Marx’s discussion of fetishism in *Capital* is not quite fifteen pages; Freud’s 1927 paper on fetishism takes up just six. Yet despite — because of? — their brevity, they have been among the most influential texts in twentieth-century theories of media and culture. In this course we will examine the origins of the concept of the fetish in the context of European imperialism; its canonical formulations in Marx, Freud, and their exegetes; its role in the post-structuralist turn of the 1970s and 1980s; and its place in “thing theory,” “actor-network theory,” and other contemporary idioms.

**Course objectives:**

Students will develop:
- An understanding of the development of the “fetish” in European intellectual and cultural history;
- A grasp of the role of “fetishism” in the works of Marx, Freud, and thinkers whom they have influenced;
- A conception, particular, of how these discourses on “fetishism” reflect the very different attitudes of Marxism and psychoanalysis towards abstraction;
- The ability to pursue their own research on problems of fetishism (sexual, economic) in modern culture and media.

**Course evaluation:**

Students will be graded on:
- Three short papers (one page, single-spaced, eleven-point type, 0.5 inch margins) explicating course readings (10% each)
- A final paper in the form of a publishable article (50%)
- Preparedness and participation in seminar discussions (20%)
Tentative Course Schedule

Week 1  Introduction(s)

Week 2  Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*

Week 3  W. Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, I,” *RES* no. 9 (Spring 1985)
        W. Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, II: The Origin of the Fetish,”  
        *RES* no. 13 (Spring 1987)
        W. Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, Illa: Bosman’s Guinea and the  
        Enlightenment Theory of Fetishism,” *RES* no. 16 (Autumn 1988)

Week 4  Selections from Rousseau, Kant, Hegel;
        Selections from Kraft-Ebbing, Stekel

Week 5  Marx, *Capital*, chapter 1, vol. 1;
        Freud, “Fetishism” (1927); “Splitting of the ego” (1938)  
        First paper due

Week 6  Jacques Derrida, *Glas*
        Lacan and Granoff, “Fetishism: The Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real”
        Althusser, “On Fetishism,” *Late Encounters*

Week 7  Donald Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*
        M. Masud Khan, *Alienation in Perversion*
        Alan Bass, *Interpretation and Difference*

Week 8  Barbara Johnson, *Persons and Things;*
        Naomi Schor, “Female Fetishism: The Case of George Sand,” in *Bad Objects*
        Naomi Schor, “Fetishism and its Ironies (1988-89),” in *Bad Objects*

Week 9  Emily Apter and William Pietz, eds. *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*  
        Second paper

Week 10 Arjun Appadurai, ed. *The Social Life of Things*

Week 11 Bill Brown, ed., *Things;*
        Lorraine Daston & Peter Galison, *Things that Talk*


Week 13 Laurence Rickels, *Nazi Psychoanalysis, Vol. 2: Crypto-Fetishism*  
        Third paper due

Week 14 Conclusion(s)

Final period  
        Final paper due
**Evaluation Rubric**

A= Excellent
This work is comprehensive and detailed, integrating themes and concepts from discussions, lectures and readings. Writing is clear, analytical and organized. Arguments offer specific examples and concisely evaluate evidence. Students who earn this grade are prepared for class, synthesize course materials and contribute insightfully.

B= Good
This work is complete and accurate, offering insights at general level of understanding. Writing is clear, uses examples properly and tends toward broad analysis. Classroom participation is consistent and thoughtful.

C= Average
This work is correct but is largely descriptive, lacking analysis. Writing is vague and at times tangential. Arguments are unorganized, without specific examples or analysis. Classroom participation is inarticulate.

D= Unsatisfactory
This work is incomplete, and evidences little understanding of the readings or discussions. Arguments demonstrate inattention to detail, misunderstand course material and overlook significant themes. Classroom participation is spotty, unprepared and off topic.

F= Failed
This grade indicates a failure to participate and/or incomplete assignments

A  = 94-100
A- = 90-93
B+ = 87-89
B  = 84-86
B- = 80-83
C+ = 77-79
C  = 74-76
C- = 70-73
D+ = 65-69
D  = 60-64
F  = 0-59

**Course Policies**

**Absences and Lateness**
More than two unexcused absences will automatically result in a lower grade. Chronic lateness will also be reflected in your evaluation of participation. Regardless of the reason
for your absence you will be responsible for any missed work. Travel arrangements do not constitute a valid excuse for rescheduling exams. There are no extra credit assignments for this class.

**Format**
Please type and double-space your written work. Typing improves the clarity and readability of your work and double-spacing allows room for me to comment. Please also number and staple multiple pages. You are free to use your preferred citation style. Please use it consistently throughout your writing. If sending a document electronically, please name the file in the following format Yourlastname Coursenumber Assignment1.doc

**Grade Appeals**
Please allow two days to pass before you submit a grade appeal. This gives you time to reflect on my assessment. If you still want to appeal your grade, please submit a short but considered paragraph detailing your concerns. Based on this paragraph I will review the question and either augment your grade or refine my explanation for the lost points.

**General Decorum**
Slipping in late or leaving early, sleeping, text messaging, surfing the Internet, doing homework in class, eating, etc. are distracting and disrespectful to all participants in the course.

**Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism**
[http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity](http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity)
The relationship between students and faculty is the keystone of the educational experience at New York University in the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. This relationship takes an honor code for granted and mutual trust, respect, and responsibility as foundational requirements. Thus, how you learn is as important as what you learn. A university education aims not only to produce high-quality scholars, but to also cultivate honorable citizens.

Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do, from taking exams to making oral presentations to writing term papers. It requires that you recognize and acknowledge information derived from others and take credit only for ideas and work that are yours.

You violate the principle of academic integrity when you
- cheat on an exam,
- submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors,
- receive help on a takehome examination that calls for independent work, or
- plagiarize.

Plagiarism, one of the gravest forms of academic dishonesty in university life, whether intended or not, is academic fraud. In a community of scholars, whose members are teaching, learning, and discovering knowledge, plagiarism cannot be tolerated.
Plagiarism is failure to properly assign authorship to a paper, a document, an oral presentation, a musical score, and/or other materials that are not your original work. You plagiarize when, without proper attribution, you do any of the following:

• copy verbatim from a book, an article, or other media;
• download documents from the Internet;
• purchase documents;
• report from other’s oral work;
• paraphrase or restate someone else’s facts, analysis, and/or conclusions; or
• copy directly from a classmate or allow a classmate to copy from you.

Your professors are responsible for helping you to understand other people’s ideas, to use resources and conscientiously acknowledge them, and to develop and clarify your own thinking. You should know what constitutes good and honest scholarship, style guide preferences, and formats for assignments for each of your courses. Consult your professors for help with problems related to fulfilling course assignments, including questions related to attribution of sources.

Through reading, writing, and discussion, you will undoubtedly acquire ideas from others, and exchange ideas and opinions with others, including your classmates and professors. You will be expected, and often required, to build your own work on that of other people. In so doing, you are expected to credit those sources that have contributed to the development of your ideas.

Avoiding Academic Dishonesty

• Organize your time appropriately to avoid undue pressure, and acquire good study habits, including note taking.
• Learn proper forms of citation. Always check with your professors of record for their preferred style guides. Directly copied material must always be in quotes; paraphrased material must be acknowledged; even ideas and organization derived from your own previous work or another’s work need to be acknowledged.
• Always proofread your finished work to be sure that quotation marks, footnotes and other references were not inadvertently omitted. Know the source of each citation.
• Do not submit the same work for more than one class without first obtaining the permission of both professors even if you believe that work you have already completed satisfies the requirements of another assignment.
• Save your notes and drafts of your papers as evidence of your original work.

Disciplinary Sanctions

When a professor suspects cheating, plagiarism, and/or other forms of academic dishonesty, appropriate disciplinary action may be taken following the department procedure or through referral to the Committee on Student Discipline.
Departmental Procedure

- The Professor will meet with the student to discuss, and present evidence for the particular violation, giving the student opportunity to refute or deny the charge(s).
- If the Professor confirms the violation(s), he/she, in consultation with the Program Director and Department Chair may take any of the following actions:
  - Allow the student to redo the assignment
  - Lower the grade for the work in question
  - Assign a grade of F for the work in question
  - Assign a grade of F for the course
  - Recommend dismissal

Once an action(s) is taken, the Professor will inform the Program Director and Department Chair, and inform the student in writing, instructing the student to schedule an appointment with the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, as a final step. Copies of the letter will be sent to the Department Chair for his/her confidential student file and the Associate Dean for Student Affairs. The student has the right to appeal the action taken in accordance with the School’s Student Complaint Procedure as outlined in The Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development Student’s Guide.

Referral to the Steinhardt Committee on Student Discipline
In cases when dismissal is recommended, and in cases of repeated violations and/or unusual circumstances, faculty may choose to refer the issue to the Committee on Student Discipline for resolution, which they may do through the Office of the Associate Dean for Student Affairs.

The Steinhardt School Statement on Academic Integrity is consistent with the New York University Policy on Student Conduct, published in the NYU Student Guide.

Student Resources

- Students with physical or learning disabilities are required to register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities, 719 Broadway, 2nd Floor, (212-998-4980) and are required to present a letter from the Center to the instructor at the start of the semester in order to be considered for appropriate accommodation.

- Writing Center: 269 Mercer Street, Room 233. Schedule an appointment online at www.rich15.com/nyu/ or just walk-in.