Special Topics in Cultural and Visual Studies:
Theories of Visual Consumption and Consumerism

Special Topics in Cultural and Visual Studies
This course examines specific topics central to the fields of cultural studies and visual culture, with the aim of delving into particular theoretical concerns within these overlapping and interrelated fields of study. It is the aim of Special Topics courses to incorporate historical theoretical frameworks and to examine important recent scholarship on these issues.

Theories of Visual Consumption and Consumerism
This course will focus on a genealogy of theories of consumption and consumerism, including visual consumption and reception, cultural consumption, and consumerism more broadly. The aim of this particular course is to chart the history of how consumerism has been theorized since the nineteenth century, and to make clear the relationship of modernity and visuality as well as the connections between the literature on consumerism/consumption and the literature on visual consumption. The course will trace an arc from the literature on nineteenth-century practices of visual consumption and twentieth-century theories of consumerism to theories of distinction, coolness, citizen-consumers, contemporary debates about the relationship of art and architecture to consumerism,

Course requirements:
Students are expected to do all readings in preparation for class, to participate fully in class discussions, and to do one class presentation. Students will do bring weekly questions on the readings and topics to class, do at least one class presentation, and write a research paper, the proposal for which will be due mid-semester. Grades will consist of class participation and presentations 40%; and research paper 60%.
Books
Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Kids Rule! Nickelodeon and Consumer Citizenship*
Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*
Néstor García Canclini, *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts*
Thomas Frank, *Conquest of Cool*
Kristen Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*
Thorstein Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*

Books are at Shakespeare and Co. Articles as listed on the syllabus will be available in pdf.

**Week 1, Jan. 22: Introduction: A Genealogy of Cultural and Visual Studies**

**Week 2, Jan. 29: Modernity and Visual Consumption**
Reading:
Miriam Hansen, *Babel & Babylon*, excerpt
Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities*, excerpt
Ben Singer, “Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism”
Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*, Chapter 1

**Week 3, Feb. 5: The Arcades and the Flaneur**
Reading:
Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, excerpt
Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, excerpt
Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*, Chapter 2

**Week 4, Feb. 12: Theories of Commodification**
Reading:
Karl Marx, *Capital*, Chapter 1
Arjun Appadurai, “Commodities and the Politics of Value”
Michael Taussig, “The Devil and the Commodity Fetish”
Margaret Radin, *Contested Commodities*, excerpt
Week 5, Feb. 19: Twentieth-Century Consumer Critiques
Reading:
Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class
Theodor Adorno, “Free Time”

Week 6, Feb. 26: Colonialism and the Colonization of Everyday Life
Reading:
Kristin Ross, Fast Cars, Clean Bodies

Week 7, March 4: The Consumer Republic and Spaces of Postwar Consumerism
Reading:
Lizabeth Cohen, A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America

Week 8, March 11: The 1960s: The Consumption of Cool
Reading:
Thomas Frank, The Conquest of Cool
Vance Packard, The Hidden Persuaders, excerpt
Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, excerpt

Spring Break March 17-21

Week 9, March 25: Bourdieu and Social Distinction
Reading:
Pierre Bourdieu, Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste

Week 10, April 1: Consumer-Citizenship
Reading:
Sarah Banet-Weiser, Kids Rule! Nickelodeon and Consumer Citizenship
Néstor García Canclini, Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts

Week 11, April 8: Ethnographies of Consumerism
Reading:
Elizabeth Chin, Purchasing Power, excerpt
Eva Illouz, Consuming the Romantic Utopia, excerpt
Barry Shank, A Token of My Affection, Introduction
Daniel Miller, A Theory of Shopping, excerpt
Arlene Davila, Latinos, Inc., excerpt
Week 12, April 15: Spaces of Consumption: Architecture
Reading:
Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, *Learning From Las Vegas*, excerpt
Joan Ochman, “The Architect as Tourist”

Week 13, April 22: Merchandising the Museum
Reading:
Andrea Fraser, “Isn’t This a Wonderful Place (A Tour of the Tour of the Guggenheim Bilbao)”
Haidee Wasson, “Every Home an Art Museum: Mediating and Merchandising the Metropolitan”
Group of articles on “Guggenheim Effect”

Week 14, April 29: New Forms of Collecting
Reading:
James Clifford, “On Collecting Art and Culture”
Lynn Spigel, “Barbies Without Ken”
Ken Hillis, Michael Petit, Nathan Scott Epley, Introduction to *Everyday eBay: Culture, Collecting and Desire* and a few essays