

**Anthropology 429**  
**ANTHROPOLOGY OF CONSUMER CULTURES**  
(Writing Intensive)

Fall 2013

**General Information**

Instructor	Christine R. Yano
Class meetings	TuTh 9-10:15am, Saunders 345
Office	Saunders 316
Phone	956-4447
Email	< <a href="mailto:cryano@hawaii.edu">cryano@hawaii.edu</a> >
Office hours	TuTh 1-2pm, 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, 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 consumption?
- how has a marketplace template shaped the mental mapping of our social worlds?

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.

**Course objectives**

The objectives of this course are to:

- 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

**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:**

Jenkins, Henry 1992 *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*.

Routledge ISBN-10: 0415905729

Williamson, Judith, 1994. *Decoding Advertising: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*.

Marion Boyars Publishing. Paperback. ISBN-10: 0714526150.

Yano, Christine 2013 *Pink Globalization; Hello Kitty's Trek Across the Pacific*. Duke

University Press. ISBN-10: 0822353636

All the above are available at the UH Bookstore; they are also on reserve in Sinclair Library.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Reading responses 30

Paper #1 20

Paper #2 20

Final exam 20

Class participation 10

(Incl. Facilitation team)

### **READING RESPONSES (3 x 10 points each)**

Each of the readings will require students to answer a list of questions. Students can expect to write approximate 3-5 pages for each of the reading responses.

DUE DATES: 2/4, 3/11, 4/27

### **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.

DUE DATES: 2/9, 2/11, 3/16, 3/18

### **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.

An alternative to this is a take-home exam, 7 pages long, due on Friday, 5/7 12n in my

mailbox. Failure to make this deadline means that you will have to take the exam as scheduled.

**TAKE-HOME OPTION: Fri., 5/7, 12n, in my mailbox**

**IN-CLASS OPTION: Thurs, 5/13, 9:45-11:45am, Saunders 345**

***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 7-8 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 class to decide how you will lead the discussion, divide responsibilities, etc. One recommendation: begin the class with a brief presentation of the main ideas of the readings, then break up into small groups, led by one member of the facilitation team plus 2 other students. End the class with a recap of the small group discussions.

- Note: graduate students should distribute themselves equally among teams and expect to take a leadership role.

- 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 1/19.

**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:

- 4/1 one paragraph on topic, emailed to me
- 4/8 one page on methods, bibliography
- 4/22 outline of paper
- 5/4 in-class presentations; papers due.

Note: if there are more than five students writing papers, presentations will be on 4/29 and 5/4.

**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. One of the benefits of the presence of graduate students in the course is the opportunity to work with them, specifically on writing. Thus, each undergraduate will be assigned a graduate student mentor, the number to be determined by the number of students in the course. 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. In addition, make use of my office hours during which I will be glad to read rough drafts of papers. 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
- 10- or 12-point font (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 are 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?

The length is assigned for a purpose. I will read 7 pages and no more. I will take anything less than 7 full pages as blank space.

Each paper has two due dates: 1<sup>st</sup> draft and final draft.

\* Note: for the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> drafts, your peer reviews, and your final drafts.

In addition, if anyone wants me to look over and comment on your 1<sup>st</sup> draft papers, I will give you opportunities to do so IF you hand in your paper to me the day BEFORE 1<sup>st</sup> drafts are due. You may submit these electronically up to 6pm on that day. I will give you comments within 24 hours (keep in mind that the extent of my comments depends in part on how many students take advantage of this opportunity).

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

N.B. If you do not take part in the peer review (i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> 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!

## **COURSE WEBSITE**

I will be using the course website created through Laulima in various ways. I will post handouts, lecture notes, announcements, etc, so please do check regularly. If the email that is listed on Laulima is not the one you prefer to use, please let me know and I will add your secondary email to the list. I regularly use the email available through Laulima to communicate with the class, including announcements, reminders, and deadlines.

## **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 hard. I will try to do my part to make the classroom time intellectually challenging and of interest. I ask your cooperation in meeting me half way. I ask your help in 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, 1/12-1/14**

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.

1/12 Introduction to the course: key issues

*Reading: O'Barr, Ch1*

1/14 The culture of consumption; consumption of culture

*Reading: O'Barr, Ch2*

**UNIT I BRANDING, 1/19-2/11**

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 and its larger implications for culture.

1/19 Definitions and processes of branding. Role of visuality.

*Reading: O'Barr Ch 3-4*

\* sign up for facilitation teams

1/21 Branding and emotions

*Reading: O'Barr, Ch 5-6*

1/26 Branding and culture

*Reading: O'Barr Ch 7-8*

1/28 DISCUSSION OF READING

2/2 Analyzing advertisements, visual representations

**\* Reading responses #1 due**

2/4 VIDEO: "Hawaii on Screen" (1992, Lynne Waters, 45 min. #7816)

2/9 **\* Paper #1 1<sup>st</sup> draft due**

2/11 **\* Paper #1 final draft due**

- Paper #1: analyze advertisements; **INCLUDE REFERENCES TO O'BARR AND LECTURE**

- GOAL: understand the visual and verbal elements of an advertisement (branding) and how one might analyze it as part of culture
- select one advertisement for a product from a magazine or website
- note size, placement, juxtaposition with other elements
- note visual elements of color, photography, font, font size, use of bodies
- what kinds of visual images inform this ad?
- what key words make up the advertising copy?
- 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?
- Note: include copy of the advertisement with your paper

## **UNIT 2 FORMS OF CONSUMERSHIP, FROM BROWSER TO FAN, 2/16-3/18**

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.

- 2/16 Practices and forms of consumption; fan productivity  
*Reading: Jenkins, Ch 1-2*
- 2/18 Consumption as identity (“we are what we buy”); social class; consumer citizenship  
*Reading: Jenkins, Ch3*
- 2/23 Bricolage: Things we think with  
*Reading: Jenkins, Ch4-5*
- 2/25 Goods in motion: theories of the gift  
*Reading: Jenkins, Ch6*
- 3/2 - VIDEO: “Trekkies” (Roger Nygard, 1997, 86 min. DVD 1544)  
*Reading: Jenkins, Ch7*
- 3/4 - VIDEO: cont.; discussion  
*Reading: Jenkins, Ch8*
- 3/9 DISCUSSION OF READING  
\* **Reading Response #2 due**
- 3/11 Fan clubs as cultural practice
- 3/16 \* **Paper #2, 1<sup>st</sup> draft due**
- 3/18 \* **Paper #2, final draft due**
  - Paper #2: interview a fan; INCLUDE REFERENCES TO JENKINS AND LECTURE
    - GOAL: understand the practices of fandom as a system of meaning-making
    - Basic demographics: gender, age, ethnicity, education, occupation, area of residence
    - 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.

### **UNIT 3 LOCAL/GLOBAL CONNECTIONS, 3/30-4/29**

Globalization has become an assumption of twenty-first century consumer cultures. What kinds of implications does globalism 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.

- 3/30 Global flows  
*Reading: Watkins, Ch1*
- 4/1 Cultural imperialism  
*Reading: Watkins, Ch2*
- 4/6 Tides of resistance  
*Reading: Watkins, Ch3*
- 4/8 Case study: Cola-globalization  
*Reading: Watkins, Ch4*
- 4/13 VIDEO: "The Gods Must Be Crazy" (1980, Jamie Uys, 109 min. VHS 20527)  
*Reading: Watkins, Ch5*
- 4/15 VIDEO: continuation, discussion  
*Reading: Watkins, Ch6*
- 4/20 Transnational flows, recentering globalization  
*Reading: Watkins, Ch7-8*
- 4/22 DISCUSSION OF READING
- 4/27 Transborder fetish  
**\*Reading Response #3 due**
- 4/29 VIDEO: "Mardi Gras: Made in China" (David Redmon, 2005, 76 min. HCC DVD 0074)

### **WRAP-UP**

- 5/4 Student projects; hand out final exam  
\* Research papers due

### **FINAL DUE DATES**

- Research papers: Tuesday, 5/4, in class**
- Take-home option: Friday, 5/7, 12n in my mailbox, Saunders 346**
- Final examination: Thurs, 5/13, 9:45-11:45am**