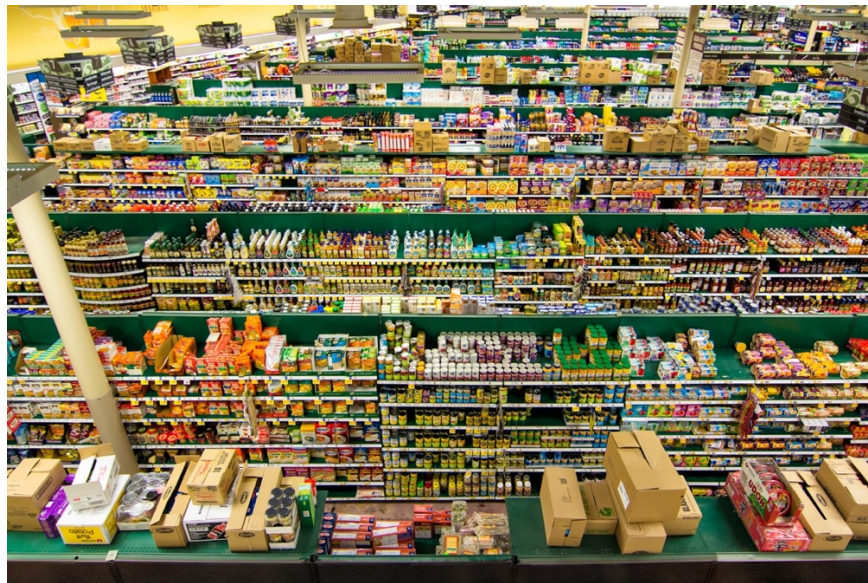


Consumer Culture and Media Consumption

Department of Media, Culture, and Communication

New York University

MCC-GE 2215 Spring 2023



Instructor and Course Information

- Prof. Marita Sturken
- Wed, 2-4:30 181 Mercer Building Room 326
- Office hours: Mon 11-12:30 and by appointment (email me!)
- East Building, 239 Greene Street, Room 814
- marita.sturken@nyu.edu

Course Description

This course examines theories of consumption, consumer culture, commodification, shopping, branding, media consumption, and the construction of social and cultural identity in the context of everyday life. We will investigate practices of consumption at both a theoretical level and in relation to our own practices of consumption, consumer identities, and ethics of consumption. What does it mean to consume things, stuff, food, media, music, and ideas? What are the affective and emotional aspects of shopping

and consumption? How can we be informed consumers? What does it mean to consume media and how is media consumption changing? We will consider critical responses to consumer culture, including the resistance and refusal of consumption as well as the attempted mobilization of consumption toward social change as commodity activism.

Course Requirements

Students are required to attend all classes, complete the readings for each class session, and complete all assignments. If you miss more than 2 classes without a reasonable excuse, your grade will be lowered.

You should make an effort to meet with me in person at some point in the semester. I am available for office hours/zoom and by appointment.

Required Texts

Elizabeth Chin, *My Life with Things: The Consumer Diaries* (Duke University Press, 2016)

All other readings are posted in pdf on Brightspace.

Readings will be prioritized each week.

Assignments

We will have a class blog that you will be required to blog on at least once a week. You will do two class presentations, either solo or with one other student.

There will be one final paper required, a research paper on a topic related to course topics, 10-12 pages. Proposals for papers will be due Week 9.

These assignments will be worth the following portion of your grade:

Final paper 40%

Blog postings 40%

2 class presentations and participation 20%

Please type and double-space your written work and number your pages. I recommend you use Chicago style for your citations; the short version is here:

http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html.

Academic Integrity

http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity

Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do, from taking exams to making oral presentations to writing term papers. It requires that you recognize and acknowledge information derived from others and take credit only for ideas and work that are yours.

You violate the principle of academic integrity 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 examination that calls for independent work, or plagiarize.

Plagiarism is failure to properly assign authorship to a paper, a document, an oral presentation, a musical score, and/or other materials that are not your original work. You plagiarize when, without proper attribution, you do any of the following: copy verbatim from a book, an article, or other media; download documents from the Internet; purchase documents; report from other's oral work; paraphrase or restate someone else's facts, analysis, and/or conclusions; or copy directly from a classmate or allow a classmate to copy from you.

I am obligated to report cheating, plagiarism, and/or other forms of academic dishonesty for appropriate disciplinary action.

Student Resources

- **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**
Students requesting reasonable accommodations due to a disability are encouraged to register with the Moses Center for students with Disabilities. You can begin the registration process by completing [Moses Center Online Intake](#). Once completed, a Disability Specialist will be in contact with you. Students requiring services are strongly encouraged to register prior to the upcoming semester or as early as possible during the semester to ensure timely implementation of approved accommodations.
- NYU Writing Center (Washington Square): 411 Lafayette, 4th Floor. Schedule an appointment online at <https://nyu.mywconline.com> or just walk-in.
- **[Steinhardt Writing Center](#)**
The Steinhardt Writing Center provides judgment-free one-on-one sessions with a professional writing consultant, allowing students to workshop their papers and receive feedback on content and organization as well as mechanics and grammar. The center works with students at any stage of the writing process (from brainstorming to final drafts) and with any kind of writing (term papers, short responses, journal articles, dissertations, MA theses, cover letters, and more). For more information and to make an appointment, see [our webpage](#).

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week 1—January 25: Introduction: Defining Consumer Society

Week 2—February 1: Theories of Commodities, Gifts, and Exchange

Reading:

Elizabeth Chin, *My Life With Things*, Introduction pp. 3-56, 142-57

Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, Foreword, Intro and Chapter 1

Daniel Miller, "Theories of Things"

Recommended:

Arjun Appadurai, "Commodity and Politics of Value," pp. 3-16

Karl Marx "The Fetishism of the Commodity"

Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture*, Introduction and Exchanging Things

Week 3—February 8: Theories of the Consumer, Making Sense of Shopping

Reading:

Chin, *My Life With Things*, pp. 85-120

Daniel Miller, "Why We Shop"

Sharon Zukin, "A Brief History of Shopping"

Kerryn Higgs, "A Brief History of Consumer Culture"

<https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/a-brief-history-of-consumer-culture/>

Recommended:

Mark Paterson, "You Are What You Buy: Theories of the Consumer"

Frank Trentmann, "The Modern Genealogy of the Consumer"

Week 4—February 15: Spaces of Consumption: From Department Stores and Shopping Malls, to Big Box Retail and Craft Culture

Reading:

Christoph Grunenberg, “Wonderland: Spectacles of Display from the Bon Marche to Prada”

Alexandra Lange, *Meet Me By the Fountain: An Inside History of the Mall*, excerpts
Sharon Zukin, et al. *Global Cities, Local Streets: Everyday Diversity from New York to Shanghai* Chaps 1 and 3

Joseph Pine and James Gilmore, “Welcome to the Experience Economy”

Richard Ocejo, *Masters of Craft* (excerpt)

Recommended:

Vicki Howard, “The Rise and Fall of Sears”

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/rise-and-fall-sears-180964181/>

Sharon Zukin, “How Brooklyn Became Cool” and “Destination Culture”

Lizabeth Cohen, “From Town Center to Shopping Center”

Adam Gopnik, “Under One Roof”

Vicki Howard, *From Main Street to Mall*, excerpt

Week 5—February 22: Taste, Conspicuous Consumption, and Class

Reading:

Thorstein Veblen, *Conspicuous Consumption* (excerpt)

Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (excerpt)

Elizabeth Currid-Halkett, *The Sum of Small Things: A Theory of the Aspirational Class*
Chaps 1, 2, 5, 6, 7

Week 6—March 1: Theories of the Brand, from the 19th Century to Brand Culture

Reading:

Sarah Banet-Weiser, “Brand Keyword”

Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Authentic*, Introduction, Chap 1 “Branding Consumer Citizens” and Conclusion

Marcel Danesi, “From Product to Brand”

Recommended:

Scott Lash and Celia Lury, *Global Culture Industry*, Chaps 1 and 2

Liz Moor, *The Rise of Brands*, Chaps 1 and 2

Week 7—March 8: Logistics, Labor, and the Global Supply Chain

Reading:

Deborah Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics*, excerpt

Miriam Posner, “The Software that Shapes Workers’ Lives” and “See No Evil”

Charmaine Chua, “The Container”

<https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/06-object-politics/container-stacking-packing-moving-world-charmaine-chua>

and “The Chinese Logistical Sublime and its Wasted Remains”

<https://thedisorderofthings.com/tag/slow-boat-to-china/>

Clare Lyster, “The Logistical Figure”

Recommended:

Elizabeth Cline, “Fast Fashion” from *Overdressed*

Pietra Rivoli, *Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy*, excerpts

Juliet Schor, “The Paradox of Materiality: Fashion, Marketing, and the Planetary Ecology”

March 13-17 SPRING BREAK

Week 8—March 22: Rethinking Retail, Online Consumption, and Amazon

Reading:

Emily West, *Buy Now: How Amazon Branded Convenience and Normalized Monopoly*, Introduction and Chapter 2: The Box, and Chapter 3: From Bookseller to Behemoth

Derek Thompson, “History of Sears Predicts Amazon”

<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/09/sears-predicts-amazon/540888/>

Allison Champion, “The Amazon Effect,” <https://flow.space/blog/amazon-effect/>

Benjamin Lorr, *The Secret Life of Groceries*, Parts 1 and IV

Week 9—March 29: Media Consumption: The Movie Theater, Television and the Emergence of Streaming

Reading:

Miriam Hansen, “Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Transformations of the Public Sphere”

Roland Barthes, “Upon Leaving a Movie Theater”

Lynn Spigel, “The Suburban Home Companion” and “Television in the Family Circle” from *Make Room For TV*

Annette Kuhn, Dreaming of Fred and Ginger, Chaps 1 and 2

Alison Trope, “Hollywood in a Box” from *Stardust Monuments*

Recommended:

Lynn Spigel, *TV Snapshots: An Archive of Everyday Life*, Chap 1

Barbara Klinger, “Once is Not Enough”

Proposals for Final Papers Due

Week 10—April 5: Platformization and On Demand Culture

Reading:

Thomas Poell, David Nieborg, and Brooke Erin Duffy, *Platforms and Cultural Production*: Introduction and Chapter 6: Creativity

Chuck Tryon, *On Demand Culture*, Introduction

Michael Smith and Rahul Telang, *Streaming, Sharing, Stealing: Big Data and the Future*

Emily West, *Buy Now: How Amazon Branded Convenience and Normalized Monopoly*,

Chapter 2: Watch Now: Ubiquitous Media and the Commoditization of Culture

David Arditi, *Streaming Culture*, excerpts

Recommended:

Graeme Turner, “Let’s Talk About Binge Viewing”

Jack Webster, “Music On Demand”

Ramon Lobato, Netflix Nations, Chapter 4: Making Global Markets

“From the Phonograph to Spotify”

<https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/history-of-internet-radio>

Jennifer Holt and Kevin Sanson, “Introduction: Mapping Connections” from *Connected Viewing: Selling, Streaming & Sharing Media in the Digital Era*

Sharon Stover and William Moner, “The Contours of On-Demand Viewing”

Week 11—April 12: Data Collection, Consumer Tracking, and New Modes of Selling

Reading:

Sarah Lamdan, *Data Cartels: The Companies that Control and Monopolize Our Information*, excerpts

Shoshana Zuboff, “Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization” and “The Other Coup We Aren’t Talking About”

Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejias, “Data Colonialism: Rethinking Big Data’s Relation to the Contemporary Subject”

Jodi Dean, “The Promises of Communicative Capitalism” from *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*

Nicole Cohen, “Commodifying Free Labor Online”

Recommended:

Norma Mollers, et al. “Interview with Shoshana Zuboff”

Mark Bartholomew, *Ad Creep*, “Colonizing New Advertising Spaces” and “New Market Research”

Joe Turow, *The Aisles Have Eyes*, Chap 4: Hunting the Mobile Shopper

Mike Serazio, “Ambient Governance of Advertainment”

Week 12—April 19: Instagram and Influencer Culture

Reading:

Brooke Erin Duffy, *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love: Gender and Aspirational Labor in the Social Media Economy*, Chapter 1, 2, 5

Tama Leaver, Tim Highfield, and Crystal Abidin, *Instagram*, Introduction and Chapter 4: Economies

Jordan Foster, “‘It’s All About the Look’: Making Sense of Appearance, Attractiveness, and Authenticity Online

Victoria O’Meara, “Weapons of the Chic: Instagram Influencer Engagement Pods as Practices of Resistance to Instagram Platform Labor”

Recommended:

Brooke Erin Duffy and Emily Hund, “‘Having it All’ on Social Media: Entrepreneurial Femininity and Self Branding Among Fashion Bloggers”

Yasmin Ibrahim, “Instagramming Life”

Alice Marwick, “Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy”

Week 13—April 26: Television, TikTok, and Pathologies of Consumption: House Flipping, Hoarding, Decluttering

Reading:

Chin, *My Life With Things*, pp. 203-219

Shawn Shimpach, "Realty Reality: HGTV and the Subprime Crisis"

Laurie Ouellette, "Spark Joy?"

Arielle Bernstein, "Marie Kondo and the Privilege of Clutter"

<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/03/marie-kondo-and-the-privilege-of-clutter/475266/>

Recommended:

Steven Kurutz, "Dumpster Diving to Shame Stores" NYT

Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette, Introduction to *Reality TV*

Week 14—May 3: Consumer Ethics, Commodity Activism, and Opting Out

Reading:

Chin, *My Life With Things*, pp. 127-129, 170-184

Sarah Banet-Weiser and Roopali Mukherjee, "Commodity Activism in Neoliberal Times"

Jo Littler, "Cosmopolitan Caring: Globalization, Charity, and the Activist Consumer"

Laura Portwood-Stacer, "Anti-Consumption as Tactical Resistance"

Ann Patchett, "My Year of No Shopping"

Emily West, *Buy Now: How Amazon Branded Convenience and Normalized Monopoly*,

Conclusion: Confronting the Cost of Convenience

Recommended:

Elizabeth Cline, "Make Alter Mend" from *Overdressed*

Maurie Cohen, "The Mass Market Maker Movement"

Nicki Lisa Cole, "Ethical Consumption in the Global Age: Coffee's Promise of a Better World"

Juliet Schor, *True Wealth*, excerpt

Final Papers Due: May 10