

Prof. Mark Auslander	Office: Seney 312
TTh 2-3:15 (Spring 2001)	O: (770) 784-4664
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Spring 2000	Office Hours: M 3-5 pm; TTh 3:30-4:30 p.m & by appt.

The Anthropology of Nature

Anthro 385R

AIMS OF COURSE: This course explores the complex, dynamic relationships between "nature" and "culture" in various systems of human thought and practice. We begin with structuralist perspectives on natural species; how, in Levi-Strauss' terms, are animals and plants "good to think"? To what extent may structuralist insights on classification be applied to the landscapes of the campus and of Newton County? We next turn to an intensive case study on the Achuar peoples of the Upper Amazon: to what extent do Achuar experience continuities and discontinuities between the 'social' and 'natural' worlds? What is the relative importance of material and symbolic forces in the determination of Achuar social organization and cosmological understandings? We next turn to conservation politics in Africa: who has the right to make choices about human and other claims to "natural" landscapes? We conclude with an extended unit on nature and modernity; why under conditions of industrialization and post-industrialization do we intensively value highly domesticated simulacra of nature, such as zoos, gardens and parks?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: This is a demanding course. Students must give careful attention to all the reading, and indicate through class discussion, frequent LearnLink postings and written essays that they have fully engaged with the texts. You should read critically. Feel free to challenge assertions or interpretations made in the readings, by the instructor, and by fellow students, provided your critiques are well-reasoned and constructively framed.

**Daily Journal:** I ask that each student keep a daily journal, in which you record your everyday observations of "nature" and of interactions between people and the "natural world. Possible entry topics could include: a detailed description of a walk through the Oxford nature trail; an account of a conversation with an Oxford alum about his or her memories of a particular tree or natural space on campus; or, your thoughts on a TV advertisement depicting a sport utility vehicle in a rugged, 'natural' landscape. At times you may wish to discuss the readings directly; you also may want to experiment with different styles of writing, including poetry or stream of consciousness writing, in your journal. I also urge you to incorporate sketches, drawings and photographs, as well as written words in the journal. You may keep the journal on line, or in handwritten form; I do ask that each Thursday, you bring copies of an entry (or a segment of an entry) to class to share with the rest of the class. I will collect the journals from time to time to read through them (please indicate any private portions that I should not read). And please, when you like, please post representative journal entries on Learnlink.

**Community Research Project:** The final section of this course entails original research on some aspect of the social construction of nature in our immediate surroundings. This might take the form of a research paper, or a website, or a video project. All projects must be approved by the instructor; we will settle on assignments in one-on-one meetings during the third or fourth week of the semester. Possible topics: Trees and collective memory on the Oxford campus; The Yarborough Oak ("The Tree that Owns Itself" in downtown Oxford); Nature and Culture in the Oxford Cemetery; Implicit narratives in the new Oxford Nature Trail; Trees and the wood carvings of Dr. Hoyt Oliver; the cultural politics of the Oxhouse.

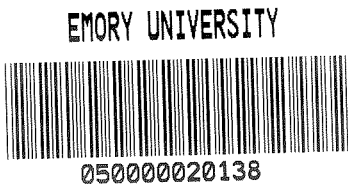
Required work:

Four short papers (5 pages) 50 points each (200 points total)

Community Project (if research paper, 12-15 pages) 100 points

Journal: 50 points

Learnlink postings and class participation 50 points



Grading is based on a scale of 400 points for the entire course, with the following letter-grade cut-offs:

A=376	B+=348	C+=306	D=266
A-=362	B=334	C=294	F=below 266
	B-=320	C-=280	

**NOTE:** Plus/minus grading is used in this course, and the Honor Code is always in force.

**Attendance and Lateness Policy:** Students are required to attend each class, on time. Missed quizzes will not be re-administered, regardless of circumstances (including illness or family emergencies). Students will not be directly penalized for the first three classes that they miss (although they will miss the chance to take a quiz that day, if one is administered). For each subsequent class missed (regardless of cause) 10 points will be deducted from the student's course total. Eight absences will be regarded as grounds for failing the course. One or more points will be deducted for each lateness or for leaving class prematurely.

**Courses updates and revisions to the syllabus** will be posted in the class LearnLink conference

The following books are available in the College bookstore:

- Claude Levi-Strauss. Tristes Tropiques.
- Philippe Descola. In The Society of Nature: A Native Ecology in Amazonia. Cambridge University Press, 1996
- The Myth of Wild Africa : Conservation Without Illusion by Jonathan S. Adams, Thomas O. McShane
- Imposing Wilderness : Struggles over Livelihood and Nature Preservation in Africa
- Reading Zoos : Representations of Animals and Captivity. 1998

COURSE OUTLINE

Part I. Nature, Culture, and the Ethnographic Imagination.

- Thursday, January 18. Introduction: Science and Art, Culture and Nature.
- Friday, January 19: Learnlink posting. What does "nature" mean to you? Find an isolated spot along the nature trail , sit down alone, and write your thoughts. What sensations do you experience in this place? What do you notice? In what respects do you regard this space as "natural", as shaped by the human presence, or as "cultural"?
- Tuesday, January 23.Claude Levi-Strauss. Tristes Tropiques.pp. 17-106
- Tuesday evening.7:30 p.m. Required Film Showing: "Never Cry Wolf"
- Thursday, January 25. Claude Levi-Strauss. Tristes Tropiques. pp.107-198
- Friday, January 26. LearnLink posting: Post your responses to the film "Never Cry Wolf" in light of Levi-Strauss' account of another Western account of encountering indigenous peoples in a seemingly "natural " environment.
- Tuesday, January 30. Tristes Tropiques. pp. 199-318 (Class discussion with Oswaldo Munoz)
- Thursday, February 1. Claude Levi-Strauss. Tristes Tropiques. pp. 319-416
- Monday, February 5. Paper 1. Levi-Strauss' journey through the Amazon is simultaneously philosophical and personal compare these two trajectories. How precisely is he transformed through his encounters with other peoples and places? (You may wish to compare his transformations with those undergone by the protagonist in "Never Cry Wolf".)

## Part II. Natural Species and Classificatory Thought

Tuesday, February 6. "Levi-Strauss, "The Science of the Concrete". (begin)

Note: You must meet this week with Dr. Auslander to discuss your community research project. Please sign up during office hours.

Thursday, February 8. Levi-Strauss, "The Science of the Concrete". (conclude)

Friday, February 9. LearnLink: Talk to several people about important trees in their lives (on campus, or perhaps in the neighborhood). Are trees "good to think" in Levi-Strauss' sense?

Tuesday, February 13. Philippe Descola. In *The Society of Nature: A Native Ecology in Amazonia*. Cambridge University Press, 1996

Thursday, February 15. Descola.

Tuesday, February 20. Descola.

7:30 p.m. Film Screening: The Lion King

Thursday, February 22. Descola. conclude.

Monday, February 26. Paper 2 Due. **Environment and Myth**

In this paper you are asked to reflect upon the relationship between physical environment and a society's 'poetic' evocations or mythic models of the cosmos. Is myth to be understood primarily as a 'mythic charter' for explaining objective environmental and biological processes? Conversely, is myth fundamentally an expression of social dynamic tensions or contradictions, which are projected out onto the 'natural' landscape? (Or is it possible to reconcile these two perspectives?)

I ask that you illustrate your argument with a detailed reading of at least one of the mythic narratives we have considered. You might examine one of the Achuar myths presented by Phillippe DeScola. Alternately, you may propose comparative reading of an Achuar and a North American myth of nature and society (such as *The Lion King*)

## Part III. The Politics of Conservation in Africa.

Tuesday, February 27. *The Myth of Wild Africa : Conservation Without Illusion* by Jonathan S. Adams and Thomas C McShane

Tuesday evening: Documentary screening (required)

Thursday, March 1. *The Myth of Wild Africa : Conservation Without Illusion* by Jonathan S. Adams, Thomas O. McShane.

Tuesday, March 6. *Imposing Wilderness: Struggles over Livelihood and Nature Preservation in Africa* pp. 1-50

Thursday, March 8. *Imposing Wilderness: Struggles over Livelihood and Nature Preservation in Africa* pp. 51-96

Tuesday, March 13 and Thursday, March 15 - **No class** (Spring break)

NOTE: Dr. Auslander will be in Ecuador during Spring Break.

Tuesday, March 20. *Imposing Wilderness : Struggles over Livelihood and Nature Preservation in Africa* pp. 97-156

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Thursday, March 22. Imposing Wilderness : Struggles over Livelihood and Nature Preservation in Africa pp. 157-213

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Monday, March 26. Paper 3. Due. Based on our readings, propose a workable conservation management plan for the Arusha region.

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#### IV. Constructing Nature Close to Home

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Tuesday, March 27. Reading Zoos : Representations of Animals and Captivity. pp. 1-104

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Thursday, March 29. Reading Zoos. pp. 105-224

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Saturday, March 31. Field Trip to Zoo Atlanta (required)

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Tuesday, April 5. Reading Zoos. pp. 225-341

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Thursday, April 5. View video; "Kinda Georgia Africa"

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Monday, April 9. Paper 4 due. Why do zoos exist? (or another topic, if approved by instructor)

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Tuesday, April 10 Student Project Presentations. (Note: short readings will be assigned, as appropriate, for this and the following class sessions; some sessions will take place outdoors, "in the field")

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Thursday, April 12 Student Project Presentations.

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Tuesday, April 17 Student Project Presentations.

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Thursday, April 19. Student Project Presentations.

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Tuesday, April 24. Screening of Student Videos.

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Thursday, April 26. Final Day of Class. Please submit full journal.

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Monday, April 30, 5:00 p.m. Final Project due. (Research Paper or equivalent)

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