
SAN 2

ANTHROPOLOGY OF CONSUMPTION

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*****Starred readings are required*****

Introduction, and questions to be considered

In popular terminology we 'consume' almost everything, from bacon rolls to television, from weather reports to adventure experiences. There are frontiers of consumption all around us, most obviously in education, where both students and teachers are now encouraged to think of ourselves as in the relationship of consumer and provider of a good, within a global market made up of university-experience providers. The anthropology of consumption, therefore, is not without its politics, and this must be taken into account when we use the language of consumption.

'Consumption' as an explanatory device was bequeathed to the discipline by political economy, economics, and anthropological theory, but thinking in terms of 'consumer' and 'provider' is also enthusiastically supported by powerful profit-interests. So how should we treat the 'consumer society' anthropologically? How should we understand consumers and their desires, as liberating? Deluded? Empowering? Marginalising? Could consumption be a (or the) key to understanding our collective experiences? An opportunity to become relevant? What about those people who lie at the peripheries and the frontiers of the global market, those who were once called 'tribal', are they also consumers? What then should we make of situations where British people 'consume' media of distant people performing 'tribalism' in exchange for consumer goods? Could the common language of consumption even/ever offer a radical level playing field for anthropological inquiry?

Is a can of coke really the same product consumed in Thetford and Trinidad, Portugal and Papua New Guinea? Ethnographically the answer must surely be no, but is their divergence best understood through the idiom of the consumer as common denominator. As anthropologists should we work with or reject a language that is tied to how powerful interests want you to think about yourself? On what basis should such a judgement be made anyway? What is the baggage that comes with "consumption," a word that was once shorthand for a terminal disease and which implies above all oral annihilation? What are the politics and the cultural circumstances under which the 'anthropology of consumption' flourishes? Who consumes what the subdiscipline produces? What are their motivations? These lectures examine consumption as a concept and its use in anthropology, critically evaluating one of our most successful subdisciplines.

Lecture 1: Consumption and its place in Political Economy and Economic Anthropology.

What is consumption? What divides consumption, exchange and production, and what is the history of this division in anthropology? What does the anthropology of consumption look at?

Core reading:

*Douglas, Mary, and Baron Isherwood. 1979. *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*. New York: Basic Books. Chapter 3: 56-70

* Miller, Daniel, 1995. 'Consumption as the vanguard of history', in *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies*. London: Routledge, pp1-57.

*Veblen, Thorstein. 1899. *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*. New York: Macmillan. (Especially chapters 1 & 4).

Background reading:

Miller, Daniel. 1995. "Consumption and Commodities." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24: 141–61.

Hann, Chris and Keith Hart, 2011. *Economic anthropology*, Polity, Chapter 8: One-world capitalism, pp142-62

Miller, Daniel. 1998. *A Theory of Shopping*. Ithaca: Polity Press.

Miller, Daniel. 1995. "Consumption and Commodities." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24: 141–61.

Bataille, Georges. 1991 [1949]. *The Accursed Share*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Zone Books.

Baudrillard, Jean. 1998 [1970]. *The Consumer Society*. Paris: Gaillmard.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. *Small Places, Large Issues-: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropolog*. Pluto Press, 2001. Chapter 12: 'Exchange', pp176-192

Friedman, Jonathan, ed. 1994. *Consumption and Identity*. Amsterdam: OPA.

Miller, Daniel, ed. 1995. *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies*. London: Routledge.

Lecture 2: Consumption and the eating metaphor

This lecture concentrates on consumption as a food metaphor applied to other objects, and anthropological attempts to grasp the consumption (as opposed to the simple eating) of food and drink. It involves examples from across the world, and is itself an example of what the anthropology of consumption typically explores.

Core reading:

*Wilk, Richard. 2004. "Morals and Metaphors: The Meaning of Consumption." In *Elusive consumption*, edited by Karin Ekstrom and Helene Brembeck, 11–26. London: Berg.

*Mintz, Sidney. 1985. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Viking Penguin. Chapter 4: 'Consumption'

*Miller, Daniel. 1998. "Coca-Cola: A Sweet Black Drink from Trinidad." In *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter*, edited by Daniel Miller, 169–87. London: University College London Press.

*Foster, Robert. 2008. *Coca-Globalization: Following Soft Drinks from New York to New Guinea*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Chapter 4: 'A Network of Perspectives, pp99-145

Related reading:

Foster, Robert J., 1995. *Social Reproduction and History in Melanesia: Mortuary Ritual, Gift Exchange, and Custom in the Tanga Islands*, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, Chapter

Munn, Nancy D., 1986. *The Fame of Gawa: A Symbolic Study of Value Transformation in a Massim (Papua New Guinea) Society*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, Chapter 3: pp49-73

Gewertz, Deborah B and Frederick Karl Errington, 2010. *Cheap meat: Flap food nations in the Pacific Islands*, Univ of California Press, Chapter 4 (Papua New Guinea's Flaps): pp72-95.

Rappaport, Roy A, 2000. *Pigs for the ancestors: ritual in the ecology of a New Guinea people*, Waveland Press

Douglas, Mary, 2002. 'Purity and Danger. 1966', *New York: Routledge*, chapter 4: The Abominations of Leviticus

Hirsch, Eric, 1990. 'From Bones to Betelnuts: Processes of Ritual Transformation and the Development of 'National Culture' in Papua New Guinea', *Man*, p18-34

Hirsch, Eric, 1994. 'Strategies of Centredness in Papua New Guinea', in Friedman, Jonathan, (ed.) *Consumption and Identity*. Amsterdam: OPA.

Marshall, Mac, 2013. *Drinking smoke: the tobacco syndemic in Oceania*, University of Hawai'i Press, Chapter 2: pp22-43

Lecture 4: Money and Consumption

In this lecture we consider those domains where consumption blurs into production or exchange, and on the way discourses of consumption rely on money to bring things into the same realm where they can be compared and consumed. Money is a medium which can be consumed but (usually) not destroyed. We look in particular at societies whose first experience with state-issued currency is relatively recent, and how this makes all forms of 'consumption' slippery.

Core reading:

*Stallybrass, Peter, 1998. 'Marx's coat', in Patricia Spyer (ed), *Border fetishisms: Material objects in unstable spaces*, pp183-207

*Reed, Adam, 2007. 'Smuk is king': the action of cigarettes in a Papua New Guinea prison. In *Thinking through things: theorizing artefacts ethnographically* (eds.) A. Henare, M. Holbraad & S. Wastell, London: Routledge, Chapter 2: pp32-46.

*Kwon, Heonik, 2007. 'The dollarization of Vietnamese ghost money', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 13:1: 73-90

*Foster, Robert. 2002. *Materializing the Nation: Commodities, Consumption, and Media in Papua New Guinea*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Chapter 2: pp36-62

Supplementary reading:

Pickles, Anthony J, 2013. 'Pocket calculator: a humdrum 'obviator' in Papua New Guinea?', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 19:3: 510-526

Munn, Nancy D., 1986. *The Fame of Gawa: A Symbolic Study of Value Transformation in a Massim (Papua New Guinea) Society*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, Chapter 3: pp49-73

Cox, John, 2011. 'Prosperity, nation and consumption: fast money schemes in Papua New Guinea', *Managing modernity in the Western Pacific*, Chapter 6: pp172-200.

Stasch, Rupert, 2015. 'Introduction: Double Signs and Intrasocietal Heterogeneity in Primitivist Tourism Encounters', *Ethnos*, 80:4: 433-447

Sexton, Lorraine Dusak, 1982. 'A Women's Savings and Exchange System in Highland Papua New Guinea', *Oceania* 52:3: 167-198

Curry, George, 1999. 'Markets, social embeddedness and precapitalist societies: the case of village tradestores in Papua New Guinea', *Geoforum*, 30:3: 285-298

Foster, Robert J., 1995. *Nation Making: Emergent Identities in Postcolonial Melanesia*, Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, Chapter 3: pp63-84, and chapter 4: pp85-108.

Walsh, Andrew, 2003. "'Hot Money" and Daring Consumption in a Northern Malagasy Sapphire-Mining Town', *American Ethnologist* 30:2: 290-305

Sykes, Karen, 1999. 'After the 'Raskol' Feast', *Critique of anthropology*, 19:2: 157-174

Wood, Michael, 2006. 'Kamula accounts of rambo and the state of Papua New Guinea', *Oceania*, 76:1: 61-82

Robbins, Joel, & Akin, David, 1999. 'An Introduction to Melanesian Currencies: Agency, Identity, and Social Reproduction', in David Akin & Joel Robbins (eds.) *Money and Modernity: State and Local Currencies in Melanesia*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press

Lecture 4: Critiques of Consumption

This final lecture is concerned with critiques of consumption theory, both within anthropology and from other disciplines, and asks whether anthropology has been less critical of the consumption paradigm than it should. This goes back to real world examples of consumption-led societies championing consumption or anti-consumption as a means of protest, e.g. not buying an iPhone, eating locally, saving the high street, the slow food movement etc., while other peoples have become uneasy consumers. Can the anthropology of consumption incorporate its critiques?

Core Reading:

*Graeber, David. 2011. "Consumption." *Current Anthropology* 52 (4): 489–511.

*Carrier, James, and Josiah Heyman. 1997. "Consumption and Political Economy." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 3 (2): 355–73.

*Schor, Juliet B, 2007. 'In defense of consumer critique: revisiting the consumption debates of the twentieth century', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 611:1: 16-30

Supplementary reading:

Ngai, Pun, 2003. 'Subsumption or consumption? the phantom of consumer revolution in "globalizing" China', *Cultural Anthropology*, 18:4: 469-492

Campbell, Colin, 1997. 'When the meaning is not a message: a critique of the consumption as communication thesis', in Mica Nava, Andrew Blake, Iain MacRury and Barry Richards (eds) *Buy this book: studies in advertising and consumption*, London: Routledge

Gregory, Christopher A., 1982. *Gifts and Commodities*, London: Academic Press Limited, Chapter 2: pp25-38, and chapter 4: pp73-106

Colloredo-Mansfeld. 2005. "Consumption." In *A Handbook of Economic Anthropology*, edited by James Carrier, 210–28. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

Campbell, Colin, 1995. 'Conspicuous confusion? A critique of Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption', *Sociological Theory* 13:1: 37-47

Wilk, Richard R., 1997. 'A critique of desire: Distaste and dislike in consumer behavior', *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 1:2: 175-196

Those interested may wish to look at how 'anti-consumption' is treated in the business and marketing academic literature.