

AN326: Digital Anthropology

Lecturer: Anthony Kelly

Time: Friday 11:00 - 13:00 (Semester 2)

Location: APT

Digital technologies are becoming ubiquitous, fuelling massive and rapid changes in how people relate to each other, how they work and do business, and how they think about what it means to be human. To what extent do these developments challenge established notions of the self, of the field, and of the real? How can anthropology help us to understand digital technologies on a human scale? This module offers students an overview of some important theoretical and methodological developments in digital anthropology, with a focus on a range of ethnographic approaches to digital culture, from traditional ethnographies of digital technologies and media to virtual ethnographies of online environments and communities.

Week 1: No Lectures (Jan 28th – Feb 1st)

Essential reading: Familiarise yourself with the course overview, including assessment requirements for the module and the extended reading list

Week 2: Introduction and Outline (Feb 4th – Feb 8th)

Essential reading: Miller, D. and H. Horst. 2012. The Digital and the Human: A Prospectus for Digital Anthropology. In H. Horst and D. Miller (eds.), *Digital Anthropology*. London: Berg.

Week 3: Cyberanthropology vs. Digital Anthropology (Feb 11th – Feb 15th)

Essential reading: Budka, P. 2011. From Cyber to Digital Anthropology to an Anthropology of the Contemporary. *Working Paper for the EASA Media Anthropology Network's 38th e-Seminar*

Escobar, A. 1994. Welcome to Cyberia: Notes on the anthropology of cyberculture. *Current Anthropology*, 35(3): 211-231.

Week 4: The Virtual and the Actual (Feb 18th – Feb 22nd)

Essential reading: Hables Gray, C. and M. Driscoll 1992. What's Real About Virtual Reality: Anthropology of, and in, Cyberspace. *Visual Anthropology Review* 8(2): 39-49

Boellstorff, T. 2012. Rethinking Digital Anthropology. In H. Horst and D. Miller (eds.), *Digital Anthropology*. London: Berg.

**Week 5: Ethnographic Approaches to Digital Technologies 1 – Online/Offline
(Feb 25th – Mar 1st)**

Essential reading: Miller D. and D. Slater. 2000. *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach*. Oxford: Berg. Chapter 1 ‘Conclusions’ + Chapter 5 ‘The Political Economy of the Internet’

**Week 6: Ethnographic Approaches to Digital Technologies 2 – Virtual Identities
(Mar 4th – Mar 8th)**

Essential reading: Boellstorff, T. 2008. *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 1 ‘The Subject and Scope of this Inquiry’ + Chapter 9 ‘The Virtual’

boyd, d. 2007. None of This is Real: Identity and Participation in Friendster. In J. Karaganis, ed. *Structures of Participation in Digital Culture*. New York: Social Science Research Council.

**Week 7: Viral Media and Epidemiography
(Mar 11th – Mar 15th)**

Essential reading: Moore, R. E. 2003. From Genericide to Viral Marketing: On Brand. *Language and Communication* 23(3-4): 331-357.

Postill, J. (Forthcoming) Democracy in the age of viral reality: a media epidemiography of Spain’s *indignados* movement. *Ethnography*

**Week 8: Hacktivism and Social Movements
(Apr 1st – Apr 5th)**

Essential reading: Coleman, G. 2011. Hacker Politics and Publics. *Public Culture* 23(3): 511-516.

Kelty, C. 2008. *Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software*. Durham: Duke University Press. Chapter 3 ‘The Movement’

**Week 9: Digital Media, Digital Text
(Apr 8th – Apr 12th)**

Essential reading: Jones, G. and B. Schieffelin 2009. Talking Text and Talking Back: “My BFF Jill” from Boob Tube to YouTube. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 14: 1050-1079

Jones, R. 2008. The role of text in televideo cybersex. *Text & Talk* 28(4): 453-473.

Week 10: Ubiquitous Computing
(Apr 15th – Apr 19th)

Essential reading: Galloway, A. 2004. Intimations of Everyday Life: Ubiquitous Computing and the City. *Cultural Studies* 18(2-3): 384-408.

Viseu, A. 2003. Simulation and Augmentation: Issues of Wearable Computers. *Ethics and Information Technology* 5(1): 17-26

Week 11: The Posthuman, the Singularity, and the Cyborg
(Apr 22nd – Apr 26th)

Essential reading: Haraway, D. 1985. A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century. *Socialist Review* 80: 65-108

Laughlin, C. D. 1997. The Evolution of Cyborg Consciousness. *Anthropology of Consciousness* 8(4): 144-159.

Week 12: Review
(Apr 29th – May 3rd)

No assigned reading

Assessment:

1) Argument Analyses (25%)

Instructions: Each argument analysis will be framed by a question, to be set by the module lecturer. Students must compose a 200-word response to this question based on the relevant course literature stipulated in the question. There will be five argument analyses in total to be submitted over the course of the module; each is worth 5% of your overall grade for the module, up to a total of 25% of your overall grade. Please see the Argument Analysis Information Sheet for a schedule of submission dates.

Word Count: 5 x 200 words (1000 words equivalent)

Due Date: Various dates

2) Viral Media Case Study (25%)

Instructions: Students must analyse a viral media phenomenon from an anthropological perspective. Topics are to be selected from those discussed in class or according to the candidate's own choice. Those students opting to choose their own topic must first discuss their choice with the module lecturer. Issues to be considered can include but are not limited to: meme semiotics, poetics, social movements, political economy, circulation, social networks, materiality, and visibility. Exercises can take the form of multimedia projects, but they must still be accompanied by a text that adheres to the specified word count. Students' Viral Media Case Studies will form the basis of in-class discussion on week 8. Please see the Viral Media Case Study Information Sheet for more details.

Word Count: 1000 words

Due Date: Friday April 5th 2013

3) Essay (50%)

Instructions: Students must select one of the following topics and produce a 2500 word essay that minimally engages with the relevant course literature (see extended reading list). Outside sources are also permitted. Those students wishing to choose their own topic must first discuss that topic with the module lecturer.

Essay 1: How do the categories 'virtual,' 'actual,' and 'real' relate to the online/offline distinction? Relate your answer to the relevant course literature using ethnographic examples.

Essay 2: "Despite the diversity of their political actions and commitments," writes Gabriella Coleman, "geeks and hackers are devising in part from their particular technical skills and life experiences novel modes for collaborating, organizing, and protesting" (2011: 515). Write a critical

essay in which you discuss the political implications of hacktivist culture. Relate your answer to the relevant course literature using ethnographic examples.

Essay 3: In discussing the relationship between the digital and physical worlds, Ana Viseu (2003) distinguishes between the principles of simulation and augmentation. How has the technological augmentation of the human form been imagined by various authors encountered during the course?

Essay 4: Candidate's choice of topic (to be discussed with lecturer)

Word Count: 2000 words

Due Date: Friday May 10th 2013

Extended Reading List:

Core Ethnographies:

Boellstorff, T. 2008. *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Coleman, G. 2012. *Coding Freedom: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Hacking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kelty, C. 2008. *Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Miller D. and D. Slater 2000. *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach*. Oxford: Berg.

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Escobar, A. 1994. Welcome to Cyberia: Notes on the anthropology of cyberspace. *Current Anthropology*, 35(3): 211-231.

Secondary reading: Rabinow, P. & G. E. Marcus (with Faubion, J. D., Rees, T.) 2008. *Designs for an anthropology of the contemporary*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Lagerspetz, K. 2001. Jakob von Uexküll and the origins of cybernetics. *Semiotica* 134(1/4): 643-651.

Week 4: The Virtual and the Actual (Feb 18th – Feb 22nd)

Essential reading: Boellstorff, T. 2012. Rethinking Digital Anthropology. In H. Horst and D. Miller (eds.), *Digital Anthropology*. London: Berg.

Hables Gray, C. and M. Driscoll 1992. What's Real About Virtual Reality: Anthropology of, and in, Cyberspace. *Visual Anthropology Review* 8(2): 39-49.

Secondary reading: Deleuze, G. 2002. The Actual and the Virtual. *Dialogues II*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Shields, R. 2006. Virtualities. *Theory, Culture & Society* 23(2-3): 284-286.

Week 5: Ethnographic Approaches to Digital Technologies 1 – Online/Offline (Feb 25th – Mar 1st)

Essential reading: Miller D. and D. Slater. 2000. *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach*. Oxford: Berg. Chapter 1 'Conclusions' + Chapter 5 'The Political Economy of the Internet'

Secondary reading: Gupta, A. & J. Ferguson 1997. Discipline and Practice: "The Field" as Site, Method, and Location in Anthropology, in A. Gupta and J. Ferguson, eds. *Anthropological Locations*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kelty, C. 2008. *Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software*. Durham: Duke University Press. Chapter 1 'Geeks and Recursive Publics'

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boyd, d. 2007. None of This is Real: Identity and Participation in Friendster. In J. Karaganis, ed. *Structures of Participation in Digital Culture*. New York: Social Science Research Council.

Secondary reading: Coleman, G. 2012. *Coding Freedom: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Hacking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 1 'The Life of a Free Software Hacker + Chapter 2 'Two Ethical Moments in Debian'

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Postill, J. (Forthcoming) Democracy in the age of viral reality: a

media epidemiography of Spain's *indignados* movement. *Ethnography*.

Secondary reading: Spitulnik, D. 1996. The social circulation of media discourse and the mediation of communities. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 62: 161-187.

Wesch, M. 2007. What is Web 2.0? What Does it Mean for Anthropology? *Anthropology News* 48(5): 30-31.

Week 8: Hacktivism and Social Movements (Apr 1st – Apr 5th)

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Kelty, C. 2008. *Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software*. Durham: Duke University Press. Chapter 3 'The Movement'

Secondary reading: Sreberny, A. & G. Khiabany 2010. *Blogistan: The Internet and Politics in Iran*. London: I. B. Tauris.

Wall, M. A. 2007. Social Movements and Email: Expressions of Online Identity in the Globalization Protests. *New Media & Society* 9(2): 258-277.

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Essential reading: Jones, G. and B. Schieffelin 2009. Talking Text and Talking Back: "My BFF Jill" from Boob Tube to YouTube. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 14: 1050-1079.

Jones, R. 2008. The role of text in televideo cybersex. *Text & Talk* 28(4): 453-473.

Secondary reading: Paul, C. 1995. Reading/Writing Hyperfictions: The Psychodrama of Interactivity. *Leonardo*. 28(4): 265-272.

Sofer, O. 2010. "Silent Orality": Toward a Conceptualization of the Digital Oral Features in CMC and SMS Texts. *Communication Theory* 4: 387-404.

Week 10: Ubiquitous Computing (Apr 15th – Apr 19th)

Essential reading: Galloway, A. 2004. Intimations of Everyday Life: Ubiquitous Computing and the City. *Cultural Studies* 18(2-3): 384-408.

Viseu, A. 2003. Simulation and Augmentation: Issues of Wearable Computers. *Ethics and Information Technology* 5(1): 17-26.

Secondary reading: Charitos, D. 2006. Spatialising the Internet: New Types of Hybrid Mobile Communication Environment and their Impact on Spatial Design within the Urban Environment. *eCAADe* 24.

Williams, A. 2006. Imagining the City: The Cultural Dimensions of Urban Computing. *Computer* 39(9): 38-43.

Week 11: The Posthuman, the Singularity, and the Cyborg (Apr 22nd – Apr 26th)

Essential reading: Haraway, D. 1985. A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century. *Socialist Review* 80: 65-108.

Laughlin, C. D. 1997. The Evolution of Cyborg Consciousness. *Anthropology of Consciousness* 8(4): 144-159.

Secondary reading: Allison, A. 2001. Cyborg Violence: Bursting Borders and Bodies with Queer Machines. *Cultural Anthropology* 16(2): 237-265.

Hayles N. K. 1999. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press.

Week 12: Review (Apr 29th – May 3rd)

No assigned reading