Spring 2019 Course Descriptions

Instructor: Sally Robinson
Course: ENGL 481.904
Title: Consumerism and American Culture

Description: From at least the middle of the 19th century, American culture has been attempting to come to terms with the ever increasing dominance of consumerism in all aspects of life. Literature, film, and a wide range of nonfiction writing has represented, criticized, made fun of, and celebrated the forms and practices of consumer culture. Whether the topic is profligate shopping, reality television, advertising, food trends, commercialized religion, or the “Disneyfication” of literature and history, representations of consumerism always raise questions about cultural value. In this class, we will read fiction and nonfiction and view films that actively engage in questions about the meanings of consumerism. Some attack consumerism as “fake;” some celebrate it as empowering; some rely on gender and class stereotypes to categorize “high” versus “low” culture; and some consider the environmental and global implications of the dominance of a specifically American consumerism on the national and world scene. Throughout the course, we will challenge commonsense ideas about the meanings of consumerism, with the goal of arriving at a more complex picture of how culture and commerce, art and commodities, the museum and the shopping center interact with and influence each other.

Proposed Readings: Tentative reading and viewing list:

Novels:
Ira Levin, The Stepford Wives (1972)
Don DeLillo, White Noise (1985)
Jessica Hagedorn, Dogeaters (1990)
Ruth Ozeki, My Year of Meats (1999)
Sophie Kinsella, Shopaholic Takes Manhattan (2002)
Judith Levine, My Year Without Shopping (2006)

Films:
David Fincher, director, Fight Club (1999)
Derrick Borte, director, The Joneses (2009)

A range of articles and book chapters (all available on eCampus) to contextualize our primary reading.