INTRO TO CULTURAL FORMS
ANT 392P (31515): Spring 2012
W 9:00AM-12:00PM SAC
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Office Hours: Tues/Thur 1:00-2:00 and by apt. SAC 4.158

Seminar Description: Today cultural analysis is being applied more widely than ever before, across varied domains—expressive, corporate, scientific, and social—that require different types of expertise and knowledge to properly comprehend. In this expansion of the scope of "cultural" as an explanatory framework, a focus on form provides a free-floating type of attention across a range of milieus and mediums. The analysis of form is as ancient as Greek philosophy (e.g. rhetoric) but as current as our interests in the latest technologies. This seminar surveys the variety of ways that an overarching interest in form is fueling interdisciplinary research, particularly in projects that track disparate cultural phenomenon across complex landscapes as they manifest in dense, multi-layered arrangements, often fusing financial, aesthetic, and political interests. We will examine the trend towards melding topic areas—such as "media ecology" or using "publics" with collectives of nonhuman life forms—to devise distinct ways of comprehending emergent cultural objects and activities. *Media*—as it references an array of substances, instruments, or channels—and *mediation* (in biotechnologies, communication infrastructures, legal practices, and market expansions) will serve as a basic point of orientation for seminar readings and discussion. Other examples of emergent phenomenon will be drawn from current work in science studies, post-human and biodiversity projects, and urban ecologies, which are each held together by an overriding attention to cultural forms of expression and exchange. The seminar will be divided into thirds: the first provides an overarching framework for an attention to form; the second examines a variety of forms (visual, sonic, urban, etc.); the final third focuses on applying these perspectives.

Seminar Dynamics: This initial stage of the seminar will feature a combination of lectures and readings: the first half of each session will primarily be lecture-oriented with a discussion following in the second half. Depending on the pace of discussions we can shift away from lectures entirely as we progress through the semester. A key objective is for participants to apply these analytical approaches, either in relation to their specific areas of research or in a more general manner. The mechanism for doing this will be a series of short, informal essays (3 or 4) in which participants develop sketches of objects, settings, or dynamics via an attention to cultural form.

Books:
Lines: A Brief History, Tim Ingold.
The Order of Things: An archeology of the human science, Michel Foucault.
Ecologies of Comparison: An ethnography of endangerment in Hong Kong, Timothy Choy.
Savage Mind, Claude Levi-Strauss.
Alien Oceans: Anthropological Voyages in Microbial Seas, Stefan Helmreich.
Dolly Mixtures: The remaking of genealogy, Sarah Franklin.
When Species Meet, Donna Haraway.
Origin of the Species, Charles Darwin.

Sessions:

1st: A grounding in form.

Week 1: **Introduction to Cultural Forms**: An intellectual history of the Américo Paredes Center for Cultural Studies.

Week 2: **Public culture, knowledge claims, and an attention to form: Morphology across the disciplines**.

Readings: *Lines: A Brief History*, Tim Ingold; "Technologies of Public Forms: Circulation, Transfiguration, Recognition," Dilip Gaonkar and Elizabeth Povinelli, *Public Culture* 15(3), 2003; selections from *Television: Technology and Cultural Form,* Raymond Williams.

Week 3: **Posthumanism: Life, Labor, Language and Biocapital.**

Readings: *Order of Things: An archeology of the human sciences*, Michel Foucault; selections from *Biocapital: The Constitution of Postgenomic Life*, Kaushik Sunder Rajan.

Week 4: Comparative perspective on sociality across species boundaries.

Readings: *Comparative Ecologies: An ethnography of endangerment in Hong Kong,* Timothy Choy; Julie Livingston and Jasbir Puar, "Interspecies," *Social Text* 106, 29:1, 2011; Kirksey and Helmreich, "The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography," *Cultural Anthropology*, 25:4, 545-576, 2010.

Week 5: **Materialities of thought and engagements with the nonhuman**.

Readings: *Savage Mind,* Levi-Strauss; Justin Smith, "Our Animals, Ourselves," *CHE*, 11-27-11; Jake Kosek, "Ecologies of Empire: On the New Uses of Honey Bees," *Cultural Anthropology*, 25:4, 2010.

2nd: Varieties of form.

Week 6: **Visual Form**.

Readings: *Alien Oceans: Anthropological Voyages in Microbial Seas*, Stefan Helmreich.

Week 7: **Urban & Built Form**.

Readings: selections from *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations: Algiers Under French Rule* (1997), Zeynep Celik; *The Appearances of Memory: Mnemonic Practices of Architecture and Urban Form in Indonesia* (2010), Abidin Kusno; *How Racism Takes Place* (2011), George Lipsitz.

Week 8: **Sonic Form**.

Readings: Martijin Oosterbaan, Sonic Supremacy: Sound, Space and Charisma in a Favela in Rio de Janeiro, *Critique of Anthropology*, March 2009 vol. 29 no. 1 81-104; Sound Acts: Elocution, Somatic Work, and the Performance of Sonic Alignment *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* June 1, 2010 39: 328-353.

Week 9: **Life Form (and Kinship)**.

Readings: *Dolly Mixtures: The remaking of genealogy*, Sarah Franklin; and Giorgio Agamben, "Forms of Life."

Week 10: **Rhetorical Form**: narrative theory.

Readings: selections from Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*; from Roland Barthes on rhetoric, and *Animal Stories: Narrating Across Species Lines*, Susan McHugh.

3rd: Applying an attention to form.

Week 11: **Figuration and the Agential Cut**.

Readings: *When Species Meet*, Donna Haraway; Marisol de la Cadena, "Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes," *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 25, Issue 2, pp. 334–370*,* 2010.

Week 12: **Remediation**.

Readings: selections from *Insect Media: An Archeology of Animals and Technology*, Jussi Parikka; David Novak, (2010), "Cosmopolitanism, Remediation and the Ghost World of Bollywood." *Cultural Anthropology* 25(1):40-72. [Supplemental materials at Cultural Anthropology website]; and (2011), "The Sublime Frequencies of New Old Media." *Public Culture* 23(3): 603-634.

Week 13: **Dynamics: Flows, Circulations, Exchange…of objects, images, and ideas**.

Readings: Brad Weis, "Making Pigs Local: Discerning the Sensory Character of Place," *Cultural Anthropology, Vol. 26, Issue 3, pp. 438–461.*

Week 14: **Matters of Scale: Molecules, Microbes, Genes, and Bacteria.**

Readings: revisit *Alien Ocean*, Helmreich and *Ecologies of Comparison*, Choy; selections form Marilyn Strathern, *Partial Connections*.

Week 15: **Origins**.

Readings: *Origin of the Species,* Charles Darwin; Comaroffs, "Naturing the Nation: Aliens, Apocalypse, and the Postcolonial State, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 27:3, 2001; Hugh Raffles, "Mother Nature's Melting Pot," *New York Times*, April 2, 2011.