



# Resources, Consumption and the Environment: The Anthropology of Interconnections

**Anthropology 6302.10 CRN 11043  
Spring 2014**

Instructor: Dr. Joshua A. Bell

Time: Thursday 5 – 7 pm

Location: Cooper Room, National Museum of Natural History (NMNH)

10<sup>th</sup> and Constitution Avenue

Instructor Email: [bellja@si.edu](mailto:bellja@si.edu)

Phone: 202.633.1935

Office Location: NMNH Rm 318

Office Hours: Thursday 3-5 pm or by appointment

This course examines the social and political process by which aspects of our lived world are turned into resources that we, and others, consume. Asking what natures, cultures, identities, bodies, and imaginaries are constructed through these engagements today and in the past, this seminar takes a critical look at the interconnections and disconnections that consumption entails. Doing so we will look at the various constructs wrapped up with consumption (gifts, commodities, value, nature, and culture), the various scales of consumption (the local and the global), their intermediaries (the state, companies, citizens) and their sites (bodies, the home, parks, stores, and museums) and their ecological and cultural impacts. Collectively we will explore through readings as well as materials and exhibits at the Smithsonian the following questions: What are the theories that help us to understand consumption, resource making/unmaking and value creation? How do things become resources and commodities? How do they circulate once they are transformed as such? How is social identity configured through the lenses of commodities and consumption? What are the social, political and ecological impacts of consumption? In what ways do nation states, NGOs and institutions (museums, national parks, zoos) promote and confront consumption? How is consumption gendered? How do we consume ethically? How do we write ethnographically about this nexus of issues?

This seminar is an interdisciplinary investigation of societies engagement and consumption of natural and cultural resources cross-cultural, and the values generated through these activities. The Smithsonian Institutions' research collections and exhibits are central to the seminar. Seminars will involve engagement with anthropological collections and museum displays to understand the topics at hand.



## Assignments

- 1. Class Participation and Attendance – 10%** Each student will participate in each class discussion. This means speaking in class, saying reasonably well thought-out things that demonstrate that you have done the assigned readings. This DOES NOT mean recounting personal experience or diverging from the readings to discuss current events. Non-participation will result in a lower final grade in the course.
- 2. Leading Seminar Discussion, Critical Analysis & Questions – 20%** Each student will lead one seminar discussion. This does not mean that you will summarize the readings for the seminar, rather you will prepare a two page single spaced critical analysis of the core readings (think of this as a guide to your discussion) (to be e-mailed to the instructor no later than 9 am on the day of the seminar) and a set of discussion questions (to be e-mailed to the entire seminar no later than 9 am on the day of seminar). Your two page critical analysis and one page of questions (minimum of 5 discussion questions) will provide grounds for the beginning of our discussion. I expect you to use these questions to elicit discussion as you lead the seminar. After your seminar these essays will be shared with the seminar. **Please feel free to bring hand-outs and or a power-point to help lead the discussion.**
- 3. Unintended Journeys Blog Post – 20%** In groups of two - students will choose and write a two page blog post for the new NMNH photography show Unintended Journey's Blog. In collaboration with Magnum Photography, this show highlights our relationship to the environment and the plight of environmental and disaster refugees following disruptive events. You will choose one of the following topics to write about: 1) Katrina, Gulf Mexico Coast (2005); 2) Haitian Earthquake (2010); 3) Tsunami in Japan (2011); 4) ongoing Flooding in Bangladesh; 5) ongoing Desertification in East Africa 6) Role of Photography and Media; 7) Relationship to our Environment (Anthropocene); 8) Societal Response and Humanitarian Aid. I am open to other topics. These posts will engage with the exhibit and help to further contextualize the exhibit's content and or elaborate on one of its themes. You can decide to explore one or a set of photographs, incorporate contextualizing video and reference other sites. Once finished, and necessary revisions are made, these pieces will be published on the exhibit's blog attributed to you. These will be due on a rolling basis. Group 1: Feb. 13; Group 2: Feb. 20 ;Group 3 Feb 27; Group 4 March 6.
- 4. Paper – 50%** Each of you will do a “commodity ethnography” paper, or in other words a paper about something that is consumed by us or others. These papers will trace the production, distribution, and consumption of a commodity of your choice. Projects can range from Smithsonian branded water, iPhones; IKEA furniture; tuna fish; and Russian Brides. To date I have had papers on kava, mattresses, tofu, elephants, and AK-47s, cut flowers, gay identity in Uganda, potato chips, carbon, Burberry trench coats, and coffee. This is a chance for you to be creative, and develop a paper that interests you. Each paper should include aspects of the following, but may choose to focus on a particular of set of these topics:
  - a. The short history of the product.** When did it arise? Who first made it? Why did people decide they needed it? Etc...
  - b. The ecology of the product.** What are the materials that make it? What are the by-products of production? Etc....
  - c. The production of the product.** Where is it made? Who makes it? What are the labor relations and labor politics of its production? Etc.....
  - d. The distribution of the product.** How does it get from production to consumption? Who ships it? What sorts of labor go into its distribution? What sorts of ecological impacts does its distribution have? Etc....
  - e. The consumption of the product.** Who buys it? Why? Where? Is the consumption gendered? Why do people think they need it?

- f. **The disposal of the product.** How is the product disposed? Is it recycled (in terms of recycling or in terms of going to second-hand shops? What are the ecological impacts of its disposal? Etc.....
- g. **The finances of the product?** Who makes money from the product along its commodity trajectory?

These papers must be 20 pages without bibliography. On **March 20** at the beginning of class an outline of the final paper is due. This outline will provide in 2 pages a sketch of the aim, scope and method of your intended paper, and be accompanied by a bibliography of relevant sources. **I expect you to do bibliographic research as appropriate for your project.** This outline is worth 5% of your final grade on the paper. I am happy to meet with you prior to this deadline to discuss your project. No late outlines will be accepted.

This final seminar (April 24) will be devoted to 10-minute presentations of your final papers (5 minutes comments). These presentations are worth 5% of your final paper grade. While I don't expect you to have everything finished for these presentations, I do expect you to have a coherent and well-argued presentation. These presentations are a chance for you to practice your presentation skills, and obtain feedback from the seminar about your topic. *I encourage you to incorporate this feedback into your final paper.* I encourage you all to use powerpoint for your presentation.

The final paper is due on **May 8** and should be submitted to me electronically as a word file. **Any paper after midnight will be considered late.**

**General guidelines for written assignments:** Please submit assignments on time. Late work will not be accepted. All written assignments should be typed in standard fonts (12 point Times) with 1-inch margins and 1.5 spacing. Please staple & paginate papers and put your name on each page. Please follow the citation/bibliographic format used in Current Anthropology.

5. Attendance to this seminar is mandatory and absences must be accompanied with a valid excuse (e.g. death in the family, documented illness, natural disaster).

#### Grading (out of 100)

- Seminar Participation: **10%**
- Seminar Discussion Leadership, Critical Analysis Paper and Critical Questions: **20%**
- Unintended Journeys Blog Post **20%**
- Final Paper: **50% (5% for outline, 5% for presentation and 40% for paper)**

#### Other Information

**Email Policy:** Email is a necessary evil, but it creates a false sense of social relations and allows us to become increasingly alienated from our colleagues and students. Please make every effort to call me or come by my office hours if you have questions about this class. You may, of course, email me the critical review and discussion questions mentioned above; and or be in touch by e-mail outside of normal hours.

**Required texts** are available for purchase at **GWU bookstore** and will be made available in the **GWU library**. Assigned articles and chapters will be available via e-mail as PDFs. The readings are divided between **required** and **further reading**. **Further readings** are intended to help provide further context for the assigned reading, and should be read by those of you leading a seminar discussion.

### **Required Texts (in order of reading)**

- Mauss, M. 2000. *The Gift. The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. London: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Marx, K. 1976 [1867]. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume One*. London: Penguin Books. The text is online: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/>
- Smith, N. 1990 [1984] *Uneven development: nature, capital, and the production of space*. New York, NY: Blackwell. The text is online: <http://neil-smith.net/uneven-development>
- Debord, G. 2006. *Society of the Spectacle*. London: Rebel Press. Text online here: <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/debord/society.htm>
- Newell, S. 2012. *The modernity bluff crime, consumption, and citizenship in Côte d'Ivoire*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ferry, Elizabeth E. 2013 *Minerals, Collecting and Value Across the US-Mexican Border*. Indiana University Press.
- West, P. 2012. *From modern production to imagined primitive the social world of coffee from Papua New Guinea*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Paxson, Heather, 2012. *The Life of Cheese: Crafting Food and Value in America*. UC Press.
- Muehlmann, S.R. 2013. *Where the River Ends: Contested Indigeneity in the Mexican Colorado Delta*. Duke University Press.

**Expectations: I expect you to come to the seminar having read the readings and ready to actively discuss the topics at hand.**

### **Week 1 (Jan. 14) No Seminar due to Art of Tapa Cloth Conference in Cologne, Germany**

*Please note that to make up for this missed seminar, we will have two three-hour seminar on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> of January.*

### **Week 2 (Jan. 23) The Gift (Seminar will run from 5-8)**

A key text in the history of anthropology, *The Gift*, by Marcel Mauss, will form the center of our discussion about the nature and meaning of exchange, the social relations it engenders, and the value creation it affords. This will be read along Annette Weiner's important contribution on *inalienable wealth*, and Anna Tsing on supply chains.

- Mauss, M. 2000. *The Gift. The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. London: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Weiner, A. B. 1985. 'Inalienable Wealth.' *American Ethnologist* 12:210-227.
- Tsing, A. 2013. "Sorting out commodities: How capitalist value is made through gifts." *Hau* 3(1): 21-43.

### **Week 3 (Jan. 30) Commodities (Seminar will run from 5-8)**

In this seminar will turn to a discussion of the commodity, which as Marx (1976: 163) in his opus *Capital* notes is a 'very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties...' Our focus will again be on the social relations, values and ways in which commodities are made, and what capitalism as a process is.

- Marx, K. 1976 [1867]. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume One*. London: Penguin Books. The full text is online: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/>

Read Part One: *Commodities and Money*, Chapter 1 *The Commodity* (pp. 125-177), Chapter 2 *Exchange* and Chapter 3 *Money, or the Circulation of Commodities* (pp. 189-244).

- Stallybrass, P. 1998. 'Marx's Coat.' In *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Places*. (ed.) P. Spyer, pp. 183-207. London: Routledge.
- Graeber, D. 2006. "Turning Modes of Production Inside Out Or, Why Capitalism is a Transformation of Slavery." *Critique of Anthropology* 26(1): 61-85.

*Further Reading:*

- Carrier, J.G. and J. Heymann. 1997 Consumption and Political Economy. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2: 355-373.
- Marx, K. 1976 [1867]. "Working Day." In *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume One*. London: Penguin Books. The full text is online: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch10.htm#S1>
- Marx, K. 1976 [1867]. "Primitive Accumulation." In *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume One*. London: Penguin Books. The full text is online: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch26.htm>

**Week 4 (Feb. 6) No Seminar due to Association of Social Anthropologists in Oceania (ASAO) Meetings in Kona, Hawai'i**

*Please note that to make up for this missed seminar, we will have two three-hour seminar on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of February.*

**Week 5 (Feb. 13) Creating & Consuming Nature (Seminar will run from 5-8)**

In this seminar we will turn our discussion to the creation of nature through a discussion of the production of space and place as articulated by the critical geographer Smith. Doing so we will address an important lacuna in Marx's work regarding nature and resources.

- Smith, N. 1990 [1984] *Uneven development: nature, capital, and the production of space*. New York, NY: Blackwell. The full text is online: <http://neil-smith.net/uneven-development>
- Ogden, Laure et al. 2013. "Global assemblages, resilience, and Earth Stewardship in the Anthropocene." *Frontiers in Ecology & the Environment* 11(7): 341-347.
- Escobar, A. 1999. 'After Nature: Steps to an Antiessential Political Ecology.' *Current Anthropology* 40, 1-30.
- Castree, N. 2003. 'Commodifying what nature?' *Progress in Human Geography* 27(2): 273-297.

*Further Reading:*

- Marston, S. 2000. "The Social Construction of Scale." *Progress in Human Geography* 24(2): 219-242.
- Tsing, A. 2004. "Frontiers of Capitalism." In *Friction*, pp.27-50. Princeton: University of Princeton Press.

**GROUP 1 Blog Post due**

**Week 6 (Feb. 20) Consuming the World Through Images (Seminar will run from 5-8)**

Turning from space we will look at the mediation of social relations through images – specifically what Debord terms *spectacle* – which generate desire and renders the world consumable as a set of images or *simulacra* in Baudrillard's terms.

- Debord, G. 2006. *Society of the Spectacle*. London: Rebel Press. Text online here: <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/debord/society.htm>
- Baudrillard, J. 1988 [1983] "Simulacra and Simulations." In *Selected Writings*. Edited by Mark Poster, pp. 166-184. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Igoe, J. 2010. 'The Spectacle of Nature in the Global Economy of Appearances: Anthropological Engagements with the Spectacular Mediations of Transnational Conservation.' *Critique of Anthropology* 30:375-397.

### *Further Reading*

- Tsing, A. 2004. "Economy of Appearances." In *Friction*, pp. 55-80. Princeton: University of Princeton Press.
- Kockelman, P. 2006. A Semiotic Ontology of the Commodity." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 16(1):76–102.

## **GROUP 2 Blog Post due**

### **Week 7 (Feb. 27) Consuming Modernity**

For this seminar we will examine the case of excessive consumption in Côte d'Ivoire as presented by Newell. Doing so we will consider the performance of identities through consumption and what he terms the *bluff* as it applies locally and more globally.

- Newell, S. 2012. *The modernity bluff crime, consumption, and citizenship in Côte d'Ivoire*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

### *Further Reading*

- Bell, J. A. 2006. 'Marijuana, Guns, Crocodiles and Radios: Economies of Desire in the Purari Delta.' *Oceania* 76:220-234.
- Nakassis, C. V. 2013. "Brands and their Surfjets." *Cultural Anthropology* 28(1): 111-126.

## **GROUP 3 Blog Post due**

### **Week 8 (Mar. 6) Politics and Poetics of Minerals**

Through a focus on Ferry's account of mineral collecting and circulation we will examine how value is made and different types of knowledge about the cultural and natural world are constituted through these multiple engagements in and outside of Mexico.

- Ferry, Elizabeth E. 2013. *Minerals, Collecting and Value Across the US-Mexican Border*. Indiana University Press.

### *Further Reading*

- Tsing, A. L. 2009. "Supply Chains and the Human Condition." *Rethinking Marxism* 21:148-176.
- Latour, B. 1999. 'Circulating Reference: Sampling the Soil in the Amazon Forest.' In *Pandora's hope: essays on the reality of science studies*, pp. 24-79. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Brazeal, B. 2013. "Indian Religions in the Global Emerald Trade: A Photo Essay." *Visual Anthropology Review* 28(2):120-132.

## **GROUP 4 Blog Post due**

**March 7 – Cultural Planet lecture – Jerry Jacka (UTSA) "Challenges to Livelihood Resilience in the Anthropocene: Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management in a New Guinea Mining Area" (NMNH, Time TBA)**

### **Week 9 (March 13) Spring Break – No Seminar**

### **Week 10 (Mar. 20) The Commodity Chains and Value of Coffee**

The growing, production and consumption of coffee connects people to Papua New Guinea in various ways. We will consider the imaginaries and values that are created along coffee's commodity chain.

- West, P. 2012. *From modern production to imagined primitive the social world of coffee from Papua New Guinea*. Durham: Duke University Press.

#### *Further Reading*

- Kopytoff, I. 1986. 'The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process.' In *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (ed.) A. Appadurai, pp. 64-94. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Foster, R. 2005. "Commodity futures: Labour, love and value." *Anthropology Today* 21:8-12.

#### \*\*\*\* Research Paper Outlines Due\*\*\*\*

#### **Week 11 (Mar. 27) Artisanal Food and the Ethics Consumption**

Continuing our focus on food, we will turn our attention to cheese and doing so use this commodity to think around the concept of *terroir* and what the ethics, realities and rhetorics of local or slow food are, how they come to shape the places, humans and non-humans involved in their making.

- Paxson, Heather, 2012. *The Life of Cheese: Crafting Food and Value in America*. UC Press.

#### *Further Reading*

- Carrier, J.G. 2010. "Protecting the Environment the Natural Way: Ethical Consumption and Commodity Fetishism." *Antipode* 42(3): 672–689.
- Weiss, B. 2011. "Making Pigs Local: Discerning the Sensory Character of Place." *Cultural Anthropology*, 26: 438–461.

**March 29 – Environmental Film Festival – Unintended Journeys program (noon to 5pm) featuring three films on climate change <http://www.dcenvironmentalfilmfest.org/>**

#### **Week 12 (Apr. 3) Indigeneity, Consumption and Value**

Indigeneity has become an important means by which places are being reconfigured as communities assert their sovereignty and acquire rights to different resources. Focusing on Muehlmann's account of the Cucapa people in the Gulf of California, Mexico we will look at how they are dealing with the various scales of dispossession that they are facing.

- Muehlmann, S.R. 2013. *Where the River Ends: Contested Indigeneity in the Mexican Colorado Delta*. Duke University Press.

#### *Further Reading:*

- Merlan, F. 2009. "Indigeneity: Global and Local." *Current Anthropology* 50(3): 303-333.
- Murray Li, T. 2010. "Indigeneity, Capitalism, and the Management of Dispossession." *Current Anthropology* 51(3): 385-414.
- Moore, D. S., A. Pandian, and J. Kosek. 2003. "The cultural Politics of Race and Nature: Terrians of Power and Practice." In *Race, nature and the politics of difference*, edited by D. S. Moore, A. Pandian and J. Kosek, pp. 1-70. Durham: Duke University Press.

#### **Week 13 (Apr. 10) The Role of Natural History Museums in the Anthropocene**

Accepting that we are living in the Anthropocene ('Age of Man'), a period of accelerated change in climate, resource use, and biodiversity alongside rapid social, economic, political, and technological transformation – what is the role (if any) of museums and more specifically Natural History Museums? Thinking about the challenges of this new era, we will think critically about museum efforts to deal with these transformations. Specifically we will critically think about the following efforts of the Smithsonian to tackle issues around the Anthropocene through the following programs: Recovering Voices Initiative

([http://anthropology.si.edu/recovering\\_voices/](http://anthropology.si.edu/recovering_voices/)), Encyclopedia of Life (<http://eol.org/>) and Global Genome Initiative (<http://www.mnh.si.edu/ggi/>).

- Bell, J.A., Christen, K. and M. Turin 2013. "Introduction: After the Return." *Museum Anthropology Review* 7(1-2):1-21.
- Hollinger, E. *et. al.* 2013. "Tlingit-Smithsonian Collaborations with 3D Digitization of Cultural Objects." *Museum Anthropology Review* 7(1-2):201-253.
- Lowe, C. 2004. "Making the Monkey: How the Togeian Macaque Went from "New Form" to "Endemic Species" in Indonesians' Conservation Biology." *Cultural Anthropology* 19(4): 491-516.
- Stewart Brand "The dawn of de-extinction. Are you ready?" April 23, 2013 TEDx Talk (<http://longnow.org/revive/de-extinction/2013/stewart-brand-the-dawn-of-de-extinction-are-you-ready/>) As part of listening to this 18 minute talk, look at the site *Revive and Restore* (<http://longnow.org/revive/>)

*Further Reading:*

- Helmreich, S. 2008. "Species of Biocapital." *Science as Culture* 17(4):463-478.
- Steffen, W., J. Grinevald, P. Crutzen, and J. McNeill. 2011. "The Anthropocene: conceptual and historical perspectives." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A* 369: 842–867
- Rivenburgh, N.K. 2013. "Media framing of complex issues: The case of endangered languages." *Public Understandings of Science* 22: 704-715.

**Week 14 (Apr. 17) No seminar**

**Week 15 (Apr. 24) Final Project Presentations**

**April 25 - Cultural Planet lecture – Frank Lake (USDA Forest Service) "Collaborative methods to understand the history and ecology of the Klamath-Siskiyou Region- Incorporating Tribal Knowledge with Scientific Inquiry" (NMNH, Time TBA)**

**May 7 Final Paper due**