

UCL ANTHROPOLOGY
**READING AND RESEARCH
GROUPS**

October 2021

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), 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

Ageing and Time

(Coordinated by Carrie Ryan and Alexia Liakounakou)

WHEN: Term 2 and Term 3, Wednesdays

FIRST SESSION: Term 2, Week 2

WHERE: Teams

'Cultural concepts of ageing,' Helman (2005) observed, 'are closely related to cultural concepts of time.' However, to date, there has not been a concerted effort to align the anthropology of time with the anthropology of ageing. This RRG will thus consider, through theoretical and ethnographic exploration, how anthropological concepts of time, like time-reckoning, rhythms, cycles, schedules, periodization, circularity, repetition, and past, present and future inform and are informed by anthropological approaches to ageing, like life stages, life course, age grades, longevity, population ageing, ageing care and management, ageing bodies and embodiment, and trans- and inter-generational interactions. As fodder for discussion, we will explore, for example, why ageing scholars suggest we are 'in the time of ageing'; how older adults describe their extended old age as living on 'earned,' 'borrowed,' or 'stolen' time; how life stages are in flux as longevity fluctuates; why good older adult care is often perceived as 'attuning to the rhythms' of ageing bodies; how new cosmetic surgery practices help older adults 'defy' and 'trick' time; how institutional schedules shape older adult subjectivities; how biopolitical projects develop strategies to optimise time across the life course; how individual experiences of time may conflict with social measurements of age; and how ageing methodologies attempt to capture time's passing, for example through narrative reflection and longitudinal studies. In doing so, this RRG aims to uncover and expand anthropological understandings of how age and time entwine.

Helman, C.G. (2005). Cultural aspects of time and ageing. *EMBO Reports*, 6(1), 54-58.

Kaufman, S. (1986). *The ageless self: Sources of meaning in late life*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Lynch, C., & Danely, J. (2013). *Transitions and transformations cultural perspectives on aging and the life course*. New York: Berghahn.

Moroşanu, R., and Ringel, F., (2016). Time-Tricking: A General Introduction. *Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, 34 (1): 17–21

Munn, N. (1992). The Cultural Anthropology of Time: A Critical Essay. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 21(1), 93-123.

You, H. (1994). Defining rhythm: Aspects of an anthropology of rhythm. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 18(3), 361-384.

All are welcome! For more information and/or to join our group, please contact Carrie: carrie.ryan@ucl.ac.uk

Anti-Social Media

Convenor: Campbell Thomson (campbell.thomson.19@ucl.ac.uk)

Where and When: Term 2, Every second Thursday, 5-6pm. MS Teams.

First Meeting: Thursday 13th January 2022

Abstract: From 8chan to the Dark Web, Incels to QAnon, social media is increasingly seen as a forum for proliferating what might be thought of as profoundly anti-social, violent behaviour. Gone is the idealism of decades of yore when Facebook was just innocently trying to connect people and Netflix sent a DVD or two through the post; we now are confronted with surveillance capitalism, misinformation, echo-chambers, political manipulation and the voracious attention economy. In this RRG we will explore the depths of this dystopian imaginary of the internet, and explore the darker side of social media. We will look at themes such as data colonialism, incels, illiberal democracy, digital militarism, as well as countermovements such as indigenous social media, indymedia and anarchist networks. In light of these questions, as anthropologists we might ask: what sort of 'social' is social media anyway?

Anthropology, its 'others', and how we study them

Coordinator: Nicholas Lackenby (n.lackenby@ucl.ac.uk)

We will meet every three weeks on Tuesdays (exact time TBC).

What is at stake in studying people with whom one profoundly disagrees? Or people whose company we enjoy but who articulate worldviews opposed to our own? Or groups whose views are, simply put, taken to be contentious and unpalatable by the liberal academy? Thinking critically about Susan Harding's (1991) notion of the 'repugnant cultural other', this RRG is intended as an informal setting in which to discuss both the challenges – and intellectual rewards – that come with studying such groups ethnographically. Such interlocutors might be framed as religious 'fundamentalists', or 'ethno-nationalists', and 'conspiracy theorists' or maybe even 'anti-vaxxers' and

'Brexiters'. To what extent – and how – should anthropologists critique those who inhabit different value systems to their own? Whilst we will read relevant texts and ethnography, this is equally a space in which to discuss past and proposed fieldwork, methodological issues, and anthropological positionality. The group might also be a space in which to discuss anthropological approaches to moral conservatism more broadly.

Please feel free to email me if you wish to join. That way we can arrange a time that works for most people. All are welcome!

Community Health Activism: Collective Care and the Struggle for Medical Justice

We live in an era of vast health inequalities. The current pandemic has revealed the distribution of health along lines of structural violence and marginalisation, with various axes of oppression intersecting to worsen outcomes and create structural vulnerability. While anthropology has been attentive to such conditions, its institutionalisation has created borders of separation between its analysis and the forms of resistance enacted by communities on the ground. Yet it is often largely through activism and collective struggle that medical justice has been achieved for otherwise marginalised communities. In the current age, we continue to see communities taking matters into their own hands to make visible the causes of their ill health and to develop webs of care and solidarity that challenge broader dynamics of infrastructural and state neglect.

This Reading and Research Group will seek to explore a range of themes and examples relevant to communities' efforts to imagine and create healthful futures. Each session will engage with both academic literature and a series of case studies, in which the actions of historical and contemporary community groups will be explored, in an effort to ground our reading in real world examples and learn from the inspiring work that already exists.

Possible topics:

Introduction: Imagining Healthful Futures

Anthropology & Academia: Fostering Engaged Research
Activist anthropology and community-based research

Health Structures & Institutions: Redistributing Power

The limits and potentials of NHS activism

Mutual Aid: Caring Across Difference
Proliferation of mutual aid groups under Covid-19

Abolitionism: Reframing Harm
Community led responses to psychiatric incarceration

Decolonisation: Reclaiming Sovereignty
Food sovereignty and land justice in envisioning health

Slow Violence: Making Suffering Visible
Documenting the effects of toxicity and ecological stressors

Medical Discrimination: Resisting State Neglect
Radical Black organising against structural discrimination in healthcare

Waiting Lists: Indefinite Neglect
Trans care and mutual aid in 'anticipatory time'

Patient Expertise & Solidarity: Chronic Illness and the Fight for Recognition
Online patient groups and experiential knowledge

This project is in an early stage of development and collaboration and assistance would be greatly appreciated! If you would like to be involved in shaping this RRG, please email Esther Kaner: esther.kaner.20@ucl.ac.uk .

The current plan is for sessions to run biweekly in terms 2 and 3, with 10 sessions in total. Precise dates and location (i.e. online or face to face) have yet to be organised and will be based on ensuring optimal accessibility and convenience for those taking part.

Decolonizing the University

(coordinators: Marcas Mag Oireachtaigh, Gareth Breen)

WHEN: Every two weeks, starting October 26th, Tuesdays 2-3:30pm

WHERE: Teams

This RRG provides a space to discuss recent and foundational texts on de/colonization and anti/racisms. This reading group aims to supplement the presentations and discussions concurrently taking place in the Anti-Racism and Decolonization Working Group. Through critical engagements with

de/colonizing texts, it asks how we can decolonize the ways in which we think, write, teach and research. Learning to work against the epistemological structures of colonialism, we argue, is critical to the process of ensuring the university, and its engagements with the world beyond, become actively anti-racist.

This group is open to everyone, both within and beyond the department and university.

Feel free to get in touch (g.breen@ucl.ac.uk; mag.oireachtaigh@ucl.ac.uk) for information on how to join.

Considering our collection: an exploration into the histories, legacies, debates and practices surrounding ethnographic (and other) collections

(coordinator: Haidy Geismar, h.geismar@ucl.ac.uk)

WHEN: TBC (two or three times a term), on Wednesdays 4pm – 5.30pm

WHERE: TBC In person so depending on numbers but hopefully in the material culture room (Once we have fixed our leak or in the staff common room or DFS). We also have a team that anyone can join:

https://teams.microsoft.com/l/team/19%3aTX7dCoMFmq7C4LWhn0vFvp_MTdZp4V9jthccCoHwBs1%40thread.tacv2/conversations?groupId=f02a317a-f205-484d-baaa-509b2064948a&tenantId=1faf88fe-a998-4c5b-93c9-210a11d9a5c2

This RRG will be an open space to discuss the contemporary debates that are emerging within cultural collections - about care, responsibility to community, repatriation, restitution, colonial histories, the role of the state and nationalism, the market - and the new practices that are emerging to explore them (crowd curating, digital 3D scanning, new cultures of accessibility and participation, etc etc). We will bring together staff expertise, student experience and practical projects over the year. We will discuss exhibitions, books, concepts, and practices and work to creating a new web site for the UCL Ethnography collections that highlights our commitments to exploring these issues, however challenging, in public.

Everyone is welcome, please be in touch with h.geismar@ucl.ac.uk or join the team which is where we will post the schedule.

Determining Kittler RRG

Coordinated by Gui Heurich (g.heurich@ucl.ac.uk) & Rik Adriaans (r.adriaans@ucl.ac.uk)

WHEN: Every last Thursday of the month from 16:30-18:00

WHERE: Staff common room

The work of media theorist Friedrich Kittler (1943-2011) spans a wide range of topics, from writing and computing to sound and photography. Tracing how technological developments inform questions of knowing and being on a grand scale, Kittler's approach seems anathema to anthropology, which tends to approach media through the particularity of situated practices. Indeed, Kittler's work is often characterized as provocatively anti-humanist and irredeemably techno-determinist, in stark contrast to media anthropology's preoccupation with bringing people's agency and cultural contexts into the picture. Only a small number of anthropologists has explored how critical readings or 'cannibalisations' (Pinney 2008) of Kittler's work can contribute to anthropology. In this research and reading group, we will gather once a month to read and explore Kittler's writings on topics such as coding, sound and optical media and discuss its provocations in relation to our own ethnographic research.

HUMAN ECOLOGY RESEARCH GROUP (HERG)

(Coordinated by Katherine Homewood k.homewood@ucl.ac.uk)

WHERE & WHEN: Every Tuesday, 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

Multispecies Ethnography and Anthropology (MEA)

(Coordinated by Bo Yang)

WHERE & WHEN: Every first Monday of the month, 4:00pm; Location TBC

FIRST MEETING: 4:00pm, Monday 1st November 2021; Location TBC or online

What is multispecies ethnography or anthropology? Why do multispecies perspectives matter? How could multispecies ideas contribute to and be situated in the discipline of anthropology?

The MEA group would like to invite any scholars and students from different disciplines who are interested in multispecies perspectives to exchange their ideas and perceptions. One critical point of multispecies perspectives is to decenter human in human-other-species relationships, which is actually a very intractable mission that has left both challenges and possibilities. It should introduce many enquires which are just focuses of this RRG group: the relationships between human, other species, and non-living beings; the various ways of knowing different species in contingently eco-social contexts

(e.g. animals, plants, fungi, microorganisms); rethinking human-nature relationships (e.g. species individuals as entities? environments as a whole? ecosystems? human beings as factors or actors?); the theoretic interfaces between multispecies ethnography and the anthropology of development, sustainability, environment, or conservation; the possibility of connecting multispecies ideas with Anthropocene, and so forth.

For more information, please contact Bo Yang (bo.yang.18@ucl.ac.uk)

PRIMATE BEHAVIOUR AND ECOLOGY READING GROUP

(Organizers: Alecia Carter alecia.carter@ucl.ac.uk & Alex Piel a.piel@ucl.ac.uk)

When: Weekly, Thursdays 1-2 PM

Where: Zoom: <https://ucl.zoom.us/j/92135459183>

The mammalian order of Primates consists of hundreds of species – including our own. Like all animals, primates are faced with the problems of how to survive, breed and rear offspring. The Primate Behaviour and Ecology research and reading group brings together people with a focus on primate behaviour, ecology, and cognition. This reading group focuses on current debates around the development of primate societies, how individuals negotiate their relationships, and how the challenges of sociality shape cognitive abilities and local adaptation. We rotate between members who present 'something', which could be a 'traditional' critique of a recent paper, or some data, a new idea, a draft manuscript, a practice presentation, etc. Our aim is to have an open and inclusive environment in which to bounce ideas off others with similar interests and work to contextualise non-human with human primates (and at times, human ancestors).

More information: alecia.carter@ucl.ac.uk, a.piel@ucl.ac.uk

Queer Politics, Queer Culture; queer culture as politics?

hosted by the QueerAnth network

When: Wednesdays 5pm - 6pm (or 6.30 if film screening)

Where: Staff Common Room

Who: QueerAnth (please contact antonia.walford@ucl.ac.uk with questions)

This RRG is roughly themed around the politics of queer cultural expression. It will explore the relationship past and present between queer identities and everyday creativity, queer performance and art, and queer discourse and intellectual work around queer studies - and the political possibilities and social universes that these practices and imaginaries open up and close down, for both queer communities, and more broadly. What is queer culture and where are its boundaries? What is queer politics and how does it manifest?

The RRG will double up as both a space to collectively explore queer intersectional politics and culture across a range of material, and also to provide some grounding in queer theory and queer and trans studies for those who are missing that in their learning. We are by no means experts in these scholarly fields but will provide a space for us to work it out together.

The RRG will run over two terms and will not just involve reading academic texts. It will include books and novels, graphic novels, film screenings and more.

Each session will be led by a member of QueerAnth, but everyone is welcome.

It will run every 3 weeks or so, on Wednesdays from 5-6.00pm (longer if screening a film).

Dates:

Term 1:

Weds 27th Oct -

Film Screening and discussion:

***Sins Invalid: an unshamed claim to beauty*
32 min (2013)**

Sins Invalid witnesses a performance project that incubates and celebrates artists with disabilities, centralizing artists of color and queer and gender-variant artists. Since 2006, its performances have explored themes of sexuality, beauty, and the disabled body, impacting thousands through live performance. Sins Invalid is an entryway into the absurdly taboo topic of sexuality and disability, manifesting a new paradigm of disability justice.

Please also read this short text as accompaniment:

Cosenza, J (2013) The Crisis of Collage: Disability, Queerness and Chrononormativity *Cultural Studies* ↔ *Critical Methodologies* Vol. 14(2)
(available on Teams)

Session led by Daria Duda

17th Nov -

Reading and Discussion:

Lee Edelman (2004) *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Duke University Press (Selected Chapters)

Session led by Andrew Sanger, more info to follow

8th Dec -

Reading and Discussion:

José Esteban Muñoz (2009) *Cruising Utopias: the then and there of queer futurity*. New York University Press (Selected Chapters)

Session led by Anne-Sofie Lautrup Sørensen, more info to follow

Term 2 dates:

19th Jan - TBC

9th Feb - TBC

2nd March - TBC

23rd March - TBC

Ritualistic art forms and performance

(Coordinator: Meera Menon Pattaruveetil meera.pattaruveetil.21@ucl.ac.uk)

WHEN: Fortnightly meetings – Day and time to be confirmed

WHERE: Teams

Ritualistic art and performances have been studied extensively by anthropologists, folklorists, mythologists alike.

What gives rituals and ritualistic performances their magical aura? What makes it engaging? Can Rituals be classified under art? What are its social impacts? Through this RRG, I hope to cover interesting aspects of ritualistic art and performances - how the medium of art/performance conveys ritualistic ideas – its form of existence through myths, rituals and theatre. The focus will not just be on materials and art forms, but we shall also look at the role of emotions in shaping rituals. Through the readings, hopefully, we shall try to understand the lived experience of religion through its materials, expressions and how spirituality and religion are given forms. We shall also look at modern connotations of such ritualistic art/materiality/performance and how these are remodelled to fit the current, changing situations.

Anyone interested in rituals, art, performance, indigenous culture, textile, folklore is more than welcome to join. You don't need any prior experience or knowledge related to the genre :)

Feel free to get in touch (meera.pattaruveetil.21@ucl.ac.uk) for more information.

Human Evolutionary Ecology Group (HEEG)

(Coordinated by Ruth Mace and Yuan Chen)

WHERE & WHEN: Thursdays, 1-2pm, Bentham House
XG01 Keeton Room (Term 1) and IOE - Endsleigh Gardens (9-11) -
G05 (Term 2)

FIRST MEETING: Thursday 7th October

The Human Evolutionary Ecology Group, located in the Department of Anthropology at UCL, investigates human ecology from an adaptive perspective. We study human behaviour and life history as adaptations to local environments - which includes not only human behavioural ecology but also the related areas of evolutionary demography, evolutionary medicine and cultural evolution. Many of us are specifically interested in human reproduction, including human reproductive scheduling and patterns of parental investment and we are also working on the ecology of cooperation. Members have a range of projects including those based on field studies ranging from hunter-gatherers to post-industrial, urban populations in the UK, and some that are making use of existing historical or modern medical or demographic datasets. We discuss any papers the group feel are of interest and may also host informal talks from each other or visitors.

For more information contact yuan.chen.20@ucl.ac.uk and/or visit <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/heeg/>