

THE GLOBAL DENIM PROJECT

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Material World

A Global Hub for Thinking About Things

Please do visit www.ucl.ac.uk/global-denim-project This is the web address of a scheme designed to bring together what we hope will be an increasing number of projects on the topic of denim. The project is being announced in a paper called *A Manifesto for the Study of Denim* by Daniel Miller and Sophie Woodward which is being published in the next issue of the Journal of Social Anthropology. The abstract of the paper follows:-

This paper considers the challenge to anthropology represented by a topic such as global denim. Using the phrase 'blindingly obvious' it considers the problems posed by objects that have become ubiquitous. While there are historical narratives about the origins, history and spread of denim, these leave open the issue of how we make compatible the ethnographic study of specific regional appropriations of denim and its global presence in a manner that is distinctly anthropological. Ethnographies of blue jeans in Brazil and England are provided as examples. These suggest the need to understand the relationship between three observations: its global presence, the phenomenon of distressing and its relationship to anxiety in the selection of clothes. As a manifesto, this paper argues for a global academic response that engages with denim from the global commodity chain through to the specificity of local accounts of denim wearing. Ultimately this can provide the basis for an anthropological engagement with global modernity.

One of the main arguments in this paper is that at least occasionally it would be helpful if social anthropology tried to be social. Instead of everyone picking topics on the basis that no one was studying the same topic, perhaps we could occasionally pick topics because many people were agreeing to study the same thing in different ways over the same period. The Global Denim Project is an attempt to persuade as many academics as possible to consider studying denim over the next five years. Hopefully these will include historians, people concerned with the economics of the industry, and the cosmological significance it represents as a tension between global ubiquity and the personalisation of distressing. Miller and Woodward have now begun an ethnography of denim wearing in three streets in North London. Other projects range from a study of denim, sexuality and the body in Italy, to a study of trashed denim shoddy and its uses in recycling (until recently a third of US dollar bills were denim shoddy). Other proposals include denim in China, Japan and Korea, a study of how blue jeans record the movements of the body in their wear, and a proposal to work on the pressures towards ethical trade in denim in Turkey and Brazil. Brief outlines may be found on the global denim site. The point is that this is a global phenomenon and would be much better understood through collaboration between many projects. Think open-source academia. So if anyone out there would like to consider working on any aspect of denim over the next five years, a) go for it b) please contact me at d.miller@ucl.ac.uk and send something for the global denim project. Similarly if you know of anyone working on this topic please ask them to get in touch with d.miller@ucl.ac.uk

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