

FASHION, CONSUMER CULTURE, AND CLASS STRUGGLE

A MARXIST READING OF TOILE DE JOUY

SHAJWAN NARIMAN FATAH

Charmo University

shajwan.nariman@chu.edu.iq

Orcid 0000-0001-7806-5216

Copyright: © Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.
Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.
Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest

DOI: 10.36253/ft-2676

Abstract

Toile de Jouy, a distinctive textile associated with the world of fashion, originated in France during the 18th century. Initially embraced by the aristocratic class, it has since transcended social boundaries to become a prevalent phenomenon in contemporary society. In this paper, I will explore the underlying themes that highlight the social dynamics depicted in the narratives portrayed on this fabric. From a conceptual perspective, this study aims to illustrate the intrinsic relationship between the labor of the proletariat and the consumption patterns of the bourgeoisie as reflected in Toile de Jouy. Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of Karl Marx and Jean Baudrillard, I will investigate the interrelation between fashion, means of production, consumer conduct, and simulated phenomena.

Keywords: *Toile de Jouy; Capitalism; Consumption; Fashion; Simulation*

INTRODUCTION

One must be able to read into the future to know which type will supplant that which is already in place because everywhere, there is a type that is more sought after than the others and this will always be the case. The most skilled is also the man who knows when to stop in time in order to have the fewest leftovers when that type ceases to please...

-- Christophe-Philippe Oberkampf (Gril-Mariotte, 2009)

Historically, fashion has served as a mechanism through which the upper class has engaged in consumption practices. In contemporary society, particularly within the realm of modern fashion,

this phenomenon extends beyond aristocratic circles, attracting individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, races, cultures, and genders. However, this widespread consumption often overlooks considerations of authenticity regarding the goods and the labor invested in their production. Therefore, in this study, my focus will be on Toile de Jouy (fig. 01) as a product, tracing from the Enlightenment era to the present day. I will investigate the hidden premises of the work as I show the integration of the labor, the essence of the product, and cultural consumption of this design pattern, which is often used for various interior decoration, clothes, and ornaments. Semiotically, Toile de Jouy may refer to various connotations depending on different contexts: on the one hand, it appears as a decorative fashion



Fig. 01

pattern; on the other hand, from deeper layers, it reveals the essence of labor. Etymologically, the term 'toile' finds its roots in the French language, where it denotes the meaning of 'fabric'. Consequently, Toile de Jouy signifies textile, often cotton in composition, originating in the town of Jouy-en-Josas in France. This town is situated in the southwestern periphery of Paris, merely four miles distant from Versailles. Other French towns also engaged in the production of analogous textiles, such as 'Toile de Nantes' and 'Toile d'Orange.' However, from a historical perspective, 'Toile de Jouy' is specifically indicative of printed fabrics crafted by the French-German industrialist, Christophe-Philippe Oberkampf, in Jouy-en-Josas during the period spanning from 1760 to 1843. Distinguishing authentic de Jouy textiles from those produced by alternative manufacturers necessitates the identification of a distinctive printer's mark. This identification practice was obligatory throughout the manufacturing process due to the proliferation of numerous companies that created similar toile styles both before and after the existence of the Oberkampf Manufactory (Sporn, 2023). It's essential to state that before that time, during the late 16th century, India held the distinction of being the world's leading producer of cotton textiles. They employed highly intricate printing techniques, utilizing vibrant and richly colored dyes. The importation of these colorful cotton chintz fabrics from India was perceived as a threat to the livelihood of French wool and silk weavers. Consequently, they lobbied the government to enact legislation prohibiting the importation and use of these textiles. Although this ban was officially enforced in 1686, it was consistently disregarded by individuals who prioritized fashion over the law. It wasn't until 1759

that the ban was lifted, as French manufacturers had at last acquired the knowledge to produce their own colorful and durable variations of printed Indian cotton.

Sporn (2023) states that Oberkampf hired a painter – Jean-Baptiste Huet – to create designs celebrating the factory's recognition as a 'Manufacture Royale'. Huet later became the factory's chief designer, known for integrating scenes into copperplate-printed textiles. The rise of copperplate printing in the 1750s is credited to Francis Nixon and Theophilus Thompson in Ireland, but Oberkampf introduced it to France, contributing to the Rococo style of de Jouy prints. Copperplate prints involved etching designs onto copper squares and were ideal for detailed and narrative motifs. This technique allowed for mass production and conveying political messages through textiles. Critics shed light on Toile de Jouy as a unique work of design, for instance, Gril-Mariotte and Warner (2009) focus on the origin of the fabric -- they state that the Jouy factory established in 1760, aimed to manufacture printed cotton under the leadership of Oberkampf, who sought to address the demand for skilled textile-printing artisans. The facility experienced swift growth due to its product excellence and continuous innovation in design (p. 162). Then the critics shed light on the value of the work saying that: the surviving drawings and printed fabrics from that era illustrate how Oberkampf's designers ingeniously translated contemporary events and trends into textiles intended for interior decoration. These interpretations of current events aimed to appeal to a broad audience. This cultured, if not prosperous clientele, typically made their purchases at boutiques in the Palais-Royal or in the shops of major provincial cities (p. 163).

Besides Gril-Mariotte and Warner, Fikioris (1970) claims that the printed cotton manufactured at the Oberkampf factory accurately mirrored the evolving preferences of the French populace during the latter part of the 18th century. This transformation is evident in the thematic choices made by their principal textile designer, Huet, who was affiliated with the company from 1783 until his passing in 1811. Initially, he depicted a range of subjects including historical narratives, sophisticated political allegories, as well as vibrant scenes of everyday life and idyllic pastoral settings. However, from around the mid-1790s onwards, he shifted towards a stricter, more academically

inclined neoclassical style of ornamentation that was fashionable during that era (p. 75).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This article employs a qualitative approach, through a close reading, I explore an invisible aspect of de Jouy textile. In terms of production and consumption – it seems quite significant to highlight Marxist insights as theoretical frameworks related to the selected subject. As a modern reader, my concern is rather with the essence of Toile de Jouy as a product – how it has been produced; the means of production, and then the consumers. That's to say, through Marx's notion of capitalism, this study shows two groups within society: the working class – the producers (proletariats) and the upper class, I shall say the consumers (bourgeoisies). Furthermore, this paper draws its argument from the theory of simulation by Jean Baudrillard – highlighting how consumers are influenced by the prevalence of simulated realities. Consequently, works featuring de Jouy patterns have been utilized without consideration of their intrinsic value.

MARX'S THEORY ON CAPITALISM

Karl Marx's concepts regarding communism and capitalism laid the foundation for Marxism. Central to his ideas is a critical examination of capitalism and its deficiencies. Marx anticipates the self-destruction of the capital system, envisioning a scenario where marginalized workers, who are estranged, would rise against their employers to seize control of production, thereby initiating a society without class distinctions (Kenton, 2024). He also introduces the concept of alienation to characterize how capitalism impacts the working class. Before this, the understanding of alienation evolved over centuries. In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx portrays alienation as the condition in which the product of labor appears to the worker as something separate and independent and an external force detached from the producer (Guy-Evans, 2024). At this point, I would clarify Marx's concept as it appears to give literal meanings such as estrangement or separation. The notion seems to propose deeper issues in the context of capitalism, that is to say, the working class – proletariats – are alienated from not only society and daily life but also from their identity and the goods they produce.

In other words, alienation seems to be not exclusively tied to Marx's ideas but significantly associated with his intellectual legacy, which denotes a specific societal problem characterized by the disconnection between entities that should naturally belong together. Typically, the 'subject' refers to an individual or a collective, while the 'object' represents an entity that may not be recognized as a subject itself, maybe another subject(s), or may even be the original subject (thus allowing for a reflexive relationship). The relationship between the subject and object is marked by a troublesome separation. Both aspects of this characterization hold significance (Wolff & Leopold, 2021). Marx goes further as he examines alienation from a historical, anthropological, and socio-economic standpoint: in his analysis of alienation, particularly concerning alienated labor within the capitalist economic system, he illustrates how individuals – especially workers – become estranged within specific historical economic systems and ownership structures. He also explains how these relationships are perpetuated through alienated labor and exist in a mutually reinforcing manner (Christ, 2015).

JEAN BAUDRILLARD'S SIMULATION

Baudrillard posits that in postmodern culture, societies have become heavily reliant on models and maps to the extent that they have severed all ties with the genuine reality that existed before these representations. Instead, reality has begun to mimic the model, with the model now taking precedence and dictating what constitutes reality. In his words: “[t]he territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—precession of simulacra—that engenders the territory”. Baudrillard suggests that in the realm of postmodern simulation and simulacra, the concern is no longer about imitation, duplication, or even parody since they appear as a reality for the public (Felluga, 2011).

Baudrillard's argument (1994) extends beyond labeling postmodern culture as merely artificial. Unlike the notion of artificiality, which implies a reference to some form of reality for comparison, he contends that we've completely lost the capacity to discern between what is natural and what artificially constructed.

On images, Baudrillard states:

it is the reflection of a profound reality;

it masks and denatures a profound reality;
it masks the absence of a profound reality;
it has no relation to any reality whatsoever;
it is its own pure simulacrum.

Then he goes further saying:

In the first case, the image is a good appearance - the representation is of the sacramental order.

In the second, it is an evil appearance - it is of the order of maleficence. In the third, it plays at being an appearance - it is of the order of sorcery.

In the fourth, it is no longer of the order of appearances, but of simulation. (1994, p. 6). Plainly, in this context, the details of de Jouy fabric evoke Baudrillard's statement on 'images' in terms of how these representations are replacing the realities and the value of labor.

CLASS STRUGGLE AND SIMULACRUM IN TOILE DE JOUY

The fabric of de Jouy appears to capture the essence of nature and the rural lifestyle, the sentiments evoked by these diverse works of design connect to a shared fascination with pastoral existence and the daily work of farmers. However, there is an irony within the selected work; as it was produced and became popular during the middle of the 18th and early 19th century – throughout history – its aura has been somehow lost. Hence, I would examine this irony; as a fashion design, Toile de Jouy has been used by the bourgeoisie for centuries, for instance, the textile emerged as the favored option for both attires and interiors, even the trend-setting, Queen Marie Antoinette, personally toured Oberkampf's factory in 1781. As the demand for de Jouy fabric surged, numerous printing enterprises in France, England, and the United States began producing similar textiles. Without copyright protection for Oberkampf's designs, these patterns were widely replicated, appearing on various items ranging from porcelains to wall coverings (The History of Toile de Jouy, 2020). This seems to propose multiple explanations, on the one hand, as Marx explains, aristocrats are the consumers of such items, while the producers are alienated from their achievements. On the other hand, the problem of simulation is evoked, as explained by Baudrillard, he provides the example of maps asserting that in postmodern culture, society has become excessively dependent on models and maps to the extent that we have severed our connection with the real world that existed before the creation of these representations (Felluga, 2011). Moreover,

reality has now transitioned into merely imitating the model, which has taken precedence and holds sway over what is considered the real world.

Metaphorically, Baudrillard's theory plays a key role in this context, not only because, the textile of de Jouy has been copied and re-produced in other countries and the original work has lost its essence, but also, because of the images on the fabric; from shallow layers, the material appears as a design which is being traded and consumed by the individuals. However, upon close examination of the signs and symbols depicted in the textured paintings, it suggests a complex interpretation of the constructed reality by social ideologies.

Here, I want to focus on the social norms, particularly the consumption by the public: one could raise the question of whether the real value behind Toile de Jouy is merely the phenomenon, the pattern, or the consumers would desire to see the stories of the working class depicted on the fabric. This riddle elicits the philosophical aspect behind the means of production, the goods, and the consumers. This is how capitalism operates within communities. It's also simulation, because the irony within this work is shown through a close reading of the images on the fabric, one could realize the aesthetic of the rural life, pastoral scenes, and cultural significance has become commercialized and widely popularized in the modern world.

Among these depictions, one can observe the designer Huet (fig. 02) alongside a female co-worker, engaging in sketching activities outdoors. Additionally, there are portrayals of dyers expertly mixing colors, and printers diligently employing the printing blocks. The final phase of the process is illustrated as the finished cloth undergoes drying on the factory's premises. This unique concept of representing scenes from the manufacturing process highlights the Enlightenment-era fascination with the achievements of humanity, reflecting the spirit of intellectual curiosity and appreciation for human endeavors. Once again, a critical reading of the work and the figures in the toile shows the concept of 'alienation' which has a longstanding presence in the history of Western theology and philosophy. For instance, the depiction of the women in (fig. 03), as each one appears disconnected from the others, with none facing each other or the viewer, symbolizes the sense of isolation and the loss of self in the labor process. Despite this detachment, the resulting product—presumably textiles featuring these scenes— is utilized in clothing and furniture



Fig. 02



Fig. 03

by the bourgeoisie.

On a metaphorical level, there's a striking paradox – the upper-class consumers utilizing imagery that depicts the labor of the lower class. This trade has expanded not only through the mechanisms of production but also through the dissemination of the depicted truth printed on the fabric.

In contemporary times, de Jouy patterns persist in drawing inspiration from French design aesthetics. However, these textiles have evolved beyond their traditional pastoral themes to embrace a more diverse range of motifs, including animals, plants, and celestial patterns. Once again, this exemplifies the notion of simulation, illustrating how the original has transformed into replicas devoid of consideration for the intrinsic value of labor and

its true significance. For instance, since its debut on Avenue Montaigne, toile de Jouy has established itself as a recognizable and enduring design within the Dior brand (Fig. 4). Over the years, this classic pattern has been reinterpreted and incorporated into various collections by numerous esteemed designers associated with Dior. Notable among these designers are John Galiano, who brought his unique vision to the concept, Gianfranco Ferré, who added his distinctive touch, and more recently, Maria Grazia Chiuri, who has continued to explore and innovate with Toile de Jouy in her contemporary collections. These designers, among others, have ensured that the fabric of de Jouy remains a significant and celebrated element of Dior's design heritage. Experiencing a resurgence in popularity, de Jouy textiles have made a notable comeback in both modern interior designs. Its influence was particularly pronounced in the 2019 summer and cruise collections of renowned houses such as Chloé, Dior, and Oscar de la Renta, showcasing its enduring relevance and versatility in the ever-evolving landscape of creative expression (The History of Toile de Jouy, 2020). This evokes the concept of capitalism and also simulation; Workman and Lee (2011) state that fashion consumer groups consist of two main categories: style change agents and trend followers. Fashion change agents, as the name suggests, are individuals who play a pivotal role in initiating and adopting changes, this group includes design innovators, who are among the first to embrace new fashion trends by purchasing and wearing them. Additionally, there are fashion opinion leaders who influence others to adopt new styles through persuasion. Some individuals fulfill both roles, acting as innovative communicators who both adopt new trends themselves and encourage others to do the same. On the other hand, mode followers are characterized by their tendency to wait until new trends have gained widespread acceptance among other consumers before they adopt them themselves (p. 51).

It's fair to say that in the contemporary context, de Jouy fabrics have adorned both home textiles and garments. These picturesque prints have transcended their original medium and have been reproduced on wallpaper as well. These wallpapers (Fig. 5) enjoy widespread popularity, transcending urban townhouses to find a place of equal appeal in quaint country cottages. Their delicate yet intricate designs lend an aesthetic charm to rooms, whether the style is soft and expansive, filling the



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

wall space, or sharp and detailed, adding grandeur to the interior. While traditionally characterized by a limited color palette, the addition of vibrant highlights can create striking focal points, particularly in smaller rooms. Moreover, Toile de Jouy maintains its status as a timeless pattern, consistently favored in interior design – among the numerous options available, Les Oiseaux and Chateau de Loire (Fig. 6) stand out as particularly esteemed. The patterns evoke exquisite imagery reminiscent of Provence, capturing the essence of how Marie-Antoinette perceived the “idyllic” lives

of French peasants (Toile de Jouy: Classical Scenes for Timeless Interiors, 2024). Strikingly, this seems to evoke Baudrillard’s *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976), in which he succinctly explores the core premise that capitalist society has nullified its Other, extinguishing all possibilities by redefining death as the antithesis of life rather than an integral component of it. Capitalism’s erasure of death signifies not only the elimination of mortality but also the eradication of any opposition or alternatives to its hegemony. In negating death, capitalism destroys all opposites and imposes its dominance over society (Arcypanjin, 2006). In other words, the work has lost its origin in the modern day and within the capital system. Ma et al. (2012) assert that the primary theoretical perspectives on the consumption of design dating back to the 1970s can be summarized as follows: fashion consumption serves the dual purposes of displaying status and establishing individual identity. That is to say, consumption patterns typically follow a hierarchical flow, starting from the upper echelons of society and gradually filtering down to lower social classes. Once a design trend is adopted by lower social classes, the upper classes often discard it in favor of new styles, thereby perpetuating a cycle of continual change and renewal in the fashion industry (p. 87). Thus, in this context, I would present Thorstein Veblen’s theory of “conspicuous consumption,” which stems from the emergence of a leisure class characterized by individuals who do not engage in productive work but instead appropriate the surplus produced by the labor of the working class. As societies generate surplus wealth, the relationship between private property ownership and social status becomes increasingly significant. As a result, the accumulation of property becomes a crucial element for individuals aiming to preserve and enhance their reputation and social standing. This leads to the formation of a social hierarchy in which the ownership of property is directly linked to the conferment of prestige and honor. Those who possess substantial property are elevated within this hierarchical structure, enjoying increased respect and admiration from their peers. Conversely, individuals who lack property find themselves at a significant disadvantage, experiencing a corresponding decline in status and recognition. The disparity between property owners and non-owners thus becomes a defining feature of the social order, reinforcing the importance of the products as a marker of one’s position and worth

within the community (Trigg, 2001, p. 3).

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have opted to examine Toile de Jouy, a historical French design pattern originating from the 18th century, as a lens through which to study the socio-economic implications inherent in the fusion of fashion. I have emphasized two theoretical frameworks relevant to the contemporary context of postmodernity, particularly concerning consumption patterns and simulated phenomena. My analysis involved a deep examination of the semiotics embedded within the de Jouy fabric, explaining how the capitalist system appropriates the product devoid of consideration for its aesthetic qualities, labor origins, or intrinsic essence. Consequently, I have juxtaposed my interpretive framework with the theoretical insights of Karl Marx and Jean Baudrillard, focusing on their analyses of capitalism and simulation. The prevailing reality emerges wherein consumers constantly acquire these products while factory owners replicate them without regard for the value of the labor involved. This highlights the common influence of social norms and cultural traditions within communities, prompting a philosophical inquiry into these dynamics.

CAPTIONS

- [Fig. 01] Toile de Jouy
[Fig. 02] Jean-Baptiste Huet collaborating with fellow workers
[Fig. 03] Toile de Jouy details of labor
[Fig. 04] "An archive image of the perfume table at Dior's 30 Avenue Montaigne boutique, where toile de Jouy was used for the décor"
[Fig. 05] Toile de Jouy wallpaper
[Fig. 06] Toile de Jouy fabric in interior designs

REFERENCES

- Arcypanjin. (2006, January 6). Baudrillard and Symbolic Exchange. Retrieved from Symbolic Exchange: <https://symbolicexchange.wordpress.com/2008/01/06/ baudrillard-and-symbolic-exchange/#:~:text=The%20title%20%E2%80%9CSymbolic%20Exchange%20and, itself%2C%20all%20opposites%20to%20itself.>
- Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and simulation*. University of Michigan Press.
- Christ, O. (2015). The Concept of Alienation in Early Works of Karl Marx. *European Scientific Journal*, 11, 551- 563. Retrieved from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/236412303.pdf>
- Cleary, M. (2022, October 7). A toile de Jouy jungle showcases Dior perfume. Retrieved from Wallpaper: <https://www.wallpaper.com/beauty-grooming/ toile-de-jouy-dior-perfume>
- Felluga, D. (2011, January 31). Modules on Baudrillard: On Simulation. Retrieved from *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*: <https://www.cla.purdue.edu/academic/english/ theory/postmodernism/modules/baudrillardsimulation.html>
- Fikioris, M. A. (1970). Neoclassicism in Textile Designs by Jean-Baptiste Huet. *Winterthur Portfolio*, 6, 75-110. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1180524>
- Gril-Mariotte, A., & Warner, P. J. (2009). optical Themes from the Oberkampf Textile Manufactory, Jouy-en-Josas, France, 1760-1821. *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, 17, 162-197. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/652667>
- Guy-Evans, O. (2024, February 13). Marx's Theory Of Alienation In Sociology. Retrieved from *Simply Psychology*: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/marx-alienation.html>
- Kenton, W. (2024, February 28). Karl Marx: His Books, Theories, and Impact. Retrieved from *Investopedia*: <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/k/karl-marx.asp#:~:text=His%20key%20theories%20were%20a, ushering%20in%20a%20classless%20society.>
- Ma, F, Shi, H., Luo, Y., & Chen, L. (2012). A Theory on Fashion Consumption. *Journal of Management and Strategy*, 3, 84-92. doi:10.5430/jms.v3n4p84
- Manufactory Oberkampf Manufactory. (n.d.). Retrieved from *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/221839>
- Sporn, S. (2023, May 25). Toile de Jouy: Everything You Need to Know About the Famous Design. Retrieved from *Archdigest.com*: <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/ toile-pattern-explained>



Fig. 6

The History of Toile de Jouy. (2020, August 20). Retrieved from My French Country Home: <https://myfrenchcountry-homemagazine.com/history-of-toile-de-jouy/>

The Met. (n.d.). Retrieved from Manufactory Oberkampf Manufactory: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/221839>

Toile de Jouy. (2018, January 8). Retrieved from Diptyqueparis- Memento.com: <http://www.diptyqueparis-memento.com/fr/toiles-de-jouy/>

Toile de Jouy: Classical Scenes for Timeless Interiors. (2024, February 10). Retrieved from F & P Interiors : <https://www.fabricsandpapers.com/blog/toile-de-jouy-classical-scenes-for-contemporary-interiors>

Trigg, B. A. (2001). Veblen, Bourdieu, and conspicuous consumption. *Journal of economic issues*, 35(1), 99-115. Retrieved from <https://oro.open.ac.uk/89777/1/17E.pdf>

Wolff, J., & Leopold, D. (2021). Karl Marx. Retrieved from The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/marx/#Bib>

Workman, J. E., & Lee, S.-H. (2011). Materialism, fashion consumers and gender: A cross-cultural study. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 35, 50-57. doi:10.1111/j.1470-6431.2010.00935.x

