

San José State University

Department of Anthropology

ANTH 136: Thought Control in Contemporary Society Spring 2022

Course and Contact Information

Instructor:	Professor Marlovits
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Office Hours:	Tuesday/Thursday 12:00-1:00 or by appt.
Class Days/Time:	Tuesday and Thursday 3:00-4:15 pm
Classroom:	Clark 202
Prerequisites:	None

Course Description

In this course we will analyze the means by which different institutions and individuals control the actions, behaviors, and thoughts of people in contemporary modern societies—including our own. We will also analyze the dynamics of control—how control mechanisms change over time, as well as the means by which people are able to resist or escape such controls. The course should help you think critically about controllers, their targets, the mechanisms they employ, and the goals they seek to accomplish. It should also help you understand controlling processes affecting your everyday life.

For more than a century, social scientists and others have taken an interest in mechanisms of cultural and social control including "brainwashing" or coercive persuasion, indoctrination, groupthink, and propaganda, among others. Some argue that increasing political and economic centralization on a global scale—together with the wide reach of today's global communication technologies—have led to more efficient and total social and cultural controls. Controllers may use these techniques in an undemocratic (and sometimes dangerous) fashion to convince others

to modify their behaviors, to reform their thoughts and values, or to compel them to act in predictable ways.

In this course, we will be particularly focused on analyzing control from an anthropological perspective. We will examine the use of culture as a tool—in other words, the instrumental uses of culture. To help us think critically about processes of social and cultural control, we will begin by reading the classic novels *1984* and *Brave New World* as ethnographic accounts. Then we will focus upon mechanisms of social and cultural controls in various realms including schools, families, government, science, media, and business. Although much of the course material is set in the US, we will also examine other regions. Finally, we will discuss how processes of control influence everyday life and how we might effectively deal with them.

Learning Outcomes

Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

Over the course of the semester, I intend to help you meet the following learning objectives:

1. Identify various mechanisms of social and cultural control operating in contemporary societies (including the US) and dynamic processes that transform them over time.
2. Analyze the ways in which institutions such as governments, corporations, religious groups, and other organizations have compelled members to behave and act in specific ways.
3. Understand the processes by which mass media, government officials, social scientists, and the advertising industry have interacted to design new means of influencing public opinion, shape habits and tastes, and create mass consumers.
4. Gain insight into the ways by which nationalism, ethnicity, and other forms of identity and membership have been incorporated into controlling processes.
5. Trace the development of communication, pharmacological, and surveillance technologies for behavior modification, and other inventions which might potentially be used for control.
6. Identify how and why individuals and groups resist or revolt against forms of social and cultural domination, and how mutual aid, education, political mobilization, direct action, and other means might be used as a means of countering social and cultural controls.

Required Texts/Readings

Textbooks

1984 by George Orwell (any edition)

Addiction by Design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas by Natasha Dow Schull

United States of Distraction: Media Manipulation in Post-Truth America, by Nolan Higdon and Mickey Huff

Ill Fares the Land, by Tony Judt

In addition, we will use a supplemental materials distributed through Canvas.

Course Requirements and Assignments

Course grades will be derived from six assignments:

1. *List of control mechanisms in 1984*. This assignment should be typewritten. Instructions will be distributed in class by the instructor. (10 points)
2. *List of control mechanisms in Don't Look Up, 13th, or The Great Hack*. This assignment should be typewritten. Instructions will be distributed in class by the instructor. (10 points)
3. *List of control mechanisms in Requiem for the American Dream*. 10 points.
4. *Three Research Cluster (Group) Seminar Papers*. Research clusters are required to compose Seminar Papers throughout the semester. (15 points each)
5. *Participation*. This grade will be assessed based on class participation as well as peer- and self-evaluations. (10 points)
6. *Term Paper*. In this assignment, you will research and write an 8-page (double-spaced, not including cover page or references) term paper that analyzes a mechanism of social control, cultural control, or ideological control that has affected your own life. The instructor will give you more information about this assignment in Week 4 of the course. Term papers are due on the date of the last regular class meeting. (25 points)

Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally 3 hours per unit per week with 1 of the hours used for lecture) for instruction or preparation/studying or course related activities including but not limited to internships, labs, clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus.

Final Examination or Evaluation

You will take one final exam, consisting of identifications/definitions, essays, and maps. (Final exam counts for 25% of final grade. CLO 1,2,3) . Final exam will be administered in the usual class meeting room (see Course Schedule at the end of this syllabus for the date and time).

[University Policy S06-4](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S06-4.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S06-4.pdf>) states that “There shall be an appropriate final examination or evaluation at the scheduled time in every course, unless the course is on the official List of Courses in which a final is optional.”

Grading Policy

Your work will be assessed based on your effort and reasoning, as illustrated by your writing. Your assignments document your mastery of the skills critical to anthropological inquiry. More guidelines on grading information and class attendance can be found from the following two university policies:

- [University Syllabus Policy S16-9](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>) · [University policy F15-12](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F15-12.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F15-12.pdf>)

Determination of Grades

- Grades will include minus and plus grades as illustrated below and are determined by percentage of total points possible.
- Short summaries and evaluations of instructor-approved public lectures may provide extra credit options up to 5 points.
- All assignments must be completed in order to pass. I will not accept late assignments nor will I administer makeup exams unless documents can be presented as evidence of illness, death in family, jury duty, etc. No assignments will be accepted via e-mail—I must receive hard copies of all assignments. The term paper will **also** be uploaded via Canvas and vetted through turnitin.com.
- NOTE that [University policy F69-24](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F69-24.pdf) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F69-24.pdf> states that
“Students should attend all meetings of their classes, not only because they are responsible for material discussed therein, but because active participation is frequently essential to insure maximum benefit for all members of the class. Attendance per se shall not be used as a criterion for grading.”

Grading distribution is as follows:

100	-	97	A plus
96	-	93	A
92	-	90	A minus
	89	-	87 B plus
86	-	83	B
83	-	80	B-
79	-	77	C plus

76	-	73	C	
		72	-	70 C minus
		69	-	67 D plus
66	-	63	D	
Below 63			F	

Note that “All students have the right, within a reasonable time, to know their academic scores, to review their grade-dependent work, and to be provided with explanations for the determination of their course grades.” See [University Policy F13-1](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F13-1) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F13-1.pdf> for more details. If you have questions regarding your grades (including explanations for the determination of course grades, you should visit with the course instructor during office hours.

Classroom Protocol

Students are expected to attend and contribute to class discussions. Finally, students are expected to *prepare for both class and research cluster meetings by reading and viewing course materials before meeting*. Debate and disagreement are essential elements of critical cultural analysis, and there is plenty of room for a diversity of opinions, however discussion that is disrespectful of others will not be tolerated.

University Policies

Per University Policy S16-9, university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc. will be available on Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs’ [Syllabus Information web page](http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/>”

Course Schedule

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
1	1/27	Part 1: Introduction George Orwell, <i>1984</i> (Part I) Viewing: <i>Inequality for All</i>
		Part 2: Othering, Misdirection, Empire

2	2/1 2/3	<p>Othering, Misdirection, Empire Spencer Ackerman, excerpts in <i>Reign of Terror: How the 9/11 Era Destabilized America and Produced Trump</i></p> <p>Watch: Twenty Years After 9-11 on Deepa Kumar’s <i>Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire</i>: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoyuCSmd-JA</p> <p>Listening: “Your Call” with Rose Aguilar interview with historian Nancy McClain, “One Year After the Insurrection What Have We Learned?”: https://www.kalw.org/show/your-call</p>
3	2/8 2/10	<p>White Mythologies: American Exceptionalism, Nationalist Innocence, and Racist Nationalism</p> <p>Viewing: <i>13th</i> on Netflix Karen Cox, “What Trump Shares with the Lost Cause of the Confederacy” in NYT Ryan Jobson, “The Case for Letting Anthropology Burn: Sociocultural Anthropology in 2019” in <i>American Anthropologist</i> vol 122 (2): 259-271</p> <p>Recommended: Lee Baker, “The Racist Anti-Racism of American Anthropology”</p>
		<p>Part 3: Mass Media, Propaganda, Spectacle, Capitalism</p>
4	2/15 2/17	<p>Mass Media, Propaganda, Fascism, and the postwar Democratic Surround Fred Turner, “Where Did All the Fascists Come From?” And “World War 2 and the Question of National Character,” in <i>The Democratic Surround</i></p> <p>Viewing: <i>Don’t Look Up</i></p> <p>Control Mechanisms in 1984 due 2/16</p>
5	2/22 2/24	<p>The Society of the Spectacle Naela Schleuning, excerpts in “The Situationist International: Art as Direct Action” pp. 155-160 Greil Marcus, “The Long Walk of the Situationist International” Fredric Jameson, pp. 11-16 & 19-20 in “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” Roland Barthes, “The World of Wrestling” in <i>Mythologies</i> Raoul Veniegem, “The Crisis of Culture,” pp. 3-8 in <i>A Cavalier History of Surrealism</i></p> <p>Viewing: Situationist International documentary and PBS documentary <i>Generation Like</i></p>

6	3/1 3/3	<p>Algorithm, Capitalism, and the Capture of Public Media Higdon and Huff, “Prologue How did we get here” and “A Crumbling fourth estate” in <i>United States of Distraction</i> Jayson Harsin, “Regimes of Post-Truth, Postpolitics, and Attention Economies”</p> <p>Viewing <i>The Great Hack</i> Listening: Your Call with Rose Aguilar: “Media Roundtable: Why Local Journalism Matters for a Healthy Democracy” Jan 6, 2022: https://www.kalw.org/show/your-call</p>
Part 4: Dismantling the Commons		
7	3/8 3/10	<p>Requiem for the American Dream</p> <p>Viewing: <i>Requiem for the American Dream: Noam Chomsky’s Lessons about the concentration of wealth and power</i> Reading: Tony Judt, <i>Ill Fares the Land</i> pp. 1-136</p> <p>Control Mechanisms in Great Hack, Don’t Look Up, or 13th due 3/10</p>
8	3/15 3/17	<p>Institutions of Social Democracy Tony Judt, <i>Ill Fares the Land</i>, pp. 137-237 Ta-Nehisi Coates review of <i>Ill Fares the Land</i></p> <p>Viewing: <i>Capitalism, a Six-Part Series</i></p> <p>Research Cluster Paper #1 due</p>

9	3/22 3/24	<p>Citizens or Consumers? Neoliberal Subjectivity and Austerity Andrew Ross, “Free Education for Free People” Susan Hyatt, “From Citizen to Volunteer: Neoliberal Governance and the Erasure of Poverty” Mari Ruti, “The Creed of Pragmatism” David Graeber, “Ferguson and the Criminalization of American Life”</p> <p>Viewing: Lauren Berlant Public Feelings Salon</p> <p>Recommended: Stuart Ewen, “Captains of Consciousness”</p> <p>Control Mechanisms in Requiem for the American Dream due 3/24</p>
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		Part 5: Addiction by Design
	3/28-4/1	Spring Break — no classes
10	4/5 4/7	Casino Capitalism Natasha Schull, <i>Addiction by Design</i> Research Cluster Paper #2 due
		Part 6: The Paranoid Style, Cults, and the New Hysterias
11	4/12 4/14	The Paranoid Style in American Politics Richard Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics” George Marcus, “The Paranoid Style Now” Jose A. Del Real, “An American Tradition: Lessons from a year covering conspiracy theories” <i>Washington Post</i> Dec 29, 2021 Viewing: <i>What’s the Matter with Kansas?</i>
12	4/19 4/21	Conspiracy Theory and Cults Susan Lepselter, “Secret Immobilities and the Poetics of the Uncanny” Susan Harding, “Living Prophecy at Heaven’s Gate” Kathleen Stewart, “Conspiracy Theory’s Worlds” Viewing: Jello Biafra and the Unarians Recommended: Robert J. Lifton, “Cult Formation”
13	4/26 4/28	Hysterical Epidemics: Cultural Contradictions and Psychic Crises Elaine Showalter, “Multiple Personality Disorder,” (pp. 159-170) “Satanic Ritual Abuse,” (pp. 171-188) “The Hysterical Hot Zone,” (pp. 3-13) and Defining Hysteria” (pp. 14-29) in <i>Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media</i>
14	5/3 5/5	Democratic Assemblages David Graeber, “The New Anarchisms” Yen-Ling Tsai, “Farming Odd Kin in Patchy Anthropocenes” Research Cluster Paper #3 due

15	5/10 5/12	Research Cluster Conferences Preparation and workshopping of Term Papers
FINAL	05/18	Wednesday, May 18 2:45-5:00 PM Term Paper Due Peer-Review and Self Evaluation Due