural life (e.g.: Francophone Anthropology of Techniques, STS).

This RRG aims to move beyond public and academic discourses that paint Africans as recipients and victims of Western, colonial and neocolonial technology. Instead, it foregrounds their role as technical agents through a close study of their everyday, ordinary, material innovations and creativities (Guyer, 1996) that contribute to and emerge from the encounters between incoming and African things and techniques (Mavhunga, 2017). The aim is to explore the ‘technical’ across multiple scales, domains and historical viewpoints in order to understand contemporary sociomaterial forces in Africa and their impact on everyday life. Topics will include the technical creation of generativity, livelihood and value; resource extraction; techniques of hunting and divination; technico-ritual intersections; colonial technical encounters; how to think about innovation and creativity.

This will be an informal, open-ended discussion group based around pre-circulated readings, and will appeal to those interested in African Studies and/or anthropological theories of techniques/technology. Participants are encouraged to suggest other topics or readings of interest, including their work in progress.

All welcome! Feel free to get in touch with Rosalie Allain ([rosalie.allain.10@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:rosalie.allain.10@ucl.ac.uk)) for more information or if you’d like to get involved.

## ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHRISTIANITY READING GROUP

(Inter-collegiate group, coordinated by Dr. Alina Apostu, SOAS)

**WHERE & WHEN:** Every first Tuesday of the month at 5pm, Location TBC

**FIRST MEETING:** Tuesday, 15th October, 5pm, Location TBC

This reading and discussion group engages with the wide-ranging phenomena called 'Christianity'. We read widely, addressing western and

eastern, credal and non-credal, historical and contemporary Christian groups. The group explores the many forms of Christianity in their points of contact with, transformations and impact upon larger social, cultural, political and religious spheres. Further, discussions also offer space for reflection upon the anthropological practice in the study of Christianity and its role and influence with the wider project of the anthropology of religion.

Many in the group are actively involved in research projects on or about Christianity so at times we take the opportunity to share some of our own working papers in a seminar-like setting.

The group is open to anyone with an interest in academic studies of Christianity. Please contact Alina Apostu ([alina\\_apostu@soas.ac.uk](mailto:alina_apostu@soas.ac.uk)) for more information or to be added to the email list. The group also hosts a Facebook page where information about seminars, conferences, exhibitions etc. related to Christianity is posted.

## **ANTHROPOLOGY OF SOUTH-EAST ASIA**

(Coordinated by Ben Theobald – [benjamin.theobald.17@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:benjamin.theobald.17@ucl.ac.uk))

**WHERE & WHEN:** Every third Wednesday of the month at 6pm, Staff Common Room, UCL Anthropology Department, 14 Taverton St

**FIRST MEETING:** Anthropology Department Common Room – Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> October 18:00

This reading group will look at ethnography carried out across Southeast Asia. We will examine a broad range of work focusing on concepts including, but not limited to, religion, family and gender relations, strategic group formation, and social class. The aim will be to consider how issues may link and interact across the complex societies throughout the region. We will also look at whether it makes sense to view Southeast Asia as a single ethnographic region. Is it productive to focus on commonalities within the area, or might we find more illuminating comparisons in ethnography from other parts of the world?

## **CLOTHING AND FASHION**

(Organiser: Julie Valk)

**WHERE & WHEN:** Fortnightly meetings, location & time TBC

**FIRST MEETING:** third week of October, location & time TBC

Clothing is a daily practice for all of us, a core part of our social and personal identity, endlessly contested and debated. It is also a behemoth industry with problematic facets, such as labour exploitation, waste and pollution. This

research groups aims to bring together staff and students interested in a range of themes in the rich subfield of the anthropology of clothing as it relates to other anthropological concerns, such as gender, identity, economics and religion. Research and reading themes include, but are not limited to, the role of clothing in the everyday construction of identity, dress and gender, clothing and subculture, traditional dress, high-end fashion, street fashion, religious dress (in particular debates and conflicts over Islamic dress), the impact of the fashion industry on climate change, labour exploitation in the fashion industry and the recycling of clothing and textiles. Cross-cultural comparisons and reflections on clothing and fashion in different regions of the world are particularly encouraged.

The first meeting will be a chance for members to discuss which of the themes above (or any new theme) they wish to prioritise. A list of readings associated with each theme will be circulated, and members will get a chance to add and discuss readings. The idea of this group is to create a dynamic forum for discussion on the subject of clothing, in which members have a hand in designing the contents of discussion. This group is open to all students and staff.

Suggested first meeting: third week of October

Meeting frequency: bi-weekly

## **DISABILITY: THE HUMAN BODY AND NOTIONS OF 'NORMAL'**

(coordinated by Kelly Fagan Robinson)

**WHERE & WHEN:** TBC

**FIRST MEETING:** TBC

**MOODLE DETAILS:** <https://moodle-1819.ucl.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=104>

This RRG will examine recent developments across concepts of disability and related fields including: social vs clinical models; eugenics; biosocialities; prosthetics; bioethics; and equalities laws & policies, contending with notions of what it means for anybody to have a 'normal' body in the 21st century. We'll use this as a forum to think through how interventions have changed the way we see ourselves and others and what the benefits and burdens are of new tech on/in the body for health and wellbeing. We will explore the ethical and cultural issues that surround novel biomedical technologies including the relationship between therapy and enhancement, the mind/body distinction, the debates surrounding physical and social mediation in 'abnormal' bodies, and the ways that the body is being altered, extended or erased according to notions of normal.

For more information contact Kelly Robinson at [k.robinson.12@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:k.robinson.12@ucl.ac.uk)

# EDANTH ANTHROPOLOGY AND EDUCATION

(Organiser: Alison Macdonald)

**When:** Monthly, Tuesdays 11-1pm, Term 1 and Term 2

**Where:** Staff Common Room

**Next Meeting:** 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2019

**Moodle Details:** TBC

How can we think creatively and critically about contemporary modes of education in the context of anthropology? Looking at literature from anthropology, pedagogy, policy and other disciplines, this RRG aims to consider the diverse modes of engagement between education and anthropology. This includes the methodological, theoretical and applied dimensions of conducting research in educational contexts, together with a focus higher education pedagogy and teaching innovation in anthropology and beyond. In particular, the RRG provides a space to consider how research on wide ranging aspects of education and pedagogy can inform and challenge our understanding of what 'education' might be, whilst also open up avenues to consider how diverse educational realities can shape anthropology.

All students and staff welcome!

For more information contact: [alison.macdonald@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:alison.macdonald@ucl.ac.uk)

## ETHNOGRAPHIES OF ISLAM READING GROUP

(Organizers: Meredith McLaughlin, Zora Kostadinova)

**WHERE AND WHEN:** Details to be confirmed on first meeting. Meet in Staff Common Room, UCL Anthropology Department

**FIRST MEETING:** Friday October 25 from 2:30 to 4:00pm in the Staff Common Room, UCL Anthropology Department, 14 Taverton St.

What are the themes and concepts that have defined the "Anthropology of Islam?" How have debates in the anthropological study of Islam responded to changes in the discipline and the global political climate? What are the methodological concerns that have preoccupied ethnographers of Islam over time?

This reading and discussion group will consider these issues while reading new, ground-breaking, and discipline-defining ethnographies in the anthropology of Islam (broadly defined). The selected readings will cover

issues such as reformism and Islamic revival, piety and self-cultivation, political Islam, defining the "everyday" in Islam, illness and healing, doubt and contradiction, post-secularism and its critiques, post-colonialism and Islam, and many more.

The group welcomes anyone working on Islam, Muslim societies, or with an interest in ethnographies of Islam. We will be finalizing the reading list and our schedule in the first meeting, so please attend or be in touch over email if you would like to be involved.

For more information, please contact [z.kostadinova.12@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:z.kostadinova.12@ucl.ac.uk) and [meredith.mclaughlin@yale.edu](mailto:meredith.mclaughlin@yale.edu)

## **EVOLUTIONARY APPROACHES TO HEALTH, DISEASE AND PUBLIC HEALTH**

(Coordinated by Deniz Salali and Emily Emmott)

**WHERE AND WHEN:** Wednesday 11AM-12PM (Term 1 only), Staff Common Room or Room 231 (depending on numbers)

**FIRST MEETING:** 11AM Wednesday 9th October, Staff Common Room

Why did evolution leave our bodies vulnerable to diseases? Why are anxiety and depression on the rise? What insights does evolutionary theory bring in tackling these issues?

This RRG discusses evolutionary approaches to health, disease and public health. We will read recent developments in the exciting field of evolutionary medicine and public health, and discuss how evolutionary concepts (e.g. mismatches between modern and ancestral environments; trade-offs between growth, reproduction and body maintenance; evolutionary constraints; and arms races between hosts and pathogens) are applied to pressing health issues. These include current discussions on the links between microbiome, immune system and brain, why we get anxious, why mental disorders like schizophrenia exist at all. We will also discuss evolutionary approaches to public health (i.e., preventing disease & improving health), exploring individual and population-level determinants of health.

Please contact Deniz Salali ([guldeniz.salali@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:guldeniz.salali@ucl.ac.uk)) and Emily Emmott ([emily.emmott@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:emily.emmott@ucl.ac.uk)) for further information.

# HUMAN ECOLOGY RESEARCH GROUP (HERG)

(Coordinated by Katherine Homewood [k.homewood@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:k.homewood@ucl.ac.uk))

**WHERE & WHEN:** Every Tuesday, 2-4pm, Daryll Forde Seminar Room

**FIRST MEETING:** Tuesday 1st October, 2-4pm,

**MOODLE DETAILS:** All MSc AED students as well as PhD students supervised by MB, LD, CG, KH, JL, MAM, SR, AT, EW in the area of Human Ecology, should enroll on the HERG site on Moodle, at the start of the academic year. HERG's Moodle site includes a current news notice-board, funding opportunities, job offers, reading lists, links to outside organisations and seminars of interest.

The Human Ecology Research Group (HERG) provides a stimulating and supportive interdisciplinary forum for postgraduate research students (both Masters' and PhDs) developing, discussing and disseminating their work. Some 25 postgraduate researchers (including MSc's and postdocs), together with 6-7 staff, meet on a weekly basis for work in progress, research methods, reading and workshop sessions.

HERG focuses, on the one hand, on the impact of environmental and population policy and management on people's livelihoods, health and welfare, and on the other, on the impacts of changing resource use on environment and biodiversity. HERG members are currently working on many facets of the Anthropocene, including interactions of environment and development in regions ranging from Amazonia, East and West Africa to Siberia and South East Asia; in ecosystems from tropical rain forest through drylands, coastal and riverine wetlands, to urban areas, and with a research focus ranging from broad themes (e.g. Climate change, REDD+, population change, wellbeing as a measure of development interventions, multispecies ethnography) through specific issues (bushmeat; fire management regimes; fishers and aquatic resources, pastoralists and payments for wildlife conservation) to single species conservation / development interactions with people (e.g. great apes/large carnivores). Research explores the interactions of environmental policy and livelihoods, mostly but not always in developing countries and rural settings, focusing particularly on ecosystem and threatened species ecology, household economy and livelihoods diversification.

**For more information visit:**

[http://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/research/research\\_reading\\_groups/herg](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/research/research_reading_groups/herg)

## LATIN AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGY SEMINAR

Inter-collegiate seminar run at the School of Advanced Study, London University, Senate House. Coordinated by Ainhoa Montoya (ILAS, SAS), Agustín Diz (LSE), Johanna Gómez (UCL), Natalia Bonet (Kent)

**WHERE & WHEN** Alternate Thursdays 5:00pm - Room 780, IOE Institute of Education, Bedford Way, Bloomsbury

**FIRST MEETING:** Thursday 24 October 2019

The Latin American Anthropology Seminar series is a forum in which anthropologists in the early phase of their careers working on Latin America can present their work and get feedback in a supportive and collaborative environment, as well as build connections between researchers and departments. It is jointly run by the Institute of Latin American Studies and several London-based Anthropology departments at LSE, Goldsmiths and UCL. Seminars are chaired by peers on a rotational basis and take the form of around 45 minute presentations, leaving time for questions and discussion. For information on all meetings visit: <https://ilas.sas.ac.uk/events/seminar-series/latin-american-anthropology-seminar-series>

## **ONTOGENESIS: Simondon's Modes of Existence, from Technical Object to Personhood**

(coordinated by Ludovic Coupaye)

**WHERE AND WHEN:** Fridays lunchtimes, fortnightly. Venue TBC

**FIRST MEETING:** TBC

**MOODLE DETAILS:** <https://moodle-1819.ucl.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=9531>

After many attempts over the year, Gilbert Simondon's major philosophical work, *On the Modes of Existence of Technical Objects*, has been translated and published in 2017.

Though rarely known by the English-Speaking anthropology community, Simondon's influence has been indirectly felt through anthropological readings of Deleuze & Guatarri (e.g. Ingold), up to the work of Bruno Latour on the Enquiry of the Modes of existence. In a Bergsonian tradition, Simondon dealt with the question of ontogenesis and emergence of both social and material forms, through practices and engagements in ways that prefigured and more or less indirectly influenced, approaches dealing with relational ontologies, such as the New Melanesian ethnography (Strathern, Wagner), materiality (e.g. Ingold), or ANT (Latour).

This second year, we intend to concentrate on Simondon's second part of t book and investigate its relevance for exploration of contemporary technical objects and their political and ontological dimensions. We also will experiment on ethnography of technical objects.

There will be fortnightly 1 hour meetings during Friday, lunch times (12:00). All are welcome. Readings will be circulated a week in advance.

For more information to receive the readings contact Ludovic Coupaye,  
[l.coupaye@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:l.coupaye@ucl.ac.uk)

## PROJECT STORYTELLING (PS)

(Coordinated by Harsha Balasubramanian)

**WHERE AND WHEN:** Monthly (3rd Wednesday of month) starting October 2019, venue TBC

Please contact Harsha Balasubramanian ([ucsahba@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:ucsahba@ucl.ac.uk)) to express interest and for more information.

From fairy tales to interactive film, from around the campfire to virtual reality headsets, humans have consistently shown themselves to be storytelling animals. This RRG will explore how and why stories are, and have been, told and received across the world. We will begin by considering a variety of storytelling practices, including emerging techniques, media, and genres. What are the implications for narrative theory and for researchers' methodological toolkits? Another feature of the contemporary context is the steady corporatisation of the term 'storytelling', marked by communications departments taking interest and the rise of job titles like Chief Storyteller. How are scholars approaching studying these developments?

As well as thinking about researching storytelling, we will be paying attention to the stories that researchers tell and how we tell them. A story is said to be co-created between the teller and her audience (Scott 2011). What lessons can we learn as anthropologists and ethnographers if we view ourselves as storytellers?

Beyond reading, watching, listening, feeling and, of course, discussing, there will be opportunities to swap stories in occasional story slams. A list of suggested readings will be circulated nearer the time of the first meeting. Members are most welcome to suggest readings, themes or share work-in-progress, if they so wish. Bring yourselves and your stories- all welcome!

## RHYTHM RESEARCH GROUP

(Convenors: Francisco Vergara, Rafael Fuentes, Andrew Sanger and Natalia Garcia-Bonet)

**WHERE AND WHEN:** Fortnightly, UCL Anthropology

**FIRST MEETING:** Monday 14<sup>th</sup> October, 5:30-7:30 pm.

**MOODLE DETAILS:** TBC

Rhythm research group is a multidisciplinary group formed by anthropologists, archaeologists, dancers and performers. It is focused in exploring the relationships between people, space, time and energy from an

anthropological angle. It addresses the idea of rhythm as an analytical and phenomenological category through which multiple social phenomena, such as discipline, kinship, work, calendars, enchantment, identity, anticipation, gratitude and attention can be explored.

Every two weeks we either hold a seminar-like session in which speakers share their ideas followed by a discussion, a session in which we discuss key publications, or a field-lab in which we analyse and discuss the rhythm of a particular event, place or practice.

Anyone with an interest on rhythm is welcome. For further information please contact Francisco Vergara ([francisco.vergara.15@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:francisco.vergara.15@ucl.ac.uk)), Rafael Fuentes ([rafael.fuentes.19@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:rafael.fuentes.19@ucl.ac.uk)), Andrew Sanger ([andrew.sanger.19@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.sanger.19@ucl.ac.uk)) or Natalia Garcia-Bonet ([n.c.garcia-bonet@kent.ac.uk](mailto:n.c.garcia-bonet@kent.ac.uk)).

## SCIFI ANTH RRG

(Contact: Jill Reese – [jill.reese@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:jill.reese@ucl.ac.uk))

**FIRST MEETING:** 9 October at 5pm in Taviton (14) room 129. See Moodle for details

**MOODLE:** <https://moodle.ucl.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=12291>

This year, the SciFi Anth RRG will examine fluidities of gender, sexualities, identities, bodies and more in science fiction and anthropology through works predominantly by trans, non-binary, genderqueer and intersex authors, artists, creatives and scholars.

Films, short stories, graphic novels, academic articles. This group is for nerds. Manifest on Moodle.

## VIRTUOUS CANNIBALS? Exploring the Anthropology of Ethics

(Convenor Brian Burns)

**WHERE AND WHEN:** Alternate Wednesdays 13:00 (Location TBC)

**NEXT MEETING:** Oct 16, 2019

**MOODLE:**

Are each of the world's many cultures moral worlds entire to themselves? Are judgements issued from within one culture on another therefore necessarily meaningless? Is freedom only that which is granted to you from within your own culture?

The anthropology of ethics is a long-neglected dimension of human conduct within the academy. Arriving at an analytically substantial framework from

which to study humanity's wrestling with ethics is often fraught with difficulty because it requires us to be honest with ourselves.

This RRG will involve friendly debates and discussions on various selections from *The Subject of Virtue* (2014) by James Laidlaw, Head of the Social Anthropology Department at Cambridge.

Laidlaw challenges us with the questions:

- How can we, as anthropologists *take seriously* the forms of life we describe: regarding them – and therefore describing them – as something we learn *from* as well as about?
- How can what we observe in other cultures move away from an us-them position to one that challenges our own critical reflections and identities?

A quote from the book's back cover: "All intellectually ambitious anthropologists will want to read it" Joel Robbins, University of California

Our department's very own Allen Abramson, Jo Cook, and Martin Holbraad each had an influence on this heady read.

For more information contact: [brian.burns.19@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:brian.burns.19@ucl.ac.uk)