

# PHENOMENOLOGIES OF CAPITALISM

Fran Mascia-Lees

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16:070:538

email: [sbsdean@sas.rutgers.edu](mailto:sbsdean@sas.rutgers.edu)

Class meeting time: Tuesday, 9:15am-12:15pm

## OFFICES AND APPOINTMENTS:

- Office Hours: Tuesday 12:15-1:15pm in RAB 313, Douglass
- Other Appointments: Executive Dean's Office, 77 Hamilton St., CAC.

If you need an appointment with me outside my office hours, it will have to be in my CAC office. Please contact Sherri Somers ([ssomers@sas.rutgers.edu](mailto:ssomers@sas.rutgers.edu)) to schedule it.

## REQUIRED TEXT

Illouz, Eva. 2007. *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*. Polity.

*Man [sic] is affirmed in the objective world not only in the act of thinking, but with all his senses.*

Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (1844)

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores capitalism as a particular form of sensuous, embodied material culture, an aesthetic organization of sense experiences that varies across historical and cultural contexts. It emphasizes the ability of commodities and other objects to alter human consciousness; shape human desires, emotions, and memories; produce new ways of being-in-the-world; transform the sensory; and create culture.

### Part I

To explore capitalism in this way, the first section of this course brings together concepts and insights from contemporary phenomenological anthropology, especially work on embodiment and the senses, with recent work in material culture studies. These approaches challenge and extend staunchly political-economic and semiotic approaches that have dominated explanations of capitalism in anthropology, and provide a framework that facilitates analyses of the everyday lived experience of capitalism across ethnographic contexts. From here we will focus on understanding capitalism as a lived, embodied experience in two primary ways (Part II and Part III):

### Part II

First, we track the development of Western capitalism from the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the current moment, evaluating theories that have conceptualized it in terms of its sensuous and aesthetic dimensions and their relationship to broad economic, ideological, and political structures. Here we explore understandings of capitalism as a particular organization of the sensorium under different forms and at different "moments" of capitalist development. These include characterizations of it as "rational" and "disenchanted" during early capitalism (i.e., Weber); "phantasmagoria" and "dream world" under conditions of capitalist modernity (e.g., Benjamin); simulacrum during late capitalism

(e.g., Baudrillard); and “emotional” under neoliberalism (e.g., Illouz). We will assess the strength of these conceptualizations to capture the nature of experiences of capitalism in our contemporary moment.

### **Part III**

Secondly, we will focus on how relations among humans and things constitute the everyday for people in different times and places, linking them into systems of power and shaping their experience of daily life. Here we explore ethnographically salient phenomenological questions such as these: How do people gather and organize commodities and other “things” into social worlds? How do object-laden activities create particular sensory effects and experiences of time and place? How do certain commodities and objects provoke desire and come to be invested with value, meaning, and different degrees of emotional intensity? Why and how do some objects come to embody personal and social experiences?

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

### Weekly Reading Critiques and Class Discussion                      60% of grade

You are required to prepare 10 weekly 1-2 page critiques (no longer!) of the reading material, which demonstrate your creative, critical integration and evaluation of ideas from each of the articles. You will be expected to read half of your critiques in class and turn in the other half. Critiques will be used to facilitate our discussion of the material, so please make them interesting and lively.

There is no one acceptable form of critique, and you should experiment to find a form that is most productive for you. You can, for example, synthesize all the readings from a week into an overview of a type of approach; draw on one main idea from one reading and assess it in terms of the other readings for that class; use the articles to counter or elaborate on an argument, idea, or approach raised in earlier weeks; apply the week’s approaches to a concrete object, case, context, etc.; or something else entirely – you should feel free to be creative and take risks (and if you are too far off track I’ll let you know gently and without penalizing you in any way). What is important is that your critique address ideas from **each** of the articles and demonstrate your critical engagement with some of the main ideas being discussed. If you do not come prepared to class with your critique, you will receive a grade of zero for that day.

You are expected to participate actively in the discussion of the reading material in each class, demonstrating your knowledge of, and critical thinking about, the material covered. Participation should go above and beyond the reading of your critique in class, and should involve careful listening and generous responses to others’ critiques and ideas.

### Final Paper and Final Presentation                                      40% of grade

You are required to write a research paper of at least 15, but no more than 20, pages excluding references (12 point type, double spaced, one inch margins). In it, you will need to draw on at least 10 course readings to make a case for a particular approach you will then use to analyze some aspect of capitalism as a sensuous, embodied material experience.

Please email me your topic and preliminary ideas by February 7, 2012. Although it is not required, you may submit a draft to me once during the semester, at a time of your choosing, on which I will be happy to give feedback. But please let me know at least a week in advance.

The final version of your paper is due to me electronically by 5pm on April 10, 2013. I will NOT accept a late paper (no excuses, technological or otherwise). This will give you a week to prepare your final presentation, which is due on April 17, 2013. The best presentations are usually those that are most like conference papers, that is, they are edited down versions of your full paper. You may read your final paper if you choose or present it using notes. Whatever you choose they may be no longer than 10 minutes tops!

#### **ATTENDENCE POLICY**

Students are required to attend all class meetings (only one absence is allowable, and this only with a legitimate excuse such as serious illness). If you miss more than one class, you will jeopardize your standing in the course and may be asked to withdraw from it.

## COURSE OUTLINE

### PART I APPROACHES

#### Week 1 Introduction

Jan. 17

- Mascia-Lees, Frances E. Aesthetic Embodiment and Commodity Culture. In *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment*, edited by F.E. Mascia-Lees. Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

Suggested: those of you unfamiliar with some of Marx's basic ideas, may want to skim the following:

- The Real Basis of Ideology, from *The German Ideology, Part I*  
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01c.htm>
- Ruling Class and Ruling Ideas, from *The German Ideology, Part I*  
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01b.htm#b3>
- Estranged Labour from *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. Karl Marx  
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>

#### Week 2 Approaches to Stuff

Jan. 24

- Brown, Bill. 2001. Thing Theory. *Critical Inquiry* 28(1): 1-22.
- Ingold, Timothy. 2011. Anthropology Comes to Life. In *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge, and Description*, pp. 3-18.
- Keane, Webb. 2005. Signs are not the Garb of Meaning: On the Social Analysis of Material Things. In *Materiality*, edited by Daniel Miller, pp. 182-205.
- Kidron, Carol. 2009. Toward an Ethnography of Silence. *Current Anthropology* 50(1):
- Kopytoff, I., 1986. "The Cultural Biography of Things." In *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Appadurai, Arjun, ed., pp. 64-109.
- Tilley, Christopher. 2006. Introduction. In *Handbook of Material Culture*, edited by C. Tilley, W. Keane, S. Kuchler, M. Rowlands, and P. Spyer, pp. 1-5.

#### Critique #1 due in class

#### Week 3 Approaches to Experience: Phenomenological Anthropology, Embodiment, and the Senses

Jan. 31

- Crossland, Zoe. 2010. Materiality and Embodiment. *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, edited by Dan Hicks and Mary Beaudrey, pp. 386-405.
- Howes, David. 2006. Scent, Sound, and Synaesthesia: Intersensoriality and Material Culture Theory. *Handbook of Material Culture*, edited by C. Tilley, W. Keane, S. Kuchler, M. Rowlands, and P. Spyer, pp. 161-172.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 2007. The Phenomenology of Perception. In *Beyond the Body Proper: Reading the Anthropology of Material Life*, edited by Margaret Lock and Judith Facquhar, pp. 133-149.
- Sobchack, Vivien. 2004. The Passion of the Material: Toward a Phenomenology of Interobjectivity. In *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, pp. 286-318.
- Thomas, Julian. 2006. Phenomenology and Material Culture. *Handbook of Material Culture*, edited by C. Tilley, W. Keane, S. Kuchler, M. Rowlands, and P. Spyer, pp. 43-59.

- Bille, Mikkel and Tim Flohr Sørensen. 2007. An Anthropology of Luminosity: The Agency of Light. *Journal of Material Culture* 12: 263-284.
- Miller, Daniel. 2009. Buying Time. In *Time, Consumption and Everyday Life: Practice, Materiality and Culture*, edited by Elizabeth Shove, Frank Trentmann, and Richard Wilk, pp. 157-170.

Critique #2 due in class

## Part II PHENOMENOLOGIES OF WESTERN CAPITALISM

Those of you who would like a primer on approaches to consumer capitalism might want to look at "Approaches to Consumption: Classical and Contemporary Perspectives" by Matt Gottdiener in *New Forms of Consumption*, edited by M. Gottdiener (2000, Roman and Littlefield).

### Week 4 Modernity as Disenchanted or Dreamworld?

Feb. 7

- Benjamin, Walter. 1969. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, pp. 217-252
- Boym, Svetlana. 2001. The Angel of History. In *The Future of Nostalgia*, pp. 19-32.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. 1995. "The City as Dreamworld and Catastrophe," *October* 73: 3-26.
- Campbell, Colin. 1987. The Other Protestant Ethic. In *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, pp. 100-137.
- Sassatelli, Roberta. *The Rise of Consumer Culture. Consumer Culture: History, Theory, Politics*, pp. 9-31.
- Weber, M. Protestant Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism. In *Weber: Selections in Translation*, edited by W.G. Runciman (translated by Eric Matthews), pp. 138-173.
- Williams, Rosalind. 1991. The Dream World of Mass Consumption. In *Rethinking Popular Culture*, edited by C. Mukerji and M. Schudson, pp. 198-235.

Critique #3 due in class

### Week 5 Postmodernity: The Cultural Logics of Late Capitalism

Feb. 14

- Baudrillard, J. Simulacrum and Simulations. In *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, edited by Mark Poster, pp. 166-184.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. The Habitus and the Space of Life-Styles. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, pp.169-225.
- Featherstone, M. 1992. Postmodernism and the Aestheticization of Everyday Life. In *Modernity and Identity*, edited by S. Lash and J. Friedman, pp. 265-290.
- Gitlin, Todd. 1989. Post-modernism: Roots and Politics. In *Cultural Politics in Contemporary America*, edited by Ian Angus and Sut Jhally, pp. 347-360.
- Harvey, David. 1989. The Condition of Postmodernity, Chapter 11 (pp. 189-200) and Chapters 12-17 (201-307). *I know most of you have read this already. If so, just skim.*
- Jameson, Fredric. Postmodernism and Consumer Society. In *Postmodernism and its Discontents*.
- Mascia-Lees, F., P. Sharpe, and C. Cohen. The Female Body in Postmodern Consumer Culture: Subjectivity and Agency at the Mall. In *Taking a Stand in a Postfeminist World*, Mascia-Lees and Sharpe.
- Taussig, M. Tactility and Distraction. In *Rereading Cultural Anthropology*, edited by George Marcus, pp. 8-14.

Critique #4 due in class

**Week 6 Neoliberal/Millennial/Global Capitalism and its Structure(s) of Feeling**

Feb. 21

- Comaroff, Jean and John Comaroff, 2005. Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism. In *The Anthropology of Development and Globalization: From Classical Political Economy to Contemporary Neoliberalism*, edited by M. Edelman and A. Haugerud, pp.177-187.
- Gledhill, John. 2004. Neoliberalism. In *A Companion to the Anthropology of Politics*, edited by David Nugent and Joan Vincent, pp. 332-348.
- Mole, Noelle. 2008. Living it on the Skin: Italian States, Working Illness." *American Ethnologist* 35(2): 189-210.
- Brewer, John and Frank Trentmann. 2006. Introduction: Space, Time and Value. In *Consuming Cultures/Global Perspectives: Historical Trajectories, Transnational Exchange*, edited by John Brewer and Frank Trentmann, pp. 1-18.
- TBD: reading on Neoliberalism, Governmentality, and Embodiment

Critique #5 due in class

**Week 7 Affective Economies/ Emotional Capitalism**

Feb. 28

- Illouz, Eva. 2007. *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*, all.
- Prada, Juan Martin. Economics of Affectivity.
- Smith, Daniel. 2007. Deleuze and The Question Of Desire: Toward An Immanent Theory Of Ethics. *Parrhesia* 2: 66-78.

Critique #6 due in class

**PART III PHENOMONOLOGIES OF EVERYDAY LIFE**

**Week 8 Magical Things: Fetishes, Totems, and Enchantment**

Mar. 6

The first three readings are short:

- Jackson, Michael. 1998. "Fetish," excerpt from *Minima Ethnographica: Intersubjectivity and the Anthropological Project*, pp. 75-82.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1928. "Fetishism." In *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* 21:152-157.
- Marx, Karl. 1894. The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof. Chapter 1, Section 4, In *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm#S4>
- Mitchell, W. J. T. 2001. Romanticism and the Life of Things: Fossils, Totems, and Images. *Critical Inquiry* 28(1): 1-22.
- Moors, Annelies. 1998. Wearing Gold. In *Border Fetishisms*, edited by Patricia Spyer, pp. 208-223.
- Piels, Peter. 2010. Magical Things: On Fetishes, Commodities, and Computers. In *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, edited by Dan Hicks and Mary Baudrey, pp. 613-633.
- Stallybrass, Peter and Ann Rosalind Jones. 2001. Fetishizing the Glove in Renaissance Europe. *Critical Inquiry* 28(1): 114-132.

Critique #7 due in class

**Week 9 Workshop papers**  
Mar. 20

**March 27 Phenomenologies of Place: Nell Quest (Guest Instructor)**  
Week 10

Critique #8 due in class

**Week 11 Tyranny of Things or Gathering Social Worlds?: Shopping, Collecting, and Hoarding**  
Apr. 3

- Belk, R. 2006. Collectors and Collecting. In *Handbook of Material Culture*, edited by C. Tilley, W. Keane, S. Kuchler, M. Rowlands, and P. Spyer, pp. 534-545.
- Benjamin, W. 1968. "Unpacking my Library." In *Illuminations*. Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.
- Bennett, Jane. 2011. Powers of the Hoard: Notes on Material Agency
- Moutu, Andrew. 2006. Collection as a Way of Being. In *Thinking through Things: Theorising Artefacts Ethnographically*, edited by Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad, Sari Wastell, pp. 93-112.
- Veenis, Milena. 1999. Consumption in East Germany: The Seduction and Betrayal of Things. *Journal of Material Culture* 4(1): 79-112.
- Pinch, Adela. 1998. Stealing Happiness: Shoplifting in Early Nineteenth-Century England. In *Border Fetishisms*, edited by Patricia Spyer, pp. 122-149.

Critique #9 due in class

**Week 12 I reserve this week for your choice of a topic. For example, we could focus on something like "Objects, Memory, and (Colonial) Nostalgia" or "Being at Home," or something else that comes up during our discussions that interests enough of us. I will take your lead on this.**  
Apr. 10

Critique #10 due in class

**FINAL PAPER DUE BY 5pm (electronically)**

**Week 13 PAPER PRESENTATIONS**  
April 17

**Week 14 CONCLUSIONS (discussion over dinner at Fran's house)**  
April 24