

Raffael Davila

Max Nelson, Professor Peters

FILM 160

February 16th, 2022

Object Meditation

People often express themselves through their apparel. The style, form, and function of what they outfit themselves in alludes to their priorities and values. In a primarily academic setting, one of the most consistent ways to gain a glimpse into a person is through the backpack that they carry. Functionally, most bags are difficult to distinguish. Other than appearance, nothing separates any one backpack – like mine, for example – from others. In its design, however, some conclusions can be drawn about its intended user and purpose.

At first glance, there is nothing significant about this backpack. The majority of the external material is a black canvas. It is ill suited for wet weather, as this lining is not waterproof. It has various zippers and accessories along the front and sides. It is a mundane object, a casualty of needing to be mobile and prepared on a college campus.

The bag has gray accents, primarily on the zippers and the straps. There is a lone blaze of orange in the center, a marker of my high school, which gifted me the bag to commemorate my acceptance to a prestigious university. Above it lies the first of many attachment points, for attaching additional loads that may not fit inside. Below, a trademark logo for the bag's maker, 'Under Armor', reflects silently down towards the ground. On either side of this arrangement, two gray loops are sewn in, additional points of attachment.

On either side of the bag there is a daisy chain loop. These are of a looser but more durable elastic than the loops on the front, and also serve as a guard of sorts for particularly large

objects. The multitude of connection points supersede the physical edges of the bag as the limit for what can be carried using it. Under these loops, there are two nets on either side, just wide enough to secure one drinking vessel each. Everything on the surface of this bag serves to enable the wearer, regardless of the total load. The bag makes no assumptions of what will be done or why, where it will go or for how long. It silently obeys, giving itself up entirely.

The straps are simplistic and monochrome. A slight reflective lining illuminates the wearer in darkness, presumably if out at night near roads. The bottom of the bag is made of a very rugged material, and it just creates a stable surface on which the bag can stand freely when placed on the floor, though it would rather lean against something else for support. It sags, both from age and wear, and when empty completely slumps over and collapses, as if it has no point to stand at attention if not fulfilling its purpose of storing things. When standing, it has a slight lean to it, a sign of consistently shouldering all of the weight on one side. The bag as a whole is near amorphous. Though it probably has a definite shape and dimension, it always falls short, never having been stressed to its limits.

The backpack has three compartments. At the very top, stitched into the main compartment's flap, is a small pocket. Just under its zipper is a larger, much more noticeable logo for the bag's maker, also reflective, a reminder that this bag is not unique, that somewhere exists a receipt for a bulk order of its kind. The small pocket is felt-lined and compact. It claims the smallest share of the bag's volume, and yet its importance in isolating and protecting the most vital of personal possessions cannot be overlooked. It is the most trusted compartment in the entire backpack, the only area that is curated.

The main compartment is accessed through the top flap. Inside, there is no structure or form, save for the walls of the bag itself. Anything remaining in here does so at its own risk. This

compartment is well suited to carry gear, sports equipment, things that are large and durable and do not mind taking a beating. Folders and notebooks are not welcomed, often creased at the corners from impact with the outside world through the thin canvas. Only a sliver of this cavern is cordoned off with an elastic lining. Perhaps it is what the designers assumed would be sufficient storage for academic material. I use it as a space to store my laptop, always in its sleeve, offloading the task of guarding my possessions.

The final compartment is accessible through the front, its flap acting as a surface for the face of the bag, where the Orange blaze burns. It falls away to reveal a surprisingly deep pocket. This compartment lacks an identity – the space it claims is owned by the main compartment, and this relationship is emphasized through the shoddy design of this pocket's back lining. It is flimsy and too large, placed almost as an afterthought. Here, only incidental belongings are placed. Things like charging cords and pencil cases, anything that should not be intermingling with the contents on the other side of the lining.

This bag is not designed to be precise, organized, or comfortable. Every minute aspect of its design largely favors function over form. The body is mute, the additional attachments highlighted in a lighter gray. Its main purpose is to be noticed as a storage solution, one that can be more than it already, should the need arise. It silently accomplishes so much work but is often disregarded as another obstacle, when in fact it shares more experiences with its owner than anyone else. It is perhaps an incompatible choice with my lifestyle. That I still employ it speaks not only to its ability to render its services, but also to the sentimental value that it holds. This bag, and any other bag, carry much more than the physical items inside. They carry a story, along its edges and inside its compartments. This bag is as much a vessel and an unyielding laborer as it is a persistent companion.