

Variants of objectification: commodification, propertization, objectivation

Syllabus

Day: Mon.
Time: 6:00 p.m. - 7:50 p.m.
Location: 6 East 16th Street
Seminar Room: 1108
Professor: Eva von Redecker (vonredee@newschool.edu)
Office hours: Tu 4-6pm (or by appointment)
Office location: D1115A (6 East 16th St)

Course Content:

"Commodification", "propertization", and "objectification" are all concepts which serve both as descriptive tools for certain tendencies in the historical development of modern, capitalistic social relations and as critical diagnoses of their particular distortions or pathologies. In the seminar, we will first try to highlight the analytic specificity of each phenomenon and then read some classical texts from within Critical Theory and Feminism to see which of the notions are operative there and how phenomenology and critique interlace.

Learning outcomes:

At the end of the seminar, you should have

- a) gained a differentiated understanding of the conceptual cluster around "objectification" and an overview of its theoretical elaboration in various strands of critical theory.
- b) tested the research hypothesis that theories of objectification are guided by different phenomenological paradigms (commodity-form, thing-analogy, instrumental use) and can be enriched by adding the focus on propertization.
- c) become familiar with some of the classical texts on objectification by deep hermeneutical engagement (both on the level of rational reconstruction and close reading).
- d) learned to disclose experiences and analyze social phenomena in the (new?) light of the focal concepts.

Required coursework:

- a) Thorough reading of the assigned texts.
- b) Gathering of instructive examples (see week 5 for more detailed information).
- c) 20%: Revised handouts and short presentation. For each session, the core reading(s) are prepared by students (individually or in small groups). You will present the content of the text on the basis of a handout outlining the text's core claims and arguments in (max!) 10min. The handouts are due by 10am on the day of the class. They are vital to structure the seminar discussion, which can be seen as a collective attempt to work toward the "ideal handout". During seminar discussion, the presenting student(s) take notes and press for their particular claims and interpretations to be debated. They then hand in a revised handout (about 2 pages in length) by Wednesday, 6pm. Those handouts will be graded and made available to everybody in class. We will assign the presentations in Week 2.
- d) 80%: 12 to 15 pages seminar paper due Dec. 21st (per pdf email attachment). I require an abstract for the individually chosen topics by week 12 (or earlier). The abstract should state your question, a tentative hypothesis for an answer, a preliminary structure of your essay and selected references for secondary reading. I will discuss the abstracts in an extended office hour in order to develop a viable research question with each of you. After that, I am also happy to comment on drafts of your paper (about 5 pages long).

Supply of reading material:

All assigned reading will be uploaded to Canvas, so you do not need to buy anything. However, some of the texts are canonical enough that you might want to have a copy on your shelf. My top five shopping recommendation would include (for full reference, see below in schedule): Lukács: History and Class Consciousness; Adorno: Dialectic of Enlightenment; Adorno: Negative Dialectics; Irigaray: The Sex Which

is not One; Butler: Gender Trouble.

Semester schedule:

Week 1. M, August 31st

General introduction, discussion of methodological approach and guiding research questions

Week 2. M, September 21st

Conceptual focus I: Commodification

Core reading:

- Radin, Margaret Jane/Sunder, Madhavi (2005): The Subject and Object of Commodification, 8-32 in: Ertman, Martha/Williams, Joan C. (ed.): Rethinking Commodification. Cases and Readings in Law and Culture. New York: NYU Press.
- Cohen, Gerald A. (2000 [1978]): Some Definitions, 415-423 in: Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence. Expanded Edition. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Marx, Karl [1867]: The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret thereof, in: Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. I.

Further reading:

- Appadurai, Arjun (2005): Commodities and the Politics of Value, 34-43 in: Ertman, Martha/Williams, Joan C. (ed.): Rethinking Commodification. Cases and Readings in Law and Culture. New York: NYU Press.
- Marx, Karl [1867]: Chapter I. Commodities, in: Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. I.

Week 3. M, September 28th

Conceptual focus II: Propertization

Core Reading:

- Bhandar, Brenna (2014): Property, Law, and Race: modes of abstraction, 203-218 in: UC Irvine Law Review 4 (1).
- Margaret Davies (1994): Feminist Appropriations: Law, Property, and Personality, 365-391 in: Social and Legal Studies 3.

Further reading:

- Bhandar, Brenna (2015): Title By Registration: instituting modern property law and creating racial value in the settler colony, 253-282 in: Journal of Law and Society.
- Schroeder, Jeanne (1994): Chix Nix Bundle-O-Stix: A Feminist Critique of the Disaggregation of Property, 239-319 in: L. Michigan Law Review 93 (2).

Week 4. M, October 5th

Conceptual focus III: Objectification/Reification

Core reading:

- Pitkin, Hanna F. (1987): Rethinking Reification, 263-293 in: Theory and Society 16 (2).
- Nussbaum, Martha C. (1995): Objectification, 249-291 in: Philosophy and Public Affairs 24 (4).

Week 5. M, October 12th

Phenomenological orientation I: discussion of collected examples

For this session, all participants (individually or in groups) present and discuss current examples of commodification/propertization/objectification as found f.i. in news, pamphlets, legislation, public debate, personal experience, artistic representation etc.

We will start collecting and circulating those from the beginning of the semester and test the scope of our focal concepts against them.

Week 6. M, October 19th

Hermeneutical focus I: Lukács

Core reading:

- Lukács, Georg (1971 [1923]): Preface + Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat I & II, xli-xlvi + 83-148 in: History and Class Consciousness. Studies in Marxist Dialectics. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Further reading:

- Andrew Arato (1972): Lukács' Theory of Reification, 25-66 in: telos 11.

Week 7. M, October 26th

Hermeneutical focus I: Lukács

Core reading:

- Lukács, Georg (1971 [1923]): Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat III, 149-222 in: History and Class Consciousness. Studies in Marxist Dialectics. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Further reading:

- Moishe Postone (2003): Lukács and the Dialectical Critique of Capitalism, 78-100 in: Albritton, Robert/Simoulidis, John: New Dialectics and Political Economy. Houndsmill/New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Week 8. M, November 2nd

Hermeneutical focus II: Adorno/Horkheimer

Core reading:

- Adorno, Theodor W./Horkheimer, Max (2002 [1950]): Juliette or Enlightenment and Morality, 63-93 in: Dialectic of Enlightenment. Stanford: Stanford UP.

Further reading:

- Benjamin, Jessica (1977): The End of Internalization. Adorno's Social Psychology, 42-64 in: telos 32.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1994 [1983]): The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-Reading Dialectic of Enlightenment, 35-50 in: Bernstein, Jay (ed.): The Frankfurt School. Critical Assessments. London/New York: Routledge.

Week 9. M, November 9th

Hermeneutical focus II: Adorno

Core reading:

- Adorno, Theodor W. (2006 [1952]): Minima Moralia. London: Verso [excerpts tba].
- Adorno, Theodor W. (1973 [1966]): Negative Dialectics. New York: Seabury Press [excerpts tba].

Further reading:

- Jaeggi, Rahel (2005): "No individual can resist": Minima Moralia as Critique of Forms of Life, 65-82 in: Constellations 12 (1).
- Geuss, Raymond (2005): Adorno's Gaps, 234-248 in: Outside Ethics. Princeton: Princeton UP.

Week 10. M, November 16th

Hermeneutical focus II: Marcuse

Core reading:

- Marcuse, Herbert (1968): One-Dimensional Society, in: One-Dimensional Man. Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society. Boston: Beacon Press.

Further reading:

- Cohen, Jerry (1969): Critical Theory: The Philosophy of Marcuse, 35-51 in: New Left Review 57
- Bernstein, Richard T.: Herbert Marcuse: An Immanent Critique, 97-111 in: Social Theory and

Practice 1(4).

Week 11. M, November 23rd

Hermeneutical focus III: Irigaray

Core reading:

- Irigaray, Luce (1985 [1977]): The Looking Glass, from the Other Side + Women on the Market, , 9-22 + 170-191 in: The Sex Which is not One. Ithaca: Cornell UP.

Background reading:

- Rubin, Gayle (1975): The Traffic in Women. Notes on the Political Economy of Sex.

Week 12. M, November 30th

Hermeneutical focus III: Irigaray

Core reading:

- Irigaray, Luce (1985 [1977]): Commodities among Themselves, 192-197 in: The Sex Which is not One. Ithaca: Cornell UP.
- de Beauvoir, Simone (2011 [1949]): Introduction + Women's Situation and Character, 3-17 + 638-665 in: The Second Sex. New York: Random House.
- Butler, Judith (1990): Language, Power, and the Strategies of Displacement, 34-46 in: Gender Trouble. New York: Routledge.

Further Reading:

- Deutscher, Penelope L. (2013): Simone de Beauvoir, in: Hugh LaFollette (ed.): International Encyclopedia of Ethics. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Deutscher, Penelope L. (2006): Irigaray, 745-746 in: Donald Borchert (ed.): Encyclopedia of Philosophy Vol 4. 2nd Edition. Detroit: Macmillan Reference.

Week 13. M, December 7th

Current debate I: Reification and Recognition

Core reading:

- Honneth, Axel (2008): Reification and Recognition. A New Look at an Old Idea. 17-95 in: Jay, Martin (ed.): Reification. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Background reading:

- Geuss, Raymond (2008): Philosophical Anthropology and Social Criticism, 120-130 in: Jay, Martin (ed.): Reification. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Butler, Judith (2008): Taking Another's View: Ambivalent Implications, 97-119 in: Jay, Martin (ed.): Reification. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Week 14. M, December 14th

Current debate II: Alienation

Core reading:

- Jaeggi, Rahel (2014): Alienation. New York, Chich.: Columbia UP [excerpts tba].
Discussion with author.

Week 15. M, December 21st

Concluding discussion; return to phenomenological examples.