Anthropology 429
ANTHROPOLOGY OF CONSUMER CULTURES
(Writing Intensive)

Fall 2013

General Information
Instructor    Christine R. Yano
Class meetings TuTh 9-10:15am, Saunders 345
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Office hours TuTh 11am-12n, or by appt
Prerequisites for Anth429 Anth152 or consent of the instructor

Course description
In the twenty-first century, consumer cultures tie local and global worlds together in complex, shifting, and interactive ways. Embedded within these ways lie issues of class, gender, modernity, identity, nation, globalism, and desire. This course explores these issues through the framework of late-capitalism, asking the following:
- what are the conditions and processes of consumption that shape meaning in contemporary life?
- how is culture influenced by practices and assumptions of marketing and consumption?
- how has a marketplace template shaped the mental mapping of our social worlds?
- what can anthropology bring to bear upon our understanding of marketing and consumption?

In the contemporary world, to buy is to become. Furthermore, specific to particular practices, to buy is to engage in practices of modernity. This course explores the dynamics of consumption and sociocultural meaning embedded within our lives.

Course objectives
The objectives of this course are as follows:
- survey anthropological approaches to consumption
- examine consumption as part of culture
- compare and contrast different consumer cultures
- place consumer cultures within related analytical frames, such as gender, social class, nationalism, globalism, history

Expected student learning outcomes
By the end of this course, students will be able to:
- describe various theoretical approaches to consumption in anthropology
- understand consumer cultures as prestige systems, identity constructs, exchange systems, gender dynamics, and symbolic structures
- link consumer cultures to processes of globalization and localization
- understand the political implications of consumer cultures, including issues of gender,
social class, regionalism, and nationalism
- incorporate delimited field-based research, analysis, and writing
- acquire basic abilities in critical thinking as applied to consumer cultures

Assessment of these outcomes will be based upon a cumulative evaluation of all papers, in-class participation, and final examination.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
Reading responses 30
Paper #1 20
Paper #2 20
Final exam 20
Class participation 10

READING RESPONSES (3 x 10 points each)
Reading responses ask you to think through the readings, gleaning for ideas more than facts. To this end, I will pose a series of questions that ask you to write a response. There is no set page requirement for the reading responses, but I expect thorough, thoughtful answers to the questions. Note that these responses will be graded generously. I will be looking for quality of thought.
- I know that the tendency is for students to put off doing these until the night before it is due. But the class is designed for you to do these readings throughout the semester. I urge you to do so. If anyone wants to hand in their reading responses in partial form before the deadline, I would be glad to read and give you feedback.
- Note: the reading responses are due on the day of discussion. Please feel free to amend your responses as a result of the in-class discussion.

PAPERS (2 x 20 points each)
Each of the units will culminate in a more formal paper, 7 pages. The papers will be based on specific assignments that combine readings, lectures, and mini-fieldwork. The papers will undergo peer review sessions held in class. After the paper is graded, students will have the opportunity to submit a revised version upon consultation with the instructor.

- Paper #1: analyze advertisements; INCLUDE REFERENCES TO READING AND LECTURE
  - GOAL: understand the visual and verbal elements of an advertisement (branding) and
how one might analyze it as part of culture, part of *ideology* (a system of meanings, often with a political agenda).

- select one advertisement for a product from a magazine or website
- give us the context of the ad (what is the target audience of the magazine or website? How do you know?)
- note size, placement, juxtaposition with other elements
- note visual elements of color, photography, composition, font, font size, use of bodies
- what kinds of visual images inform this ad?
- if people are depicted in the ad, analyze who they represent? Does their gaze say anything within the ad?
- what key words make up the advertising copy? Use of metaphors? How does language use shape the message of the ad?
- how is gender an important part of the advertisement?
- who is the target market? How can you tell?
- in sum, what are the brand elements of the product being conveyed by the ad?
- as extrapolation, what can we say about the cultural context from which this product and its branding are placed?
- what might this advertisement say about IDEOLOGY? (I.e. what are the “ideological state apparatuses” at work here?)
- Note: include copy of the advertisement with your paper

**Paper #2: interview a fan; INCLUDE REFERENCES TO READINGS AND LECTURE**

- **GOAL:** understand the practices of fandom as a system of meaning-making
  - Basic demographics: gender, age, ethnicity, education, occupation, area of residence
  - You may use the following questions as prompts for conversation, but please do let the conversation veer into areas that your interviewee finds interesting.
  - what is the object of the fandom and how did that relationship come about?
  - how long has the person been a fan of object x?
    * Note: this object x can be a thing, person, brand, food, etc.
  - is he/she a fan of multiple objects of consumption? If so, what?
  - what is the attraction to the object?
  - how did he/she become introduced to object x?
  - what kinds of practices constitute this fandom?
  - what kinds of socializing does this fan do with other fans?
  - what kinds of web-based interaction is there among fans?
  - is there any kind of fan productivity that goes into this form of consumption?
- Note that the person you interview does not have to be a young person. Fandom is not restricted to youth.

**FINAL EXAM (20 points)**

The exam will be a two hour closed-book essay test as scheduled. It will be based upon all readings, lectures, and films. I will hand out the exam questions on the last day of
class.
An alternative is to take the same test as a take-home exam, 7 pages long, due on Sunday, 12/15, 6pm, emailed to me. Failure to make this deadline means that you will have to take the exam as scheduled.

**TAKE-HOME OPTION:** Sun, 12/15, 6pm, email cryano@hawaii.edu

**IN-CLASS OPTION:** Tues, 12/17, 9:45-11:45am, Saunders 345

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**CLASS PARTICIPATION (5 + 5 = 10 points)**

In a highly interactive course such as this, each student’s daily presence and participation is critical. You will be assessed on the basis of attendance, verbal participation, and completion of in-class worksheets. 5 points for facilitation team + 5 points for class participation.

**FACILITATION TEAMS:** each student will belong to a facilitation team of 5-7 students. These students will be required to lead the discussion for the reading in the unit. I strongly encourage members of the discussion team to meet outside of class time to discuss the questions ahead of time and divide up responsibilities.

- **Members of the facilitation team are required to electronically submit to me the answers to the questions ONE WEEK prior to the discussion.**
  - This is so that I know you are all ready and capable of leading discussion. I will return your answers prior to the discussion day.
  - Class procedure: break up into small groups by chapters of readings; rotate small group leaders every 15-20 minutes. End the class with a large group discussion, bringing up salient points that emerged during small group conversations.
  - Note: graduate students should distribute themselves equally among teams and expect to take a leadership role. They are to meet with the teams, go over the questions and answers, plan how to lead the discussion.
  - All members of the team will receive the same grade. Maximum number of points: 5 for facilitation.
  - sign-up for facilitation teams will be on Tues, 9/3.

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**Research Paper alternative to the final exam**

All graduate students are required to write a research paper in lieu of the final exam. Undergraduates who have achieved 18 or better on both papers are also invited to write a research paper. The choice of topic is open and subject to approval. The paper can combine some of the mini-fieldwork assignments with further reading, web-based research, and/or additional fieldwork.

Note: all papers must include some key concepts from the course. Failure to do so will result in a lowered grade.

Each student who writes a research paper will give a brief 10-minute presentation on their paper.

Paper length: graduate students 10-15 pgs; undergraduate students 7-9 pgs.

**Deadlines:**

- 10/15 graduate students: one paragraph on topic, emailed to me
- 11/7 undergraduates: one paragraph on topic, emailed to me
On Writing

This course is designated writing-intensive for good reason. My firm belief is that good writing makes for good thinking and vice versa. Disciplining one’s writing is akin to disciplining one’s thinking. Writing will be an integral part of your learning process in several ways: 1) Short papers incorporating readings, lectures, and fieldwork; 2) reading responses; and 3) in-class writing. Common to all three of these is the requirement that your writing be clear, succinct, and grammatical. I expect any piece of writing that has been done on a computer to be spell-checked and proofread. You should approach these three types of writing in different ways.

1) The papers are the most formal pieces of writing that you will do. We will do peer reviews of each of the papers and you should write knowing that not only I, but also your peers, will be reading these. Please do make use of the Writing Workshop at Kuy415 (956-7619) where you can sign up for half-hour appointments with writing tutors. The Department of Anthropology also has graduate student mentors to help students, including with writing assignments. If you are interested, please contact me.

2) The reading responses are less formal. I will pose questions on the readings and ask you to respond. In many cases, the questions I pose will be big ones that could be answered by quoting the entire book or chapter. Do not do this. Instead, summarize briefly what the author says. In addition, inject some of your own thought to this. Do keep in mind that this should be a response, not a regurgitation.

3) In-class writing is even less formal. For one thing, it is not done on computer and I don’t expect the kind of “perfection” that instant editing, spell-checkers, grammar-checks easily provide.

The bottom line is that writing will be a self-conscious and fully integrated part of this course. Thus, not only will you learn something about consumer cultures through taking this course, hopefully you will end up writing with greater clarity, thought, and care.

The format of papers is as follows:
1" margins, all around
12-point font, Times New Roman (i.e., what I have used in this syllabus)
double-spaced
pages numbered
no title page for this length of a paper
no folders or binders (this is a short paper)
stapled

These approximate standard university requirements and should be followed not only in this course but in others as well.

In addition, PLEASE UNDERLINE YOUR THESIS STATEMENT in your introduction, as well as its restatement in your concluding paragraph. The thesis statement should answer the question: what is the point you are trying to make in this paper?
Each paper has two due dates: 1st draft and final draft.
* Note: for the 1st draft papers, please bring in 2 copies of your paper. We will conduct a peer review in class.
* When you hand in your final papers, please include your 1st drafts, your peer reviews, and your final drafts.

In addition, if anyone wants me to look over and comment on your 1st draft papers, I will give you opportunities to do so if you hand in your paper to me the day BEFORE 1st drafts are due. You may submit these electronically up to 6pm on that day. I will give you comments within 24 hours.

Late papers are highly discouraged. **I will deduct 1 point per day past due.** This holds true for 1st and final drafts.

N.B. If you do not take part in the peer review (i.e. 1st draft paper), then 1 point is deducted from your paper grade. If you hand in your final draft paper 1 day late, then 1 point is deducted. If you hand in your final draft paper 2 days late, then 2 points are deducted. Etc. Do the math!

**On electronic seductions and classroom etiquette**

Rudeness has existed since time immemorial. However, I think that technology has contributed to our further devolution as beings that do not recognize common courtesy in a group setting, such as the classroom. Therefore, I feel the need to lay out some ground rules for the class. A lot of this is kindergarten stuff, yet it still needs saying. Maybe we all need reminders of the manners we supposedly learned in elementary school. Forgetting comes easy.

Bottom line: I believe that we have all become a more distractable bunch, and I think that technology contributes to it. Our attention spans are short. If we do not find something immediately entertaining or if we find something too difficult, we mentally switch channels. In fact, we channel surf through our realms of attention, searching through multiple signals and messages. Electronic seductions call us constantly -- and I include myself in this. These seductions make reading a book particularly difficult. They make listening to a lecture challenging. I will try to do my part to make the classroom time intellectually rich and of interest. I ask your cooperation in meeting me half way. This means stemming the tide of distraction. For 75 minutes, twice a week, for 16 weeks, I ask that you recover (or discover) your powers of focus and attention. We'll be better thinkers for it.

1. **Come to class on time.** In fact, come to class at least one minute before class is supposed to start. It won't kill you.
2. **Turn off electronic distractions (I-phones, Blackberries, etc).** Put them away. Don't look at them, try not to think about them.
3. **Don't talk to neighbors while someone else is officially speaking in class (this could be me, or it could be another student).**
4. **Recapture the notion of undivided attention.** (THIS is something that I feel is being lost through technology.)
5. **If you are using your computer to take notes in class, don't browse the Web, play games, chat, email, etc.** Eliminate distractions -- especially electronic ones. We have to relearn how to focus.
6. Use the bathroom before coming to class. There should be no reason – other than an emergency – for people getting up in the middle of the class and leaving the room. (I find this embarrassing to have to say.)

I call these ground rules of classroom courtesy, and in some ways I find it incredible that they need be stated in a university-level syllabus. So be it. At the same time, I do not necessarily want to lay out explicit and punitive means for enforcing them. I detest taking that position. I would prefer to think that in a university setting, we are all mature adults who come together willingly (even excitedly) in the spirit of mutual respect and eager learning. Therefore, these are old-fashioned rules designed to make our time together hashing out newfangled ideas the most productive that they can be. We are here to learn and to think. Join me in this endeavor.

CALENDAR (subject to change)

INTRODUCTION: CONSUMPTION AND THE SOCIAL, 8/27-29
The social nexus forms a critical backdrop for any consideration of consumer culture. We begin with that assumption and examine issues of social class, sociality, and gender as important components. We consume as social beings embedded within hierarchies, kinship systems, and networks of interaction.
8/27 Introduction to the course: key issues
  Reading: Williamson, Introduction
8/29 The culture of consumption; consumption of culture; basic Marxist thought
  Reading: Williamson, Part One, Advertising Work

UNIT I BRANDING, 9/2-9/26
Branding has become a catchword of late capitalism and extends beyond products to institutions, social groups, and even nations. What are the process involved in branding? Why has it been so influential in how we conceptualize aspects of the social world? Has the marketplace become the template for human processes? This unit will address the processes of branding, the interpretation of advertisements (the message of branding), and larger implications for culture.
9/3 Definitions and processes of branding. Role of visuality.
  Reading: Williamson, Ch1
  * sign up for facilitation teams
9/5 Branding and emotions
  Reading: Williamson, Ch2
  *note: Facilitation Team #1 submit answers to reading questions.
9/10 Branding and culture
  Reading: Williamson, Ch3
9/12 DISCUSSION OF READING
  * Reading responses #1 due
9/17 WORKSHOP: BRANDED IMAGE
9/19 VIDEO: “Hawaii on Screen” (1992, Lynne Waters, 45 min. #7816)
9/24 * Paper #1 1st draft due
9/26 * Paper #1 final draft due
UNIT 2 FORMS OF CONSUMERSHIP, FROM BROWSER TO FAN, 10/1-10/31
A fan may be considered to be one extreme form of consumership. By examining this extreme form, we may query more general processes of consumption. When does a consumer become a fan? What is the relationship between consumers/fans and the objects of their consumption/affection? What are the roles of fandom in consumer culture? How does studying fandom and its productivity disrupt the producer-consumer divide and Marxist (Frankfurt School) critique that consumers are all dupes of capitalist machines? This unit explores these issues surrounding fandom with special attention laid to object, gender, and class.

- Additional reading (no reading response questions): Yano, Ch 3, fan interviews
  *Note: this chapter can serve as a template for the paper that you are to write

10/1 Practices and forms of consumption; fan productivity
  *Reading: Jenkins, Ch 1-2

10/3 Consumption as identity (“we are what we buy”); social class; consumer citizenship
  *Reading: Jenkins, Ch3

10/8 Bricolage: Things we think with
  *Reading: Jenkins, Ch4-5

10/10 Goods in motion: theories of the gift
  *Reading: Jenkins, Ch6

10/15 - VIDEO: “Trekkies” (Roger Nygard, 1997, 86 min. DVD 1544)
  *Reading: Jenkins, Ch7
  *Note: Facilitation Team #2 submit answers to reading questions.

10/17 - VIDEO: cont.; discussion
  *Reading: Jenkins, Ch8

10/22 DISCUSSION OF READING
  * Reading Response #2 due

10/24 Fan clubs as cultural practice

10/29 * Paper #2, 1st draft due

10/31 * Paper #2, final draft due

UNIT 3 LOCAL/GLOBAL CONNECTIONS, 11/4 - 12/10
Globalization has become an assumption of twenty-first century consumer cultures. What kinds of implications does globalization hold for culture? How do the local and the global intertwine? What kinds of power hierarchies connected to globalization shape consumer cultures that may be seen on the individual, group, and national levels? How does desire shape some local responses to globalization? This unit examines globalization and its effects as ongoing processes and subjects of debate.

11/5 Global flows
  *Reading: Yano - Introduction

11/7 Cultural imperialism
  *Reading: Yano - Ch2

11/12 Tides of resistance
VIDEO: No Logo - Brands, Globalization & Resistance (directed by Sut Jhally; 2003, 40 min; DVD 1926)
Reading: Yano - Ch3

11/14 Case study: Cola-globalization
Reading: Yano - Ch4

11/19 VIDEO: “The Gods Must Be Crazy” (1980, Jamie Uys, 109 min. VHS 20527)
Reading: Yano - Ch5

11/21 VIDEO: continuation, discussion
Reading: Yano - Ch7

11/26 Transnational cultures of consumption
Note: Facilitation Team #3 submit answers to reading questions.

12/3 *Reading Response #3 due
DISCUSSION OF READING

12/5 Case study: Coffee as global beverage

WRAP-UP
12/10 Consuming Christmas
12/12 Student projects; hand out final exam
* Research papers due

FINAL DUE DATES
Research papers: Thurs, 12/12, in class
Take-home option: Sun, 12/15, 6pm, email <cryano@hawaii.edu>
Final examination: Tues, 12/17, 9:45-11:45am