Examiner guidelines, SOSANT 2630

About the course:

The course 'Digital Anthropology' provides an overview of themes and approaches to the digital, from social media to smartphones, from temporality to mobility. Secondly, it presents and discusses the methodologies required to study these phenomena, relating them to classic ethnographic methods. Thirdly and finally, the course contextualises the new digital technologies historically, indicating continuities and ruptures with enduring and classic themes and theories of anthropology. It therefore presupposes basic knowledge of anthropological theory, method and subject matter.

The course covers a broad range of issues relating to digital technologies, including:
- Social networks online and offline
- New methodologies tailored to research on digital communication
- The transformation of work
- Empowerment and surveillance in digital capitalism
- Games and gaming
- Micro-coordination and the smartphone as locative media
- Temporality, simultaneity and acceleration
- Mobility and the smartphone
- Information excess

Learning outcome

Knowledge
- Overview of recent and current anthropological research on the digital;
- Introduction to research methods dealing with the digital;
- Knowledge of cultural and social variation regarding engagement with digital technologies;
- Understanding of network types and forms of social and cultural integration;
- Awareness of tensions, conflicts and contradictions involving digital technologies, ranging from concentration deficits to robotisation.
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Skills
- Ability to distinguish theoretically and analytically between different information technologies and their implications;
- Mastery of methodological tools enabling basic research on digital and virtual worlds;
- Ability to work competently with other people in computer-mediated work environments.
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General competence
- The ability to build an argument blending methodological, theoretical and empirical elements, both orally and in writing;
- Enhanced academic reading competence, which involves the critical interrogation of form and content in anthropological texts.

Teaching:

There have been ten double lectures in the autumn semester. Since not all the students have social anthropology as their major, some attention has been paid to the basics of anthropology, notably the kind of knowledge produced through fieldwork and the difference between fieldwork and interviewing. It has also been emphasised throughout that digital anthropology is, in fact, anthropology and should be viewed as part of a larger knowledge project. Simple dichotomies such as the online/offline nexus have been challenged.

The lectures have not summarised the texts on the reading list, but has used them as a point of departure for examining the social, cultural, cognitive and political aspects of digitalisation as well as methodological implications of digital technology. Students have been encouraged to find supplementary readings to cover their specific interests.

Exam:

The students have written essays conforming to the general guidelines for take-home exams. They were asked to answer one of three questions; one concerning methodology, one about the smartphone, one about temporality. In assessing the essays, examiners should emphasise the students' ability to develop an independent line of reasoning drawing on academic literature in the field (but other sources are also fine when relevant), as well as their ability to connect the topic at hand to broader issues, either through comparison or by showing its relevance in e.g. economic or cognitive anthropology.

The course has an interdisciplinary element, and the general literature in the field, ranging from journalism to trade books, is very considerable. In assessing the essays, examiners should nevertheless place emphasis on the students' ability to use anthropologial approaches – ethnography, comparison, non-ethnocentrism, holism – in making sense of the digital. Rather than producing simple 'just so' narratives, they have been encouraged to search for tensions and contradictions in the field.