



ANTHROPOLOGY DEPARTMENT  
361 Social Sciences I  
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SANTA CRUZ, CALIFORNIA 95064

Dear Selection Committee:

I am writing to apply for the position of Assistant Professor of Anthropology. I have been trained as a cultural anthropologist with foci in medical anthropology, the study of science and technology, and media studies. My background is in American literature and history; by training, scholarly interest, and political commitments, I am an Americanist. My work marries contemporary ethnography with patients, physicians, scientists, and support groups with archival and textual research of American medicine and its developments since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. What guides my work is an abiding interest in the interconnected formations of the American economy, medicine, science and the body.

My first book, *The Slumbering Masses: Sleep, Integral Medicine, and the Formation of American Everyday Life* (UMN Press, 2012), traces the interactions of American allopathic medicine, industrial capitalism, and the human desire for sleep from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century through the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The foundation of contemporary American sleep is laid in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the industrial workday demands the coordination and consolidation of sleeping and waking patterns. What was lost in this transition was unconsolidated sleep – instead of two nightly periods of rest, or daily naps supplemented with nightly sleep, one eight hour period of sleep was substituted as a new norm. This norm laid the basis for the emerging field of sleep medicine, which took as its primary concern the eradication of napping and insomnia, and posited eight regular and consolidated hours of sleep as necessary for *Homo sapiens*. This invention of consolidated sleep led to the eventual pathologization of many forms of sleep, and provided the basis for contemporary sleep medicine. The present interest in sleep, exemplified by advertising campaigns for the so-called “Z drugs” – a new chemical that promotes and consolidates sleep – is not so much new as an intensification of a two hundred year old interest in making “normal” American sleep. In the present, I focus on the lives of physicians, scientists, patients and their families as they deal with the social frictions that sleep disorders are accepted as causing and how these difficulties form and enact emergent biological and social desires.

The book manuscript I am currently working on, *What Matters: The Politics of American Brains* (under contract with UMN Press), follows up on an argument that I make in the closing pages of *The Slumbering Masses*: What if we accepted medical disorders not as pathologies but as human variation, leading to a politics of *multibiologism*? To unfold the implications of this position, I focus on the two separate worlds of autism education and bioethics in the United States. I see in bioethics a means of undoing biopolitics, but bioethics has largely been concerned with the facilitation of new medical technologies and the mitigation of social effects. I join an ethnography of a special education facility in San Jose that specializes in severe cases of autism with three alternate histories of bioethics. What, I ask, are the dormant bioethics in the work of Gregory Bateson and his cybernetics colleagues? Felix Guattari’s post-Lacanian, group psychoanalysis? The materialist neuroscience of Jose Delgado, Antonio Damasio and Gerald Edelman? Each history begins in the 1960s, and provides a means to rethink the American particularities of bioethics. In tracing these alternatives, my aim is to reimagine what bioethics might be, and how it might provide a foundation for anthropological engagements with disability and everyday life that take as their basis a cosmopolitan understanding of the variations of human biology.

Social Sciences 9/8/11 8:09 PM

**Comment:** ‘Selection Committee’ or I’ve seen people name the chair of the search committee.

Social Sciences 9/8/11 8:09 PM

**Comment:** This is the most banal paragraph of the lot. You need to identify what you’re applying for (sometimes there will be more than one job offered in a department), and tell a little about yourself – in the broadest possible language – and thereby identify why you’re applying for *this* job. So if it’s a job in Medical Anthropology, mention that you’ve been trained as a medical anthropologist.

Social Sciences 9/8/11 8:12 PM

**Comment:** This second paragraph should be about your dissertation. It should be on the short side, and give people a sense of the overall themes, ideas, and data. One of the big mistakes that people make is to write too much about their dissertation – like a Las Vegas lounge act, you want to leave your audience wanting more. Keep it brief, interesting, and generative. You want your reader to remember this paragraph – not that you went on for a page or two about every slightly interesting discovery...

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**Comment:** Your third paragraph should be about what you plan to do next. It doesn’t need to be totally fleshed out, but it should build in some logical way on your dissertation (even if it seems to be totally different). You might mention if you’ve already begun working on it, if you have funding for it, and if you plan to be in your fieldsite in the near future.

My teaching ranges from introductory classes in medical anthropology, science studies, area studies of the United States and North America, to graduate courses in the anthropology of the body and the place of experimentation in the arts and sciences. My interests are broad and flexible. In Detroit, when I taught an introduction to cultural anthropology, we read a series of ethnographies about places like Detroit, but not: Crapanzano's *Waiting*, Caldeira's *City of Walls*, Ferguson's *Expectations of Modernity*, Holmes' *Integral Europe*. At first confounded, students ended the term understanding that Detroit is both an exemplary and representative place, sharing qualities with cities around the world. In Santa Cruz, my version of an introduction to medical anthropology unsettles student assumptions about the authenticity and veracity of "traditional" medicines – Ayurveda, Traditional Chinese Medicine, African folk medicine – and shows how cultural and "traditional" American allopathic medicine is. Across my teaching, one of my primary concerns is unsettling educational emphases on individual performance: I have students work together on the research leading to term papers, develop projects as large teams or whole classes, and co-author exams. Many students find this intensely frustrating, but after working through their tensions, they feel radically altered for the better. I also emphasize critical reading strategies -- which many students seem to lack -- and supplement demanding reading and writing schedules with multimedia assignments that introduce students to podcasts, video games, films, television, and online publications that often change student media consumption patterns.

My background is interdisciplinary, albeit veering towards the humanities. I came late to Anthropology, finding in its breadth a means to integrate my varied interests in social science theories and methods -- and, more importantly, a common basis for engaging colleagues across the sciences and humanities. Because my research often touches upon historical periods studied by historical archaeologists and biological processes studied by physical anthropologists, I enjoy working with colleagues to develop collaborative curricula, departmental workshops, and grant applications. As a case in point, I currently have an NIH grant under review, aimed to study the many meanings and lived experiences of "stress" in the United States. As a training grant, it is intended to fund interdisciplinary teams of graduate students to conduct biological and social research in sites throughout the U.S. in an effort to correlate cultural expectations of stress with its physical effects. My hopes -- beyond the research findings of the project -- are to enable graduate students to find common intellectual ground across the social and biological sciences, and to thereby provide a shared basis for future collaborations and research.

I am very interested in the Anthropology department at University of Humanity. My interest in the materiality of the body and its complex interactions with pharmaceuticals and society accord with the departmental emphases in material culture and space -- which I focus on through questions of temporality. The medical anthropologists who have anchored your department over the last two decades inform my own research, and being able to work closely with them would be generative and lead to synergistic activities.

Thank you in advance for your review of my application materials.

Sincerely,

Matthew Wolf-Meyer  
Assistant Professor

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**Comment:** And then you turn towards your teaching... You shouldn't rewrite this for every job -- if they have specific needs, it's implied that you can meet them since you're applying for the job. Secondly, you should pitch your teaching broadly enough that they can read their needs into your statement. That all being said, it's a pretty safe bet they want you to at least be willing to teach Introduction, Methods and Theory, and classes in your subfield.

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**Comment:** This is the research paragraph, and should give your reader a sense of your broader interests and the potential benefits of having you on campus -- both in the department and more generally.

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**Comment:** This paragraph is usually reserved to discuss your fitness for the institution -- take a look at faculty interests and explain how your interests relate to theirs. You might also identify how you'll be able to fill certain gaps, although you should do so by emphasizing their strengths, not their weaknesses.

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**Comment:** You don't need to tell people to contact you for more information, or that you'll be at the AAA. If they're interested, they'll get in touch...