

Introduction to Cultural Anthropology: Class 26
Creating Consumer Culture and its Impacts
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- Janus: Advertising and Global Culture
 - Janus says the “change agents” (the actors causing global cultural change right now) are **transnational corporations**. What are those?
 - **Corporation**: an organization that is legally a person
 - The corporation has all the rights and responsibilities of a person
 - It can make contracts, and must comply with them
 - It can earn and spend money, make profit and incur debt
 - But the individuals who operate it are not personally liable for its debts, errors, misfortunes, etc. unless they personally break laws
 - This is the reason people form corporations: so that the business bears the risk of business dealings, not the operators themselves
 - But unlike a person, who has many, complex social goals in life, a corporation has only the goals set for it
 - usually to make money
 - (it is possible to have a charitable nonprofit corporation, a research corporation, etc., but these are less common)
 - also unlike a person,
 - a corporation is immortal
 - it also cannot feel pain or sorrow, be shamed or rebuked, go to jail, or be executed
 - except in the sense of being dissolved if it loses all its money
 - that is, an immortal, single-minded profit-seeking entity that cannot be influenced by social sanctions except, arguably, by fines
- **transnational**: spanning multiple nation-states
 - thus hard for any one nation-state to control
 - and thus not necessarily aligned with any particular nation-state’s interests
- Note how similar this is to the British East India Company you read about in the Robbins extract
 - There was also a Dutch East India Company, and other large corporations starting at least with the beginning of European colonialism and industrialization in the mid-1700s
- Janus argues that transnational corporations are intentionally altering cultures in order to suit their ends: making profit
- Janus suggests that advertising offers “**consumer democracy**” as a substitute for political democracy
 - Political democracy: a citizen’s power to have his or her wishes counted in decisions about government actions: taxation, war, roads, schools, police, etc.
 - Consumer democracy: a consumer’s power to choose the products he or she purchases: Nike or Rebock
 - Purchases are an accessible way of expressing oneself or one’s desire for change; real political action is not

- According to Janus, transnational corporations tend to use similar advertising across markets, both to save costs and because US and European cultures seem attractive in their wealth and luxury
 - This is somewhat less true today than it was 25 years ago, when this was written, but still applies to a considerable extent
 - Result: people in other countries see advertisements that feature European-looking people and values
 - Reinforcing the idea that their culture is worth less than the wealthy, white, European one
 - That traditional or old is bad, and modern and new is good
 - Example: buildings of “materia noble” in Peru replacing the historic structures that foreign tourists come to see
 - Example: Peruvian billboards for condensed milk all feature blonde, white kids; for beer usually feature mestizo men and blonde, white women
 - Reduces respect for old people
 - Who embody traditional ideas, not the ones in the advertisements
 - Reduces compliance with “old-fashioned” cultural rules that used to work to regulate behavior
 - Creates shame of being dark
 - and a market for skin and hair lighteners
 - Creates unhappiness and dissatisfaction, especially among the poor, who are least able to buy what is advertised
- Corporations are just trying to sell things, no one is forced to buy – isn’t that OK?
- Given the negative social effects of transnational marketing, who profits, and who bears the costs?
- What is the political consequence of teaching the poor to value things that they cannot have, or the non-white to value what they cannot be?
 - How do they handle the daily contradiction?
 - How can they maintain their identities?
 - Could this relate to
 - Resentment or hatred of other cultures? Terrorism? Revolution? “extremism”? crime? Depression?
- So, where does culture (or cultural constructs) come from?
 - The usual model: some sort of gradual group process of evolving ideas
 - Reacting in some ways to stimuli like the environment and ideas held by neighbors
 - Maybe sometimes more so due to trade, military conquest, colonization, etc.
 - But Janus’s article suggests the importance of advertising
 - How is that different?
 - It is intentionally directed towards a particular goal (selling a certain product)
 - It is an effort to bring about cultural change
 - With resources behind it to try to bring about that change
 - Any resulting changes are not the accumulated, incidental results of many people’s beliefs and decisions made for their own individual reasons
 - But instead are consciously directed

- Even if not always successful in the intended way
- As a result, it can not only affect the direction, but also speed up change
 - Advertisers look for trends, latch onto them to exploit their potential, and speed up their spread
 - Maybe also speed up their exhaustion and abandonment
- This aspect of advertising is well documented in a good video: “The Merchants of Cool”
- Does this change the nature of culture?
- Is political propaganda any different?
 - A common term for a TV or radio commercial in Peru is “propaganda”, which also has the same meaning as it does in English
 - Does political propaganda differ in its goals? How so?
 - Does it differ in its means? How?
 - Does it differ in its effects?
- Weatherford: Cocaine and the Economic Deterioration of Bolivia
 - What is globalized about this example?
 - What are the costs and benefits to Bolivians? To others?
 - How are these interrelated, that is, how is this a view of culture as system?
 - Weatherford says that it does not matter that the cocaine trade is illegal; any shift into the world market economy would do this
 - How so?
 - Is there reason to disagree?
- What should an anthropologist (a cultural relativist) think about this?
 - What are the ethical issues here?