THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF SUPERHEROES

Featuring:

The Ethnographer: Dr. Jamon Halvaksz
Office: MH 4.03.24
Office Hours: MWF 10:00-11:00, and by appointment

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Course Description:
This course will examine the world of superheroes as both an imagined universe and a fan culture. Superheroes are not simply characters in illustrated books, but reflections of our own ideas about what it does and does not mean to be human, offering dystopic/utopic reflections of our own reality and imagined future. Ultimately, our goal is to discover what an anthropology of superheroes potentially can be.

The class will, of course, delve into classic anthropological concepts including: Gender, Ethnicity, Nature vs. Culture, Utopia/Dystopia, media studies, ritual, creativity, etc. while considering comic and real world superheroes.

Learning Outcomes:
Students will understand the role of superhero fiction in society, developing both an appreciation for the form and creativity. Students will also develop critical evaluation skills as they analyze their own culture.

Required Readings/Purchase
Comic con ticket for one day (http://alamocitycomiccon.com).

The following books are available in paperback, digital and through the library.
   Digital available in some formats.
   Digital available for individual editions from the publisher

Articles posted to Blackboard. Many, but not all, of these readings area also available through the University's Library databases (such as JSTOR, Anthrosourse, etc).
**Grading**
Grading will be based upon attendance, three exams, a fieldwork project and a series of short projects. Final grades will be done using a +/- system.

**Exams**
Exams will be multiple choice, true/false and short answer. Questions will be based upon assigned readings, lecture, films and class discussions.

**Participation**
Attendance will be taken randomly throughout the course. You can miss two attendance days without penalty. (5 points per day)

**Create a Superhero**
Each student will create three superheroes over the course of the term. This will involve filling out the superhero background sheets with both a discussion of their powers and origins. Origin stories and powers are not simply fiction, but are also reflections of our world. (20 points each)

1) The first hero should be a reflection of the student’s own world.

2) The second hero will be constructed around a culture or subculture, which is not the same as that of the student. Research into anthropological texts and citation of those sources will be required.

3) The third hero will be a villain/vigilante, reflecting the emergence of ‘real world superheroes’ and the genre that sees the world as dystopic and full of chaos and violence.

Each will require an image sketched by the student, or generated using one of the following websites (try each to see which best suits your needs).

http://marvel.com/games/play/31/create_your_own_superhero
http://www.heromachine.com/heromachine-2-5-character-portrait-creator/
http://www.heromachine.com/heromachine-3-lab/

Powers:
http://www.superherodb.com/powers/
http://www.superheronation.com/2007/12/30/list-of-superpowers/
http://powerlisting.wikia.com/wiki/List_of_Supernatural_Powers_and_Abilities
**Fieldwork Project**
The fieldwork project is both an individual and class effort to document the Alamo City Comic Con. During Alamo City Comic Con, students will be required to conduct research on topics chosen by their group. The goal will be to write individual (graded) components, assemble them into a group report, and then joined with the rest of the class for a 'swarmed' ethnography of the event (or what is normally called collaborative event ethnography).

1. In assigned groups, students will chose a focus (e.g. cosplayers, vendors, families, teenagers, men, women, panel discussions, autograph areas, nearby restaurants and stores, etc). They will strategize research questions and methods (interviews, observations, participant observation, photography) and coordinate attendance plans.

2. At the event itself, we will act as a swarm of superhero ethnographers, collecting as much information about the event as we can.

3. Individually, students will write up a 5 page ethnographic description of the research that they conducted. These will be graded. Further guidance will be offered. (60 points)

4. Students will revise their text based upon graded feedback.

5. Groups will be charged with organizing the narratives weaving them together thematically, and adding 2-3 page layer of analysis. Groups with similar topical focus will be combined for this activity. These will form the ‘chapters’ of our story. While class time will be scheduled, groups should expect some out of class coordination. These will be graded for your group project grade (30 pts). Fellow group members will also evaluate each other for a group participation grade (10 points)

6. In class, we will combine the narratives into a multi part ethnography which will be made available for everyone on the class to read, and published on the web.

**EXTRA CREDIT**
Participate in the Halloween superhero costume contest. Based upon one of the heroes that you have created for class, a student will create a complete costume and explain it to the class in a five minute presentation on October 30th. (15 points extra credit).
Important Dates:

*COMICS ALLIANCE PRESENTS* SUPERMOVIES

**2015**
- MAY 1: *Avengers: Age of Ultron* - Marvel
- JULY 17: *Ant-Man* - Marvel
- AUG 7: *Fantastic Four* - Fox

**2016**
- FEB 12: *Deadpool* - 20th Century Fox
- MAY 6: *Captain America: Civil War* - Marvel
- MAY 27: *X-Men: Apocalypse* - 20th Century Fox
- AUG 6: *Suicide Squad* - Warner Bros.

**2017**
- OCT 7: *Gambit* - Fox
- NOV 4: *Dr. Strange* - Marvel
- MARCH 3: *Logan* - 20th Century Fox
- MAY 5: *Guardians of the Galaxy 2* - Marvel
- JUNE 9: *Fantastic Four 2* - Fox
- JULY 29: *Untitled Spider-Man Movie* - Sony

**2018**
- NOV 3: *Thor: Ragnarok* - Marvel
- NOV 17: *Justice League* - Warner Bros.
- MAY 4: *Avengers: Infinity War 1* - Marvel
- JULY 6: *Black Panther* - Marvel
- JULY 13: *Unknown* - Fox
- JULY 20: *Untitled Spider-Man* - Sony
- JULY 27: *Aquaman* - Warner Bros.
- APRIL 3: *Cyborg* - Warner Bros.
- JUNE 14: *Green Lantern* - Warner Bros.

**2019**
- APRIL 5: *Shazam* - Warner Bros.
- MAY 3: *Avengers: Infinity War 2* - Marvel
- JUNE 12: *Inhumans* - Marvel

**2020**
- APRIL 3: *Cyborg* - Warner Bros.
- JUNE 14: *Green Lantern* - Warner Bros.

YEAR UNKNOWN
- X-FORCE - Fox
- SANDMAN - Warner Bros.
- SANDMAN - Fox
- SINISTER SIX - Sony
- UNTITLED SUPERMAN MOVIE - Warner Bros.
- JUSTICE LEAGUE DARK - Warner Bros.
- BATMAN MOVIE - Warner Bros.
- HARRENHEIR - Sony

NOTES

All dates and information subject to change. Fox and Sony Columbia have not announced any dates past 2018. Visit COMICSAIALLIANCE.COM for updates and news. [Updated April 23, 2015]

**Other Important Dates**
September 9: Superhero 1, Wednesday
September 25: Individual ethnographies, Friday
October 5: Exam 1
October 19: Superhero 2, Monday
October 30: Costume Contest
November 2: Exam 2
November 16: Super villain/Vigilante 3
December 2: Exam 3
**Academic Policies, including Misconduct:**
The University of Texas at San Antonio has clear policies concerning disruptive classroom behaviors, plagiarism, and other forms of misconduct (see www.utsa.edu/infoguide/appendices/b.cfm). Plagiarism can be as simple as collaborating with a classmate on an assignment that is intended to show individual effort. A common form in this class is failure to appropriately cite sources in the ethnography paper. More serious forms include cheating or copying another’s work as your own. Cutting and pasting from internet sources is particularly problematic as the material on-line is not always accurate, and this is plagiarism. The college’s policies regarding this and other misconduct are available in written form, and you are expected to know them and follow them. You can also refer to the UTSA Student Code of Conduct on scholastic dishonesty and disciplinary action (http://www.utsa.edu/OSJA/index.cfm). There are clear procedures for instructors and students to follow in the event of misconduct, harassment, or other unwanted behaviors, along with appropriate consequences for infractions. Students who ignore these policies will minimally receive an F on the associated assignment, but could receive an F for the course at my discretion.

**Access/Accommodations:**
Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with disabilities and learning needs. **Writing Center:** www.utsa.edu/twc/index.html If you need accommodation in order to fully participate in the course, information about the Disability Services can be found at their web site (www.utsa.edu/disability/), or call them at 458-4157. Please let me know if there is anything that I can do as well.

**The Creed!!!! <http://www.utsa.edu/about/creed/>**
**The Honor Code!!!!!! <http://www.utsa.edu/about/creed/honorcode.html>**
**The Comics Code Authority!!!!!!! <http://cbldf.org/comics-code-history-the-seal-of-approval/>**
Week 1, August 19, 21
Wednesday: Introduction
Friday: Film Truth, Justice, and the American Way

Read:
1. Rocket Girl Vol 1
2. http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/03/10/secret-skin

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSGf6is3U2w

Week 2, August 24, 26, 28
Monday: Lecture
Wednesday: Film With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility
Friday: class discussion... what is a superhero

Read:


Superhero Culture, some anthropologists go to comic con

Week 3, August 31, September 2, 4
Monday: Lecture/discussion on readings, groups assigned
Wednesday: Research methods
Friday: Group meetings to develop research questions plan

Read:


Week 4, September 7 (Labor Day, no class), 9, 11
SUPERHERO 1 Due Wednesday September 9
Swarm Ethnography: Ethnographic prep for comic con.
ALAMO CITY COMIC CON, September 11-13

Monday: no class
Wednesday: Class discussion/Group meeting
Friday: research at Comic Con

Read:


For further reading see Wikipedia on
Participant Observation: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participant_observation
Person-centered interviewing: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Person-centered_ethnography
Week 5, September 14, 16, 18
Superhero Cultures and The Comic Industry
Monday: Lecture, discussion
Wednesday: Film *SyfyTionians*, Dir. Alejandro Cabrera
Friday: Guest Speaker Alejandro Cabrera

Read:
1. New Geographies of Comic Book Production in North America: The New Artisan, Distancing, and the Periodic Social Economy

Week 6, September 21, 23, 25
Individual ethnographies due Friday
Monday: Lecture/discussion, The future
Wednesday: Lecture/discussion,
Friday: Lecture/discussion

Read:
3. Ex Machina Volume 1

Week 7, September 28, 30, October 2
Monday: Lecture/discussion
Wednesday: Lecture/discussion
Friday: Films *We are all Cyborgs Now, Deus Ex: The Eyeborg Documentary*, & more

Read:
2. Ex Machina Volume 2
A Diverse Multiverse

Week 8, October 5, 7, 9
Monday: Exam 1
Wednesday: Group meetings (bring individual papers to class)
Friday: Lecture/discussion

Read:


Week 9, October 12, 14, 16
Monday: Lecture/discussion
Wednesday: Guest Speaker David Liss (http://davidliss.com)
Friday: Lecture/discussion

Read:
1. Ms. Marvel Vol 1


Week 10, October 19, 21, 23
Superhero 2 Due Monday October 19
Monday: Group meetings, class discussion of fieldwork project
Wednesday: Lecture/discussion
Friday Film: The Burka Avenger

Read:
1. Ms. Marvel Vol 2


**Week 11, October 26, 28, 30**

FYI: Wizard World, Austin (Friday and Saturday)

Monday: Lecture/discussion


18 Days, episodes

Friday: Costume contest

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**Real World Superheroes, Comic Book Vigilantes**

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**Week 12, November 2, 4, 6**

Monday: Exam 2

Wednesday: Lecture/ Discussion

Friday Film: *Hero can be anyone*

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Read:


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**Week 13, November 9, 11, 13**

Monday: Lecture/Discussion

Wednesday: Film *The Phenomenon: the comic that changed comics*

Friday: Final Group Meeting and class discussion about ethnography of comic con.

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Read:

1. *The Watchmen*, chapters 6-9

**Week 14, November 16, 18, 20**

**Super villain/Vigilante 3 Due November 16**
Monday, Lecture/Discussion
Wednesday and Friday: Film, Barnett, Mike *dir. Superheroes* HBO, 2011. / Discussion
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Final group paper due on-line by Sunday 22 November.
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Read:

1. *The Watchmen*, chapters 10-12


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**Week 15, November 23, 25 (Thanksgiving, no class on Friday)**

Monday: Guest Speakers Heroes With Heart (https://www.facebook.com/HeroesWithAHeart)
Wednesday: Lecture Discussion.
Friday: No class, holiday.
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Read:


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**Week 16, November 30, December 2**
Monday: Discussion/ Review
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Wednesday December 2, Exam 3