

**ANTH 236: THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF DEATH: FOUR FIELD  
APPROACHES**  
(Syllabus is subject to change)

Mon / Wed 3:10p - 4:30p  
OLIN 310

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays 1:30-4:30p in Hopson 303 or by appointment  
Signup at: [www.jonahrubin.com/office-hours](http://www.jonahrubin.com/office-hours) or email [jrubin@bard.edu](mailto:jrubin@bard.edu)

**Moodle2 Enrollment Key:** ritualF16

**Course Description:** This course offers an overview of how anthropologists approach the problem of death, dying, burials, and mourning. Taking a four-field approach, this course explores the diverse ways humans experience death, how the (social and biological) fact of death organizes societies, and how dead persons continue to affect the living. By looking at the ritualization, medicalization, and politicization of death, we seek to complicate popular ideas of death as a universal experience. In exploring anthropological understandings of mourning and burial, students will deepen their understanding of ethnographic, archaeological, and physical anthropological methods and theories.

**Course Goals:**

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Synthesize key anthropological concepts relating to death, mourning, and burial.
- Relate socio-cultural, linguistic, archaeological, and physical anthropological methodologies and theories of death, dying, and burial.
- Apply anthropological insights about death, medicine, politics, and archaeology to the world they encounter.
- Design an anthropological research program to investigate issues relating to death, dying, and mourning.

**Course Requirements and Grading:**

- **Class Participation (15%)**
- **Moodle Responses (15%)**
- **Short Writing Assignments (20%)**
- **Final Essay (50%)**

**Class participation** will include attendance of classes, active participation in classroom discussions, and attendance at the instructors' office hours. Attending all classes is mandatory, unless the student makes arrangements with me prior to her absence. Students are expected to read all required readings carefully and to come to class prepared to discuss them. And although there exists a wide range of ways to participate in the course (including in class, office hours, and online), active participation is a requirement for this course, not extra credit.

**Moodle Responses** (10% of final grade): Over the course of the semester, students will post ten (10) short reactions to the readings on the Moodle discussion board. Posts should not exceed one paragraph in length. Your posts should highlight one aspect of the text you would like to discuss further in class. Please cite a specific page or passage in your post. This might be something you found provocative, problematic, or even perplexing. You may wish to draw on your journal for inspiration. We will begin each class with at least one of these posts, so please come to class prepared to present your thoughts to the class. Please post your responses no later than 10 p.m. on the night before class.

**Short Writing Assignments:** At the end of each unit, you will be required to write a short essay on some of the themes raised in the readings and class discussion. You will be graded mostly on your ability to apply the readings to new case studies, but you will also be expected to maintain high writing standards.

**Final Essay:** Your final essay will consist of a research proposal for a project related to the anthropology of death, dying, and mourning. While you do not have to follow through and conduct this research, the proposal should be able to be carried out, if you had the time and resources to do so.

**Students who have already matriculated** may alternatively use this course to undertake a short-term ethnographic research project into a topic related to the anthropology of death, dying, and mourning (min. 25 pages). This may include alternative final projects, such as photography essays, documentary films, or artistic productions, so long as they are accompanied by a written explication. Students choosing this option will not have to complete the short writing assignments. Instead, the final project will count as 70% of your grade. If you are choosing this option, you must inform me and receive approval for your project by the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of the semester.

## **Course Policies:**

**Plagiarism and Academic Integrity Policy:** This class has a zero tolerance policy on plagiarism. As per Bard College's Academic Regulations (<http://www.bard.edu/undergraduate/requirements/>): "The Bard faculty regards acts of plagiarism very seriously...Students who are found to have plagiarized or engaged in academic dishonesty will be placed on academic probation." Plagiarism will also result in an automatic failure in the course.

**Disability Policy:** If you require any accommodation for this course, please present the instructor with a copy of your Accommodation Verification Letter as soon as possible. Bard

College's Disability Support Coordinator can be contacted at: [disabilityservices@bard.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@bard.edu) or 845.758.7532.

**Absence Policy:** You are expected to attend all classes, arriving on time and remaining for the duration of the class. After more than two unexcused absences, I reserve the right to lower your final grade. After more than 6 unexcused absences, I reserve the right to withhold a passing grade. I will count two late-arrivals as equivalent to one absence.

**Screens Policy:** My preference is that no electronic devices be used in class. However, since many of our readings are articles and book chapters and, recognizing the high costs of printing, I will permit you to have laptops or tablets with the readings pulled up on two conditions. First, you must take notes on the reading, using a program like Skim or in a separate Word document. Second, that you continue to take classroom notes on a paper notebook. Phones are not permitted under any circumstances. If you need an exemption to this policy, please contact the instructor as soon as possible.

**Required Texts:** Most readings will be available electronically through Moodle. The following exceptions will be available for purchase at the campus Barnes and Noble:

- Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman. 2012. *Mengele's Skull: The Advent of a Forensic Aesthetics*. Sternberg Press.

## **Course Schedule:**

### **UNIT 1: FOUNDATIONS. DEATH AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON**

**Session 1.1** (29 Aug 16): **Introductions.**

**Session 1.2** (31 Aug 16): **The Changing Experience of Death**

- Ariès, Philippe. 1981. "Conclusion: Five Variations on Four Themes." In, *The Hour of Our Death*. New York: Knopf, pp. 602-614.
- Laqueur, Thomas W. 2015. "Introduction: The Work of the Dead." In, *The Work of the Dead*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 1-27.

**Session 2.1** (5 Sep 16): **The Experience of Death: Universal or Particular?**

- Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1954. "Death and the Reintegration of the Group" In, *Magic, Science, Religion*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, pp. 47 – 53.
- Fabian, Johannes. 1972. "How Others Die: Reflections on the Anthropology of Death." *Social Research* 39(3): 543-567.
- Gordon, Alex 2014. "The New Semiotics of Death" *InDepth*: 4-9. Available at: <http://www.signalsalad.com/media-store/2014/03/The-new-semiotics-of-death.pdf>

### **Session 2.2 (7 Sep 16): The Archaeology of the Dead**

- Parker Pearson, M. 1999. "Reading the body". *The archaeology of death and burial*. College Station, Texas A&M University Press, pp. 20, 45-71.
- Joyce, Rosemary A. 2001. "Burying the Dead at Tlatilco: Social Memory and Social Identities." *Archaeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association*. 10(1): 12-25

### **Session 3.1 (12 Sep 16): The Ritualization of Death.**

- Hertz, Robert. 2004 [1960]. *Death and the Right Hand*. New York: Routledge, pp. 27-53; 76-86.
- van Gennep, Arnold. "Funerals." In, *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 146 – 165.
- Writing Workshop #1: What is a Thesis?

#### **☞ 18 Sep 16: Short Writing Assignment #1**

Find an object in your surroundings commemorates the dead. This may be a grave, monument, ritual practice, or a more subtle reference to the deceased. In 1-2 pages, write about how the object confirms the insights of at least two authors we have encountered so far. Then write about how the object diverges from the insights of at least one of those authors. This assignment should take the form of a coherent essay, rather than a list (we will discuss what this means in class).

## **UNIT 2: MOURNING DEATH**

### **Session 3.2 (14 Sep 16): The Difference Mourning Makes**

- Rosaldo, Renato. 2004. "Grief and the Headhunter's Rage." In *Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross Cultural Reader*, edited by Antonius C.G.M. Robben. Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp. 167-178.
- Danforth, Loring M. "Metaphors of Mediation in Greek Funeral Laments." In, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 71 – 115.

### **Session 4.1 (19 Sep 16): Cannibalism as Mourning**

- Conklin, Beth A. 2001. "Motifs and Motives." In, *Consuming Grief: Compassionate Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society*. University of Texas Press, pp. 3-8, 65-86 & 224-239.

### **Session 4.2 (21 Sep 16): The Archaeology of Mourning**

- Tarlow, Sarah. 1999. "Towards an Archaeology of Bereavement and Commemoration: Death, Emotion, and Metaphor" In, *Bereavement and Commemoration: An Archaeology of Mortality*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 20-49
- Dawdy, Shannon Lee. 2013. "Archaeology of Modern American Death: Grave Goods and Blithe Mementoes." In, *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Contemporary World*, edited by Paul Graves-Brown and Rodney Harrison, pp. 451-465.

### **Session 5.1 (26 Sep 16): Speaking to the Dead: The Semiotics of Mourning**

- Faudree, Paja. 2013. "Singing for the Spirits: The Annual Day of the Dead Song Contest." In, *Singing for the Dead: The Politics of Indigenous Revival in Mexico*. Duke University Press, pp. 105-140

### **Session 5.2 (28 Sep 16): Listening to the Dead: Mourning, Race, and Politics**

- Auslander, Mark. 2011. "'The Other Side of Paradise': Mythos and Memory in the Cemetery." In, *The Accidental Slaveowner: Revisiting a Myth of Race and Finding an American Family*. University of Georgia Press, pp. 128-180.

### **Session 6.1 (3 Oct 16): Mourning In the Absence of the Dead Body**

- Robben, Antonius C. G. M. 2004. "State Terror and the Netherworld." In *Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror*, edited by Jeffery A. Sluka. University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 91 – 113.
- Rojas, Isaias 2014. Inhabiting Unfinished Pasts: Law, Transitional Justice, and Mourning in Postwar Peru. *Humanity* 4, no. 1: 149-170.

### **Session 6.2 (5 Oct 16): Those We Can and Cannot Mourn**

- Butler, Judith. 2004. "Violence, Mourning, Politics." In, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. New York: Verso, pp. 19-49.

#### **☞ 11 Oct 16: Short Writing Assignment #2:**

Unlike most of the scholars we read this semester, Judith Butler is not an anthropologist. In 3-5 pages discuss how Butler's analysis of mourning could be enhanced by at least two of the anthropologists we have read so far. The anthropologists may provide empirical support for her argument, provide critiques of it, or raise new questions for Butler to consider.

**10 Oct 16: Fall Break. No Class. Enjoy!**

## **UNIT 3: GOVERNING THE DEAD, GOVERNING THE LIVING**

### **Session 7.1 (12 Oct 16): Burials, Commemorations, and the Nation-State**

- Gal, Susan. 1991. "Bartok's Funeral: Representations of Europe in Hungarian Political Rhetoric." *American Ethnologist* 18: 440–58.
- Anderson, Benedict R. O.G. 1991. "Introduction" and "Memory and Forgetting" In, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. New York: Verso. pp. 1-7 and 187-206.

### **Session 8.1 (17 Oct 16): Managing Graves, Disciplining the Dead at Archaeological Excavations**

- **FIELD TRIP: WARD MANNOR**

### **Session 8.2 (19 Oct 16): Necropolitics**

- Parker Pearson, M. 1999. Chapter 8: The politics of the dead. The archaeology of death and burial. College Station, Texas A&M University Press: 170-192.
- Jamieson, Ross W. 1995. "Material Culture and Social Death: African-American Burial Practices". *Historical Archaeology* 29 (4). Society for Historical Archaeology: 39–58.

### **Session 9.1 (24 Oct 16): The Excluded Corpse**

- Mbembé, Achille, and Libby Meintjes. 2003. "Necropolitics." *Public Culture* 15 (1): 11–40.

### **Session 9.2 (26 Oct 16): Horror and the Corpse in Sites of Terror**

- O'Neill, Kevin Lewis. 2012. "There Is No More Room: Cemeteries, Personhood, and Bare Death." *Ethnography* 13 (4): 510–530. Doi:10.1177/1466138111435751.
- Klinenberg, Eric. 2001. "Bodies That Don't Matter: Death and Dereliction in Chicago." *Body & Society* 7: 121–136.

### **Session 10.1 (31 Oct 16): New Technologies and the Problem of Death**

- Asad, Talal. 2007. "Horror at Suicide Terrorism." *On Suicide Bombing*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 65-92.

#### **☞ 6 Nov 2016: Short Writing Assignment #3**

Choose one question from the list distributed by your instructor in class. Respond to this question in 4-5 pages.

### **UNIT 4: THE MEDICALIZATION OF DEATH**

### **Session 10.2 (2 Nov 16): The Archaeology of Dying**

- Lock, Margaret. 2002. "Locating the Moment of Death." In, *Twice Dead: Organ Transplants and the Reinvention of Death*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 78-102.

### **Session 11.1 (7 Nov 16): Culture, Medicine, Death**

- Briggs, Charles L. 2004. "Theorizing Modernity conspiratorially: Science, scale, and the political economy of public discourse in explanations of a cholera epidemic." *American Ethnologist* 31 (2): 164-187. Doi: 10.1525/ae.2004.31.2.164
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. "Death Without Weeping." In *Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross Cultural Reader*, edited by Antonius CijG.M. Robben. Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp. 179-194.

### **Session 11.2 (9 Nov 16): Medical Cultures and the Dead Body.**

- Segal, Daniel. 1988. "A Patient So Dead: American Medical students and their Cadavers." *Anthropological Quarterly*. 61(1):17-25.
- Kaufman, Sharon 2005. "Death and Hospital Culture" In, *...And a Time To Die: How American Hospitals Shape the End of Life*. New York: Scribner, pp. 25-60

### **Session 12.1 (14 Nov 16): New Technologies, Multiple Realities, and a New Kind of Death?**

- Annemarie Mol, 1999, "Ontological Politics: A Word and Some Questions," *Sociological Review* 49(S1): 74-89. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-954X.1999.tb03483.x

#### **☞ 20 November 2016: Short Writing Assignment #4**

Research a contemporary controversy surrounding death, burial, and mourning that is in the news. Drawing on the readings from this unit, explain in ~2 pages how the political lives of dead bodies / persons plays out in your case study.

## **UNIT 5: THE MANY LIVES OF DEAD BODIES**

### **Session 12.2 (16 Nov 16): The Political Lives of Dead Bodies**

- Verdery, Katherine.1999. "Dead Bodies Animate the Study of Politics." In *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 23-53.

### **Session 13.1 (21 Nov 16): The Era of Forensics: The Dead on Trial**

- Keenan, Thomas and Eyal Weizman. 2012. *Mengele's Skull: The Advent of a Forensic Aesthetics*. Sternberg Press.

### **Session 13.2 (23 Nov 16): Producing Evidence from Human Remains**

- Haglund, William D., Melissa Connor, and Douglas D. Scott. 2001. “The Archaeology of Contemporary Mass Graves.” *Historical Archaeology* 35: 57–69.
- Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team. “Recommendations.” [http://eaaf.typepad.com/recommendations\\_en/](http://eaaf.typepad.com/recommendations_en/).

### **Session 14.1 (28 Nov 16): Witnesses from the Grave: Testimonies of the Dead.**

- Crossland, Zoe. 2009. Of Clues and Signs: The Dead Body and its Evidential Traces. *American Anthropologist* 111(1): 69-80.
- Class Choice: Either “Introduction” or “9/11: Absence, Sediment, and Memory.” In *Necropolitics: Mass Grave Exhumations in the Age of Human Rights*.

### **Session 14.2 (30 Nov 16): Reckoning with the Dead: The Archaeology of Ghostly Presences**

- John J. Crandall and Debra L. Martin (2014). The Bioarchaeology of Postmortem Agency: Integrating Archaeological Theory with Human Skeletal Remains. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 24, pp 429-435. doi:10.1017/S0959774314000584.
- Palmié, Stephan. 2013. “Signal and Noise: Digging up the Dead in Archaeology and Afro-Cuban Palo Monte.” *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 28 (1): 115–131.

### **Session 15.1 (5 Dec 16): The Agency of the Dead**

- Crossland, Zoë. 2009. “Acts of Estrangement. The Post-Mortem Making of Self and Other.” *Archaeological Dialogues* 16: 102–25. doi:10.1017/S1380203809002827.

**7 Dec 16: Advising Day. No class.**

### **Session 16.1 (12 Dec 16): Ethical Problems of the Living Dead**

- Scarre, Geofferey. 2013. “Sapient Trouble-Tombs?: Archaeologists’ Moral Obligations to the Dead.” In, *The Oxford Handbook of Death and Burial*. Edited by Liv Nilsson Stutz and Sarah Tarlow. Oxford University Press, pp. 665-676.
- De Baets, Antoon. 2004. “A Declaration of the Responsibilities of Present Generations Toward Past Generations.” *History and Theory* 43: 130–164. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2303.2004.00302.x.
- Nash, Stephen. 2016. “The Right to Own Living Memorials.” *Sapiens* 29 April. <http://www.sapiens.org/blog/curiosities/vigango-and-informed-consent/>

**Session 16.2 (14 Dec 16): Writing Workshop: Preparing a Research Proposal**



☞ **FINAL PAPER: Due 23 December 2016**

Submit an 8-10 page research proposal. Citing readings from this course, your research proposal must accomplish the following things in order to be satisfactory:

1. It must identify an empirical problem relating to the anthropology of death.
2. It must establish a tentative thesis about that empirical problem.
3. It must situate the problem in the existing anthropological research on death, demonstrating how your research builds upon and contributes to the field
4. It must establish a methodological program capable of addressing the problem you identify. You should draw on methods from at least two sub-fields we discuss in class.