

Cultural Criticism and Theory

CES 405.1/Engl 410.1
Cultural Criticism and Theory
Spring 2015
Time: TTH:10:35-11:50
Place: Sloan 169

Instructor: Rory Ong
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Office Hours: T; 12:30-2:30 pm
or by appointment

Objectives: This course was designed to provide non-majors with a fundamental critical framework for analyzing various aspects of cultural theory and practice. Although in some respects introductory in scope, the course will examine cultural practices from a something of an intermediate to advanced perspective as well. This semester our focus will be on critical consumerism and ancillary aspects of consumerism (waste, food justice). We will begin by examining some of the ways we are educated from an early age to become consumers. This will involve looking at consumption, not as a natural function of the human condition, but as a contrived practice that reinforces gender stereotypes, racism, sexism, under the guise of American patriotism. We will also examine some of the consequences of unchecked consumerism in the guise of waste, and take a look at food piracy to examine the ways in which the production of food has become politicized and controlled by multinational corporations. Finally we will examine some alternative practices that may lead to more sustainable and just consumer habits and lifestyles, less waste, and food justice.

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will study about the history and legacy of consumerism and the development of consumption as a product of capitalization, gendered marketing, national consciousness, free enterprise, democracy, the individual, American culture, American leisure, and the American Dream.
- Students will engage with the modern problems related to consumerism, overconsumption, and the production of waste.
- Students will become proficient in the research, theories, and critical practices that are deployed in food production, food piracy, and the alternatives to large agribusiness strategies.
- Students will articulate themselves in both oral and written academic discourse that will require them to become familiar with, and employ, various analyses about consumption and consumerism through class discussion and facilitation in the classroom written reviews, and formal presentations.

Required Texts:

Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash. Edward Humes.

Water Wars. Vandana Shiva.

Educating the Consumer-Citizen. Joel Spring.

Course Requirements:

Reading Responses

Students will write short 1-2 page weekly essay responses over the assigned course readings. These will be a combination of instructor prompts and student driven responses. These responses are to assess your engagement with the readings. The responses will count toward 20% of your grade.

Chapter Review/Presentations

You are also required to write one (1) chapter review, 3-4 pages long, typed and double-spaced. This is a summary of the materials we read for a particular day. The review must thoughtfully engage and discuss the assigned reading by explaining some of the major points of analysis in relation to the theme of consumption. Additionally, you will present your review to the class in a brief 5-10 minute powerpoint. **Highlighting 3-4 key points of the reading is the main goal here. However, you are also to bring 1 or 2 substantive questions to leave with the class to consider as well.** The written portion is due on the same day you give your powerpoint synopsis to the class. The review will count as 25% of the total grade.

Group Proposals

Students will organize into groups to discuss and present their idea or outline of a social movement or concern that is related to issues surrounding consumption: consumption of the environment, food production, or of a critique/analysis of our consumption of some form of popular culture (film, television, advertisement, commercials, video games, children’s toys, or some pop icon, figure, image, persona, concept or idea). Students will present a short overview of their proposed group presentation (5-10 minutes). Groups must also meet with the instructor to approve their proposal. The Group Proposal will count 20% of the total grade.

Group Presentation

Students will formally present their analysis/critique of dominant consumer practices or their discussion of more just and sustainable consumer practices (4-6 students per group; 20 mins per group). This presentation will obviously be the fully developed presentation groups discussed in their proposals complete with prepared images, video, or other visual examples along with a corresponding full and substantive analysis. Each individual in each group must have a significant role. Students will be graded individually as well as receive an overall group grade. This group presentation will count 35% of the total grade.

Policies:

Grading

Grades will be averaged in the following proportions:

Reading Responses _____	20%
Chapter Review _____	25%
Presentation Proposal _____	20%
Presentation _____	35%

Grading Scale

100-98=A+	Suggests that a student’s work is outstanding to excellent; The student’s work reflects an engaged comprehension of the content and focus of shows thoughtful insight into the complexities of the course. Students also show an attentive engagement with the course. Always well written and articulated.
97-93=A	
92-90=A-	
89-87=B+	Suggests the student’s work is very good to good; it reflects a very strong, engaged, and solid understanding of the material. Occasionally doesn’t go the extra step incritical analysis. Mostly well written and articulated.
86-83=B	
82-80=B-	
79-77=C+	Suggests the student’s work is adequate; it reflects a fair, but essentially disengaged, grasp of the material and doesn’t go very far in comprehen-
76-73=C	
72-70=C-	sion, or reflects a lack of understanding of the issues represented in the material. Unclearly written or articulated. There may be some attendance problems.
69-67=D+	Suggests the student’s work shows some, but little effort, and does not comprehend the material, is disengaged, or reveals a lack of reading, attention, and/or attendance.
66-63=D	
62-60=D-	

Attendance

Attendance is required. If you know in advance that you will have to miss class for a legitimate reason, contact me to see whether arrangements can be made to make up any work that will be missed. If you have not finished an assignment for a given class period, attend class anyway to avoid missing further assignments and in-class work/discussions. **Only institutional excuses will be accepted. If you have more than four unexcused absences, your grade will be lowered one point for every absence thereafter.**

Extra Credit

There may be opportunities for extra credit throughout the semester. I will announce those opportunities as they come up. Unless the instructor advertises an extra credit, students must get approval from the instructor. Extra Credit assignments must relate to the course content of CES 300. Extra Credit should be in the form of a short 1-2 page review of the event, lecture, or film attended–

typed and double-spaced. To receive the possible full credit, students must also make a connection in the review with the event, film, or lecture and the content of this course. **Students are allowed only 2 Extra Credit assignments.** Each Extra Credit will count 2.5 pts toward the student's overall final grade (for a total of 5 extra credit points).

Disability Accommodations

The Department of Critical Culture, Gender, and Race Studies supports members of our community who request disability accommodations. Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and need accommodations to fully participate in this class, please either visit or call the Access Center (Washington Building 217; 509-335-3417) to schedule an appointment with an Access Advisor. All accommodations MUST be approved through the Access Center.

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty, such as cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, and fraud, is prohibited as per the 2013-14 Student Handbook [WAC 504-26-202 <<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=504-26-202>>]. The proper use of primary or secondary research sources and without proper citation or acknowledgment, or copying and claiming someone else's work as your own, is illegal and is not acceptable in this or any other class at WSU. Whether intentional or unintentional, academic dishonesty will result in a grade of F for the assignment in question, or a grade of "F" for the entire course. Should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty, we will discuss the situation with you before penalties are enforced.

Classroom Etiquette

Out of respect for your classmates and the instructor, **all cell phones must be turned off. iPods and any other devices for listening to music, podcasts, radio, or for text messaging are also prohibited in class. Unless you have a documented disability, no earphones are allowed in class. Use of computers, pads, or e-notebooks of any kind are permitted only by approval of the instructor.** Any use of these items during class will automatically result in a loss of points from the student's final grade.

Campus Safety Plan Emergency Information

In the interest of campus safety and emergency procedures, please become familiar with the information available on the WSU-provided websites:

- <http://safetyplan.wsu.edu> Campus Safety Plan
- <http://oem.wsu.edu/emergencies> Emergency management web site
- <http://alert.wsu.edu> WSU Alert site

Syllabus:

Tuesday, January 13: Handout Syllabus. Introduction to Course.

Conspicuous Consumption: A Legacy of Consumerism

Thursday, January 15: **Video: NO LOGO.**

Tuesday, January 20: *Educating the Consumer Citizen* (ECC) Chpt One, pp: 1-27. Discuss consumer ideology; 19th C. protestant consumerism; enabling a consumer public; manufacturing consumer desires.

Thursday, January 22: *ECC* Chpt Two, pp: 28-61. Discuss women as consumers; gendered branding; home economics, race, consumption and the "white" family; "mass" psychology and consumption; fashion, normalcy and equal opportunity; Puritanism and immigration.

Tuesday, January 27: *ECC* Chpt Three, pp: 62-94. Discuss producing and consuming masculinity; a spermatic political economy?; High School Proms, sexuality and consumption, masculinity, consumption, and patriotism; the businessman; the cowboy; consuming eroticism.

Thursday, January 29: *ECC* Chpt Four, pp: 95-124. Discuss the impact of popular movies, radio, on consumption and American leisure.

- Tuesday, February 3: *ECC* Chpt Five and Six, pp: 125-154. Discuss manufacturing consumer consent in schools; free enterprise and consumption as democracy; consumption and Americanism; civic consumerism and the American Way; representing race, class, and gender in American popular culture
- Thursday, February 5: *ECC* Chpt Seven, pp: 182-208. Discuss the end of the individual; educating consumers for perpetual consumption.
- Tuesday, February 10: **Video: *Food Inc.***
- Thursday, February 12: **Video: *Food Inc.***

The Dilemmas of Consumerism: Overproduction, Overconsumption, and Garbage

- Tuesday, February 17: *Garbology*: Introduction, Chpts 1-2 pgs 1-58. Discuss the production of trash; trash collecting; production, consumption and waste; waste in the city. **Video: *Trashed (2007)*.**
- Thursday, February 19: *Garbology*: Chpts 3-4, pgs 59-106. Discuss American Dream or Wasteland?; mass media and overconsumption; manufacturing consumption, manufacturing waste; landfill nation; waste management.
- Tuesday, February 24: *Garbology*: Chpts 5-6, pgs 60-144. Discuss ocean waste; the plastic ocean; plastic in motion; Project Kaisei; the Pacific Garbage Patch.
- Thursday, February 26: **Video: *Trashed (2012)*.**
- Tuesday, March 3: **Video: *Trashed (2012)*.**
- Thursday, March 5: *Garbology*: Chpts 7-8, pp 145-186. Discuss trash trackers; smart trash; the illusion of waste management; the Garbage Project; contradictory trash habits; class and gender in trash; the Lean Cuisine Syndrome; trash or waste?
- Tuesday, March 10: *Garbology*: Chpts 9-10, pp 187-246. Discuss Recology; Recycled Art; the plastic bag dilemma; the Chicobag; Bag Monster; the history of the plastic bag; TerraCycle.
- Thursday, March 12: *Garbology*: Chpts 11-12. Discuss green cities (Portland OR; Copenhagen, Denmark); plasma gasification; trash burning power plants; mass burn technology; recycling vs. waste to energy debates; downsizing; cultural shift to consume less—waste less;
- Mon-Fri, March 16-20: Spring Break

Food Production, Food Piracy, Food Democracy

- Tuesday, March 24: **Video: *The World According to Monsanto***
- Thursday, March 26: **Video: *The World According to Monsanto***
- Tuesday, March 31: *Stolen Harvest* Chpts. 1-3 and “The Neoliberal State” by David Harvey. Discuss neoliberal ideology; agribusiness; free trade or forced trade?; monocultures; food democracy; the mustard oil dilemma; soy imperialism; consequences of industrial aquaculture—farmed seafood.
- Thursday, April 2: *Stolen Harvest* Chpt. 4-5. Discuss cattle industry; livestock economies; vegetarians into beef eaters; McDonaldization of world food; Reversing McDonaldization.

Tuesday, April 7:	<i>Stolen Harvest</i> Chpts. 6-7. Discuss Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO's); stealing seeds; WTO and biopiracy; genetic engineering and the myth of food security; biosafety; food democracy movements; food sustainability.
Thursday, April 9:	Video: <i>Bullshit!</i>
Tuesday, April 14:	Video: <i>Bullshit!</i> Course Evaluations.
Thursday, April 16:	Group Prep Day.
Tuesday, April 21:	Group Presentations.
Thursday, April 23:	Group Presentations.
Tuesday, April 28:	Group Presentations.
Thursday, April 30:	Group Presentations.
Mon-Fri, May 4-8:	Finals Week. No Final