This course explores recent scholarship on the “social life of things,” with emphasis on processes of commodification and cultural appropriation of consumer objects. In addition, it features research on the history of the automobile, a particularly evocative “thing” in Euro-American culture. Although the automobile has a rich and varied scholarship, its status as a cultural artifact has only recently gained sustained interest among European social historians. The course consists of required readings and discussion, student oral presentations (during the last five weeks of the semester), and a final research paper of 18-20 pages on a topic chosen in consultation with the instructor. Each week a group of 2-3 students will be responsible for circulating discussion questions via e-mail to the rest of the class and presenting a short critique (15 minutes maximum) of the reading in seminar.

Seminar participation and the oral presentation account for about half of the total grade; the final paper accounts for the rest. The research paper is due on Monday, December 16, in my office.

Required reading consists of excerpts from a course pack (indicated with an asterisk below) and three collections of essays by Victoria de Grazia, Susan Strasser et al, and Rudy Koshar. The course pack is available for purchase at the Mosse Humanities Building Copy Center; the three books may be found at the Underground Textbook Exchange on State St. All required reading will be placed on reserve at Helen C. White.

Required Reading:


*Sean O'Connell, The Car in British Society: Class, Gender, and Motoring 1896-1939 (Manchester University Press, 1998), 43-76


*Vanessa Schwartz, Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (University of California Press, 1998), 1-12

Susan Strasser, et al, eds., Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century (German Historical Institute/Cambridge University Press, 1998)


**PART 1: INTRODUCTION**

September 4: Outline of the Course

September 11: Conceptual Perspectives on Things and Commodities
Required Reading:
Kopytoff, 64-91*; Levin/Kracauer, 1-30*, 75-86*; Miller, 1-33*

Supplementary Reading:
Theodor Adorno, Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life (1951)
Roland Barthes, Mythologies (1972)
Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," in Basic Writings, edited by David Krell (1977), 343-63

**PART 2: THE SEX OF THINGS**

September 18: Consumption Regimes
Required Reading:
de Grazia, 1-150; Barthes, 88-90*

Supplementary Reading:
James J. Fink, The Automobile Age (1988)
Harold James, A German Identity 1770-1990 (1989)
Susan Reid and David Crowley, eds., Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Postwar Eastern Europe (2000)

September 25: Modern Consumer Households
Required Reading:
de Grazia, 151-274, O'Connell, 177-91*

Supplementary Reading:
Michael Berger, The Devil Wagon in God's Country: The Automobile and Social Change in Rural America, 1893-1929 (1979)
Erica Carter, How German is She? Postwar West German Reconstruction and the Consuming Woman (1997)
October 2: Women as Citizen-Consumers
Required Reading:
de Grazia, 275-387; O'Connell, 43-76*

Supplementary Reading:
Erica Carter, How German is She? Postwar West German Reconstruction and the Consuming Woman (1997)
Mary Louise Roberts, “Gender, Consumption, and Commodity Culture,” American Historical Review 103, 3 (June 1998): 817-44.
Victoria Scharff, Women at the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age (1991)

PART 3: EUROPE AND AMERICA AS CONSUMER SOCIETIES

October 9: Politics, Markets, and the State
Required Reading:
Strasser, 1-185; Stokes, 221-39*; Zatlin, 358-80*

Supplementary Reading:
David Head, Made in Germany: The Corporate Identity of a Nation (1992)
Reinhold Wagnleitner, Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War (1994)
Don Slater and Fran Tonkiss, Market Society: Markets and Modern Social Theory (2001), Chapter 5: "States and Markets"

October 16: Everyday Life
Required Reading:
Strasser, 187-405; Moorhouse, 170-199*

Supplementary Reading:
Richard Pells, Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture since World War II (1997)
Harvey Levenstein, Seductive Journey: American Tourists in France From Jefferson to the Jazz Age (1998)
Uta Poiger, Jazz. Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany (2000)
Ralph Willett, Americanization of Germany, 1945-1949 (1989)

PART 4: THINGS AT/IN LEISURE

October 23: Seeing as Leisure
Required Reading:
Koshar, 1-101; Schwarz, 1-12*; Zeller, 218-38*

Supplementary Reading:
Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle (1973)
David Matless, Landscape and Englishness (1998)
Reich (Oxford), pp. 68-89

October 30: Leisure Traveling
Required Reading:
Koshar, 105-230; Lavenir, 113-34*

Supplementary Reading:
Shelley Baranowski and Ellen Furlough, eds., Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America (2001)
Warren James Belasco, Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945 (1979)
James Clifford, Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century (1997)
Rudy Koshar, German Travel Cultures (2000)
Harvey Levenstein, Seductive Journey: American Tourists in France From Jefferson to the Jazz Age (1998)

November 6: Consuming (as) Leisure
Required Reading:
Koshar, 233-359; Ross, 15-70*

Supplementary Reading:
Lynn Abrams, Workers’ Culture in Imperial Germany: Leisure and Recreation in the Rhineland and Westphalia (1992)
Rebecca L. Spang, The Invention of the Restaurant: Paris and Modern Gastronomic Culture (2001)

PART 5: SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS (NOV. 13, 20, 27; DEC. 4, 11)

RESEARCH PAPER DUE MONDAY, DEC. 16