

CAPITALISM AND COMMODIFICATION

Sociology 190.002, Fall 2018

Wednesdays 2- 4 pm

106 Wheeler Hall

Instructor

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Office hours: Wednesdays 4-5pm

or by appointment

Course Description

Capitalist economies are based on the production and consumption of commodities. We have to pay for most goods and services that we consume, and they are only provided as long as somebody makes a profit out of it. Even more so: Things that cost nothing are often considered to be worthless or at least of lower quality. On the other hand, there are things that we commonly do not associate with money, such as love or affection, but also the provision of human organs or the birth of babies and paying for them is considered unethical and potentially damaging for society. Hence even in capitalist economies, some goods and services are not or only partially commodified. However, neoliberalism has shifted the frontier of commodification in recent decades through privatization, marketization, and financialization. In this course, we will first review theories of commodification and then analyze processes of commodification in different social spheres such as health care, education, food, and housing. We will, furthermore, explore the consequences of commodification, including the consequences for social equality. Finally, we will look at the limits of commodification.

Attendance:

Attendance is mandatory. Students cannot miss more than two classes if they want to pass the course. Absences due to illnesses count towards your two absences. Students are responsible for notifying instructors about absences.

Readings:

Readings are also mandatory. All readings will be uploaded at the bCourses site. All readings should be completed before class each week. Reading implies that students are able to summarize content, identify main arguments, and discuss the readings during the seminar. Students are strongly advised to take notes from the readings as that will make it easier to prepare for class and to complete the assignments.

Assignments:

- 20% Participation and the submission of weekly reading questions
- 30% Essay
- 10% Research abstract
- 40% Final research paper

Participation and weekly reading questions:

Participation means more than physical presence during the seminar: Students are expected to actively take part in discussions, raise questions, and make comments. In addition, students are expected to submit three questions for each weekly reading until Monday before class. The questions should refer to major arguments or propositions in the readings (rather than on some specific details) and show that students have read and thought about the text. Questions (including name and student number) must be uploaded on the bcourse site.

Essay

The essay will be a response to a question (topic will be announced). Students are expected to use the course readings to answer it. The essay should be 6-8 pages long, double spaced, 12point New Roman font and include one-inch page margins. Essays should include references to at least four readings from class. The essay is due on October 5 (before midnight) and must be uploaded as word document on the bcourse site (including name and student number).

Research abstract and paper

The topic of the research paper can be chosen from one of the following topics: health care, education, media & culture, housing, space & cities, food & agriculture, labor, body & reproduction, or another topic if agreed by the instructor. Students can use readings from class but are encouraged to find additional academic publications that deal with the topic. Academic publications are books, books chapters, and journal articles. Websites are not academic sources! You find books and journals in the library. Students are expected to reference at least six sources. The essays should be between 10 and 12 pages long, again double-spaced, 12point New Roman font, one-inch page margins.

Students should provide an abstract, subheadings and a list of references for the research paper until November 12. The abstracts will be discussed in class on November 14. The full research paper is due on November 30 (before midnight) and must also be uploaded on the bcourse site (do not forget name and student number).

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is the appropriation and representation as one's own of the words or ideas of someone else. Even if confined to a short phrase, it is a grave act of academic dishonesty and grounds for failure of the course or academic discipline. No source in any form or medium—including encyclopedias, dictionaries, textbooks, internet material, unpublished material, work by other students, material without a copyright—may be used without full acknowledgement and, in the case of direct quotes, quotation marks. For further reference, see <http://uga.berkeley.edu/sas/rights.shtml> and <http://www.web-miner.com/plagiarism>.

Accommodations for Disabilities

The Disabled Students' Program (DSP) is the campus office responsible for verifying that students have disability-related needs and for planning appropriate accommodations. Students who need accommodations for disabilities must obtain a letter of confirmation from the DSP. If you already have a Letter of Accommodation from the DSP, please pass it on immediately, if you receive one, as soon as possible, so that I am able to make necessary arrangements in a timely manner. Please note that at the end of the semester it is too late to inform me about disabilities or any other condition that prevented you from succeeding in class.

Course Schedule

Week 1 (08/22): Introduction

Week 2: (08/29): Theories 1

- Marx, Karl (1978): *Commodities* from The Marx-Engels Reader, ed. by Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton), pp. 302-329 [originally from Capital Vol I].
- Polanyi, Karl (2001): *Chapter 6* (The Self-Regulating Market and the Fictitious Commodities Labor, Land and Money) from his book The Great Transformation. Boston: Beacon Press, pp. 71-80.
- Veblen Thorstein (2015) *Chapter 8* (Summary and Trial Balance) from his book The Higher Learning in America: A Memorandum on the Conduct of Universities by Business Men. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 187-234.

Week 3 (09/05): Theories 2

- Anderson, Elizabeth (1993): *Chapter 7* (The Ethical Limitations of Markets) from her book Value and Ethics in Economics. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 141-167.
- Sandel, Michael (2012): *Introduction and Chapter 3* (How Markets Crowd out Morals) from his book What Money Can't Buy. The Moral Limits of Markets. London: Allen Lane, pp. 1-3 and 44-93.
- Satz, Debra (2012): *Chapter 4* (Noxious Markets) from her book Why Some Things Should Not Be for Sale. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 91-114.

Week 4 (09/12): Theories 3

- Zelizer, Viviana A. (2000): *The Purchase of Intimacy*. Law & Social Inquiry. Volume 25, Issue 3, pp. 817-848.
- Healy, Kieran (2006): *Chapter 1* (Exchange in Human Goods) from his book Last Best Gifts: Altruism and the Market for Human Blood and Organs. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 1-23.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russel (2003): *Chapter 2* (The Commodity Frontier) from her book The Commercialization of Intimate Life: Notes from Home and Work. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 30-44.

Week 5 (09/19): Theories 4

- Prudham, Scott (2009): *Commodification*. Noel Castree et al (eds), A Companion to Environmental Geography. Willey-Blackwell, pp. 123-142.
- Leys, Colin (2001): *Chapter 4* (Markets, Commodities, Commodification) from his book Market-Driven Politics. London: Verso, pp. 81-107.
- Harvey, David (2003): *The New Imperialism and Accumulation by Dispossession*. Socialist Register 2004, pp. 63-87.
- Hermann, Christoph (unpublished): The Critique of Commodification.

Week 6 (09/26): Health care

- Kuttner, Robert (1996): *Chapter 4* (Markets and Medicine) from his book Everything for Sale: The Virtues and Limits of Markets. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 110-158.
- Kalman Applbaum (2009): *Marketing Global Health Care: The Practices of Big Pharma*. Socialist Register 2010, pp. 84-102.
- Stone Deborah (2005): *For Love nor Money. The Commodification of Care*. In: Martha Ertman and Johan Williams (eds), Rethinking Commodification. New York: New York University Press, pp. 271-290.

Week 7 (10/03): Education

- Newfield, Christopher (2016): *Introduction and subsequent excerpts* from his book The Great Mistake. How We Wrecked Public Universities and How We Can Fix It. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Molesworth, Mike, Elizabeth Nixon and Richard Scullion (2009): *Having, Being and Higher Education: The Marketisation of the University and the Transformation of the Student into Consumer*. Teaching in Higher Education Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 277-287.
- Busch, Lawrence (2017): *Education* from his book Knowledge for Sale. The Neoliberal Takeover of Higher Education. Cambridge MA: MIT Press, pp. 49-64.

Week 8 (10/10): Media & culture

- McChesney, Robert W. (2013): *Chapter 4* (The Internet and Capitalism 1) from his book Digital Disconnect. New York: Monthly Review Press, pp. 96-129.
- Mosco, Vincent (2009): *Chapter 7* (Commodification, Content, Audiences, Labor) from his book The Political Economy of Commodification. London: Sage.
- Austin, Regina (2003): *Kwanzaa and the Commodification of Black Cultures*, in Martha Ertman and Johan Williams (eds), Rethinking Commodification. New York: New York University Press, pp. 178-190.

Week 9 (10/17): Housing/space/cities

- Madden, David, and Peter Marcuse (2016): *Chapter 1* (Against the Commodification of Housing) from their book In Defense of Public Housing. London: Verso, pp. 15-52.
- Harvey, David (2008): *The Right to the City*. New Left Review 53, pp. 23-40.

- Cespedes, Crispell et al. (2015): *Chapter 4: The Mission District Case Study*. In; Gentrification and Displacement in the San Francisco Bay Area. Center for Community Innovation UC Berkeley.

Week 10 (10/24): Food & agriculture

- Pollan, Michael (2006): *The Industrialization of Eating* from his book In Defense of Food. New York: Penguin Press, pp. 101-136.
- Holt-Gimenez, Eric (2017): *Chapter 4 (Capitalism, Food, and Agriculture)* from his book A Foodie's Guide to Capitalism. New York: Monthly Review Press, pp.115-142.
- Albritton, Robert (2009): *Between Obesity and Hunger: The Capitalist Food Industry*. Socialist Register 2010, pp. 184-197.

Week 11 (10/31): Labor

- Bryan D. Palmer (2013): *Reconsiderations of Class: Precariousness and Proletarianization*. Socialist Register 2014, pp. 40-62.
- Schor, Juliet B. et al (without year): Dependence and Precarity in the Platform Economy. Unpublished research paper.
- Hochschild, Ariel (1983): *Chapter 6 (Feeling Management: From Private to Commercial Use)* From her book The Managed Heart. The Commercialization of Human Feeling. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 89-136.

Week 12 (11/07): Body and reproduction

- Shepper-Hughes, Nancy (2003): *Commodity Fetishism in Organ Trafficking*. In Nancy Shepper-Hughes and Loic Wacquant (eds.), Commodifying Bodies. Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp. 31-62.
- Healy, Kieran (2006): *Chapter 6 (Managing Gifts, Making Markets)* from his book Last Best Gifts: Altruism and the Market for Human Blood and Organs. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 110-132.
- Anderson, Elizabeth (1993): *Chapter 8 (Is Women's Labor a Commodity?)* from her book Value and Ethics in Economics. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 168-189.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russel (2012): *Chapter 4 (Our Baby her womb)* and *Chapter 5 (My womb their baby)* from her book The Outsourced Self. New York: Metropolitan Books, pp. 71-103.

Week 13 (11/14): Discussion of abstracts for the Research Paper.

Week 14 (11/29): Limits to commodification

- Luxemburg, Rosa (2003): *Chapter 26 (The Reproduction of Capital and its Social Setting)* from her book The Accumulation of Capital (New York: Routledge), pp.328-347.
- Polanyi, Karl (2001): *Chapter 11 (Man, Nature, and Productive Organization)* from his book The Great Transformation (Boston: Beacon Press), pp. 136-157.
- Hermann, Christoph (unpublished): The Limits of Commodification.