

Department of Sociology Faculty of Arts and Science
University of Toronto – St. George Campus
SOC497H1S - New Topics in Sociology: Cultural Objects and Materiality

Winter 2020

Class Location: FE – Room 41, 725 Spadina Avenue, basement

Class Time: Friday 12pm-2pm

Instructor Lance Stewart

Office Location: Room 335

Office Hours: By appointment

E-mail Address: lance.stewart@mail.utoronto.ca

E-mail Response Hours: Monday-Friday 9am-6pm

Course Web Site: q.utoronto.ca

Course Description:

Objects surround us. They fill in our environments and are integrated into our everyday lives. But just as objects hold an important place in social life, we commonly take for granted their power to shape and influence our thoughts and behaviours. In sociology, we tend to concentrate on the lives of people, and the importance of meanings, connections, thoughts and beliefs. Many areas in sociology treat objects as by-products of social relationships, under-theorizing their importance in understanding social life. This course asks instead, what can objects do? How do they shape the way we think and act? How do we take objects seriously as subject in sociology?

This course explores a variety of different theoretical and empirical approaches to the study of objects and materiality. This course will specifically concentrate on the major approaches to studying cultural objects, prominent theories applied in understanding objects, and how these approaches and theories have been applied in research. In service of this goal, we will read widely across disciplines to take from the best of what is written from anthropology, cultural sociology, material culture studies, materiality, and its applications on a variety of objects and empirical settings. The diversity of these approaches is intended to demonstrate the complex ways objects can be studied and understood, to strengthen your sociological imagination about *things*. Throughout the class we'll address how to incorporate object-based approaches and theories into the development of your object biography and theorizing paper, and then into your final research proposal paper.

Prerequisites: 1.0 SOC FCE at the 300+ level. Students without this requirement will be removed at any time discovered and without notice.

Course Goals:

In this course, students will develop a sociological understanding of a range of disciplinary approaches, theories, and analysis of material culture. Students will leave the course with an understanding of how to approach analyzing objects, providing an analytical toolkit on which to further your critical thinking about things we take for granted around us. As a senior reading seminar, students will provide presentations on supplemental course materials, engage in conversation around the readings for each week, developing critical reading and writing skills in learning how to engage in contributing to academic conversations. This will be accomplished through a **scaffolded paper structure**, where you will develop a theoretical and methodological approach to studying an object. It will begin with an object biography, where you will apply two of the approaches learned in class to theorize about an object. You will then integrate your theorizing into a methodological proposal on how to possibly study your object sociologically. It is designed to carry your progress throughout the seminar, though you may decide to change your object between papers. If you decide to change your object, it is advised to book an office hours to discuss this with Professor Stewart in detail.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Examine the relationship between objects and individuals or groups
- Recognize how one's social position may shape our understandings and interpretations of objects
- Understand the range of approaches and theories in the field of cultural objects and materiality
- Critically assess and identify the complexity of objects and their impact on social life
- Identify, explain, and evaluate some of the central concepts and theories used in the study of objects and materiality
- Apply terminology used in the course correctly, and compare how approaches use terminology differently
- Apply central concepts and theories to case studies and other empirical examples
- Critique perspectives and theories used in researching objects
- Formulate and assess recommendations on how to study objects from different perspectives
- Exercise initiative, personal responsibility, and accountability in the class setting
- Draw on academic sources to research objects and to write critically and creatively
- Engage in constructive and collegial academic discussions

Required Texts:

All readings are provided on the University of Toronto library website and the course's Quercus page. It is vital that you come to the seminar having fully read the two required

readings for the week in advance of the class. You will be required to sign-up for two separate weeks to read one of the supplemental readings, provide a 10 minute presentation on the reading, and come prepared with two questions to guide discussion about your reading in relation to the other readings of the lecture.

Course Structure/Seminar Format:

This course is organized as a discussion-based reading seminar, relying on open discussion of the weekly materials between the instructor and students. Each class will begin with Professor Stewart providing some lecture materials covering an overview of the topic, and reviewing through the two required readings for that class. During the two separate weeks where you read an additional supplemental reading, you will be required to provide a 10 minute presentation on your chosen reading, and contribute what you learned in your reading by bring two discussion questions to help guide class discussion. It will be crucial that students not presenting are familiar with the required readings for each class in order to fulfill your participation grade for the seminar. As everyone has a different style of participating in class discussion, frequency of engaging in discussion is not as important as contributing something important to every class; reach outside your comfort-zone, and try to push the limits of your discussion on academic materials. Do your best to support your fellow classmates in being prepared to contribute to discussions after presentations.

Requirements and Grading:

<i>Item</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Important Dates</i>
Theorizing Objects Paper	20%	Lecture 6 (February 14 th)
Supplemental Reading Presentation 1	10%	Due by Scheduled Lecture
Supplemental Reading Presentation 2	10%	Due by Scheduled Lecture
Seminar Participation	10%	Throughout Term
Research Proposal Paper	25%	Lecture 10 (March 20 th)
In-Class Final test	25%	Lecture 12 (April 3 rd)
Total	100%	

Course Schedule:

Lecture 1: January 10th
Introduction to Material Culture
OBJECT SHOW-AND-TELL

Miller, Daniel. 2008. "Prologue," "Empty," and "Full." Pp. 1-31 in *The Comfort of Things*. Polity Press.

Lecture 2: January 17th
Anthropology

Appadurai, Arjun. 1986. Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value. Pp. 3-16 in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Kopytoff, Igor. 1986. The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process. Pp. 64-94 in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, edited by Arjun Appadurai. Cambridge University Press.

Supplemental Readings:

Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. Here and Now. Pp. 1-23 in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. University of Minnesota Press.

Douglas, Mary, and Baron Isherwood. 1996 (1979). The Uses of Goods. Pp. 36-47 in *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*, rev'd ed. New York: Basic Books.

Myers, Fred R. 2001. Introduction. Pp. 3- 61 in *The Empire of Things: Regimes of Value and Material Culture*. Fred R. Myers, Editor. School of American Research Press.

Lecture 3: January 24th
Sociology of Culture and Art

Becker, Howard S. 1982. "Conventions" pp. 40-67 in *Art Worlds*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Griswold, Wendy. 1987. The Fabrication of Meaning: Literary Interpretation in the United States, Great Britain, and the West Indies. *American Journal of Sociology*. 92: 1077-1117.

Supplemental Readings:

Benjamin, Walter. 1968. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Pp. 217-252 in *Illuminations*. Hannah Arendt, editor. Schocken Books.

Mitchell, W. J. Thomas. 1996. "What Do Pictures Really Want?" *October*. 77: 71-82.

Wagner-Pacifici, Robin and Barry Schwartz. 1991. "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past." *American Journal of Sociology*. 97: 376-420.

Lecture 4: January 31st Material Culture

Hebdige, Dick. 1983. "Traveling Light: One Route Into Material Culture." *RAIN*. 59: 11-13.

Woodward, Ian. 2007. Locating Material Culture. Pp. 1-32 in *Understanding Material Culture*. Sage.

Supplemental Readings:

Crane, Diana, and Laura Bovone. 2006. Approaches to material culture: the sociology of fashion and clothing. *Poetics* 34.6: 319–333.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly and Eugene Rochberg-Halton. 1981. "What Things are For" and "Object Relations and the Development of the Self." PP. 20-54 and 90-120 in *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*. Cambridge University Press.

Molotch, Harvey. 2005. Lash-ups: Goods and bads. Pp. 1-23 in *Where Stuff Comes From: How Toasters, Toilets, Cars, Computers, and Many Other Things Come to Be As They Are*. Routledge.

Lecture 5: February 7th Materiality

Ingold, Tim. 2007. "Materials against materiality." *Archeological Dialogues*. 14: 1-16.

Miller, Daniel. 2005. "Materiality: An Introduction." Pp. 1-41 in *Materiality*. Daniel Miller, editor. Duke University Press.

Supplemental Reading:

Bartmanski, D. and Woodward, I., 2015. The vinyl: The analogue medium in the age of digital reproduction. *Journal of consumer culture*, 15(1), pp.3-27.

Keane, W. 2005. "Signs are not the Garb of Meaning: On the Social Analysis of Material Things." Pp. 182-205 in *Materiality*. Daniel Miller, editor. Duke University Press.

McDonnell, Terence E. 2010. Cultural objects as objects: Materiality, urban space, and the interpretation of AIDS campaigns in Accra, Ghana. *American Journal of Sociology* 115.6: 1800–1852.

Lecture 6: February 14th
Material Agency – Actor-Network-Theory
THEORIZING OBJECTS PAPER DUE

Gell, Alfred. 1998. "The Problem Defined" and "The Theory of the Art Nexus." Pp. 1-27 in *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. New York: Clarendon Press.

Morphy, Howard. 2009. "Art as a Mode of Action." *Journal of Material Culture*. 14: 5-27.

Supplemental Readings:

Callon, Michel. 1986. Some elements of a sociology of translation: Domestication of the scallops and the fishermen of St. Briec Bay. In *Power, action and belief: a new sociology of knowledge?* Edited by J. Law, 196–223. London: Routledge.

Gomart, Emilie and Antoine Hennion. 1999. "A Sociology of Attachment: amateurs, drug users." *The Sociological Review*. 220-247.

Latour, Bruno. 1992. Where are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts. In W. Bijker and J. Law, eds., *Shaping Technology/Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

READING BREAK: FEBRUARY 17TH – 21ST -----

Lecture 7: February 28th
Affordance Theory

Faraj, S., & Azad, B. (2012). The materiality of technology: An affordance perspective. *Materiality and organizing: Social interaction in a technological world*, 237-258.

Gibson, J.J. 1979. "The Theory of Affordances." Pp. 119-135 in *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Hillsdale: Erlbaum.

Supplemental Readings:

Davis, J. L., & Chouinard, J. B. (2017). Theorizing Affordances: From Request to Refuse. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 02704676177

Evans, S. K., Pearce, K. E., Vitak, J., & Treem, J. W. (2016). Explicating affordances: A conceptual framework for understanding affordances in communication research. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 22(1), 35-52.

Nagy, P., & Neff, G. (2015). Imagined affordance: Reconstructing a keyword for communication theory. *Social Media+ Society*, 1(2), 2056305115603385.

Lecture 8: March 6th Objects, Technology, and Knowledge

Cetina, K.K., 2007. Culture in global knowledge societies: Knowledge cultures and epistemic cultures. *Interdisciplinary science reviews*, 32(4), pp.361-375.

Pickering, Andrew. 1995. "The Mangle of Practice" and "Machines: Building the Bubble Chamber." Pp. 1-27 and 37-67 in *The Mangle of Practice: Time, Agency and Science*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Supplemental Readings:

Clark, Andy. 2004. Cyborgs Unplugged. Pp. 13-34 in *Natural-born cyborgs*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press.

Frickel, Scott. 1996. Engineering heterogeneous accounts: The case of Submarine Thermal Reactor Mark-I. *Science, Technology & Human Values* 21.1: 28–53.

Hutchins, Edwin. 1995. Navigation as Computation. Pp. 49-65, 112-116 *Cognition in the wild*. Cambridge, MA: MIT.

Lecture 9: March 13th Digital Materialities

Leonardi, P. M. 2010. Digital materiality? How artifacts without matter, matter. *First monday*, 15(6).

Magaudda, P. (2011). When materiality 'bites back': Digital music consumption practices in the age of dematerialization. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 11(1), 15-36.

Supplemental Readings:

Bratteteig, T. (2010). A Matter of Digital Materiality. In *Exploring Digital Design*(pp. 147-169). Springer London.

Dourish, P., & Mazmanian, M. (2011). *Media as material: Information representations as material foundations for organizational practice*. June.

Lehdonvirta, V. (2012). A History of the Digitalization of Consumer Culture: From Amazon through Pirate Bay to FarmVille. *Pre-print version of a chapter in Digital Virtual Consumption*.

**Lecture 10: March 20th
Encounters, Settings, and Places:**

Babon, Kim M. 2006. Composition, coherence, and attachment: The critical role of context in reception. *Poetics* 34.3: 151–179.

Gieryn, Thomas F. 2002. "What do Buildings Do?" *Theory and Society*. 31: 35-74.

Supplemental Readings:

Fuss, Diana. 2004. "Keller's Hand: Arcan Ridge Easton Connecticut" Pp. 47-64 in *The Sense of an Interior: Four Writers and the Rooms that Shaped Them*. Routledge.

Griswold, Wendy, Gemma Mangione, and Terence E. McDonnell. 2013. "Objects, Words, and Bodies in Space: Bringing Materiality in to Cultural Analysis." *Qualitative Sociology*. 36: 343-364.

Klett, Joseph. 2014. "Sound on Sound: Situating Interaction in Sonic Object-Settings." *Sociological Theory*. 32(2): 147-161.

**Lecture 11: March 27th
Thing Theory and Final Test Review**

Brown, Bill. 2001. "Thing Theory." *Critical Inquiry*. 28: 1-22.

**Lecture 12: April 3rd
In-Class Final Test**

Course Policies

Attendance and Preparation

Attendance is mandatory. This is a small seminar, and will require your presence and participation for the seminar to function successfully. You are responsible for all material presented in class. If you are unable to attend class on a given day, you are responsible for obtaining notes on all material covered, including discussion material and course announcements.

Participation

In addition to participation contributing to your overall mark, this class is an advanced discussion-based seminar that depends on everyone's participation in the discussion of course material. In order to succeed in contributing to discussion, you must complete the readings before each lecture, and come with notes and questions on the material. This will help you contribute to the discussions after presentations, and you will take away much more from the course as a result. Your class participation grade will be based on an overall contribution to seminar discussions, and assessed throughout the seminar period as a whole. Your presentation mark on the supplemental readings will be based on: A) presentation of supplemental reading for two lectures (signed-up in the first week of the seminar), B) leading the discussion of the course materials after supplemental reading presentation, and C) meeting with Professor Stewart in advance of the presentation to discuss the points you plan on covering.

Course Website

The course website on Quercus is available at <https://q.utoronto.ca/>. The site will contain the course syllabus, copies of the paper guidelines, reading and writing resources, links of interest and course announcements. You are responsible for the content of all course materials.

Email

When emailing Professor Stewart, please use your utoronto.ca address. Please also include "SOC497" and a brief description in the subject line, so your email can be easily prioritized. Emails will typically be answered within 36 hours, during the workweek (i.e. Monday through Friday, between 9am-6pm). You must use your Utormail or Quercus to email me, no outside email accounts will be accepted for email. Keep in mind that for simple questions, email is the preferred method of communication. However, for longer questions, you should schedule an appointment with Professor Stewart to discuss complex ideas fully.

Office Hours

Professor Stewart's office hours are by appointment. This is to ensure students registered for this seminar get one-on-one consultation with him. However, arrangements for "group" office hours can be made if requested. You are required to book an appointment to discuss your presentation before the day of the lecture, for both presentations. You may also use office hours as an opportunity to explore ideas and experiences related to the course material, how to approach the supplemental reading presentations, ideas for writing the seminar papers, discuss plans for a career in Sociology, or other course and career related matters. If you wish to schedule an appointment with Professor Stewart, please email him directly (lance.stewart@mail.utoronto.ca). In your email, include details about the nature of

your meeting request and a list of dates/times when you are available. You will typically receive a response within 36 hours.

Late Assignments (Please read carefully!!)

Unless otherwise specified, all assignments are due as a submission on Quercus by **the beginning of class (by 12pm)** on the due date provided. Late assignments will be penalized 5 percentage points for every 24 hour period, including weekend days. **Late assignments will not be accepted via email.**

Missed Test (Please read carefully!!)

Students who miss a test/exam will be assigned a grade of 0. However, students may have an absence excused with proper documentation in the case of illness or unforeseen personal circumstance. Proper documentation consists of a “**Verification of Student Illness or Injury Form**” or a **doctor’s note**, completed by a medical practitioner **on or before the day of the test** (you may find the form at www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca). Medical documentation (VOI forms and doctor’s notes must indicate start and anticipated end of illness. All documentation must be received via email or in a sealed envelope addressed to the **instructor within six calendar days of the test (i.e. by the Wednesday following the test)**. If documentation is received and deemed sufficient, a make-up test will be scheduled for one week from the original test date. All makeup tests are held and a time amenable to instructor and student. Students who do not attend the scheduled make-up test will receive a grade of 0.

Re-Grading Assignments

All requests for re-grading the course assignments should be made to Professor Stewart within **one week** of the date when the assignments are returned to the class. A short memo that clearly states specific reasons to justify the request and backs up these reasons with evidence from your assignment must be submitted to the Instructor. No re-grading requests will be considered if they are submitted more than one week after the assignments are returned to the class. This deadline applies to all students including those who missed the class when the assignments were returned.

Writing Centres (<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres/arts-and-science>)

All students are encouraged to visit and make use of the available writing centres. Writing tutors may help you brainstorm ideas, develop a thesis, structure and organize your paper, present your evidence effectively, argue logically, cite appropriately and express yourself clearly and concisely. However, proofreading and copyediting for spelling, grammar, or format are not within the primary scope of the writing centres.

Accessibility

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, please visit <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility> as soon as possible. If you are registered with Accessibility Services, please forward your accommodations paperwork to Professor Stewart within the first two weeks of the course so that arrangements can be made.

Academic Integrity/Academic Misconduct

The University of Toronto treats academic integrity and academic misconduct very seriously. To participate honestly, respectfully, responsibly, and fairly in the academic community at U of T, you should familiarize yourself with the University of Toronto’s Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters

(<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/ppjun011995.pdf>).

In addition, students should acquaint themselves with the rules concerning plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct, including but not limited to:

- Using someone else’s ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement.
- Copying material word-for-word from a source without quotation marks.
- Including references to sources that you did not use.
- Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment including (e.g.) working in groups on assignments that are supposed to be individual work
- Lending your work to a classmate who submits it as his/her own.
- Letting someone else look at your answers on a test.
- Falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University.

Student Contacts

You are responsible for all material presented in class, including announcements. If you are unable to attend class, you should obtain notes from a classmate. Write down the contact information for two of your classmates below in case you need notes.

Name: _____	Name: _____
E-mail: _____	E-mail: _____
Phone: _____	Phone: _____
Other: _____	Other: _____