

Consumption and Sustainability, F&ES 90025b Spring 2010

Juliet Schor, Visiting Professor

Room: 380 Edwards Time: Wednesday 1:30-4:20

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Course Content and Objectives: This course addresses the role of consumption in achieving sustainability, considering challenges such as the scale of consumption in the global north, the spread of consumer culture globally, and the role of particular highly damaging goods and services. The sub-text of much of the discussion to date has been about how difficult it is to affect the trajectory and composition of consumption. However, a look at the historical path of consumer cultures reveals that they are dynamic, multi-faceted, and complex entities.

For the most part, sociologists and anthropologists who study consumption as a cultural phenomenon have played a limited role in discussions about sustainability, which has been more rooted in design and engineering approaches. This course looks at consumption and sustainability primarily from a socio-cultural perspective, bringing foundational theories of consumption and consumer culture into dialog with the contemporary sustainability literature. Situating the challenge of sustainability in a socio-cultural perspective expands our understanding of how and why consumption cultures change and where the points of contradiction are located. The second half of the course considers ecologically significant cases (food, energy, and lifestyle) and the complex politics of sustainable consumption. The objective of the course is to develop basic fluency in the rapidly growing field of sustainable consumption, with an emphasis on underlying paradigms and theoretical approaches. Students will develop a strong analytic context from which to develop expertise as well as understand and evaluate the growing literature and applied activity in this field.

Requirements: Weekly reading, one book (or article review, February 10), one 20 page paper (due April 25). Alternative requirements will be discussed during the first class.

Readings and Texts: I have ordered three books for the class. Other readings will be available electronically.
Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Harvard 1984)
Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford 1991)

Daniel Jaffee, *Brewing Justice: Fair Trade Coffee, Sustainability and Survival* (University of California 2007)

I. Introduction: The Challenge of Sustainable Consumption Jan 13 (1 week)

An introduction to the problem of unsustainable growth and the field of sustainable consumption. Overview of some key issues.

Rockström, Johan, Will Steffen, Kevin Noone, Åsa Persson, Chapin F. Stuart III, Eric F. Lambin, Timothy M. Lenton, et al. 2009. A safe operating space for humanity. *Nature* 461 (September 24): 472-75.
Tim Jackson, 2008, "The Challenge of Sustainable Lifestyles," 2008 *State of the World*, (Washington, DC: Worldwatch Institute), ch 4, pp. 45-60.

Gert Spaargaren, "Sustainable Consumption: A Theoretical and Environmental Policy Perspective," in *The Ecological Modernisation Reader*, Edited by Arthur P.J. Mol, David A. Sonnenfeld and Gert Spaargaren, (London: Routledge), pp. 318-333.

Richard Wilk, 2004, "Questionable Assumptions about Sustainable Consumption," in *The Ecological Economics of Consumption*, edited by Lucia A. Reisch and Inge Røpke, (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar), pp. 17-31.

Juliet B. Schor, 2005, "Sustainable Consumption and Worktime Reduction," *Review of Industrial Ecology*, Special Issue on Sustainable Consumption, 9(1):37-50.

II. Understanding Consumer Culture: Socio-Cultural Theories (5 weeks)

Consumption as a historically evolving practice, its role as symbol and reproducer of culture.

Consumption as cultural communication, reproducer of social difference, inequality, and identity. Particular emphasis on Bourdieu's theory of taste and distinction and Giddens and Beck on reflexive identity in a risk society.

A. Taste and Distinction Jan 20, 27

Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods*. (Routledge 1996), ch 1, pp. 36-47.

Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Harvard 1984), chs 1-5. (page numbers and reading guidelines will be given in class).

Douglas Holt, "Does Culture Capital Structure American Consumption?" *Journal of Consumer Research*, reprinted in Schor and Holt, *The Consumer Society Reader* (New Press 2001), pp. 212-252.
Schneider, "In and Out of Polyester, Desire, Disdain and Global Fiber Competitions," *Anthropology Today*, 10(4):2-10.
Jesper Ole Jensen, 2008, "Measuring Consumption in Households: Interpretations and Strategies," *Ecological Economics* 68:353-361.

B. Consumption, Identity and Risk February 3

Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, chs.
Ulrich Beck, *World At Risk* (Polity Press) 2007, chs.
Dynamics of Green Consumption: A Matter of Visibility," *J of Environmental Policy and Planning* 2:193-210.

C. Advertising, Branding and the Contradictions of Contemporary Consumer Culture February 10

Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, chs. (University of Chicago Press)
Craig J. Thompson, 2004, "Marketplace Mythology and Discourses of Power," *Journal of Consumer Research* 31:162-180.
Douglas Holt, 2002, "Why Do Brands Cause Trouble?" *Journal of Consumer Research*

D. Ecological Modernization Theory and the "Infrastructural" Approach Feb 17

Inge Røpke, 2009, "Theories of Practice—new inspiration for ecological economic studies of consumption," *Ecological Economics*, 68:2490-2497.
Dale Southerton, Alan Warde and Martin Hand, 2004, "The Limited Autonomy of the Consumer," in *Sustainable Consumption: The Implications of Changing Infrastructures of Provision*, Dale Southerton, Heather Chappells and Bas Van Vliet (Edward Elgar).
Spaargaren, G, Vliet B.J.M. van, 2000, "Lifestyles, Consumption and Environment: The Ecological Modernization of Domestic Consumption," *Environmental Politics*, 9:50-77
Martin Hand, Elizabeth Shove and Dale Southerton, 2005, "Explaining Showering: a Discussion of the Material, Conventional, and Temporal Dimensions of Practice," *Sociological Research Online* 10(2), available at: <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/10/2/hand.html>

Martin Hand and Elizabeth Shove, 2007, "Condensing Practices: Ways of Living with a Freezer," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 7(1): 79-104.
Elizabeth Shove and Mika Pantzar, 2005 "Consumers, Producers and Practices: Understanding the Invention and Re-invention of Nordic Walking," *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 5(1):43-64.
Bente Halkier, "Routinisation or Reflexivity: Consumers and Normative Claims for Environmental Consideration," in Jukka Gronow and Alan Warde, *Ordinary Consumption* (Routledge 2001), pp. 25-44.
Maj-Britt Quitzau and Inge Røpke, Danish bathroom boom, *Journal of Industrial Ecology* 2008

E. Models of Consumer Behavior: Rational Actor, Neuro-Economics and the Social Agent February 24

Gary Becker, *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior*, ch 1.
Gowdy, John M., 2008. "Behavioral economics and climate change policy," *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 68(3-4): 632-644.
Noah Goldstein, Robert Cialdini and Vidas Griskevicius, 2008, "A Room with a Viewpoint: Using Social Norms to Motivate Environmental Conservation in Hotels," *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol 35:472-482.
Nicholas A. Christakis and James H. Fowler, 2009, *Connected: The Surprising Power of Our Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives* (Boston: Little Brown), chs.
Schor, *The Overspent American* (Basic Books 1998) ch 4.
Guido Buenstorf and Christian Cordes, 2008, "Can Sustainable Consumption Be Learned: A Model of Cultural Evolution," *Ecological Economics* 67:646-657.

IV. Consumption and Sustainability in the Global Context February 24

Myers N, Kent J. 2003. New consumers: the influence of affluence on the environment. *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 100:4963-68.
Wolfgang Sachs and Tilman Santarius, *Fair Future: Resource Conflicts, Security and Global Justice* (London: Zed), chs. 2,5. pp. 35-82, 150-180.
Juliet B. Schor, 2005, "Sustainable Consumption and Worktime Reduction," *Review of Industrial Ecology*, Special Issue on Sustainable Consumption, 9(1):37-50.
Tuba Üstüner and Douglas B. Holt. Forthcoming. "Toward a Theory of Status Consumption in Less Industrialized Countries." *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2010.

Arrow, Kenneth, Partha Dasgupta, Lawrence Goulder, Gretchen Daily, Paul Ehrlich, Geoffrey Heal, Simon Levin, et al. 2004, "Are we consuming too much?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 18 (3):147–72.

V. Paths to Sustainability: Commodities and Lifestyle Choices (4 weeks)

A. Food March 3

Mary Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal," reprinted in *Food and Culture: A Reader*, eds, Carol Counihan and Penny van Esterik (Routledge 1977), pp. 36-54.

Michael Pollan, 2001, "Naturally: How Organic Became a Marketing Niche and A Multi-Billion Dollar Industry," *New York Times Magazine*, May 13.

Gill Seyfang, 2008, *The New Economics of Sustainable Consumption* (London: Palgrave) ch 5.

Alison Leitch, "Slow Food and the Politics of Pork Fat: Italian Food and European Identity," *Ethnos* Vol 68(4): 437-462.

Thompson, Craig J, and Gokcen Coskuner-Balli. 2007. "Enchanting Ethical Consumerism: The Case of Community Supported Agriculture." *Journal of Consumer Culture*,7:275-303.

Josee Johnston, 2008, "The citizen-consumer hybrid: Ideological Tensions and the Case of Whole Foods Market," *Theory and Society* 37(3):229-270.

Richard Wilk, 2006, "Bottled Water: The Pure Commodity in the Age of Branding," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 6:303-325. [look at this again and decide]

Julie Guthman, "Fast food/organic food: reflexive tastes and the marking of 'yuppie chow' *Social and Cultural Geography*, 4(1):45-58.

B. Energy, Carbon and the Debate about Climate Change March 24

Hayden, Anders. 2008. "From Growth to Sufficiency? The Emerging Challenge to Ecological Modernization in the UK Climate-Change Debate." unpublished paper, Boston College, Department of Sociology.

Reg Platt and Simon Retallack (2009), *Consumer Power: How the public thinks lower-carbon behaviour could be made mainstream,* Report Institute for Public Policy Research, available at TK.

Seyfang, G. Lorenzoni, I. and Nye, M. (2007) Personal Carbon Trading: notional concept or workable proposition? Exploring theoretical, ideological and practical underpinnings, CSERGE Working Paper, EDM

2007-03, available at:
http://www.uea.ac.uk/env/cserge/pub/wp/edm/edm_2007_03.htm.
Marius K. Luedicke, Craig Thompson and Markus Giesler, "Defying the Jeremiad against Consumerism: How American Exceptionalism Provides a Moral Justification for Resource-Intensive Consumption Practices," *Journal of Consumer Research*, forthcoming 2010.

C. Worktime, Downshifting, and Low-Impact Lifestyles March 31

Juliet B. Schor, 1998, *The Overspent American* (New York: Basic Books), ch. 5.

Connolly J. and Prothero A. (2008), "Green Consumption: Life-politics, Risk and Contradictions", *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 8(1), pp 117-145.

L.H. Pedersen, 2000, "The

Evans and Abrahamse, " Environmental Politics

Kasser, Tim, and Kirk W. Brown. 2003. "On time, happiness, and ecological footprints," *Take back your time: Fighting overwork and time poverty in America* , edited by John De Graaf. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 107-12.

Jo Littler, *Radical Consumption*, ch 5, "Ecologies of Green Consumption," Open University Press 2009, pp. 91-115.

Nelson, Michelle R., Mark A. Rademacher, and Hye-Jin Paek. 2007. Downshifting consumer= upshifting citizen? An examination of a local freecycle community. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 611 (1): 141-56.

Daniel Miller and Richard Wilk, "The Poverty of Morality," and "Consuming Morality," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 1(2): 245-260.

National Consumer Council, 2006, *I will if you will: Towards Sustainable Consumption*, National Consumer Council and Sustainable Development Commission, available at:

http://www.sdcommission.org.uk/file_download.php?target=/publications/downloads/I_Will_If_You_Will.pdf (can skim)

VI. The politics of sustainable consumption (2 weeks)

A. The Marriage of Ecology and Social Justice: Fair Trade

Daniel Jaffee, 2007, *Brewing Justice: Fair Trade Coffee, Sustainability, and Survival* (Berkeley, CA: University of California), chs. TBA

B. Consumer Action: Individualization or a Social Movement?

Maniates, Michael. 2002. "Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?" In Princen, T., M. Maniates, & K. Conca (Eds.) *Confronting Consumption* (pp. 43-66). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Seyfang, G. (2004) 'Consuming Values and Contested Cultures: A Critical Analysis of the UK Strategy for Sustainable Consumption and Production', *Review Of Social Economy* Vol 62 (3), pp.323-338.

Prothero A. and Fitchett, J.A. (2000) "Greening Capitalism: Opportunities for A Green Commodity" *Journal of Macromarketing* 20(1), pp 46-55.

Andrew Szasz, *Shopping Our Way to Safety* (U Minnesota Press).

B. Ethical Consumption and the Movement for Consumer Activism (1 week)

Matthew Hilton, 2007. "Consumers and the state since the Second World War," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 611: 66-81.

Sassatelli, Roberta. 2006, "Virtue, Responsibility and Consumer Choice: Framing Critical Consumerism,' in John Brewer and Frank Trentmann, eds., 2006 *Consuming Cultures, Global Perspectives* (New York: Berg), ch 9, pp. 219-250.

Kate Soper and Frank Trentmann, eds., 2008, *Citizenship and Consumption* (Palgrave MacMillan).

Forno, Francesca, and Luigi Ceccarini. 2006. "From the Street to the Shops: The Rise of New Forms of Political Actions in Italy." *South European Society & Politics*, 11:197-222.

Margaret Willis and Juliet B. Schor, 2010, "Does Changing a Light Bulb Change the World?" unpublished.

Soper, K. (2008) *Alternative Hedonism, Cultural Theory and the Role of Aesthetic*

Revisioning, *Cultural Studies* (forthcoming)

Spaargaren, G. (2003) "Sustainable Consumption: A Theoretical and Environmental

Policy Perspective," *Society and Natural Resources*, (16): pp. 687-701.

A. Consumption and Alternative Economies (April 21)

Juliet B. Schor, *Plenitude*.

Wolfgang Sachs, Reinhard Loske and Manfred Linz et al, *Greening the North: A Post-Industrial Blueprint for Ecology and Equity*, ch 5 *Paradigms*, pp., 84-172. (Zed Press 1998)

Jackson, T. (2009) *Prosperity Without Growth*