From Food to Fashion: Creating Consumer Desire in Modern Europe

We commonly hear that our society prioritizes the selling and buying of products—that we live in a “consumer society.” This course examines the emergence of consumer societies in capitalist and non-capitalist Europe from the early nineteenth century to the present day, focusing on how men and women learned to desire consumer objects through their everyday lives. From public spaces, to popular culture, to our own bodies—including sports arenas and subways, T.V. and the internet, fashion and food—in Europe as much as America, virtually all aspects of everyday life are commodified. Although it may feel natural to us, however, this is a modern phenomenon. Exploring the development of consumer society is therefore essential to understanding modern European society and culture.

This course is split into three parts. Part one investigates the foundations of consumer society in the nineteenth century. We will ask how new production methods and labor practices, the transformation of urban space, and emerging class and gender structures both shaped and were shaped by consumer desire. In part two, we shift our attention to the early twentieth century. Despite the increasing accessibility of consumer goods, Europe also faced traumatic periods of instability and scarcity. We will investigate the links between consumer desire and conflict, discussing empire, the New Woman, hunger, war, and black markets. Finally, in the last five weeks we turn to the post World War II era, when a mass consumer society fully emerged in Europe. Focusing on the politicization of consumer desire, we will compare and contrast consumer societies in Western and Eastern Europe and address contemporary debates about the environment and Americanization. Throughout the course we will also pull apart broader themes, including the relationship between the desire for goods and sexual desire, the extent to which consumption facilitated class, gender, and national distinctions or acted as a homogenizing force, and how individuals and societies have mobilized consumer desire as a form of power.

Structure and Requirements:
We will have two lectures and a discussion each week. Student are expected to come prepared to discuss the reading material every Friday. In addition to a final, there will be two 5 page papers and one 8-10 page paper asking students to draw upon the reading material to explore the course’s broader themes.

Attendance and Participation in all Lecture and Section Discussions (20%)
Two short papers: (both 15%)
One 8-10 page paper: (25%)
One final exam: Essays and Identifications (25%)

Books to Purchase:
Simone de Beauvoir, Les Belles Images (Translated by Partrick O’Brian)
Slavenka Drakulic, Café Europa: Life After Communism
Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyich
Zola, Au Bonheur des Dames

The rest of the readings will be included in the course reader, which can be purchased at the Humanities Copy Shop.
Class Schedule:

Week one: Introduction

Part 1: The Foundations of Consumer Society in the Nineteenth Century

Week Two: Economic and Philosophical Foundations (Part I)
Mon: The Industrial Revolution and New Production Techniques
Weds: New Conceptions of Time and Labor
Fri: Discussion

Reading:

Week Three: Economic and Philosophical Foundations (Part II)
Colonialism
Capitalism and Liberalism
Fri: Discussion

Reading:
Karl Marx, “The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret,” in Capital (1867)

Week Four: Spaces that Produce Desire
Mon: Worlds Fairs and Mechanical vs. Artisan Production
Weds: The Rise of the Department Store
Fri: Discussion

Reading:
Zola, Au Bonheur des Dames (1883) (selections)
Walter Benjamin, “The Arcades Project” (1927) (selections)

Week Five: Consumption as Distinction
Mon: Class, Taste Makers, and the Bourgeois Home
Weds: Gendered Divisions of Consumption
Fri: Discussion

Reading:
Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyich (1886)

Week Six: Critiques and Conceptions of "Pathological" Desire:
Kleptomania and Prostitution
Psychoanalysis and Socialist Critiques of Consumerism
Fri: Discussion

Readings:
Alfred Binet "Fetishism in love" (1887) (short selection)
Michael Ryan, *Prostitution in London* (1839) (short selection)
O’Brien, Patricia, "The Kleptomania Diagnosis: Bourgeois Women and Theft in Late Nineteenth-century France," *Journal of Social History* 17 (Fall 1983): 65-77

Part II: Instability and Conflict From the *Fin de Siècle* to WWII

**Week Seven: Destabilizing Boundaries through Consumption**
Mon: The New Woman
Weds: Bread, Bolsheviks, and WWI
Fri: Discussion


**Week Eight: Race, Advertising, and Popular Culture**
Mon: Advertisements and Empire
Weds: American Products and Popular Culture in Interwar Europe
Fri: Discussion

Readings:


(Pay close attention to the advertisements pictured in these articles and be prepared to compare and contrast them in discussion on Friday).

**Week Nine: Mass Production and Mass Culture in Europe**
Mon: Fordism and Taylorism
Weds: Film, Leisure, and Critiques of the “Culture Industry” in Weimar
Fri: Discussion

Readings:
Week Ten: World War II: Desire, Commodities and Conflict
Mon: Sex, Cigarettes and Chocolate: Supplying Soldiers in Europe
Weds: Hunger and Black Markets in Concentration Camps and Displaced Person Camps
Fri: Discussion

Reading:
Myrna Goldenberg, “Food Talk: Gendered Responses to Hunger in the Concentration Camps,” in Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis and the Holocaust (2003), eds. Elizabeth Baer and Myra Goldenberg, 161-179

Part III: Politicization of Mass Consumer Society in the East and West

Week Eleven: Postwar Modernization and Reconstructing Desire
Mon: Home Reconstruction in the East and West
Weds: Women as “Citizen Consumers”
Fri: Discussion

Reading:
Watch: Tati, Mon Oncle (1958)
Simone de Beauvoir, Les Belles Images (1966)

Week Twelve: Leisure and Luxuries as Cold War Battleground
Mon: Automobiles in the East and West
Weds: American Commodities and the Cold War
Fri: Discussion

Reading:

Week Thirteen: Anti-Consumerist Movements
Mon: May 68
Weds: The Green Movement and the Environment
Fri: Discussion


“Charter of the European Greens,” Adopted at the 2nd EGP Congress
Week Fourteen: Consumer Desire Beyond Borders
Mon: Commodities and the European Union
Weds: Americanization: Homogenization or Hybridity?
Fri: Discussion

Reading:

Week Fifteen: The Fall of Communism
Mon: Nostalgia and Consumer Desire in post-1989 Eastern Europe
Weds: Discussion

Reading:
Watch: *Goodbye Lenin*
Education
2010-Present
University of Wisconsin-Madison, Modern European History PhD Program
Advisors: Mary Louise Roberts and Laird Boswell

Dissertation Title: “France’s Postwar Emporium: French Participation in International Commercial Expositions from 1945 to 1967”

Masters of Arts Completed Fall 2012

Preliminary Examinations Passed May 2013: Fields in Modern German History, Early Modern and Modern France, Gender and Modern Europe

2006-2010
Miami University, Oxford, Ohio

Bachelor of Arts in History, May 2010
Bachelor of Arts in International Studies, May 2010
Minors: French and Political Science
Magna Cum Laude

Professional and Teaching Experience

Fall 2014
Teaching Assistant, UW-Madison History Department
HIST 201: Historian’s Craft: Athenian Democracy
Professor: Claire Taylor

Summer 2011 to 2013
Project Assistant, UW-Madison Graduate School
Program Co-Coordinator for the Graduate Student Collaborative
Developed, organized, and implement professional development workshops and social activities for graduate students.

Spring 2011
Teaching Assistant, UW-Madison History Department
HIST 120: Europe and the Modern World, 1815-Present
Lecturer: Hunter Martin

Fall 2010
Teaching Assistant, UW-Madison Political Science Department
POL 103: Intro to International Relations
Professor: Jon Pevehouse

Spring 2009
Intern at The Geneva Center for Security Policy
Location: Geneva, Switzerland
Supervisor: Dr. Graeme Herd
Assisted Dr. Herd’s academic research,
proof read/edited papers, organized research materials

Language Proficiency
French: Advanced reading, writing, and speaking knowledge
German: Reading knowledge

Fellowships and Awards
Chancellor’s Fellow, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Spring 2015

Vilas Research Travel Grant, UW-Madison Graduate School, Spring 2014

Chateaubriand Research Fellowship, Embassy of France in the United States, 2013-2014 (8 month fellowship)

Jeanne Marandon Research Fellowship, Société des Professeurs Français et Francophones d'Amérique (SPFFA) (year-long fellowship), 2013-2014 (declined)

Ouiscin Field Research Scholarship, Wisconsin Alumni Association, 2013

Council for European Studies/Andrew Mellon Foundation Pre-Dissertation Research Fellowship, 2012

James Watson and Lois George MacDonald Scholarship for History, Miami University, 2009

Publications
"Council for European Studies Sponsored Research: France's Postwar Emporium"
Perspectives on Europe 43:1 (Spring 2013): 79-82.

Conference Papers
“The Development of Campsites in Postwar France,” Center for History and the Environment (CHE), UW-Madison, February 2015


Activities/Service
Search Committee Member for Early-Modern U.S. Gender Historian, Spring 2015

History Department Harassment and Discrimination Committee, Fall 2012

Graduate Student Representative to the Graduate School Academic Planning Council, Fall 2011 – Summer 2013