

**ANTH 138A**  
**Anthropology of Digital and Biotechnologies**  
Fall 2015

Class: Tuesdays and Fridays 11:00 AM–12:20 PM  
Location: Brown Social Science Center 316  
Instructor: Faris A. Khan; [khanf@brandeis.edu](mailto:khanf@brandeis.edu)  
Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30–3:30 PM; Fridays 1:30–2:30 PM  
Office: Brown Social Science Center 219; (781) 736-8741  
TA: Zhiduo (Jude) Cheng; [zdcheng@brandeis.edu](mailto:zdcheng@brandeis.edu)

### **Course Description**

This course will examine how anthropology can contribute to the understanding of new communication and bio technologies as transformative socio-cultural forces that are changing what it means to be human. With its two overarching themes being identity and the body, the course will explore how conceptions of the personal and physical self are changing due to certain technological innovations. The course will provide an introduction to various forms of digitally-mediated communication (e.g., social media, texting, online dating, virtual worlds) and the ways in which people interact in different online spaces. It will investigate how forms of connectedness are affected not only by advances in communication technology but also through developments in the fields of biological surveillance, reproduction, and genetics. We will explore how new digital and bio technologies are shaping and reproducing practices, identities, and communities. In addition, we will examine both ethnographic methods and the ethical challenges of studying human interactions through and with these technologies. Students will have the opportunity to apply the insights gained from the course material to a real world situation through an ethnographic research study. This project will provide hands-on experience in research design, data collection, and analysis through either online or on-the-ground research.

### **Required Texts**

The following books are available on reserve and for sale at the bookstore:

- Daniel Miller. 2011. *Tales from Facebook*. Polity.
- Kim Tallbear. 2013. *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science*. University Of Minnesota Press.
- Alice E. Marwick. 2013. *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age*. Yale University Press.
- Tom Boellstorff. 2008. *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton University Press.
- Todd Wolfson. 2014. *Digital Rebellion: The Birth of the Cyber Left*. University of Illinois Press.

Additional required readings include journal articles and book chapters that are posted to LATTE.

## Course Requirements

1. **Attendance and Participation:** Each student is required to attend class, complete reading assignments on time, and participate in every class discussion. Absences are permitted only in cases of real emergencies, for which you must provide written notification. You will lose two points from your final grade for each unexcused absence or if you miss more than two class sessions. Persistent lateness will add up to one absence over the course of the semester, but arriving more than 10 minutes late to any class will count as an absence. All assigned readings should be completed prior to the class on the day they are listed on the course schedule below. Daily readings will be discussed in class for which you must come prepared to talk. Please read the following piece for tips on reading critically: <http://www.smirkingchimp.com/thread/8863>. You are encouraged to raise questions about points that are unclear to you. What you have to say may be useful both to you and to your fellow classmates.
2. **Reading Reflections:** You are required to post short reading responses (no more than 100 words) before each class session on the course's online discussion board in LATTE. Post either a comment or a question related to the day's assigned readings. For instance, you may provide a critique of key points from the readings, compare articles, relate them to current affairs, or raise new questions inspired by them. The responses must be posted to LATTE by 6 am on Tuesdays and Fridays prior to each class. Late responses will not be accepted. Your responses must be thoughtful and respectful of your classmates. The reading responses are meant to give you the chance to engage not only with the course readings but also with the ideas of your classmates.
3. **Group Presentation:** You will be paired into groups of two and be required to present an assigned reading at least once during the semester. This will involve giving a 20-minute long presentation and will be followed by a presenter-led discussion. Each team member will receive the same grade and you may divide the labor as you see fit. You must do the following in your presentation:
  - Provide a brief summary of the text and cover key points
  - Provide a critical analysis of the piece
  - Provide three discussion questionsDo not simply outline the content of the reading. In addition to time management, you will be evaluated on the clarity of your presentation for which you are required to use audio visual aids (e.g., Powerpoint/Prezi, images, audio/video clips, etc.). When using a presentation tool, please provide very brief bullet points instead of filling up your slides with too much text! You are not required to post a reading response on the days you present.
4. **Offline Life Journal Entry:** For this exercise, you will go offline for two whole days, and not use social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, etc.), online games, texting or video conferencing (e.g., WhatsApp, Vimeo, Skype, FaceTime), web browsing, other smart phone applications, or any other form of digitally mediated communication. The only exception to this rule is that you are allowed to make and receive phone calls and use email, but you must keep your usage of both to a bare minimum. During your time offline, you will use a pen and

paper to write about your experience of being “off the grid” and how it affects your social interactions. This is also an opportunity for you to reflect on how technology shapes your life and fills up your day. The journal entry should be 1½ - 2 pages long, single-spaced, and written on 8½ - 11 paper. It is due in class on Friday, October 2.

5. **Short Essay:** You will write a 4½ - 5 page paper with a clearly articulated thesis, supporting evidence, and analysis. The essay question will be provided 2-3 weeks prior to the submission deadline. The paper is due by email at 5pm on Friday, October 16.
6. **Final Project:** For your final project, you are required to conduct either online or on-the-ground research. This ethnographically informed paper should be an analytical case study of some aspect of either digital or bio technologies for which you may focus on an individual, organization, community, or event. You may use a variety of ethnographic research methods to conduct your study, including interviews (no more than one), participant observation, surveys, focus groups, discourse analysis, etc. To assist you with your project, the reading assignments for September 22 and 25 will focus on research methods and ethics. The primary data you collect must be supplemented with library research beyond the assigned course readings.

As part of your research project, you will submit a 1-2 page research project proposal plus a preliminary bibliography on Friday, October 23. Your project proposal should include the following:

- Research question. Describe your research topic and state your research question(s). What do you plan to study? What is the larger question you hope to answer from this study? What do you expect to find (i.e. your hypothesis)?
- Significance. Why is this project significant to you? Why would this project be significant for others? Who is your audience for this paper?
- Methodology. What research methods will you use? What kind of data will you collect or consider? Who will you interview? What kind of library-based material will you consult? What other methods will you use? Choose a topic that is methodologically feasible.
- Preliminary Bibliography. Provide a list of at least five scholarly articles or books related to your research topic that will inform your analysis.

During the last two weeks of the course, you will give a 5-minute oral presentation about your project. The use of visual aids for this presentation is optional, and if need be, you may use no more than one slide or image as part of your talk. In your presentation, explain your research question, your method of exploring that question, any methodological challenges you faced, and preliminary findings.

The project paper should be 10-12 pages long.

Graduate student papers must be 18-20 pages long and should be theoretically informed. Graduate students are expected to describe their theoretical armamentarium in the project proposal, and relate their findings to pertinent theoretical perspectives in the project paper.

You may draw upon theories covered in the course readings or find relevant ones through additional research.

Students are encouraged to meet with me during office hours to brainstorm ideas or if you want me to review an outline or a rough draft of the essay. The project paper is due by email at 11:59 pm on Friday, December 11.

### **Grading**

- Attendance and Participation (20%)
- Reading Reflections (20%)
- Group Presentation (15%)
- Offline Life Journal Entry (5%)
- Short Essay (10%)
- Final Project (30%)
  - Project Proposal (5%)
  - Oral Presentation (5%)
  - Paper (20%)

### **Assignment Policies**

Late assignment and paper submissions will not be accepted except in special circumstances. You are expected to notify me at least 24 hours in advance if you are unable to submit your work on time in order to receive consideration. You will lose points from your final grade for each day that your work is past the due date. All written assignments must be carefully proofread, double-spaced, and typed in Times New Roman size 12 font with a 1-inch margin all around. When emailing written assignments to me (at [khanf@brandeis.edu](mailto:khanf@brandeis.edu)), please be sure to copy the TA at [zdcheng@brandeis.edu](mailto:zdcheng@brandeis.edu).

### **Academic Dishonesty**

The University holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the University's policy on academic dishonesty, and be familiar with general academic expectations with regard to plagiarism and the proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. If I find that you have violated the integrity policy, you will receive an F on that assignment and possibly for the course. This will be accompanied by a formal complaint to the Director of Academic Integrity.

### **Students with Disabilities**

Students in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with Disabilities Services and Support. Students with authorized disability-related accommodations should speak with me during the first week of class.

### **Class Conduct**

The use of cell phones, email and web browsing is not permitted in class. Cells phones must be turned off before entering class, and laptops and other devices may not be used to take notes. Please do not converse with classmates during class, and be attentive during lectures and class discussions. Please be respectful of everyone in the classroom and allow them to fully express their points.

### Course Schedule

#### Friday, August 28- Introduction

- No reading. Course introduction.

#### Tuesday, September 1- Science and Digital Anthropology

- Bruno Latour. 1987. "Introduction: Opening Pandora's Black Box." In *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society*, 1-21. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Tom Boellstorff. 2012. "Rethinking Digital Anthropology." In *Digital Anthropology*, edited by Heather A. Horst and Daniel Miller, 39–60. Bloomsbury Academic.
- **Recommended:** E. Gabriella Coleman. 2010. "Ethnographic Approaches to Digital Media." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39: 487–505.

#### Friday, September 4- Facebook

- Daniel Miller. 2011. *Tales from Facebook*. Polity. (Preface and pp. 1-110)

#### Tuesday, September 8- Facebook

- Daniel Miller. 2011. *Tales from Facebook*. Polity. (pp. 111-218)

#### Friday, September 11- Gender and Technology

- Donna J. Haraway. 1991. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." In *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, 149-82. Routledge.
- Lisa Nakamura. 2014. "Indigenous Circuits: Navajo Women and the Racialization of Early Electronic Manufacture." *American Quarterly* 66(4): 919–941.

#### Tuesday, September 15-

- Rosh Hashanah. No class.

#### Friday, September 18- Mobiles Cultures

- Hiyam Hijazi-Omari and Rivka Ribak. 2008. "Playing with Fire: On the Domestication of the Mobile Phone among Palestinian Teenage Girls in Israel." *Information*,

*Communication & Society* 11(2): 149–166.

- Emrys Schoemaker. 2015. “Facebook Domestication.” Tanqeed, <http://www.tanqeed.org/2015/07/facebook-domestication/>
- Janet McIntosh. 2010. “Mobile Phones and Mipoho’s Prophecy: The Powers and Dangers of Flying Language.” *American Ethnologist* 37(2): 337–353.

**Tuesday, September 22-      Digital Research Methods and Ethics**

- Tom Boellstorff, Bonnie Nardi, Celia Pearce, and T.L. Taylor. 2012. “Interviews and Virtual Worlds Research”; “Other Data Collection Methods for Virtual Worlds Research” & “Ethics.” In *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Methods*, 65-112 & 129-151. Princeton University Press. (Chapters 5, 6 & 8)

**Friday, September 25-      Bioethics**

- Robert Nelson. 2000. “The Ventilator Baby/Baby as Cyborg: A Case Study in Technology and Medical Ethics.” In *Biotechnology and Culture: Bodies, Anxieties, Ethics*, edited by Paul E. Brodwin, 209-223. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Adriana Petryna. 2005. “Ethical variability: Drug development and globalizing clinical trials.” *American Ethnologist*, 32(2): 183-197.
- Nancy Scheper-Hughes. 2006. “The Last Commodity: Post-Human Ethics and the Global Traffic in ‘Fresh’ Organs.” In *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*, 145-68. New York: Blackwell.

**Tuesday, September 29-**

- No class. Brandeis Monday. Monday class schedule in effect.

**Friday, October 2-      Biopower**

- Paul Rabinow. 1984. “Introduction.” In *The Foucault Reader*, 3-30. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Michel Foucault. 1984. “Right of Death and Power Over Life.” In *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, 258-72. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Offline Life Journal Entry due!

**Tuesday, October 6-      Technologies of Surveillance**

- Jane Caplan and John Torpey. 2001. “Introduction.” In *Documenting Individual Identity*, 1-14. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- David Lyon. 2001. “Under My Skin: From Identification Papers to Body Surveillance.” In *Documenting Individual Identity*, 291-310. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Mark Maguire. 2009. “The Birth of Biometric Security.” *Anthropology Today* 25(2): 9-14.
- Listen to the following NPR piece: “The Technologies of Biometrics”, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5497893>

**Friday, October 9- Identity and Virtual Space**

- Michel Foucault. 1988. "Technologies of the Self." In *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, edited by Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton, 16-49. University of Massachusetts Press.
- Mary L. Gray. 2009. "Negotiating Identities/Queering Desires: Coming Out Online and The Remediation of the Coming-Out Story." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 14(4): 1162–1189.

**Tuesday, October 13- Identity and Virtual Space**

- Michael Wesch. 2012. "Anonymous, Anonymity, and the End(s) of Identity and Groups Online: Lessons from the "First Internet-Based Superconsciousness." In *Human No More: Digital Subjectivities, Unhuman Subjects, and the End of Anthropology*, edited by Neil L. Whitehead and Michael Wesch, 89-104. University Press of Colorado.
- Michael Heckenberger. 2012. "Marginal Bodies, Altered States, and Subhumans: (Dis)Articulations between Physical and Virtual Realities in Centro, Sao Paulo." In *Human No More: Digital Subjectivities, Unhuman Subjects, and the End of Anthropology*, edited by Neil L. Whitehead and Michael Wesch, 199-216. University Press of Colorado.
- Shaka McGlotten. 2007. "Virtual Intimacies: Love, Addiction, and Identity @ The Matrix." In *Queer Online: Media Technology & Sexuality*, edited by Kate O'Riordan and David J. Philips, 123-138. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

**Friday, October 16- Genetics, Race and Identity**

- Kim Tallbear. 2013. *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science*. University Of Minnesota Press. (Introduction and chapters 1-2)
- Short Essay due!

**Tuesday, October 20- Genetics, Race and Identity**

- Kim Tallbear. 2013. *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science*. University Of Minnesota Press. (Chapters 3-4 and Conclusion)

**Friday, October 23- Politics of Representation**

- Alice Marwick. 2013. *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age*. Yale University Press. (Introduction and chapter 1-3)
- Project Proposal due!

**Tuesday, October 27- Politics of Representation**

- Alice Marwick. 2013. *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age*. Yale University Press. (Chapter 4-6 and Conclusion)

**Friday, October 30- Self-Presentation**

- Nicole Ellison, Rebecca Heino, and Jennifer Gibbs. 2006. "Managing Impressions Online: Self-Presentation Processes in the Online Dating Environment." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 11(2): 415-441.
- Stephanie W. Aleman. 2012. "Technology, Representation, and the 'E-thropologist': The Shape-Shifting Field among Native Amazonians." In *Human No More: Digital Subjectivities, Unhuman Subjects, and the End of Anthropology*, edited by Neil L. Whitehead and Michael Wesch, 147-56 University Press of Colorado.
- Joan Morris DiMicco and David R. Millen. 2007. "Identity Management: Multiple Presentations of Self in Facebook." *Group '07*: 383-386.

**Tuesday, November 3- Body and Technology**

- Thomas J. Csordas. 2000. "Computerized Cadavers: Shades of Being and Representation in Virtual Reality." In *Biotechnology and Culture: Bodies, Anxieties, Ethics*, edited by Paul E. Brodwin, 173-192. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Gaye Ginsburg. 2012. "Disability in the Digital Age." In *Digital Anthropology*, edited by Heather A. Horst and Daniel Miller, 101-126. Bloomsbury Academic.

**Friday, November 6- Avatars and Virtual Lives**

- Tom Boellstorff. 2008. *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton University Press. (Chapters 1-4)

**Tuesday, November 10- Avatars and Virtual Lives**

- Tom Boellstorff. 2008. *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton University Press. (Chapters 5-9)

**Friday, November 13- Reproduction and Kinship**

- Marilyn Strathern. 2005. "Relatives Are Always a Surprise: Biotechnology in an Age of Individualism." In *Kinship, Law and the Unexpected: Relatives Are Always a Surprise*, 15-33. Cambridge University Press.
- Thomas W. Laqueur. 2000. "Imagining Connectedness in the Age of Reproductive Technologies." In *Biotechnology and Culture: Bodies, Anxieties, Ethics*, edited by Paul E. Brodwin, 75-98. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Damien W. Riggs and Clemence Due. 2010. "Gay Men, Race Privilege and Surrogacy in India." *Outskirts: feminisms along the edge* 22.

**Tuesday, November 17- Surgical Technologies**

- Samuel Taylor-Alexander. 2013. "On Face Transplant Surgery: Ethical Slippage and Quiet Death in Experimental Biomedicine." *Anthropology Today* 29(1): 16-19.



- Judith Butler. 2001. "Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality." *GLQ* 7(4): 621-636.
- Dean Spade. 2006. "Mutilating Gender." In *The Transgender Studies Reader*, edited by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, 315-332. New York: Routledge.

**Friday, November 20-                      *Activism and Digital Engagement***

- Todd Wolfson. 2014. *Digital Rebellion: The Birth of the Cyber Left*. University of Illinois Press. (Introduction and Part I)

**Tuesday, November 24-                      *Activism and Digital Engagement***

- Todd Wolfson. 2014. *Digital Rebellion: The Birth of the Cyber Left*. University of Illinois Press. (Part II and Conclusion)

**Friday, November 27-**

- Thanksgiving holiday

**Tuesday, December 1-                      *Activism and Digital Engagement***

- Jeffrey S. Juris. 2012. "Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere: Social Media, Public Space, And Emerging Logics of Aggregation." *American Ethnologist* 39(2): 259-279.
- John Postill. 2013. "Democracy in an Age of Viral Reality: A Media Epidemiography of Spain's Indignados Movement." *Ethnography* 15(1): 51-69.

**Friday, December 4-                      *Post Humanism***

- Olli Pyythinen and Sakari Tamminen. 2011. "We Have Never Been Only Human: Foucault and Latour and the question of anthropos." *Anthropological Theory* 11(2): 135-152.
- Neil Whitehead. 2009. "Post-Human Anthropology." *Identities* 16(1): 1-32.
- Student Presentations!

**Tuesday, December 8-**

- Student presentations!