

Consumer Culture in Modern Europe

Professor Lisa Tiersten

HIST 3327 | Fall 2023 | Tuesdays, 12:10-2:00

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Course description:

This seminar explores the development of consumer capitalism in modern Europe from the eighteenth century to the present, primarily in Britain and France. Topics to be covered include the rise of a market economy and culture, urbanization and the commercial metropolis, changing attitudes toward shopping and spending, the construction of modern gender and class identities through consumption, credit and social trust, and the relationship between consumption and democratic citizenship. Readings will be drawn from history as well as from social theory and cultural studies.

Course requirements:

1. Regular attendance and participation in class discussion (25% of grade).
2. 1/2-1-page response to the readings to be posted on Courseworks2/Canvas (under “Discussion”) by 10 am Tuesday (before class). Students are entitled to three posting “vacations” but must let me know in advance (20% of grade).
3. Moderation of discussion for one reading (20% of grade).
4. A 15-page research paper (35% of final grade). Students will hand in a brief paper prospectus on October 17 and a bibliography for the paper on November 14. Everyone must meet with me between mid-October and early November to discuss ideas for the paper. Final paper is due Friday, December 15.

Course materials:

Readings for the course are posted on Canvas.

I. The Emergence of a Market Economy and Society

1. September 5: Introduction to the Course: Defining Consumer Culture

Texts: Raymond Williams, "Consumption," *Keywords (we will read this in class)*.

2. September 12: Markets and Material Culture in Early Modern Europe

Texts: Jan de Vries, "Between Purchasing Power and the World of Goods: Understanding the Household Economy in Early Modern Europe," in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, eds. John Brewer and Roy Porter.
 Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society*, Ch. 1, "The Consumer Revolution of Eighteenth-Century England."
 Maxine Berg, "In Pursuit of Luxury: Global History and British Consumer Goods in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present*, no. 182 (February 2004). **Read only pp. 85-99.**
 James Collins, "Women and the Birth of Consumer Capitalism," in Daryl Hafer and Nina Kushner, *Women and Work in Eighteenth-Century France*.

3. September 19: The Meaning of Things: Conceptions of the World of Goods in the Old Regime

Texts: Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society*, Ch. 8, "The Acceptance of Modernity."
 Amanda Vickery, "Women and the World of Goods" in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, eds. John Brewer and Roy Porter.
 Joyce Appleby, "Consumption in Early Modern Social Thought," in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, eds., John Brewer and Roy Porter.
 Stana Nenadic, "Romanticism and the Urge to Consume in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century" in *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650-1850*, eds., Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford.

II. Consumption in the Age of the Bourgeoisie

4. September 26: The Making of the Consumer Metropolis: The Case of Paris

Texts: Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, Chs. 3, "Railroad Space and Railroad Time"; 4, "Panoramic Travel"; 12, "Tracks in the City"; and 13, "Circulation."
 David Pinkney, *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris*, Ch. 1, "Paris in 1850."
 Philip Nord, *Paris Shopkeepers and the Politics of Resentment*, Ch. 3,

“Haussmannization.”

Michael Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store*, Chs. 1, “New Stores,” and 2, “The “Grand Magasin.”

Emile Zola, *The Ladies’ Paradise* (1883), Ch. 9.

Slides: the nineteenth-century city; nineteenth-century shops and department stores; advertising.

5. October 3: Spectacle and Selfhood in the Nineteenth-Century City

Texts: Ellen Moers, *The Dandy*, Ch. 1, “Brummell.”

Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, “The *Flâneur* On and Off the Streets of Paris,” in *The Flâneur*, ed. Keith Tester.

Walter Benjamin, “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century” (1935; 1982), *Reflections*.

Karl Marx, “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof,” *Capital*, Vol. 1 (1867), Part 1 (81-96).

Vanessa Schwartz, “Cinematic Spectatorship Before the Apparatus,” in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, eds., Vanessa Schwartz and Leo Charney.

Slides: fashion plates

6. October 10: Gender, Class, and Consumption in the Nineteenth Century

Texts: Margot Finn, “Men’s Things: Masculine Possession in the Consumer Revolution,” *Social History*, vol. 25, no. 2 (May 2000), pp. 133-55.

Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods*, Ch. 4, “In Possession: Men, Women and Decoration.”

Paul Johnson, “Conspicuous Consumption and Working-Class Culture in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 38 (January 1988: 27-42.

Guy de Maupassant, “The Necklace” (1884), *Collected Short Stories*.

Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, (1979), “Introduction” (**half the class reads Bourdieu**).

Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), Ch. 4, “Conspicuous Consumption” (**half the class reads Veblen**).

Slides: bourgeois interiors

7. October 17: Debt, Credit, and Social Trust in the Nineteenth Century

Texts: Erika Rappaport, “‘A Husband and His Wife’s Dresses’: Consumer Credit and the Debtor Family in England, 1864-1914,” in *The Sex of Things*, ed. Victoria de Grazia.

Judith Coffin, “Credit, Consumption, and Images of Women’s Desires: Selling the Sewing Machine in Late Nineteenth-Century France,” *French Historical Studies*, vol. 18, no. 3 (1994): 749-83.

Timothy Alborn, “‘A Useful Lesson of Contentment’: Pedagogies of Failure in Mid-Victorian Market Culture,” in *Worlds of Political Economy*, eds., Martin Daunton and Frank Trentmann (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 95-111.

Paul Johnson, *Saving and Spending: The Working-Class Economy in Britain, 1870-1930*, Ch. 6, “Credit” (**half the class reads Johnson**).

Margot Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740-1914* (2003), Ch. 7, “Market Moralities: Tradesmen, Credit and the Courts in Victorian and Edwardian England” (**half the class reads Finn**).

*****Submit paper prospectus via e-mail (but no attachments, please)****

8. October 24: Empire and the Market

Texts: Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, Ch. 5, “Soft-soaping Empire: Commodity Racism and Imperial Advertising.”

Joanna de Groot, “Metropolitan Desires and Colonial Connections: Reflections on Consumption and Empire,” in *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, eds., Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose.

Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Ch.1, “The Empire’s Old Clothes: Fashioning the Colonial Subject.”

Erika Rappaport, “[Object Lessons and Colonial Histories: Inventing the Jubilee of Indian Tea](#),” *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History* (March 2016).

Slides: empire and consumption

III. Consumption and Cultural Crisis in the Twentieth Century

9. October 31: The Interwar Period: Mass Consumption and its Discontents

Texts: Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance through 20th-Century Europe* (2005), Ch. 3, “The Chain Store.”

Mary Louise Roberts, “Samson and Delilah Revisited: The Politics of Women’s Fashion in 1920s France,” *American Historical Review*, vol. 98, no. 3 (June 1993): 657-684.

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944).

Hartmut Berghoff, “Enticement and Deprivation: The Regulation of Consumption in Pre-war Nazi Germany,” in *The Politics of Consumption*, eds., Martin Daunton and Matthew Hilton.

Slides: Advertising

10. November 7: Election Day Holiday

11. November 14: Citizenship and Consumption in the Postwar Era

Texts: Erica Carter, "Alice in the Consumer Wonderland," *Gender and Generation*, eds., Angela McRobbie and Mica Nava, 185-214.

Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire* (2005), Ch. 7, "The Consumer-Citizen."

Emily S. Rosenberg, "Consumer Capitalism and the End of the Cold War," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. III, *Endings*, eds. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad.

Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Things Under Socialism: The Soviet Experience," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, ed. Frank Trentmann.

[*The Marriage of Maria Braun*](#) (Fassbinder, 1979) (stream on CLIO via Kanopy).

*****Submit 1-page paper bibliography via e-mail attachment*****

IV. Contemporary Consumption

12. November 21: No Class

13. November 28: Digital Capitalism

Texts: Alice Marwick, *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age*, Ch. 5, "Lifestreaming: We Live in Public."

Evgeny Morozov, "[The Death of the Cyberflâneur](#)," *The New York Times*, February 4, 2012.

Shoshana Zuboff, "Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization," *Journal of Information Technology* 30 (2015): 75-89.

Emily Hund & Lee McGuigan, "A Shoppable Life: Performance, Selfhood, and Influence in the Social Media Storefront," *Communication, Culture & Critique* (2019): 18-35.

14. December 5: The Politics of Global Shopping

Texts: Zygmunt Bauman, "Exit *Homo Politicus*, Enter *Homo Consumens*" in *Citizenship and Consumption* (2008), eds., Kate Soper and Frank Trentmann.

Daniel Miller, "Could Shopping Ever Really Matter" in *The Shopping Experience*, eds., Pasi Falk and Colin Campbell.

Michele Micheletti, "The Moral Force of Consumption and Capitalism: Anti-slavery and Anti-sweatshop," in *Citizenship and Consumption* (2008), eds., Kate Soper and Frank Trentmann.

[Walmart: The High Cost of Low Price](#) (Greenwald, 2005) (stream on Youtube; click on “Browse Youtube” when you open hyperlink).

Lee Scott, “Walmart and California: American Capitalism” (Speech, 2005).

Elizabeth Currid-Halkett, *The Sum of Small Things*, Ch. 5, “Conspicuous Production.”

*****Paper due Friday, December 15*****

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