Course Description

Consumer culture by its nature is intensely local and inevitably global. Its locality is tied up with the intimacy of food, clothing, and shelter, and the elasticity of the relationship between bodies and things. At the same time, consumption is a flash point for basic social and political debates about the relationship between needs and desires. This course seeks to develop critical approaches towards dealing with both these dimensions of consumer culture by exploring the ways in which bodies and things shape each other through long histories of production, distribution, and fashion. Though consumption is conventionally regarded as the terminus of the social life of things, this course will seek to study the social world of consumers as an analytic entry point into complex networks of cultural practice which mediate the perennial tension between habituation and novelty in the shaping of consumer experience.

Required Texts


Class Format

Each 2-hour session will be divided into 2 halves. The first half will consist of a student presentation and collective discussion. The second half will be a lecture by Professor Appadurai.

Course Requirements

Students attending the seminar will be expected to:

1. Present an analysis and lead a discussion of the week’s readings and themes, to be given twice over the course of the term.
2. At the conclusion of the course, each student will write a thematic review paper, based on the course readings. Papers will not exceed 10 double-spaced pages in length (2500 words), and will be written in standard, academic format. THIS PAPER WILL BE DUE ON DECEMBER 8, IN CLASS. THERE WILL BE NO EXCEPTIONS EXCEPT ON DOCUMENTED MEDICAL GROUNDS.

Attendance:

Your attendance is required at all sessions. Should you require a long absence, be sure to notify me in advance. Arrangements can be made with prior notice, but do not expect consideration after the fact (unless, of course, in the case of extreme emergencies). You are responsible for obtaining any missed notes or material.

Cell Phones & Laptops:

Please refrain from using cell phones, messaging devices, and laptops for personal use during the seminar sessions.

Special Circumstances, Considerations, Needs:

If you have any special circumstances, consideration or needs that you feel will either affect your ability to complete assignments, please let me know as soon as possible so that appropriate arrangements can be made. In most cases, special circumstances, considerations and needs should be facilitated through the Moses Center.
Grading
The final grade will be based on class presentation and participation (50%) and Final Paper (50%)

Academic Dishonesty And Plagiarism
'Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do.... You violate the principle when you: cheat on an exam; submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors; receive help on a take-home that calls for independent work; or plagiarize. Plagiarism, whether intended or not, is academic fraud. You plagiarize when, without proper attribution, you do any of the following: copy verbatim from a book, article, or other media; download documents from the Internet; purchase documents; paraphrase or restate someone else’s facts, analysis, and/or conclusions; copy directly from a classmate or allow a classmate to copy from you. ' (See School of Education Bulletin, 2009)
Schedule of Classes

Tuesday 09/08  Week 1 - Opening Remarks
Introductory Comments & Course Overview

Part One: Overviews & Interpretations

Tuesday 09/15  Week 2 - The Consumer Ethic
Readings: Bauman, Z. Consuming Life (ENTIRE BOOK)

Tuesday 09/22  Week 3 - The Life of the Commodity
Readings: Appadurai, A. The Social Life of Things (Introduction, pp. 3-63)
Braudel, F. The Structures of Everyday Life, Vol 1. Parts 3 & 4 (pp. 183-333)
Latour, B. Where are the Missing Masses? from Candlin, F. & Guins, R. (Eds). The Object Reader
Sahlins, M. The Original Affluent Society, from Stone Age Economics, Chapter 1 (pp. 1-39)

Tuesday 09/29  Week 4 - Affluence & Its Others
Readings: Veblen, Conspicuous Consumption, from The Theory of the Leisure Class, Chapter 4 (pp. 43-62)
Selections from Galbraith, Affluent Society
Schudson, M. Delectable Materialism - Second Thoughts on Consumer Culture
Weber, M., Class, Status & Party
Sahlins, M. The Original Affluent Society, from Stone Age Economics, Chapter 1 (pp. 1-39)

Tuesday 10/06  Week 5 - Offshore Consumption
Readings: Easterling, K. Enduring Innocence (Contemplation, pp. 63-122)

Tuesday 10/13  Week 6 - Expenditure and Excess
Roadside Retroscapes, from Brown & Sherry, Time, Space and the Market (pp. 115-140)
Tuesday 10/20  
**Week 7 - Kitchen Citizenship**

**Readings:**  
Miller, T. *Cultural Citizenship*, Ch. 3, *Television Food* (pp. 112-143)  
Pollan, M. *Out of the Kitchen, Onto the Couch*, from *The New York Times Magazine*, 08/02/09

Tuesday 10/27  
**Week 8 - Global Commodities: Circulation**

**Readings:**  
Bestor, T. *Tsukiji* (selections TBA)  
Conlon, F., *Dining out in Bombay*, from Breckenridge, C. (Ed.) *Consuming Modernity* (pp. 90-127)

Tuesday 11/03  
**Week 9 - Global Commodities: Urban Space**

**Readings:**  
Mbembe, A. *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*, Ch. 1: The Aesthetics of Superfluidity (pp. 37-67)

**Part 3: Traditions of the New**

Tuesday 11/10  
**Week 10 - Design Trajectories**

**Readings:**  
Molotch, H. *Where Stuff Comes From*, Chapter 2 (“Inside Stuff”) and Chapter 3 (“Form and Function”); (pp. 23-89)  
Goulding, C. *Corsets, Silk-Stockings, & Evening Suites*, from Brown & Sherry, *Time, Space and the Market* (pp. 54 - 74)

Tuesday 11/17  
**Week 11 - Brand Empires**

**Readings:**  
Moor, J.OCC, Branded Spaces  
Hearn, J.OCC, Meat, Mask, Burden - Probing the Contours of the Branded ‘Self’  
Langer, J.OCC, The Business of Branded Enchantment  
Wilk, J.OCC, Bottled Water  
Cohen, L. *Segmenting the Mass*, from *A Consumer’s Republic*, Chapter 7 (pp. 292-344)

Tuesday 11/24  
**Week 12 - Habituating the New**

**Readings:**  
Frosh, J.OCC, Rhetorics of the Overlooked - On the Communicative Modes of Stock Advertising Images  
Molotch, H. *Changing Goods*, from *Where Stuff Comes From*, Chapter 4 (pp. 91-130).  
Lehtonen, J.OCC, The Domestication of New Technologies as a Set of Trials  
Thrift, N. *The Material Practices of Glamour*, from The Journal of Cultural Economy
Part Four: Back to the Thing

Tuesday 12/01  Week 13 - Bodies & Things

Readings:

Grosz, E. *The Thing*, from Candlin, F. & Guins, R. (Eds.). *The Object Reader* (pp. 124-138)

Rose, N. *Governing the Present*, Chapter 1 (pp. 1-25) and Chapter 5 (pp. 114-141)

Tuesday 12/08  Week 14: General Discussion

Closing Remarks/Turn in Final Pap