

THINGS

HIS/HOS 499: Approaches to Material Culture
Spring 2015; Mondays and Wednesdays, 11 am to 12:20 pm



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This class aims to introduce recent thinking/writing about objects—and to create a forum for experimental activations of this scholarship. We will explore, together, a suite of different approaches to material culture from a broad range of historical periods, paying particular attention to new philosophical and anthropological perspectives. Historical questions will be our touchstone, but aesthetic and epistemological problems will also be engaged. Guided by diverse readings, we will endeavor to heed Wordsworth’s bold injunction to “see into the life of things.”

SPECIFICS

It is probably worth buying the following two books:

Fiona Candlin and Railford Guins, eds., *The Object Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2011).

I will try to make other readings available by PDF.

WEEK ONE

Class 1

Introduction and Organizational Meeting

(no reading)

Class 2

The Thing Speaks

Peter Miller, “How Objects Speak,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 11 August 2014.

Lorraine Daston, “Things that Talk” and “Speechless,” the preface and introduction to her edited volume, *Things that Talk* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2004).

Jill Cook, “The Gray’s Inn Lane Handaxe,” in Fiona Candlin and Railford Guins, eds., *The Object Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2009); henceforth abbreviated **TOR**.

Railford Guins, “Mermaid’s Tears,” **TOR**.

Penny Sparke, “The LC4 Chaise Longue by Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, and Charlotte Perriand, 1928,” **TOR**.

Alexander R. Galloway, “Pixel,” **TOR**.

WEEK TWO

Class 3 Gifts, Commodities, Toys

Read:

Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins, "Introducing Objects," *TOR*.
Marcel Mauss, "Gifts and the Obligation to Return Gifts," *TOR*.
Georg Lukács, "The Phenomenon of Reification," *TOR*.
Roland Barthes, "Toys," *TOR*.

Examine / Be Aware of:

Neil MacGregor, *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (New York: Viking, 2011).

Class 4 Thing Lab

First Thing-piece Assignment



WEEK THREE

Class 5 Subjects and Objects

Read:

Jean Baudrillard, "Subjective Discourse or The Nonfunctional System of Objects," *TOR*.
D.W. Winnicott, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena," *TOR*.
Tim Ingold, "On Weaving a Basket," *TOR*.
Page Dubois, "Dildos," *TOR*.

Examine / Be Aware of:

Richard Kurin, *The History of America in 101 Objects* (New York: Penguin, 2013).

Class 6 Thing Lab

Second Thing-piece Assignment

WEEK FOUR

Class 7 Thing-Theory

Read:
Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," *TOR*.
Elizabeth Grosz, "The Thing," *TOR*.
Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *TOR*.

Class 8 Thing Lab

Third Thing-piece Assignment



WEEK FIVE

Class 9 A Parliament of Things?

Read:
Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Winter 2004): 225-248.
Bruno Latour, "From Realpolitik to *Dingpolitik* or How to Make Things Public," *TOR*.
Julian Bleecker, "Why Things Matter: A Manifesto for Networked Objects – Cohabiting with Pigeons, Arphids, Aibos in the Internet of Things," *TOR*.

Class 10 Thing Lab

Fourth Thing-piece Assignment

WEEK SIX

Class 11 The Agency of Objects

Read:

Peter Brown, "Praesentia," *TOR*.

Michael Taussig, "In some way or another one can protect oneself from the spirits by portraying them," *TOR*.

Alfred Gell, "The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology," *TOR*.

Class 12 Thing Lab

Fifth Thing-piece Assignment

M I D T E R M

WEEK SEVEN

Class 13 Thing Worship and Power

Read:

Bruno Latour, "A Few Steps Toward an Anthropology of the Iconoclastic Gesture," *Science in Context* 10, no. 1 (1998): 63-83.

Michel Serres, excerpt on the *Challenger* disaster in *Statues* (we will only do this if the English translation is in fact published before our class; it is slated to come out in February).

Bruno Latour, "Where Are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts," *TOR*.

Class 14 Thing Lab

Sixth Thing-piece Assignment

WEEK EIGHT

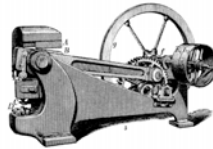
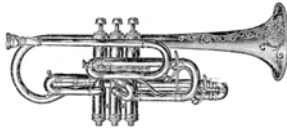
Class 15 The Experience of Things

Read:

Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting," *TOR*.
Wiebe E. Bijker, "King of the Road: The Social Construction of the Safety Bicycle,"
TOR.
Vivian Sobchack, "A Leg to Stand On: Prosthetics, Metaphor, and Materiality," *TOR*.
Sherry Turkle, "Objects Inspire," *TOR*.

Class 16 Thing Lab

Seventh Thing-piece Assignment



WEEK NINE

Class 17 The Art Object

Read:

Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *TOR*.
Siegfried Kracauer, "Calico-World: The UFA City in Neubabelsberg," *TOR*.
Elizabeth Edwards, "Photographs as Objects of Memory," *TOR*.
Maurice M. Manring, "Aunt Jemima Explained: The Old South, the Absent Mistress and the Slave in a Box," *TOR*.

Class 18 Thing Lab

Eighth Thing-piece Assignment

WEEK TEN

Class 19 Remains

Read:

Barbara Penner, "A World of Unmentionable Suffering: Women's Public Conveniences in Victorian London," *TOR*.

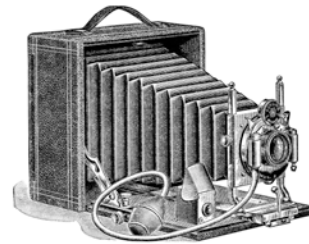
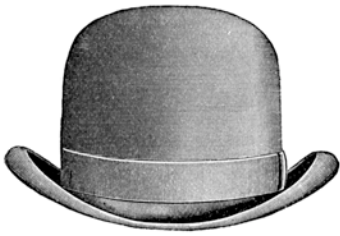
Celeste Olalquiaga, "Holy Kitschen: Collecting Religious Junk from the Street," *TOR*.

Julian Stallabrass, "Trash," *TOR*.

Christina Lindsay, "From the Shadows: Users as Designers, Producers, Marketers, Distributors, and Technical Support," *TOR*.

Class 20 Thing Lab

Ninth Thing-piece Assignment



WEEK ELEVEN

Class 21 Starting Again, from Objects (Part I)

Read:

Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2011), pp. 1-68 (chapters 1-4).

Jane Bennet, *Vibrant Matter* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), chapter 1, "The Force of Things."

Class 22 Thing Lab

Tenth Thing-piece Assignment

WEEK TWELVE

Class 23

Starting Again, from Objects (Part II)

Read:

Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2011), pp. 69-143 (chapters 5-10).

Miguel Tamen, *Friends of Interpretable Objects* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), chapter 1, "Sensible Economics."

Class 24

Thing Lab

Thing-piece Portfolio/Presentations.