

Professor Daniel Rosenberg  
**Eighteenth-Century Things: Material  
Cultures of the Enlightenment**  
HIST410/510 (CRN 25388/26263)  
Mon/Wed 10:00-11:20 301 Condon

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*Eighteenth-Century Writing Automaton*

## Course Description

Sometimes we say *you are what you eat*, but from the point of view of cultural history, you are also the things that you eat with (forks and spoons) and on (tables and chairs), the places you shop (markets and restaurants), the spaces you share meals (dining rooms and cafeterias). Mundane objects in our world—our “material cultures”—structure our every experience. This course focuses on the material cultures of eighteenth-century Europe, a period also known as “the Enlightenment.” This was a pivotal period in modern European and world history, a period of imperial expansion, slavery, and revolutions. It was the period of the first avowedly feminist movements and the first successful revolutions against slavery. The histories of these events can be unfolded through key objects of the period including commodities such as coffee, chocolate, tobacco, and sugar; technologies such as the hot air balloon, the automaton, the spinning jenny, the marine chronometer, and the steam engine; and information genres such as the daily newspaper and the scholarly journal. They can also be understood through people’s changing relationships to older things such as bread, water, and even air. As it happens, eighteenth-century writers were themselves deeply interested in material culture. The greatest written work of the period, the famous *Encyclopedia* edited by the French philosophers Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert from the 1750s to the 1770s was a catalogue of the important *things* and *ideas* of the day and a theoretical tool for understanding them. In this course, we examine both the material cultures of eighteenth-century Europe and the theoretical approaches that contemporaries used to understand them. Each student will write a paper on one object from the period.