

Department of Anthropology and Sociology (ANSO)

Academic year 2020-2021

Infrastructures and Technologies of Trust

ANSO130- Spring - 6 ECTS

[Schedule & Room](#)

Course Description

In an age where questions of trust are ever more prominent in public and political discourse, this course inquires into the forms and natures of trust itself. Moving beyond an account of the foundations of trust, it pays particular attention to how trust has been configured and conditioned through proliferating practices of audit, certification, verification, and inspection. As the reach of these practices, and their strength, extends over broad domains of life 'from the provision of public services to human rights, development, and environmental management' we examine how they may constitute infrastructures and technologies of trust. In doing so, we explore the relation of trust to transparency and opacity, knowledge and ignorance, and truth, as well as the ways in which digital technologies are leveraged to mediate these relations. Bringing classic and recent anthropological and sociological scholarship into conversation, while also harnessing practice-oriented opportunities to examine the problem of trust in contemporary life, this course aims to foster refined understandings of the following questions: What is trust? And, what does it mean to trust?

> PROFESSOR

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Syllabus (subject to revision)

Assignments and Evaluation

Class Participation (30%)

I expect your regular attendance in class, whether it be online or in-person. Whenever possible, please inform the class TA in advance of any absences. You should arrive in class having read and reflected on the readings, ready to participate by contributing your ideas and questions.

Reading Responses (20%):

Over the course of the semester, you will be responsible for completing three reading response. You will have the opportunity to sign up for the weeks of your choice during the first week of class. Your responses should be approximately 700 words. These responses should concisely capture the key points of the readings, relate the readings to each other (or to others we have covered in the course), and discuss particular strengths or weaknesses. Your response should conclude with two questions that you would like to be considered for discussion in class. I will use your responses to inform the class discussion, and may call on you during class to share or elaborate on ideas, arguments, or reflections you have written.

Please post your responses to Moodle by 10pm on Sunday evening. All members of the class are expected to read each other's responses prior to each class meeting.

Ethnographic Project and Essay (50%): The final assignment for this course takes the form of a semester long project, culminating in a final essay of 3,500 words, which takes trust as an object of ethnographic research. Students are free to determine the specific focus of their study, and are encouraged to think about contemporary phenomena in which questions and problems of trust emerge, or in which the notions of or conventional wisdoms about trust itself may be problematized. The assignment is an opening to think both conceptually and methodologically about the ways trust may be apprehended and better understood through ethnography.

This semester-long activity will develop alongside periodic virtual collaborations, in the form of three workshop meetings held online (or in hybrid form) throughout the semester, with Dr. Anna Weichselbraun's class "Methodology: Technologies of Trust," at the University of Vienna. Further information will be shared at the start of the semester.

February 22: Introduction – Troubling Trust

Jiménez, Alberto Corsín. 2005. "After trust." *Cambridge Anthropology*:64-78.

Brooks, David. "America is Having a Moral Convulsion." *The Atlantic*. 5 October 2020.

Please watch Marilyn Strathern's keynote address, "Terms of Engagement," for the 2020 European Association of Social Anthropology conference, 21 August 2020:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9aQT7Ey_lys

Part I: What are the natures of trust? What work does trust do?

March 1: Theorizing Trust: sociological, anthropological, and historical perspectives

Luhmann, Niklas. 2017. *Trust and power*. Malden, MA: Polity. Chapters 3-5 (inclusive), pp.21-42.

Elyachar, Julia. 2010. "Phatic labor, infrastructure, and the question of empowerment in Cairo."

American Ethnologist 37 (3):452-64.*

Strongly recommended: Shapin, Steven. 1994. *A social history of truth: civility and science in seventeenth-century England, Science and its conceptual foundations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter One (pp.3-41)

March 8: Exchange, credit, fiduciary cultures

Muldrew, Craig. 1993. "Interpreting the market: the ethics of credit and community relations in early modern England." *Social History* 18 (2):163-83.

Guinnane, Timothy W. 2005. "Trust: a concept too many." *Yale University Economic Growth Center Discussion Paper* (907).

Shipton, Parker MacDonald. 2007. *The nature of entrustment: intimacy, exchange, and the sacred in Africa*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Chapter 2, "Fiduciary Cultures: A Thread in Anthropological Theory." pp.17-39.

March 15: Uncertainty, risk, not-knowing

- Brownlie, Julie, and Alexandra Howson. 2005. "'Leaps of faith' and MMR: an empirical study of trust." *Sociology* 39 (2):221-39.
- Möllering, Guido. 2001. "The Nature of Trust: From Georg Simmel to a Theory of Expectation, Interpretation and Suspension." *Sociology* 35 (2):403-20.
- Simmel, Georg. 1990. *The philosophy of money*. Translated by David Frisby. 2nd enl. ed. London; New York: Routledge. "Social interaction and exchange relations: money's functions," pp.173-178 & "Credit," pp.484-486.

March 22: Workshop 1: Apprehending trust ethnographically

- Galvin, Shaila Seshia. 2018. "The farming of trust: Organic certification and the limits of transparency in Uttarakhand, India." *American Ethnologist* 45 (4):495-507.
- Weichselbraun, Anna. 2019. "Of Broken Seals and Broken Promises: Attributing Intention at the IAEA." *Cultural Anthropology* 34 (4):503-28. doi: 10.14506/ca34.4.02.

March 29: Ethnographies of Trust and Betrayal

- Carey, Matthew. 2017. *Mistrust : an ethnographic theory*. Chicago, IL: Hau Books. Selections.
- Yanagisako, Sylvia Junko. 2002. *Producing culture and capital: family firms in Italy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Introduction and Chapter Four.

April 5 (Easter, no class)**Part II: How do we trust? What are technologies of trust? Is trust infrastructural?****April 12: Cultures of accounting and verification: numbers, evidence, forensics**

- Pentland, Brian T. 1993. "Getting comfortable with the numbers: Auditing and the micro-production of macro-order." *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 18 (7-8):605-20.
- Porter, Theodore M. 1995. *Trust in numbers : the pursuit of objectivity in science and public life*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. Chapter 8 (Chapter 9 recommended).
- Lynch, Michael. 2013. "Science, truth, and forensic cultures: The exceptional legal status of DNA evidence." *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 44 (1):60-70.

April 19: Workshop 2: Encountering trust ethnographically

Discussion of research projects in progress (a short draft of 1,000 words should be circulated in advance; details to follow)

April 26: Audit, verification, certification

- Strathern, Marilyn. 2000. *Audit cultures : anthropological studies in accountability, ethics, and the academy*. New York: Routledge. Introduction.
- Power, Michael. 1997. *The Audit Society: Rituals of Verification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Introduction. Chapter 1 and 6 (pp. 1-14; 122-47).
- Kipnis, Andrew B. 2008. "Audit cultures: neoliberal governmentality, socialist legacy, or technologies of governing?" *American Ethnologist* 35 (2):275-89.

Part III: After, or beyond, trust?**May 3: Suspicion, post-truth, and social facts**

- Fassin, Didier, and Estelle d'Halluin. 2005. "The truth from the body: medical certificates as ultimate evidence for asylum seekers." *American anthropologist* 107 (4):597-608.
- Roudakova, Natalia. 2017. *Losing Pravda : ethics and the press in post-truth Russia*. Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press. Introduction.
- Ho, Karen, and Jillian R. Cavanaugh. 2019. "What Happened to Social Facts?" *American Anthropologist* 121 (1):160-7. doi: 10.1111/aman.13184.

May 10: Beyond trust? Trustlessness and Entrustment

- Werbach, Kevin. 2018. *The blockchain and the new architecture of trust*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Selections.

Shipton, Parker MacDonald. 2007. *The nature of entrustment: intimacy, exchange, and the sacred in Africa*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Conclusion.

May 17: Wrap-up: round-table discussion

Format and content to be determined by the class

May 24: No class (Pentecôte)

May 31: Workshop 3: final presentations