

## Property and Piracy

Anthropology 6591.10

Fall 2016

**Instructor:** Dr. Alexander S. Dent  
**Time:** M 1-3:30PM  
**Location:** Old Main 210 (Discourse Lab)  
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(Hortense Amsterdam House)  
**Office hours:** T 1:30-3:30  
Or by appointment



### Introduction

Legal scholars, economists, political scientists, and policy-makers often imagine that “intellectual property” has existed throughout history, and that the concept translates easily across cultures. We will explore the hypothesis that IP arises through culturally and historically distinct *dialogues* with piracies of various sorts. We will explore these dialogues by looking at the notion of “piracy” across a broad spectrum of situations, and consider ways IP is constituted in these different moments. Case studies will include indigenous cultures, the internet, the 17<sup>th</sup> century Caribbean, “fake” artifacts, and “counterfeit” brands. The course addresses itself to a broad audience, but will employ notions of “performance” from linguistic anthropology in order to determine how IP and piracy mutually constitute one another. It will be of interest to those concerned with circulation, media, materiality, and popular culture. No experience with linguistics is necessary. Open to upper-level undergraduates who have taken Anth 1004, with permission from instructor.

### Learning Goals

By the end of this class, students should be able to:

- elaborate their own perspectives on the relationship between digital technology, intellectual property, and piracy
- apply anthropological tools such as fields of cultural production, performance, and genres to complex institutional structures and practices
- understand the way in which concepts such as protection, creativity, and “competition” receive support from naturalizing “ideologies”

### Course Requirements

**1) Class participation, and attendance – 20 % (14pts. for attendance, 6pts for participation)**

Attendance is mandatory; I will distribute a signup sheet at the beginning of each class. You are expected to come to class with the reading done, and, crucially, ready to *comment* on that reading.

As part of your participation grade, each week you should email me a minimum one-paragraph comment on the readings. This should be sent to me by noon of the Friday before class

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(asdent@gwu.edu); if this is not a convenient time for you, email your thoughts to me even earlier rather than miss the deadline. I take these weekly paragraphs seriously, and use them as part of your participation grade. Use them to grapple with the arguments that are presented in the texts for that week. You might choose to compare authors within the course, or you could choose to argue with a particular aspect of one of the texts. But whatever you do, *engage* with something in detail, and choose a focused aspect of the reading. Do not simply regurgitate the argument. This exercise is not intended to test your comprehension, which I simply assume. Do not feel as though you need to “cover” all of the reading. Instead, feel free to be highly selective. *You do not need to complete a response paper in the week in which you are presenting.*

### **2) In-Class Presentation – 20%**

During the semester each of you will have the opportunity to lead one week’s discussion by presenting the key ideas of the assigned texts and raising questions for conversation. Presenters may draw on additional readings and biographical information to contextualize the book or articles discussed. Novel approaches are encouraged; think of a creative way to get across your point, and consider bringing something that is relevant for show-and-tell. Think of these presentations both as an opportunity for you to make a sophisticated *argument* about that week’s reading, and as a catalyst for discussion. Though the exact structure of the presentation is up to you, and experimentation is certainly welcome, consider attending to the following: 1) briefly cover the main arguments of the readings (*briefly*); 2) outline the kinds of data the author uses to support his/her points; 3) state the extent to which you agree or disagree with the arguments made; 4) present questions for discussion. Feel free to produce hand-outs, or use other materials, such as powerpoint. *Do not treat this as an opportunity to summarize the reading, which is dull and merely recaps what others should already know. Instead, interpret and react intelligently.* I will grade as follows: 1/3<sup>rd</sup> for demonstrated knowledge of the text; 1/3<sup>rd</sup> for the quality of questions asked; and 1/3<sup>rd</sup> for the quality and duration of the ensuing discussion.

### **3) Paper – 35% -- Due, 12/5.**

Take one of the theoretical approaches used in this course and apply it to a body of data of your choosing. This could be ethnographic data that you have collected yourself, or it could be archival. You should at all costs come to discuss your paper topic with me before starting to work on this. I recommend starting to think about this assignment by deciding on the data, at least, by the fourth week of classes; the theoretical approach may emerge later. This means selecting an empirical case that you’re interested in. For instance, how does the use of bit-torrents effect film consumption on college campuses? How do discourses of neoliberalism approach branding? What are the various approaches to thinking of culture as a kind of property? As I say, settling on a theoretical approach could well take more time, but do pick your topic early.

This is a 20 pp. paper, Times 12pt., regular margins, double spaced. Stay within the required length. Do not play font, margin, and spacing games in order to write more or less; I’ve played them myself and will recognize them.

*The paper is due at 1PM on 12/5. **Submit the paper through Blackboard’s ‘Safe Assign’; I will establish a link for these purposes.** I deduct 1/3 of a grade for each day the paper is late. Thus, at 1:01, December 5<sup>th</sup>, the paper is a day late. By a third of a grade, I mean that if your paper was an A, but you turned it in to me the next day, it automatically becomes an A-. If it was an A-, it becomes a B+. And so forth.*

### **4) Take-Home Final – 25% -- handed out after class on 12/12, handed in before 5PM 12/17.**

This take-home final will require you to synthesize material from the whole semester. I will provide concrete details on the exam structure in class, but once again, it will be submitted through Safe Assign on Blackboard.

## **A Note on Time and Effort**

I expect that you will spend about six hours per week outside of class preparing readings, writing your responses, and working on your paper.

## **Academic Integrity**

All students must practice academic integrity. This means doing your own work, and when you use *the words and ideas of others in any written work, you must:* 1) identify quotations with quotation marks; and 2) indicate the source of ideas that are not your own using social sciences notation form. If you have any questions at all about what this means, you should speak to the instructor. Plagiarism, and all breaches of academic integrity (for example, the sale of lecture-notes, or use of content from the internet as though it was your own), will be severely dealt with in accordance with the University's policies and procedures. For more information on The George Washington University's policies on academic integrity, consult: <http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html>

*The policy on academic integrity in this course is that if you are caught cheating on any assignment or exam, you will receive a zero for that assignment or exam. This infraction will be reported to the University's Academic Integrity Council. You will be **clearly** notified by the instructor in person or by email before the Council is informed.*

## **Disability Support Services (DSS)**

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in the Marvin Center, Suite 242, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: <http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/>

## **University Counseling Center (UCC) 202.994.5300**

The University Counseling Center (UCC) offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include: - crisis and emergency mental health consultations - confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals  
<http://gwired.gwu.edu/counsel/CounselingServices/AcademicSupportServices>

## **Security**

In the case of an emergency, if at all possible, the class should shelter in place. If the building that the class is in is affected, follow the evacuation procedures for the building. After evacuation, seek shelter at a predetermined rendezvous location.

## **Reading**

I recommend securing reading through Amazon. Other chapters and articles will be available on the course's Blackboard site – in Electronic Reserves (**ER**).

## **Required Books**

Boateng, Boatema. 2010. *The Copyright Thing Doesn't Work Here*. University of Minnesota Press.

Brown, Michael. 2004. *Who Owns Native Culture?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Coombe, Rosemary. 1998. *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Property: Authorship, Appropriation, and the Law*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Eckstein, Lars & Anja Schwarz, eds. 2014. *Postcolonial Piracy: Media Distribution and Cultural Production*

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*in the Global South*. Bloomsbury.

Johns, Adrian. 2010. *Piracy: The Intellectual Property Wars from Gutenberg to Gates*. University of Chicago Press.

Larkin, Brian. 2008. *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Lessig, Lawrence. 2004. *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity*. New York: Penguin.

Mazzarella, William. 2013. *Censorium: Cinema and the Open Edge of Mass Publicity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

SSRC. 2011. *Media Piracy in Emerging Economies*. SSRC Press.

Wong, Winnie. 2014. *Van Gogh on Demand: China and the Readymade*. Chicago. University of Chicago Press.

#### **Week 1**

##### **Introduction – Cataclysms and Creativities**

**M – 8/29**

Phillips. *Knockoff*. Introduction and Chapter 1 (read pp. 1-17)

Available as an ebook at Gelman -- <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/gwu/docDetail.action?docID=10106648>

Dent -- Annual Reviews Article:

<http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102215-100127>

(Access it through Gelman – DON'T pay for it)

Also listen to This American Life Episode called “When Patents Attack”:

<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/441/when-patents-attack>

#### **Week 2**

**Labor Day**

**M – 9/5**

No class

#### **Week 3**

**The Piracy-IP Dialogue – Historically**

**M – 9/12**

Johns

#### **Week 4**

**Theoretical Orientations**

**M – 9/19**

Michael Warner. “Publics and Counter-Publics”

Pierre Bourdieu. “Fields of Cultural Production”

Baumann & Briggs. “Genre, Intertextuality, and Social Power,” and “Performance”

Benjamin. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”

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**Week 5**

**“Piracy,” Broadly Conceived**

**M – 9/26**

Jatin Dua, “After Piracy?”

-- can be found at --

<https://experts.umich.edu/en/persons/jatin-dua>

Dent, Dawdy, Nakassis, Skinner, Galvin, Thomas, Gaynor, Johns

-- can be found at --

<http://muse.jhu.edu/issue/26022>

*Make sure to access this through Gelman Library – do not pay for the articles, because you already have!*

**Week 6**

**The “Costs” of IP Protection in a Digital Age**

**M – 10/3**

Lessig.

**Week 7**

**Copying**

**M – 10/10**

Wong.

**Week 8**

**Alternative Medias**

**W – 10/17**

Larkin.

**Week 9**

**Postcolonial Piracies**

**M – 10/24**

Eckstein & Schwarz.

**Week 10**

**Indigenous appropriations**

**M – 10/31**

Brown.

**Week 11**

**Ethnography of the Law**

**M – 11/7**

Coombe.

**Week 12**

**Piratical Practices and Social-Scientific Intervention**

**M – 11/14**

SSRC Report

-- can be found at --

<http://www.ssrc.org/publications/view/C4A69B1C-8051-E011-9A1B-001CC477EC84/>

Download the free version; do not pay.

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**Week 13**

**Dialogics**

**M -- 11/21**

Articles by Dent from Cultural Anthropology, The Journal of Linguistic Anthropology, American Ethnologist, Current Anthropology (in press), Anthropological Quarterly (in press), and Routledge volume edited by Kuipers and Bell (in press).

*I will upload these to Bb.*

**Week 14**

**Cinema & Publicity**

**M – 11/28**

Mazzarella.

**Week 15**

**M – 12/5**

**Locality as Dysfunction**

Boateng.

*PAPERS DUE THROUGH BLACKBOARD.*

**Week 16**

**Closing**

**M – 12/12**

Other reading TBA