

Soc 150b
Brandeis University
Spring 2003
M W Th 10:10-11:00
Pearlman 113

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office hours:
M, Th 11:00-12:00
and by appointment

The Culture of Consumption

Contemporary society is frequently characterized as a consumer society, a place where material goods and the process of accumulating those goods have become extremely important for individuals and the larger culture. This course will examine the development and significance of a culture of consumption. It will pay particular attention to the ongoing debate over whether consumption is a diversion from pressing social problems or a legitimate expression of popular pleasure. In the first few weeks of the course, we will examine the rise of commercialized leisure and the ways in which consumption patterns became marked by class and gender. The course will then lead into the contemporary era by exploring the significance of advertising and marketing for consumer culture. Finally, we will study how consumer culture gets expressed in various realms of everyday life.

The TA for this course is Cheryl Kingma-Kiekhofers (cherking@brandeis.edu). Her office hours will be announced in class.

Requirements

Students are expected to keep up with the readings, attend class, and actively participate in discussions. In addition, you will complete two short papers covering readings and other course material, and a take-home final exam consisting of essay questions.

Evaluation

First short paper (4-5 pages)	30%
Second short paper (5-6 pages)	33%
Take-home final	37%

Students are expected to uphold standards of academic integrity. Each student is expected to turn in work completed independently. It is not acceptable to use the words or ideas of another person without proper acknowledgement of that source. This means that you must use references and, where appropriate, quotation marks to indicate the source of any phrases, sentences, or ideas not your own -- whether they are found in written materials or on the Internet, and whether they are created by a published author, another student, or your parent. Violations of University policies on academic integrity may result in failure in the course or on the assignment, and could end in suspension from the University. Students with questions about standards of academic integrity are advised to consult Section 3 of Rights and Responsibilities from the Brandeis Student Handbook and/or speak to me. If you are in doubt about the instructions for any assignment in this course, you must ask for clarification.

If you are a student who needs academic accommodations because of a documented disability,

you should contact me, and present your letter of accommodation, as soon as possible. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting academic accommodations, you should contact Assistant Dean Laura Lyndon in Undergraduate Academic Affairs at 736-3470. Letters of accommodation should be presented at the start of the semester to ensure provision of accommodations. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

The following books are available for purchase from the university bookstore:

Nicholson Baker, *The Mezzanine*. New York: Vintage, 1988.

William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.

Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986.

These books are also on reserve at the main library.

The readings for weeks 2 and 3 are on Electronic Reserves:
<http://ereserves.publib.brandeis.edu> (password: shop)

All other readings are contained in a custom course packet. Information on how to purchase this will be announced in class.

Course Schedule

week 1
Jan 13-16

Introduction

Nicholson Baker, *The Mezzanine*. New York: Vintage, 1988.

week 2
Jan 22-23

Origins of Consumer Society

Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*. London: Europa Publications, 1982, chaps. 1 & 6.

week 3
Jan 27-30

Theoretical Perspectives on Consumption

Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*. New York: Mentor, 1953, chap. 4.

Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964, pp. 1-12.

Mary Douglas, "Goods as a System of Communication." From *In the Active Voice*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982, pp. 16-33.

Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, General Introduction.

Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard, and Pierre Mayol, *The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 2: Living and Cooking*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, chap. 6.

week 4
Feb 3-6

Department Stores: Palaces of Consumption

William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993, introduction, chaps. 3 & 5.

week 5
Feb 10-13

The Growth of Commercialized Leisure

Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986, chaps. 4-6.

week 6
Feb 17-20

Cold War Consumerism

Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. New York: Basic Books, 1988, chap. 7.

Robert H. Haddow, *Pavilions of Plenty: Exhibiting American Culture Abroad in the 1950s*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997, chap. 2.

first short paper due Wednesday, February 19

week 7
Feb 24-27

Advertising: Creating New Art or Creating New Needs?

John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, fortieth anniversary edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998, chap. 11.

Joseph Turow, "Segmenting, Signalling and Tailoring: Probing the Dark Side of Target Marketing." In Robin Andersen and Lance Strate, eds., *Critical Studies in Media Commercialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 239-249.

Mica Nava, *Changing Cultures: Feminism, Youth and Consumerism*. London: Sage, 1992, chap. 9.

Michael Schudson, *Advertising, The Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on*

American Society. New York: Basic Books, 1986, chap. 7.

Mar 3-7 reading week

retrieve your favorite toy

week 8
Mar 10-13

Love and Romance for Sale

Eva Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, chaps. 1. & 2.

Leigh Eric Schmidt, "The Commercialization of the Calendar: American Holidays and the Culture of Consumption, 1870-1930." *Journal of American History*, Vol. 78, No. 3, December 1991, pp. 887-916.

week 9
Mar 17-20

Children: Learning Consumer Culture

Stephen Kline, "Toys, Socialization, and the Commodification of Play." In Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern and Matthias Judt, eds., *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 339-358.

Ellen Seiter, *Sold Separately: Children and Parents in Consumer Culture*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993, chap. 4.

Heather-Jane Robertson, "Marketing to Kids." In Bohdan Szuchewycz and Jeannette Sloniowski, eds., *Canadian Communications: Issues in Contemporary Media and Culture*. Scarborough, ON: Prentice Hall Allyn and Bacon Canada, 1999, pp. 356-364.

toy show & tell

week 10
Mar 24-27

Fashion: Class, Style, and Identity

Leach, *Land of Desire*, chap. 4.

Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984, Introduction.

Diana Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, chap. 8.

Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997, chap. 10.

Paul Willis, with Simon Jones, Joyce Canaan, and Geoff Hurd, *Common Cultures: Symbolic Work at Play in the Everyday Cultures of the Young*. Boulder: Westview, 1990, chap. 4.

week 11
Mar 31-Apr 3

Theme Parks and Themed Environments

Susan G. Davis, "The Theme Park: Global Industry and Cultural Form." *Media, Culture & Society*, Vol. 18, No. 3, July 1996, pp. 399-422.

John Hannigan, *Fantasy City: Pleasure and Profit in the Postmodern Metropolis*. London: Routledge, 1998, chaps. 4 & 5.

Noam Shoal, "Commodification and Theming of the Sacred: Changing Patterns of Tourist Consumption in the 'Holy Land'." In Mark Gottdiener, ed., *New Forms of Consumption: Consumers, Culture, and Commodification*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000, pp. 251-263.

second short paper due Monday, March 31

week 12
Apr 7-10

Shopping Malls

Margaret Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mall." In Michael Sorkin, ed., *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*. New York: Noonday Press, 1992, pp. 3-30.

Jon Goss, "Once-upon-a-Time in the Commodity World: An Unofficial Guide to Mall of America." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* Vol. 89, No. 1, March, 1999, pp. 45-75.

John Fiske, Bob Hodge, and Graeme Turner, *Myths of Oz: Reading Australian Popular Culture*. Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987, chap. 5.

week 13
Apr 14-16

Education: Consumers in the Classroom

Jill J. McMillan and George Cheney, "The Student as Consumer: The Implications and Limitations of a Metaphor." *Communication Education*, Vol. 45, No. 1, January 1996, pp. 1-15.

Jef I. Richards, Ellen A. Wartella, Cynthia Morton, and Lisa Thompson, "The Growing Commercialization of Schools: Issues and Practices." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 557, May 1998, pp. 148-163.

William Hoynes, "News for a Captive Audience." *Extra!*, Vol. 10, No. 3, May/June 1997, pp. 11-16.

Apr 17-24

spring break

week 14
Apr 28-30

Politics: Consumers or Citizens?

Charles McGovern, "Consumption and Citizenship in the United States, 1900-1940." In Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern and Matthias Judt, eds., *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 37-58.

Mark Weiner, "Consumer Culture and Participatory Democracy: The Story of Coca-Cola During World War II." *Food and Foodways*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1996, pp. 109-129.

C.B. Macpherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, chap. 4.

Neal Ryan, "Reconstructing Citizens as Consumers: Implications for New Modes of Governance." *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 60, No. 3, September, 2001, pp. 104-109.

Take-home final due Thursday, May 8th