

The Thingliness of Things
K10.0051 FYS
715 Broadway, room 501
New York University
Gallatin School of Individualized Study
Fall 2008

Professor Eve Meltzer
Meets: Mon. and Weds. 11:00-12:15
Office hours: Thursdays by appointment
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course engages a seemingly simple question: what is an object? Relatedly, what is a thing? As a means of illuminating these questions we will consult everyday objects, theories of various object forms, and literary and artistic representations. One of our challenges will be to learn to read objects both by having them at hand, and by understanding how economic, psychic, and social values shape their visual and material properties. In this process, we will engage the popular view that objects tell us something, first and foremost, about the people who create and use them. We will also encounter the taboo proposition that objects may have an intentionality of their own, and that humans do not dictate the meaning of all things.

This course also serves as an introduction to the nature, processes, and perils of interdisciplinary study, as well as the practices of close reading and analytical writing.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students will be expected to attend all meetings, to do so well prepared, and to participate actively in discussions (attendance and participation = 30%). In addition to occasional discussion board entries, students will be asked to write three papers: a single-paged description on an object (15%) and two close readings—one three to four pages in length (25%), one six to eight pages in length (30%). Additionally, the final paper will involve a brief (no more than ten minute) presentation at the end of the semester. **In order to pass this class, you must complete all assignments and you may miss no more than three class meetings.**

There will be two required screenings. At their convenience (but always in advance of class meetings), students can view videos on reserve at the Avery Fisher Center for Music and Media (AFC) located on the 2nd floor of Bobst Library. When possible, group screenings will be arranged. There will also be one museum visit to be arranged at a mutually convenient date and time.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Dick Hebdige, Subculture: The Meaning of Style

All other materials will be made available to you by other means.

IN-CLASS REQUIREMENTS AND PROHIBITIONS

Always bring your reading materials with you to class.

Laptops and other handheld electronic devices may not be used during class time.

COURSE SCHEDULE

INTRODUCTION: THINGS AND THINKING

Weds 9/3 Introductions.

FIRST OBJECTS, FIRST LOVES, and, THE FIRST THING THAT IS NOT ME

Mon 9/8

read: • Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, "Overture"

Weds 9/10 and Mon 9/15

read: • D.W. Winnicott, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena—A Study of the First Not-Me Possession"

YOUR FIRST PAPER or, HOW TO DESCRIBE A THING?

Weds 9/17

read: • A few exemplary descriptions, available on blackboard
do: Bring in your **first try at a description of an object, chosen by you.**

"I" AM AN OBJECT

Mon 9/22 and Weds 9/24

read: • Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience"
 • Jonathan Scott Lee, *Jacques Lacan*, p. 1-30

Friday 9/26 **FIRST PAPER DUE** in my box, 715 Broadway, 4th floor, by 4 pm.

MW 9/29 and 10/1

screen: • Discussion of *North by Northwest*
 Alfred Hitchcock, *North by Northwest*, place and time TBA

MW 10/6 and 10/8

read: • Discussion of *North by Northwest* continued
 • Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"

M 10/13

No Class Meeting (University Holiday)

OBJECTS OF EXCHANGE

Weds 10/15 and Mon 10/20

read: • Karl Marx, "The Commodity"

Weds 10/22 and Mon 10/27

read: • Jean Baudrillard, "The Ideological Genesis of Need"
Second paper topics distributed and discussed.

Weds 10/29 and Mon 11/3

read: • Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*

Tuesday 11/4 **SECOND PAPER DUE, put in my Gallatin box by noon.**

Weds 11/5 • This class will be rescheduled at some time this week in order to
Visit *Pipe, Glass, Bottle of Rum: The Art of Appropriation*, at MoMA

FETISHISMS

Mon 11/10 and Mon 11/17

read: • Marx, “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof”
• Sigmund Freud, “Fetishism” and “Female Sexuality”

Weds 11/12 **THAT THING CALLED “REGISTRATION”:**
First-year adviser Becky Amato visits class to discuss Spring '09 registration.

W 11/19 and M 11/24

screen: • Alfred Hitchcock, *Vertigo*, on reserve at AFC

PRESENTING YOUR THINGS AND YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT THEM

Weds 11/26 **OUTLINE FOR FINAL PAPER DUE IN CLASS**

Mon 12/1 student presentations

Wes 12/3 student presentations

Mon 12/8 student presentations

Weds 12/10 student presentations

Friday 12/12 **FINAL PAPER DUE**