Anthropological Perspectives on Science and Technology
Professor Lisa Messeri
Fall 2017

Meeting Time: W 9:25-11:15
Office Hours: Tu 2-4 and by appointment
Office Location: 10 Sachem St. Rm 308

Not long after anthropology “came home,” the ethnographer began studying science and technology as institutions and cultural forces that pervade both arenas of expertise and the everyday. Science and technology are rich black boxes that, when opened, illuminate how and why knowledge is created and believed, the power we ascribe to this way of knowing, the ways in which the high tech comes to matter in our everyday lives, how cosmologies and worldviews are shaped by scientific work, and how, in turn, beliefs shape scientists’ identity and practice.

This course samples across the anthropology of science and technology, mixing in texts from the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS). We will read canonical texts as well as newer entrants to the field. Throughout, we will focus on the theme of boundaries. How are ideas, people, communities, and things demarcated? For the most part, we will be breaking down and dissecting boundaries, as the scholars we engage with offer complex representations of the world (and things therein) that trouble cleanly separating this from that, us from them. If boundaries set helpful heuristic limits, as they dissolve what empirical, methodological, and even philosophical questions are raised?

Assessments

• **Book Review (3-4 pages, double spaced) – 15%.** Twice during the semester, students will write a review of the week’s book (not including any additional readings). The review should explicate the central argument, assess whether this argument was well supported/empirically persuasive, and most importantly be organized around a theme of interest to the student. This theme does not necessarily have to be explicitly stated in the book or even of central importance, but rather one the student as a reader was drawn to/inspired by/reminded of. Please do not provide chapter summaries (though individual chapters can be called out), but rather evaluate the book as a whole. Additionally sources are neither required nor expected, but can be brought in provided that attention remains on the book at hand. Book reviews will be pre-circulated and all students are expected to have read them in advance of class.

• **Presentations (10-15 minutes) – 15%.** Students will present once or twice (depending on class size) during the semester. Presentations will be a response to the readings and the review(s). Presentations should not be summaries, but rather generous engagement with the scholarly and student texts.

• **Final paper (20-25 pages, double spaced) – 50%.** Students may take one of two approaches to the final paper. In either case, a topic proposal and meeting with the professor will be required.
- **Review Essay.** Write a review essay of three or more books in the anthropology of science and technology. The essay should have an argument and be synthetic, not summative, in nature.
- **Research Paper.** S&T is everywhere, and well worth examining. This paper should have an ethnographic component, either by way of extended observation or interview(s).

- **Participation – 20%.** This seminar is discussion based, requiring close reading of the texts and a willingness to share thoughts and ideas. I expect student ideas, as much as my own, to direct and shape our conversation.

*On Academic Integrity*

You must document all of your source material. If you take any text from somebody else, you must make it clear the text is being quoted and where the text comes from. You must also cite any sources from which you obtain numbers, ideas, or other material. If you have any questions about what does or does not constitute plagiarism, ask! Plagiarism is a serious offense and will not be treated lightly. Fortunately, it is also easy to avoid and if you are the least bit careful about giving credit where credit is due you should not run into any problems. For further information, please consult the Center for Teaching and Learning’s website on Academic Integrity:

http://ctl.yale.edu/writing/wr-instructor-resources/addressing-academic-integrity-and-plagiarism

You may use any citation style, as long as you are self-consistent.

**Logistics**

Books are available for purchase at the Yale Bookstore and are on reserve at the Bass library. Other course material are available on the Canvas site.

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1. Introduction to the Class**

*August 30*

No Reading

**Week 2. Methodological boundary crossing, the history of science, and the problem of objectivity**

*September 6*


Unit I. Where is/isn’t science? The first set of boundaries that we will explore concerns where science and technology are located. Ethnographies of science began in the laboratory, the presumed space of scientific knowing. Yet Lab Studies would no sooner become an established sub-discipline than researchers began “following scientists” out of the field and into the larger networks they inhabited.

Week 3. The Laboratory
September 13


Week 4. The Field
September 20


Week 5. The City
September 27


Unit II. Identities. Encounters with scientific findings and interactions with technologies structure our lives almost down to the minute. What, then, is the boundary (if any) between technoscience and our selves? How does it effect our self-conception and how also can technology be a mode of self exploration and expression? Finally, what is modern selfhood and how does that map (or not) on to different kind of knowledges?

Week 6. Digital Selves
October 4


**Week 7. Scientific Selves**  
*October 11*


**Week 8. Modern Selves?**  
*October 25*


**Unit III. Nature/Cultures.** The porosity between self and science/technology feeds into a larger question of whether or not there is any meaningful distinction between Nature and Culture. The theoretical approach that posits “naturecultures” as a meaningful unit of analysis has spurred the methodological approach of multispecies ethnography.

**Week 9. Life/A-Life**  
*November 1*


**Week 10. Human/Non-Human**  
*November 8*


**Unit IV. Geopolitics.** One final boundary that we will destabilize is the one thought to divide science and technology from politics. Technoscience is popularly thought to be above or outside of politics. However, it is deeply embedded in, among other things, the making of nation-states. Moreover, sometimes the assumption that a scientific place like Antarctica is apolitical becomes its reason for obtaining political purchase.

**Week 11. In the Middle**  
*November 15*

**Week 12. Ends of the Earth**

*Novaember 29*


**Epilogue. Assemblages.** To conclude, we will read a recent ethnography that brings many of the classes’ themes together.

**Week 13. End of the World**

*December 6*