



ANTH831

Culture, Commodities and Consumption: Anthropological Approaches to Economic Life

S2 Evening 2015

Dept of Anthropology

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General Information

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| Unit convenor and teaching staff Chris Vasantkumar chris.vasantkumar@mq.edu.au |
| Credit points 4 |
| Prerequisites Admission to MGlobalHlthDevStud or GradCertGlobalHlthDevStud or MAppAnth or PGDipAppAnth or MDevCult or PGDipDevCult or PGCertDevCult or MIntRel or MSocEntre or PGCertSocEntre or GradDipIntRel |
| Corequisites |
| Co-badged status ANTH731 |
| Unit description The unit explores anthropological approaches to questions in economic life, such as intercultural marketing, informal exchange, social networks, social organisation of labour, forms of property, the cultural implications of commoditisation, forms of money, ritual dimensions of trade and social regulations on markets. |

Important Academic Dates

Information about important academic dates including deadlines for withdrawing from units are available at <https://www.mq.edu.au/study/calendar-of-dates>

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this unit, you will be able to:

Develop familiarity with anthropological approaches to economic institutions and transactions

Develop the ability to assess received understandings of economic discourses and practices using anthropologically informed holistic and relativistic descriptions of cultural practices

Question commonly held and taken for granted assumptions about what is 'natural' or 'normal' human economic experience.

Apply a critical, anthropologically informed understanding of economic transactions and

institutions to real world situations and phenomena

Understand how global interconnectedness shapes contemporary practices of consumption and structures of inequality.

Analyze how cultural difference affects the interpretation and practice of economic transactions and institutions in different societies.

Improve writing skills, especially structuring of argument, organization, and use of supporting evidence and data.

Produce in cooperation with other students an effective presentation about a conflict in economic anthropology-related materials, improving presentation skills and teamwork.

General Assessment Information

Some Further Thoughts on Written Assessments

Again, it is imperative that your written expression is free of grammatical and spelling errors. Papers with significant spelling and grammatical errors will be returned ungraded for correction and late penalties will apply (1 percentage point deducted from the paper's final mark for each day that the assignment is late).

Essays must connect to the concepts in the readings and lectures. High quality essays will offer a clear thesis and argument, seamlessly integrate unit material, observations concerning the issue at hand, and demonstrate the effective use of anthropological concepts. (Rubric is in appendix, below). In all essays, creativity is encouraged. You are permitted to use the first person ("I observed...", "I attended...") in your essays. Unlike many of the sciences, anthropologists often write in the first person (because our research is strongly influenced by our presence and it is important to account for that). In this writing assignment, students will be evaluated most heavily on organization, use of data and supporting materials, clarity, and writing style. As a favor to the assessor please **double space** all submissions and be sure to **indent** at the beginning of each paragraph. Students are not expected to do extensive outside research, but can rely on the required readings and recommended readings from the unit guide. For more details about how this assignment is assessed, see the assessment rubric at the end of this unit outline.

Cite all material you use (beyond your own thoughts, observations, and opinions). The citations style you use is up to you. I recommend Harvard:http://sydney.edu.au/library/subjects/download/s/citation/Harvard_Complete.pdf

Whichever style you use, all in-text citations must be consistent and include the authors' last name, year of publication and, if you are using a direct quote, or paraphrasing, **the page number**. *Direct quotations from other material should be employed judiciously*. I am interested in your ability to gather, synthesize, and apply information, not in your repeating it verbatim, I want you to put your own intellectual stamp on the material.

Late submissions on any assignment will incur a penalty, unless the unit convenor has granted an extension due to certificated "unavoidable disruption" (see Undergraduate Student Handbook). **The late penalty is a 5% deduction in your mark per 24-hour period.**

The word limit

You will be deducted 1 percentage point for each 25 words you exceed the word limit. Please take the word limit very seriously and try to make your argument concisely and clearly. It is unfair to fellow students if one person has much more space to argue their case while another student sticks firmly to the length guidelines. The word limit is designed to level the essay-writing field, so to speak. You must **provide a word count beneath the title** when you submit your work. If you fail to provide a word count, you will be deducted 1 percentage point and the assessor will estimate length and mark accordingly. **The word limit excludes end-of-text references but it includes footnotes and in-text citations.**

No consideration for lost work or technology issues

It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy (electronic or otherwise) of all written work submitted for each unit. No consideration will be given to claims of 'lost work' or technology issues no matter what the circumstances. It is your responsibility to ensure that your computer is fully compatible with iLearn during exam periods.

Returning assignments

Student work will usually be marked and returned within two to three weeks of receipt. Students who hand their work in *before* the due date will not have it returned early. Do not ask when marking will be finished. If you turned in your assignment late, it will likely be marked later.

Extensions and Disruption of Study:

Please view the Disruption to Studies Policy at: http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/disruption_studies/policy.html

All Disruption to Studies notifications are to be made online via the University's Ask MQ system.

Remember, the University has determined that some circumstances routinely encountered by students **are not acceptable** grounds for claiming Disruption of Studies. These grounds include, but are not limited, to:

- Routine demands of employment
- Routine family problems such as tension with or between parents, spouses, and other people closely involved with the student
- Difficulties adjusting to university life, to the self-discipline needed to study effectively, and the demands of academic work
- Stress or anxiety associated with examinations, required assignments or any aspect of academic work
- Routine need for financial support
- Routine demands of sport, clubs and social or extra-curricular activities

Conditions existing prior to commencing a unit of study are not grounds for Special Consideration. The student is responsible for managing their workload in light of any known or anticipated problems. The student is responsible for contacting Student Support Services if they

have a chronic condition.

Grade Appeals

The Macquarie Grade Appeal Policy is available here: <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/gradeappeal/policy.html>

Plagiarism and Academic Honesty

Its fundamental principle is that all staff and students act with integrity in the creation, development, application and use of ideas and information. This means that:

*All academic work claimed as original is the work of the author making the claim.

*All academic collaborations are acknowledged.

*Academic work is not falsified in any way

*When the ideas of others are used, these ideas are acknowledged appropriately.

The University defines plagiarism in its rules: "Plagiarism involves using the work of another person and presenting it as one's own." Plagiarism is a serious breach of the University's rules and carries significant penalties. You must read the University's definition of plagiarism and its academic honesty policy. These can be found in the Handbook of Undergraduate studies or on the web at: http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/academic_honesty/policy.htm The policies and procedures explain what plagiarism is, how to avoid it, the procedures that will be taken in cases of suspected plagiarism, and the penalties if you are found guilty.

Please note that the availability of online materials has made plagiarism easier for students, but it has also made discovery of plagiarism even easier for convenors of units. We now have specialized databases that can quickly identify the source of particular phrases in a student's work, if not original, and evaluate how much is taken from sources in inappropriate ways. My best advice to you is to become familiar with the guidelines about plagiarism and then 'quarantine' the files that you are actually planning on turning in; that is, do *not* cut and paste materials directly into any work file that you plan to submit, because it is too easy to later on forget which is your original writing and which has come from other sources. It's so easy to avoid plagiarism: all you have to do is make sure you (a) put in quotes any words taken from another source, and (b) scrupulously reference all quotes and all statements of fact. No matter what, it's always better to cite than to use someone else's words without citation.

In this class I use Turnitin to detect plagiarism and I take it very, very seriously. **Plagiarism will result in a mark of zero for that assignment and, depending on the severity of the plagiarism, may also result in failing the unit and/or referral to the University Discipline Committee.**

Macquarie University students have a responsibility to be familiar with the **Student Code of**

Conduct: https://students.mq.edu.au/support/student_conduct/

Student Support Services

Macquarie University provides a range of **Student Support Services**. Details of these services can be accessed at: <http://students.mq.edu.au/support/>

Learning Skills provides academic writing resources and study strategies to improve your marks and take control of your study: <http://mq.edu.au/learningskills>

IT Help: For help with University computer systems and technology, visit: <http://informatics.mq.edu.au/help/>

University Grading Policy

<http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/grading/policy.html>

The grade a student receives will signify their overall performance in meeting the learning outcomes of a unit of study. Grades will not be awarded by reference to the achievement of other students nor allocated to fit a predetermined distribution. Graded units will use the following grades:

| | |
|----------------------------|--------|
| HD High Distinction | 85-100 |
| D Distinction | 75-84 |
| C Credit | 65-74 |
| P Pass | 50-64 |
| F Fail | 0-49 |

Assessment Tasks

| Name | Weighting | Due |
|--|-----------|--------------------|
| Class Preparation: DPG | 20% | Weekly |
| Participation in Seminar | 20% | Weekly |
| Leading Seminar Discussion | 10% | Two Times/Semester |
| Short Paper #1 | 10% | 20/08/15 |
| Short Paper II | 10% | 08/10/2015 |
| Research Essay | 30% | 09/11/2015 |

Class Preparation: DPG

Due: **Weekly**

Weighting: **20%**

Each week, you must fill out a Discussion Preparation Guide and bring it to class.

Details: A sample Discussion Preparation Guide (DPG) is found at the end of this Unit Outline; I'll hand out a guide in the first week of class, and after that, you should print / copy and fill one out each week. You will bring this to class and use it to inform class discussions. When you first come to class each week, you should show it to me so that I can give you credit for completing it. If you miss class, you can still get credit for doing the readings by handing in your DPG.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Develop familiarity with anthropological approaches to economic institutions and transactions
- Develop the ability to assess received understandings of economic discourses and practices using anthropologically informed holistic and relativistic descriptions of cultural practices
- Analyze how cultural difference affects the interpretation and practice of economic transactions and institutions in different societies.

Participation in Seminar

Due: **Weekly**

Weighting: **20%**

Brief description: Each student is expected to participate actively and constructively in the seminar discussion.

Details: Each week, all students are responsible for filling out the Discussion Preparation Guide and bringing it to class (see Assessment Task # 1, Class Attendance and Participation). Each week, two or three students will take responsibility for leading the seminar discussion (see Assessment Task #3). The unit convenor will assess seminar participation for each student.

Points will be awarded for any of the following:

- initiating discussion
- giving information
- asking for information
- raising questions
- restating another's contribution
- asking for clarification
- giving salient examples
- encouraging others
- relieving group tension

Points will be subtracted for any of the following:

- expression of unsupported opinions
- attempts to dominate discussion
- mocking others

In your verbal contributions to class discussions, what I will be looking for is remarks that engage thoughtfully with the readings. It is also important that you engage respectfully with your peers. Do not mock anyone's contributions in seminar. If you don't understand or agree with something someone says, ask them to clarify, or explain respectfully why you disagree. Everyone should feel free to speak up in class. Please do not drown out quieter voices. If you are having trouble speaking up in class discussion, please come to speak with the unit convenor privately and together we can strategise ways to facilitate your contribution to the seminars.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Develop familiarity with anthropological approaches to economic institutions and transactions
- Develop the ability to assess received understandings of economic discourses and practices using anthropologically informed holistic and relativistic descriptions of cultural practices
- Question commonly held and taken for granted assumptions about what is 'natural' or 'normal' human economic experience.
- Understand how global interconnectedness shapes contemporary practices of consumption and structures of inequality.
- Analyze how cultural difference affects the interpretation and practice of economic transactions and institutions in different societies.

Leading Seminar Discussion

Due: **Two Times/Semester**

Weighting: **10%**

Brief description: Each student is responsible for leading the seminar discussion twice during the semester. (Dates for each person's turns leading discussion will be worked out during first class meeting.)

Details: It is your responsibility for finding questions that will provoke a lively class discussion about the readings. Give this some careful thought: some questions that seem obvious can be real discussion-killers. Creativity is definitely a plus: feel free to try any clever idea to get discussion going, whether it's a debate, role-play, etc. But don't let your creative ideas take people off topic: it can be easy to let discussion just descend into the sharing of anecdotes. A good discussion leader will keep us all focused on the readings, how they relate to each other, and the methods and theory underpinning their arguments. Also, it's your responsibility to make sure that nobody dominates the discussion, and that nobody gets left out. Don't be afraid to call

on your peers to get them involved, but when put people on the spot, it's never a great idea to ask questions that are really hard to answer, because some people panic and freeze up. Try asking open-ended questions

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Develop the ability to assess received understandings of economic discourses and practices using anthropologically informed holistic and relativistic descriptions of cultural practices
- Understand how global interconnectedness shapes contemporary practices of consumption and structures of inequality.
- Produce in cooperation with other students an effective presentation about a conflict in economic anthropology-related materials, improving presentation skills and teamwork.

Short Paper #1

Due: **20/08/15**

Weighting: **10%**

Details: Write a short paper (1250-1500 words, double-spaced) on one of the following topics. In your paper you should make to reference at least three of the readings from class, and you should also find at least 2 outside sources. See the assessment rubric at the end of this unit outline for more information on how this assignment will be assessed.

1. Based on unit readings to this point, do you believe that wealth and poverty can (or should) be reduced to a single scale? What are the potential benefits and drawbacks of doing so? How does James Ferguson's concept of a "cultural topography of wealth" inform your answer to this question?
2. How does Karl Marx define the concept of commodity fetishism? Using examples from related unit readings, illustrate how it works in one or two particular instances and explain the role(s) this concept plays in everyday understandings of economic relationships and/or our place in within them.
3. Is globalization an old phenomenon or a new one? How does your answer to this question potentially affect your understanding of the contemporary global economic system? Using examples from unit readings make your case for one or the other (or some combination thereof).
4. Are There Some Things that Should not be Bought and Sold? Should there be limits on market transactions or should free markets be allowed to flourish free of government (and other sorts) of interference? How free should free markets be exactly? Is unrestricted commerce an unalloyed good or should certain kinds of things not be bought and sold (if so, what and why?)

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Question commonly held and taken for granted assumptions about what is 'natural' or 'normal' human economic experience.

- Apply a critical, anthropologically informed understanding of economic transactions and institutions to real world situations and phenomena
- Analyze how cultural difference affects the interpretation and practice of economic transactions and institutions in different societies.
- Improve writing skills, especially structuring of argument, organization, and use of supporting evidence and data.

Short Paper II

Due: **08/10/2015**

Weighting: **10%**

Details: Write a short paper (1250-1500 words, double-spaced) on one of the following topics. In your paper you should make reference to at least three of the readings from class, and you should also find at least 2 outside sources. See the assessment rubric at the end of this unit outline for more information on how this assignment will be assessed.

1. Based on what we have read and discussed so far over the course of the semester, assess the validity of the following quote (from Bloch and Perry 1989, 6): “money acts as a kind of acid which inexorably dissolves cherished cultural discriminations, eats away at qualitative differences and reduces personal relations to impersonality. It is only to be expected, then, that those ‘traditional’ cultures which must for the first time come to terms with it will represent money as a dark satanic force tearing at the very fabric of society.”

2. Should limits be placed on consumption? Which is more unjust, preventing people from expressing themselves via unfettered consumption or furthering divisions of wealth and poverty via such consumption? If school children in Australia are required to wear uniforms? Drawing particularly on Bosco’s article on the history of sumptuary laws (laws that limit consumption) in China, compose your answer to whether such a law—i.e., that places limits on individual consumption—should be applied to contemporary Australian society.

3. Critically assess the uses and limitations of a “follow the thing” framework for our understanding of crucial aspects of the global economic system (you’ll need to specify which aspects). How does such approach both differ from and build upon earlier approaches in economic anthropology? Draw upon concrete examples from the reading (and the real world, if appropriate) to illustrate your argument.

You should reference at least three of the readings from class, and you should also find at

least 2 outside sources. See the assessment rubric at the end of this unit outline for more information on how this assignment will be assessed.

It is imperative that your written expression is free of grammatical and spelling errors. If English is your second language or if you're not sure about your writing skills, ask someone else to proofread your paper before you hand it in. Papers with significant spelling and grammatical errors will be returned ungraded for correction and late penalties will apply (1 percentage point deducted from the paper's final mark for each day that the assignment is late). For advice on essay writing see 'Writing Anthropological Essays' on the Anthropology Web site http://www.anth.mq.edu.au/ug_essaywriting.html and the research paper assessment rubric on the unit iLearn page.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Question commonly held and taken for granted assumptions about what is 'natural' or 'normal' human economic experience.
- Apply a critical, anthropologically informed understanding of economic transactions and institutions to real world situations and phenomena
- Improve writing skills, especially structuring of argument, organization, and use of supporting evidence and data.

Research Essay

Due: **09/11/2015**

Weighting: **30%**

Details: For the final class project you will conduct a commodity chain analysis of a commodity of your choice. Your paper will "follow" the varied travels of your chosen commodity; including a discussion of its history, a mapping of its key sites of production, distribution and consumption, an overview of varied impacts (positive and negative) created across the world by that commodity. Your commodity chain analysis will pay attention to its "social life" as well as to how its travels have been shaped by (and shape) class, race and gendered power. You have wide latitude in terms of the thing that you select as long as you bring it into productive conversation with the unit's themes, concerns and materials. You should discuss the topic that you want to write about with me before you start writing. We'll discuss some ideas in class. For this assignment, you should do significant independent research.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Question commonly held and taken for granted assumptions about what is 'natural' or 'normal' human economic experience.
- Apply a critical, anthropologically informed understanding of economic transactions and institutions to real world situations and phenomena

- Understand how global interconnectedness shapes contemporary practices of consumption and structures of inequality.

Delivery and Resources

Required Readings

All required readings are available electronically on iLearn and/or E-reserve. There is no book or reader available for purchase. If you would like a hardcopy of the readings, you are free to print these readings on your own.

Outline of Lectures & Readings

Please note that minor modifications to the readings might occur during the semester. Adequate warning will always precede these adjustments

PART I

Week 1: 28 July

Introduction: Commodity Fetishism 101 or “Getting the Luncheon Meat Anonymous”

The first week’s meeting has two purposes. First, we will go over the unit outline, paying special attention to the schedule of topics, types of assessments and unit expectations. In addition, we will set out the terms, themes, and problems to be addressed over the course of the semester. Key today will be a discussion of Marx’s concept of commodity fetishism in which the human labor central to processes of production, distribution and consumption of everyday objects and commodities that animate our lives is made invisible by separating workers from the products of their labor. How might we start to undo this harmful obscuring of the human aspects of economic systems? What benefits might accrue to both and us and them if we do so? Provisional answers to these questions form the first installment of a conversation that we will be having in more depth over the course of the semester.

Readings: No Required Readings for this meeting but you are strongly requested to take a look at these (very short) readings:

1. Howard Nemerov, “Grace to be said at the supermarket,” (a poem) readily available on the internet.
2. Bertold Brecht, “Questions from a worker who reads,” (also a poem), ditto.

Week 2: 4 August

What does it mean to talk about “cultural economies?” Isn’t that an oxymoron?

Today we will begin our consideration of what it means to approach economic institutions and practices anthropologically. Where economies and economics alike are usually represented as natural, universal facts, economic anthropologists are centrally concerned with a more holistic and relativistic approach that seeks to place received concepts like “wealth,” “value,” and “the

market” in their proper historical and cultural (i.e., man-made) contexts. Drawing on the classic work of economic philosopher Karl Polanyi and more recent advances in cultural anthropology, we will focus particularly on whether wealth and poverty can be reduced to a single, apparently neutral quantitative framework (the bottom line) or whether wealth and value are themselves defined differently by particular groups in particular places and times.

Readings:

1. Ferguson, James (1992) “The Cultural Topography of Wealth: Commodity Paths and the Structure of Property in Rural Lesotho,” *American Anthropologist* 94(1):55-73.
2. Rudnykij, Daromir (2011) “Homo Economicus and Homo Islamicus, Revisited: Islamic Finance and the Limits of Economic Reason” paper for 8th International Conference on Islamic Economics and Finance. Pp. 1-14.
3. Polanyi, Karl (1957) “The Economy as Instituted Process, Karl Polanyi,” in C.Arensberg and H. Pearson (eds) *Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economies in History and Theory*, pp. 243–70. New York: Free Press.
4. Hart, Keith (2008) “Karl Polanyi’s Legacy,” *Development and Change* 39(6):1135–1143.

Recommended Readings (optional):

Mitchell, Timothy (2002) “The Character of Calculability,” Pp. 80-122 in *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity*. Berkeley: University of CA Press.

Week 3: 11 August

Thinking like a World-System: Global Economies and Global Inequalities, Past and Present

Today, as a prerequisite for thinking about wealth, poverty and consumption in the contemporary global economy, we will explore previous moments of global interconnection. In doing so we will highlight both the significant continuities that link past and present forms on the one hand and the degree to which a comparative framework foregrounds the limits of contemporary concepts (like “modernity” and “globalization,” which per Michel-Rolph Trouillot are not natural or neutral concepts but geographically and cultural specific “North Atlantic universals” that must be approached with a critical eye). Starting with the massive dislocations and relocations of the Columbian exchange, we will look at the vast and surprising histories of economic and cultural connectedness that have brought the contemporary global ecumene into being, highlighting several of its key terms and concepts as a prelude to critically evaluating them in weeks to come.

Readings:

1. Linton, Ralph (1937) “100% American,” *The American Mercury* 40: 427-429.
2. Wolf, Eric. (1982) —Pp. 2-7 from the “Introduction” to *Europe and the People without History*.
3. Trouillot, Michel-Rolph (2002) “North Atlantic Universals: Analytical Fictions 1492-1945” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101(4):839-858.

4. A. Tsing (2005) Engaging the Universal, pp. 6-10 in *Friction: An Anthropology of Global Connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
5. Harvey, David (1990) selections on "Time-Space Compression," pp. 240- 257, 284-307 and 141-172 in *The Condition of Postmodernity*.
6. A. Gupta and J. Ferguson (1992) Beyond "Culture": Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference, *Cultural Anthropology*, 7(1): 6-23.

Recommended Readings:

One of both of Chapters 6 ("The Fur Trade") or 7 ("The Slave Trade") in Wolf's *Europe and the People Without History*. Pp. 158-194 or Pp. 195-232.

A. Tsing "The Global Situation" Pp. 66-98 in Inda and Rosaldo, eds., *The Anthropology of Globalization*. (orig. 2000)

Harvey, D. (2006) "Neo-liberalism as creative destruction." *Geogr. Ann.*, 88 B (2) 145-158.

PART II

Week 4: 18 August

Beyond North Atlantic Universals I—Exchange

Today we will embark upon our collective project of provincializing and critically assessing received wisdom concerning key economic topics. Here we focus on the classic approaches to exchange in human societies of Karl Marx and Marcel Mauss. While Marx is famous (or infamous) as the great critique of commodity exchange and the free markets of capitalism, Mauss, whilst less widely known is an equally crucial thinker to become acquainted with. Where Marx focussed on the anonymizing nature of capitalist commodity economies in contemporary Europe, Mauss drew on ethnological and classical material to articulate his influential theory of the Gift in which neither the objects exchanged nor their exchangers are ever completely anonymous. In lecture we will first elaborate a contrast between these two visions of exchange and then ask whether it stands up under closer scrutiny. We do so in part by interrogating utopian notions of the free market that have emerged and become widely popular since the late eighteenth century. Is a completely free market desirable (or even possible) or are there some things that money can't (or shouldn't) buy?

Readings:

1. Marx, Karl (1867) "The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret." *Capital, Volume 1*.
2. Mauss, Marcel (1922), "The Exchange of Gifts and the Obligation to Reciprocate," Ch. 1 in *The Gift* pp. 10-23. (and Ch. 2 if you have time).
3. Taussig, Michael, 1996, "Money and Spirit Possession in Karl Marx", Pp. 129-146. in *The Magic of the State*.

4. Miller, D. (2003) "Could the Internet defetishise the commodity?" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 21(3) 359 – 372

Recommended Readings:

Brown, Susan L. (1997) "The Free Market as Salvation from the Government," Pp. 99-128 in James Carrier, ed., *Meaning of the Market*. (New York: Berg). Doward, Jamie (2015)

Alder, Ken (1995) "A Revolution to Measure: The Political Economy of the Metric System in France. In Wise, M.Norton, ed., *The Values of Precision*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, Pp. 39-71.

T. Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, "The Market's Place," Pp.244-271.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 20, 23:59, Short Essay #1 Due via Turnitin

Week 5: 25 August

ANTHROPOLOGY DEPARTMENT RESEARCH WEEK: No Class, No Tutorial

Week 6: 1 September

Beyond North Atlantic Universals II—Money

Money makes the world go round, or so we are told. But what makes Money go round? Does it work the same for all people in all places at all times or is money as we know the product of a particular history? We will address these and related themes in this week's lecture, focusing specifically on the impact of modern Western money on traditional social and cultural institutions. This question has historically formed one of the most enduring themes in economic anthropology and the anthropology of capitalism more generally. Yet where social thinkers such as Marx and Georg Simmel, author of the influential *Philosophy of Money*, have understood money as a kind of acid that dissolves traditional forms, anthropological inquiries into the meeting of global capitalism and local economic worlds paint a much complicated (and interesting) picture.

Readings:

1. Hart, Keith (1986) "Heads or Tails: Two Sides of the Coin." *Man* 21:620-644.
2. Bohannan, Paul (1959) "The impact of money on an African subsistence economy," *Econ. Hist.* 19: 491-503.
3. Bloch, Maurice and Jonathan Parry (1989) Introduction, pp. 1-32 in *Money and the Morality of Exchange*.
4. Simmel, Georg (1909), "Money's relationship to the rationalism of law and logic" and "The

calculating character of modern times" " from *The Philosophy of Money*, Pp. 446-450

Recommended Readings:

Hart, Keith (2007) "Money Is Always Personal and Impersonal," *Anthropology Today* 23(5):12–16.

Bohannon, Paul, 1955 "Some Principles of Exchange and Investment among the Tiv." *American Anthropologist* 57:60-70.

Graeber, David (2012) "On Social Currencies and Human Economies: Some Notes on the Violence of Equivalence." *Social Anthropology* 20(4): 411-428.

Curtis, Bruce (1998) "From the Moral Thermometer to Money: Metrological Reform in Pre-Confederation Canada." *Social Studies of Science* 28(4): 547-570.

Week 7: 8 September

Beyond North Atlantic Universals III: Stuff (Consumption in Critical Perspective)

This week we ask what is culturally and historically specific about the practices of consumption that shape our everyday lives. We will examine processes by which familiar commodities (sugar, coke, instant noodles) come to be familiar in particular contexts. An orienting (and possibly disorienting) question in these explorations will be whether our consumer desires emerge from processes of individual self-fashioning or whether they are themselves the products of large-scale economic processes (i.e. are markets made in our own image, or vice versa). Do we choose the stuff or does the stuff choose us? Is consumption a matter of choice or constraint? These themes and more will be the basis of our conversation.

Readings:

1. Mintz, Sydney (1996) "The Conquest of Honey by Sucrose: A Psychotechnical Achievement. Pp.50-66 in *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom*.

2. Bosco, Joseph (2014) "The Problem of Greed in Economic Anthropology: Sumptuary Laws and New Consumerism in China" *Economic Anthropology* 1:167-185.

3. Errington, F., Fujikura, T. and Gewertz, D. (2012), Instant Noodles as an Anti-friction Device: Making the BOP with PPP in PNG. *American Anthropologist*, 114: 19–31

4. De Vidas, A. (2008) "Containing Modernity: The social life of Tupperware in a Mexican indigenous village," *Ethnography* 9(2): 257-284.

Recommended Readings: Tsing, A. (2005) "Friction in the Commodity Chain," Pp. 51-54 in *Friction*.

Mintz, Sydney (1996) "Food and It's Relationship to Power." Pp. 17-32 in *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom*.

Foster, R. J. (2005), Commodity futures: Labour, love and value. *Anthropology Today*, 21: 8–12.

Miller, Daniel (1995) "Consumption and Commodities," *Ann Rev. Anth* (24): 141-161.

***BREAK** (12-27 September)*

PART III

Week 8: 29 September (This meeting will need to be rescheduled)

Follow that Thing!/Friction in the Commodity Chain

This week, we begin the final part of the unit in which, drawing upon recent innovative work in economic anthropology and critical human geography, we will focus on the connections across distance and difference that are crucial to the production, circulation and consumption of the stuff of everyday life. Today we delve into generative accounts of "following the thing," that augment a focus on particular, local cultural and economic worlds with an attention to the commodity chains that both tie these local worlds to global economic forces and make the movements of goods and concepts possible. By doing so, by following economic relations to their sources, hopefully we can shed some critical light on the everyday erasures and invisibilities of a world whose functioning is based on the unquestioned fetishism of the commodity. This approach will be the central focus of this part of the unit (and of your research essay) Today we will elucidate it in general terms before turning in coming weeks to a more detailed focus on following one particular commodity through the various stages of its life (and death).

Readings:

1. A. Tsing (2005) "Friction in the Commodity Chain," Pp. 51-54 in *Friction*.

at least one (1) of the following

2. Kaplan, M, 2007 "Fijian Water in Fiji and New York: Local Politics and a Global Commodity," *Cultural Anthropology* 22(4): 685-706
3. Cook, I. (2004) "Follow the Thing: Papaya," *Antipode* 36(4): 642-664.
4. Bestor, Theodore C. (2001) "Supply-Side Sushi: Commodity, Market, and the Global City," *American Anthropologist* 103(1): 76-95.

and

5. Kopytoff, Igor (1986) The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process. In *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Arjun Appadurai, ed. Pp. 64-91. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Recommended Readings:

- Tsing, A. (2009) "Supply Chains and the Human Condition," *Rethinking Marxism* 21(2): 148-176.

Harvey D (1990) Between space and time: Reflections on the geographical imagination. *Annals, Association of American Geographers* 80(3):418–434

NPR—“Planet Money Makes a T-shirt”: <http://www.npr.org/series/248799434/planet-moneys-t-shirt-project>

Week 9: 6 October

Movie Week

This week there will be no formal class meeting, however you are **required** to watch **at least two** documentaries devoted to tracing the commodity chains that shape the production of various familiar objects. Everyone is **required** to watch the movie “**Blood Coltan**” (available on youtube) on the mining, in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, of Coltan, a rare earth of crucial importance to smartphone production. You must also watch one from a list of movies (all available on youtube or at MQ Uni Library) that can be found on the ANTH 731/831 iLearn page (or you may nominate via email to the convenor a similar documentary on another product (you must have email confirmation from me or your tutor before proceeding if you choose to nominate a movie of your choice)).

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8, 23:59 — Short Essay #2 Due via Turnitin

Week 10: 12 October

Following the Mobile I — Resource Extraction in the Global Shadows

Today we commence following the journey of a smartphone, our destination, the mines of Central Africa, the focus of our attention the extraction and circulation of Coltan, a crucial ingredient in contemporary information technology devices. We will trace the connections that bind together African civil wars, Cold War geopolitics and the Western cult of the entrepreneur. In doing so, we will find that an exclusive focus on the genius of Steve Jobs and others like him at the expense of any awareness of or curiosity about either the laborers on whose back actual processes of production rest or the sordid political history of the regions in which such extraction occurs is itself a kind of damaging commodity fetishism. Further, we will address the place of extractive industries in Africa more broadly, highlighting their place in new discontinuous geographies of global capitalism that are designed so that a rising tide will not lift all boats.

Readings:

1. The Onion (2011) “The Last American Who Knew What the Fuck He was Doing Dies,” October 6. <http://www.theonion.com/article/last-american-who-knew-what-the-fuck-he-was-doing--26268>
2. Smith, James H., and Jeffrey W. Mantz (2006) “Do cellular phones dream of civil war? The mystification of production and the consequences of technology fetishism in the Eastern Congo.”

In *Inclusion and exclusion in the global arena*, edited by Max Kirsch and June Nash, 71–93. New York: Routledge Press.

3. Ferguson, J, “Globalizing Africa,” pp. 25-49 in *Global Shadows*.

4. Ryan, Rowena (2015) “Baotou is the world’s biggest supplier of rare earth minerals and it’s hell on Earth,” [news.com.au](http://www.news.com.au/travel/world-travel/baotou-is-the-worlds-biggest-supplier-of-rare-earth-minerals-and-its-hell-on-earth/story-e6frqb9-1227308456947), April 17. <http://www.news.com.au/travel/world-travel/baotou-is-the-worlds-biggest-supplier-of-rare-earth-minerals-and-its-hell-on-earth/story-e6frqb9-1227308456947>

5. Tamm, Ingrid (2004) “Dangerous Appetites: Human Rights Activism and Conflict Commodities,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 26(3): 687-704

Recommended Readings:

Amnesty International (2015) “United States of America: Digging for transparency: How U.S. companies are only scratching the surface of conflict minerals reporting April 22.” Available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AMR51/1499/2015/en/>

Mantz, Jeffrey (2008) Improvisational Economies: Coltan Production in the Eastern Congo. *Social Anthropology* 16(1):34–50.

Smith, James, H. (2015) “May it never end” Price wars, networks, and temporality in the “3 Ts” mining trade of the Eastern DR Congo, *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5 (1): 1–34

Week 11: 20 October

Following the Mobile II—Production (with Suicide Nets)

From the extraction of materials discussed last week, we now turn to processes of assembly and distribution, placing the production of the mobile we are following alongside broader trends in the global economic order that condition the production of many other familiar commodities. In particular we will lay out how free trade and other related aspects of contemporary global capitalism result in a “race to the bottom” in which corporations’ freedom to relocate factories in search of ever cheaper labor costs results in more and more dangerous and precarious working conditions in both the developed and developing world. We will also critically assess Western justifications for horrific working conditions in the developing world, subjecting their disingenuous use of cultural relativism to sustained critique. And we will read the poetry of one of the many young Chinese workers who found conditions in the plants assembling smartphones and other gadgets so intolerable that he killed himself in order to escape. In so doing, perhaps we can remind ourselves of these workers’ humanity (and, perhaps, question our own).

Readings:

1. Pun Ngai and Jenny Chan, 2012, “Global Capital, the State, and Chinese WorkersThe Foxconn Experience,” *Modern China* 38(4):383-410

2. "The poetry and brief life of a Foxconn worker: Xu Lizhi (1990-2014)" <https://libcom.org/blog/xulizhi-foxconn-suicide-poetry>.
3. J. Collins (2007) The Rise of a Global Garment Industry and the Reimagination of Worker Solidarity, *Critique of Anthropology*, 27(4): 395-409 .
4. J. Miller (2003) Why Economists Are Wrong About Sweatshops and the Antisweatshop Movement, *Challenge*, 46(1): 93-122.
5. Ralph Litzinger, 2013, "The Labor Question in China: Apple and Beyond," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112(1): 172-178.

Recommended Readings:

Jenny Chan, Pun Ngai, "Suicide as Protest for the New Generation of Chinese Migrant Workers: Foxconn, Global Capital, and the State," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 37-2-10, September 13, 2010..

M. Yglesias (2013) Different Places have Different Safety Rules and that's Okay. *Slate*, April 24.

Charles Duhigg and Keith Bradsher, "How the U.S. Lost Out on iPhone Work," *New York Times*, Jan. 21, 2012

N. Kristof and S. WuDunn (2000) Two Cheers for Sweatshops, *New York Times*, September 24.

Week 12: 27 October

Following the Mobile III — (Ethical?) Consumption and Digital Intimacies

We will cover two main sets of issues in today's meeting. First, we will ponder the strange intimacies of our own relationships to smartphones and other gadgets, attempting in the process to make these technologies less transparent and more opaque—not windows into other worlds, but objects worth studying in their own right. How do such digital intimacies emerge from commodity fetishism and how might they undo it? Second, we will take a critical gander at Fair Trade, one of the most influential attempts to redress some of the worst abuses in the contemporary global economic system. Has Fair Trade succeeded? Does it cause its own sorts of problems? How do folks on the producing end of Fair Trade products feel about? The answers to these questions may surprise you.

Readings:

1. T. Luhrmann: "What students can teach us about iPhones" *Salon*, http://www.salon.com/2010/05/30/iphone_college_students/
2. Apple Policy on Supplier Responsibility: <https://www.apple.com/au/supplier-responsibility/>
3. P. West, 2010, "Making the Market: Specialty Coffee, Generational Pitches, and Papua New Guinea" *Antipode* 42(3): 690-718

4. Moberg, M. (2014), Certification and Neoliberal Governance: Moral Economies of Fair Trade in the Eastern Caribbean. *American Anthropologist*, 116: 8–22.

5. Carrier, J. G. (2010), Protecting the Environment the Natural Way: Ethical Consumption and Commodity Fetishism. *Antipode*, 42: 672–689

Recommended Readings:

Daniel Miller, “The Particular Significance of SNS for Anthropology,” https://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/people/academic_staff/d_miller/mil-26

Elias, Marlène and Magalie Saussey (2013) “The gift that keeps on giving’: Unveiling the paradoxes of fair trade Shea butter,” *Sociologia Ruralis*, 53(2):158–179.

Pfaff, J. (2010), Mobile Phone Geographies. *Geography Compass*, 4: 1433–1447

Week 13: 3 November

Following the Mobile IV—E-waste and Capitalism’s Afterlives.

In the final week of the semester, we explore the inevitable end of all things and their rebirth. Trash, e-waste, etc., too entail networks that connect us across distance and differences. Further the end of one thing may well be another’s beginning. How can we adapt methodologies of following the thing to situations in which the boundaries of thingness are themselves situationally unclear. And, further, in contrast to such theoretical or abstract questions, we will ask how what we have learned from the semester long experience of pursuing commodities through the chains of human relationships that underly their apparently faceless movement through the global economy can help us to reconceptualize the latter in a more human and a more just manner as we go forward.

Readings:

1. “60 Minutes: Following the Trail of Toxic E-Waste” <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/following-the-trail-of-toxic-e-waste/> 2. Gregson, N., M. Crang, F. Ahamed, N. Akhter, and R. Ferdous, (2010)

“Following things of rubbish value: End-of-life ships, ‘chock-chocky’ furniture and the Bangladeshi middle class consumer,” *Geoforum* 41(6): 846-854

3. Reddy, Rajyashree N.(2015) “Producing abjection: E-waste improvement schemes and informal recyclers of Bangalore,” *Geoforum* 62: 166–174.

4. Hamblin, James, 2015, “A Brewing Problem: What’s the healthiest way to keep everyone caffeinated?” *The Atlantic*, March 2, 2015.

5. Gidwani, V. and Reddy, R. N. (2011), The Afterlives of “Waste”: Notes from India for a Minor History of Capitalist Surplus. *Antipode*, 43(5): 1625–1658

Recommended Readings:

Herod, Andrew, Graham Pickren, Al Rainnie and Susan McGrath Champ (2014) "Global destruction networks, labour and waste," *J Econ Geogr* (2014) 14 (2): 421-441.

Pickren, G. (2014), Geographies of E-waste: Towards a Political Ecology Approach to E-waste and Digital Technologies. *Geography Compass*, 8: 111–124.

Yates, M. (2011) "The Human-As-Waste, the Labor Theory of Value and Disposability in Contemporary Capitalism," *Antipode*, 43(5): 1679-1695.

WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 9, 23:59 —Research Essay Due via Turnitin

Appendix I: Sample Discussion Preparation Guide

DISCUSSION PREPARATION GUIDE

Name _____ Date _____

Author/Title/Article/Chapter _____

1. Note words that are unfamiliar or seem to be used in a special manner to create a particular impression. **Define the word in the context of the phrase where you found it.**

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

2. What particular details or ethnographic data seem especially significant or puzzling to you? These may include: a statement, the setting, a name, the title, the situation, a conflict, an irony, or anything of interest to you. Prepare questions about these items to ask in discussion. "How..." "Why..." questions work very well.

a.

b.

c.

d.

3.State in one complete sentence, the theme of this work.

4. Sum up the reading in a motto, a bumper sticker, or in a T-shirt slogan.

5. How would you relate this material to other sources you have read, to materials you have studied in other courses, or to something you learned outside school?

6. What is your opinion of this selection? Give you reason for your opinion.

7. What did you learn from this reading? Be specific and concrete.

8. What is your personal reaction to the material you read? Be specific and concrete.

9. (To be filled out in class during discussion)

What are some of the best ideas that you heard from other people in your discussion group?

Policies and Procedures

Macquarie University policies and procedures are accessible from [Policy Central](#). Students should be aware of the following policies in particular with regard to Learning and Teaching:

Academic Honesty Policy http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/academic_honesty/policy.html

Assessment Policy <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/assessment/policy.html>

Grading Policy <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/grading/policy.html>

Grade Appeal Policy <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/gradeappeal/policy.html>

Grievance Management Policy http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/grievance_management/policy.html

Disruption to Studies Policy http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/disruption_studies/policy.html *The Disruption to Studies Policy is effective from March 3 2014 and replaces the Special Consideration Policy.*

In addition, a number of other policies can be found in the [Learning and Teaching Category](#) of Policy Central.

Student Code of Conduct

Macquarie University students have a responsibility to be familiar with the Student Code of Conduct: https://students.mq.edu.au/support/student_conduct/

Results

Results shown in *iLearn*, or released directly by your Unit Convenor, are not confirmed as they are subject to final approval by the University. Once approved, final results will be sent to your student email address and will be made available in [eStudent](#). For more information visit ask.mq.edu.au.

Student Support

Macquarie University provides a range of support services for students. For details, visit <http://stu>

[dents.mq.edu.au/support/](https://unitguides.mq.edu.au/support/)

Learning Skills

Learning Skills (mq.edu.au/learningskills) provides academic writing resources and study strategies to improve your marks and take control of your study.

- [Workshops](#)
- [StudyWise](#)
- [Academic Integrity Module for Students](#)
- [Ask a Learning Adviser](#)

Student Services and Support

Students with a disability are encouraged to contact the [Disability Service](#) who can provide appropriate help with any issues that arise during their studies.

Student Enquiries

For all student enquiries, visit Student Connect at ask.mq.edu.au

IT Help

For help with University computer systems and technology, visit <http://informatics.mq.edu.au/help/>.

When using the University's IT, you must adhere to the [Acceptable Use Policy](#). The policy applies to all who connect to the MQ network including students.

Graduate Capabilities

PG - Capable of Professional and Personal Judgment and Initiative

Our postgraduates will demonstrate a high standard of discernment and common sense in their professional and personal judgment. They will have the ability to make informed choices and decisions that reflect both the nature of their professional work and their personal perspectives.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcome

- Produce in cooperation with other students an effective presentation about a conflict in economic anthropology-related materials, improving presentation skills and teamwork.

Assessment task

- Leading Seminar Discussion

PG - Discipline Knowledge and Skills

Our postgraduates will be able to demonstrate a significantly enhanced depth and breadth of

knowledge, scholarly understanding, and specific subject content knowledge in their chosen fields.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Develop familiarity with anthropological approaches to economic institutions and transactions
- Develop the ability to assess received understandings of economic discourses and practices using anthropologically informed holistic and relativistic descriptions of cultural practices
- Question commonly held and taken for granted assumptions about what is 'natural' or 'normal' human economic experience.
- Apply a critical, anthropologically informed understanding of economic transactions and institutions to real world situations and phenomena
- Analyze how cultural difference affects the interpretation and practice of economic transactions and institutions in different societies.

Assessment tasks

- Class Preparation: DPG
- Participation in Seminar
- Leading Seminar Discussion
- Short Paper #1
- Short Paper II
- Research Essay

PG - Critical, Analytical and Integrative Thinking

Our postgraduates will be capable of utilising and reflecting on prior knowledge and experience, of applying higher level critical thinking skills, and of integrating and synthesising learning and knowledge from a range of sources and environments. A characteristic of this form of thinking is the generation of new, professionally oriented knowledge through personal or group-based critique of practice and theory.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Develop the ability to assess received understandings of economic discourses and practices using anthropologically informed holistic and relativistic descriptions of cultural practices
- Question commonly held and taken for granted assumptions about what is 'natural' or

‘normal’ human economic experience.

- Apply a critical, anthropologically informed understanding of economic transactions and institutions to real world situations and phenomena
- Understand how global interconnectedness shapes contemporary practices of consumption and structures of inequality.
- Improve writing skills, especially structuring of argument, organization, and use of supporting evidence and data.

Assessment tasks

- Class Preparation: DPG
- Participation in Seminar
- Leading Seminar Discussion
- Short Paper #1
- Short Paper II
- Research Essay

PG - Effective Communication

Our postgraduates will be able to communicate effectively and convey their views to different social, cultural, and professional audiences. They will be able to use a variety of technologically supported media to communicate with empathy using a range of written, spoken or visual formats.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Improve writing skills, especially structuring of argument, organization, and use of supporting evidence and data.
- Produce in cooperation with other students an effective presentation about a conflict in economic anthropology-related materials, improving presentation skills and teamwork.

Assessment tasks

- Leading Seminar Discussion
- Short Paper #1
- Short Paper II

PG - Engaged and Responsible, Active and Ethical Citizens

Our postgraduates will be ethically aware and capable of confident transformative action in relation to their professional responsibilities and the wider community. They will have a sense of connectedness with others and country and have a sense of mutual obligation. They will be able to appreciate the impact of their professional roles for social justice and inclusion related to

national and global issues

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Develop familiarity with anthropological approaches to economic institutions and transactions
- Understand how global interconnectedness shapes contemporary practices of consumption and structures of inequality.
- Analyze how cultural difference affects the interpretation and practice of economic transactions and institutions in different societies.

Assessment tasks

- Class Preparation: DPG
- Participation in Seminar
- Leading Seminar Discussion
- Short Paper #1
- Research Essay