Anthropologies and Aftermaths
Thinking, Narrating, and Writing Disturbances

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Course dates: 30 July – 3 August 2018

Main disciplines: Anthropology,
Sociology, History
Course Credits: 10 pts (ECTS)

Course overview / learning objectives
From passing industrial orders and financial collapses to increasingly weird weather, anthropologists have become preoccupied with events or processes that our interlocutors register as discrete and intense systemic disturbances. These would be events or processes understood to severely unsettle, even utterly destroy, given, anticipated, or promised life worlds. Leaving aside the question of whether or not such understandings are unprecedented or even warranted, this course considers how anthropologists might attend to our interlocutors’ efforts to inhabit the remainders of discrete seeming disturbances. We will be especially interested in thinking, writing, and narrating the stretches of time, space, and things that pile around disturbances. It proposes to route that consideration through the concept metaphor of "the aftermath." This course will be of interest especially for students of anthropology, history, and sociology eager to develop tools and strategies for analyzing and writing about contemporary uncertainty.
"Aftermath" most often refers to the consequences of a disastrous event. Yet its etymological roots suggest something far less calamitous: the growth that immediately follows the mowing of grass or some other crop. This growth is not so much new as it is an extension or intensification of whatever had been already cultivated in place. Unlike the romantic charge of "the ruin" or the redemptive charge of "afterlife," "the aftermath" challenges us to keep destruction and continuity in constant tension. It pushes us to engage the practicalities, impossibilities, enticements, and mourning that comes with navigating the remainders of a disturbance. Our work with "aftermath" will frame several larger questions: How might the concept's assertion of a direct and continuous relationship between destruction and durability challenge us to develop analytical approaches appropriate for an age characterized by anxieties and excitements surrounding unsettled futures? How might thinking with the aftermath, specifically, with how it foregrounds the social and material remainders of disturbed systems, refine our approaches to temporality, materiality, embodiment, emplacement, and other meaningful dimensions of social life? Finally, how might anthropologists experiment with a range of representational strategies to capture and effectively convey the lived experiences of inhabiting aftermaths and their remainders?

The seminar's structure mimics the work that young anthropologists and more broadly, young historians and ethnographers have ahead of them: developing and refining appropriate conceptual frameworks, and learning to write with these frameworks in ways that animate empirical materials (to be) gathered in "the field" or "the archive." To model possibilities, we will devote every morning to broad conceptual framings, and every afternoon to fairly recent texts selected to help us imagine the possibilities of our own analysis and writing. Our texts will span several disciplines and even genres, and take up cases that include "natural" and "man made" disasters, political turmoil, toxicity, waste, and industrial decay.

**Seminar Expectations and Assignments**

I have organized this seminar around engaged lecturing and collegial discussion, as both are critical to the work of gaining facility and experimenting with ideas. Students will come to each session prepared to contribute in two ways. First, I expect students to have read assigned material so that they can engage key ideas presented in the lecture component of each session. Second, I expect students to prepare two to three questions for each session that will advance collective discussion. Students should not worry if they are less familiar with this kind of instructional format. I will give them ample opportunity and strategies to practice and I will invite them to develop discussion questions that directly engage their own research interests. The last day will include a chance for students to informally present ideas for their final assignment, an essay of 6,000 - 8,000 words.
Course books
Participants in this course must obtain these books by themselves:


The above books are all available through online booksellers. All other reading assignments will be made available as pdf files. Film screenings will be arranged.

LECTURE OUTLINE

July 30: Ruptures, Revisited

**Session 1 - Readings**


**Session 2 - Readings**

July 31: Futures Lost, Stayed and Stuttering

**Session 3 - Readings:**


**Suggested reading:**


**Session 4 - Readings:**

- Appel, H. [forthcoming]. "Infrastructural Time," (20 pages)
- Walley, C. and Boebel C. *Exit Zero*. [**screening to be arranged**]

**Suggested readings:**

August 1: Remainders: Ruination

Session 5 - Readings:


Session 6 - Readings:

  [http://somatosphere.net/2014/05/spray.html](http://somatosphere.net/2014/05/spray.html)
- Karrabing Film Collective. 2015. *Windjarrameru* (The Stealing C*nt$). [**screening to be arranged **]
August 2: Remainders: Exhilaration

Session 7 - Readings:


Session 8 - Readings:

- Cooper, Drea and Canepari, Zackery. 2011. "Cannonball," [**screenings to be arranged**]

Suggested readings:

August 3: Writing Disturbances

Session 9 - Reading


Session 10 - Readings


The lecturer

Catherine Fennell is associate professor of Anthropology at Columbia University in the City of New York. Her work examines the social and material legacies of houses and housing in the late industrial urban United States.