The title of this course is playing with the various ways in which a physical object can be approached: as a subject of study, subjected to human thought and perception; as an entity that has its own version of what we call “subjectivity”; as one among a whole world of things that impinge on us and may be crucial to our very sense of self. In this sense, it is we who are subjected to the object.

Considerations of the object are not new to philosophy, but in recent years these have been given a new intensity. In 2001, introducing a special issue of Critical Inquiry titled simply Things, Bill Brown referred to “what might be called object studies”; and that is what it has been called since then. However, this newly defined field was almost immediately shaken up by the rise of object-oriented ontology: a radical attempt to think of physical entities from their own perspective, or at least a perspective that doesn’t fold them back into human concerns.

Early in the term, we will read Heidegger’s “Various Ways of Questioning about the Thing.” This could be an alternative title for the course. Every answer leads to more questions with this subject, the subject of the object. If we let it, it will leave us with a heightened sense of the strangeness of everyday things.

Course Director: Peter Schwenger

Class 1 Object and Thing

Elizabeth Grosz, “The Thing”
Franz Kafka, “The Odradek”

Class 2 Martin Heidegger, “Various Ways of Questioning about the Thing” (pp. 1-52, What is a Thing?);
“The Thing” (pp. 163-86, Poetry, Language, Thought);
The Broken Tool (sections 15 and 16 of Being and Time, pp. 95-107)

Class 3 Lacanian things
Selections from the Seminars

Class 4 Jane Bennet, Vibrant Matter

Class 5 Levi Bryant, The Democracy of Objects, Introduction and Chapters 1-3 (pp. 13-134.)

Class 6 Graham Harmon, Selections from The Quadruple Object; Object Oriented Ontology
Class 7 Subjects formed by Objects

Winnicott, “Transitional Objects”
Bruno Latour, “The Berlin Key, or How to Do Words with Things”

Class 8 Objects and Sexuality

Katherine Behar, “An Introduction to OOF”
Objectum Sexuality website

Class 9 Objects and Capital

Marx, selections from Capital and Grundrisse
Peter Stallybrass, “Marx’s Overcoat”

Class 10 Collecting

Walter Benjamin “Unpacking my Library: A Talk About Book Collection”
Jean Baudrillard, “Subjective Discourse or the Non-Functional System of Objects”
Haim Steinbach; online, at will.

Class 11 Timothy Morton, Hyperobjects, part 1 (pp. 1-95)

Class 12 Art and Objects: selections from Anthony Hudek, ed. The Object: Documents of Contemporary Art

Assignments:

20% Object lesson

30% Seminar and short paper arising from it

50% Final Paper