ANTH 385/ARH 355 Introduction to Material Culture Studies

Dell Upton

Course meets Thursday, 3:30-6pm in 302 Campbell Hall

Office hours: Thursdays 1-3 in 111 Campbell (even-numbered Thursdays); in 202 Brooks (odd-numbered Thursdays)

This course will acquaint you with some basic concepts and practices in the study of material culture. Material culture encompasses everything we make or do – the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the houses we occupy, the art we hang on our walls, even the ways we modify our bodies. During the semester, we will investigate questions of

• Making: How are particular kinds of objects designed and fabricated? How are aesthetic concepts, ritual knowledge, and craft practices passed from one maker to another?

• Using: How do artifacts affect the ways we relate to one another, the ways we accomplish necessary tasks, the ways we experience our world?

• Meaning: What can material culture tell us about ideas of self, gender, nation, ethnicity, community, life, death, the transcendent?

• Thinking: What methods can we use to study material culture? What kinds of questions can we ask about all artifacts and what issues are specific to the study of one genre or another – clothing, for example, or ceramics, or architecture? In what ways do our methods of collecting and analyzing objects reveal our presuppositions and affect our future thinking?

In the course of our investigation, we will have occasion to examine and think about a wide variety of artifacts, including clothing, works of art, baskets, textiles, buildings, landscapes, and cemeteries and gravemarkers from a variety of cultures and subcultures (primarily but not exclusively in the United States).

Our class sessions will consist of seminar discussion of readings, and hands-on study of artifacts, and occasional lectures. We meet once a week in a single two-and-one-half-hour block to allow us to make use of the University’s and the city of Charlottesville’s material-culture resources. In addition, there will be one required Saturday field trip.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

1. **Full Attendance**, faithful reading, and active participation. Because this course meets only once a week, you must attend every session and the field trip to pass the course. **There will be no excused absences.** If you know that you have a conflict for any of the weekly class meetings or the field trip, you should not enroll in the class.

2. **1-PAGE PAPERS.** Each week (excluding the first), each person will write a one-page reaction paper to the week’s readings. This should be neither a summary nor a review of the entire reading, but should explore a particular issue or point in the readings that intrigues you. Because these are of no use after the fact, no late papers will be accepted. However, each person has the option to skip one one-page paper (but not the reading or participation in the discussion) during the semester. No prior notice is required.
3. PROJECTS

(1) Crowns. Use the book *Crowns*, which I have asked you to purchase, as a ready-made collection of artifacts and users’ comments. Write a 5-7-page material-culture study of these hats, employing some of the methods and assumptions we have read and discussed. You shouldn’t try to use every technique we’ve covered. Instead, select some thread(s) that seem appropriate to the material and construct a plausible analysis based on the images and interviews Cunningham and Marberry have collected for you. **Due Feb. 27.**

(2) Field observation. Situate yourself in a public place such as a restaurant, laundromat, hotel lobby, park bench, or coffee shop where you can perform this exercise without attracting undue attention. Observe and describe in detail, in terms of clothing, deportment, actions, and any other relevant visible data, a single stranger who is markedly different from yourself (for example, by age, gender, ethnicity, or apparent social class). Briefly (4-5 pages) discuss the insights you have gained about that person from the clues you have observed. **Due Mar. 20.**

4. FIELD TRIP. Our field trip will occupy most of the day on **Saturday, April 5**. You should also keep Saturday, April 12, open as an alternate date in case the trip is rained out on April 5. Attendance at the field trip is required of all class members.

5. TERM PROJECTS. We will divide the class into five equal groups, each of whom will choose an object or a limited group of objects from a Charlottesville collection and produce a detailed material-culture analysis of it. You should identify, date, and describe your object(s), discuss materials and techniques of manufacture, identify as well as you can the maker(s), and then analyze the artifact’s or artifacts’ meaning and use in its historical and social context. The project will be presented in two forms:

[A] Each group will have a half hour in the final meeting to **present its project to the class**. Your presentation should be well organized, disciplined, appropriately illustrated, and should take no more than 20 minutes, leaving 10 minutes for questions and discussion.

[B] Each group should prepare an **8-10-page written summary** of its presentation, outlining both its methods and its findings, plus a bibliography and a **succinct statement** specifying, in detail, the contributions of each member of the group.

**Grading Policies:**

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

- One-page papers: 10%
- Two short papers: 20% each
- Term project: 40%
- Class participation: 10%
You must complete all the assignments and you must attend every class meeting to pass the course, no matter what your average might be.

I rarely grant INCOMPLETES or EXTENSIONS, except in the case of your own (documented) death. I will not grant any after the fact, so you must make your request before the date the assignment is due.

**Readings:**
All of the article-length readings will be posted on Toolkit with one or two exceptions (TBA) where the reading exceeds the legal limit for posting on the Web. The latter will be placed on reserve in the Fine Arts Library, as will copies of the two books assigned for purchase.

**Books to buy:**
- Michael Cunningham & Craig Marberry, *Crowns: Portraits of Black Women in Church Hats* [2000]
- Daniel Miller, *A Theory of Shopping* [2000]

**Cell phone policy**
Both the Student Council and my own policies require you to turn off your cell phones before class begins. Any cell phone I hear ringing will be confiscated.
Schedule of Meetings, Field Trips, and Readings

JAN. 16. INTRODUCTION AND ORGANIZATION

JAN. 23. WHAT IS MATERIAL CULTURE?

Reading:
- David M. Guss, To Weave and Sing: Art, Symbol, and Narrative in the South American Rain Forest [1988], chap. 4, “All Things Made”

JAN. 30. DESIGNING

Reading:
- Donald A. Norman, The Design of Everyday Things [also called The Psychology of Everyday Things] [1988], chap. 6, “The Design Challenge”

FEB. 2. NB: A gallery talk, “Native American Objects, Their Interpretation and Histories,” will be presented in the University Art Museum at 2 PM.

FEB. 6. MAKING

Reading:
- David Pye, The Nature and Art of Workmanship [1968], pp. 7-10
• Nancy A. Smith, *Old Furniture: Understanding the Craftsman’s Art* [1975], chap. 1, “Wood – Its Characteristics and How It Is Worked”
• John Michael Vlach, *Charleston Blacksmith: The Work of Philip Simmons* [1981], chap. 4, “‘So Many Variables Once You Done Get Your Opening’”
• Michael J. Ettema, “Technological Innovation and Design Economics in Furniture Manufacture,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 16 nos. 2-3 [1981]: 197-223

**FEB. 13. NO CLASS**

**FEB. 20. NO CLASS**

**FEB. 27. THE SELF AS ARTIFACT**

**Reading:**

• Anne Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes: Fashioning Ourselves* [1975], chap. 5, “Dress”
• Martin Hall, *Archaeology and the Modern World: Colonial Transcripts in South Africa and the Chesapeake* [2000], chap. 4, “Substantial Identities”

**ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE TODAY**

**MAR. 6. SPRING BREAK**

**MAR. 13. CONSUMPTION**

**Reading:**

• Matthew Johnson, *An Archaeology of Capitalism* [1996], chap. 8, “Thinking about Objects”
• Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* [1899], chap. IV, “Conspicuous Consumption”
• David Brooks, “Conscientious Consumption,” in *The New Gilded Age: The New Yorker Looks at the Culture of Affluence* [2001], ed. David Remnick

MAR. 20 SHOPPING

Reading:

• Daniel Miller, A Theory of Shopping [2000]
• Ann Hecht, The Art of the Loom: Weaving, Spinning and Dyeing across the World [1989/2001], “Introduction”

ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE TODAY

MAR. 27. LIVING AND DYING, 1

Reading:

• T. G. H. James, An Introduction to Ancient Egypt [rev. ed.; 1979], chap. 6, “Funerary Beliefs and Customs”
• Wu Hung, Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture [1995], chap. 4, “Voices of Funerary Monuments”
• Roxana Waterson, The Living House: An Anthropology of Architecture in South-East Asia [1990], chap. 9, “Houses of the Dead”

APR. 3. LIVING AND DYING, 2

Reading:

• M. Ruth Little, Sticks and Stones: Three Centuries of North Carolina Gravemarkers [1998], chap. 1, “Cultural Clues in Old Graveyards”
• Edwin Dethlefsen & James Deetz, “Death’s Heads, Cherubs and Willow Trees: Experimental Archaeology in Colonial Cemeteries,” American Antiquity 31 no. 4 [1966]: 502-10
**APR. 5. FIELD TRIP**

**Reading for field trip** [no one-page paper required]:

- Grady Clay, *Close-Up: How to Read the American City* [1973], “Epitome Districts”
- Peter Bosselmann, *Representation of Places: Reality and Realism in City Design* [1998], chap. 3, “Images in Motion”

**APR. 10. ART AS MATERIAL CULTURE**

**Reading:**

- M. J. Morwood, *Visions from the Past: The Archaeology of Australian Aboriginal Art* [2002], chap. 4, “How We Study Australian Aboriginal Art”
- Fred R. Myers, “Representing Culture: The Production of Discourse(s) for Aboriginal Acrylic Paintings,” in *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology* [1995], ed. George E. Marcus & Fred R. Myers

**APR. 12. FIELD TRIP RAIN DAY**

**APR. 17. COLLECTING**

**Reading:**

- Craig Clunas, *Art in China* [1997], pp. 15-29

**APR. 24. PROJECT REPORTS**
Charlottesville Resources for Material Culture Study

Albemarle Historical Society
Ash Lawn-Highland
Kevin Barry Perdue Folk Art Archive, Brooks Hall, UVa
Kluge-Ruhe Collection of Aboriginal Art
Jefferson Library, Kenwood (part of Monticello)
Monticello
Rare Books Collection, Alderman Library
University Art Museum

A (Very) Few Bibliographical Resources

(*= journal)

**MATERIAL CULTURE – GENERAL**

Advertising and Material Culture History:  www.mediahistory.umn.edu/advert.html
*American Antiquity
Archaeology and Material Culture Links: www.iupui.edu/~anthpm/links.html
Digital Library for the Decorative Arts and Material Culture: decorativearts.library.wisc.edu/
Glassie, Henry. *Material Culture* [1999]
*Historical Archaeology
*Journal of American Folklore
*Journal of Material Culture
*Journal of Social Archaeology
*Latin American Antiquity
*Material Culture* (formerly Pioneer America)
*Material History Review
Schlereth, Thomas J. *Artifacts and the American Past* [1980]
*Technology and Culture
*Vernacular Architecture Newsletter
*Winterthur Portfolio
BOOKS AS ARTIFACTS

*Book History
Kilgour, Frederick G.  *The Evolution of the Book* [1998]
Rota, Anthony.  *Apart from the Text* [1998]

CEMETERIES AND GRAVESTONES

African American Cemeteries on Line: www.prairiebluff.com/aacemetery
Association for Gravestone Studies: www.gravestonestudies.org
Carmack, Sharon DeBartolo.  *Your Guide to Cemetery Research* [2002]
Connecticut Gravestone Network: www.ctgravestones.com
“Essential Cemetery Resources from Genealogy Today”: www.genealogytoday.com/topics/cemetery.htm
The Political Graveyard [where famous politicians are buried]: www.potifos.com/tpg/
Saving Southern Cemeteries: www.angelfire.com/ga2/cemetery/
Stones of Faith: Pennsylvania Germans and Their Gravestones: www.pagstones.com
Tomb with a View: members.aol.com/TombView/twav.html
Wright, Rebecca Hughes & Wilbur B. Hughes III,  *Lay Down Body: Living History in African American Cemeteries* [1996]

CONSUMPTION

Bocock, Robert.  *Consumption* [1993]
*Journal of Consumer Culture

DRESS/FASHION/TEXTILES/BODY MODIFICATION

*Body and Society
Montgomery, Florence M.  *Textiles in America 1650-1870* [1984]
*Textile:  *The Journal of Cloth and Culture

MAPS/CARTOGRAPHY/CITIES/SPACE

Casey, Edward S.  *Representing Place: Landscape Painting and Maps* [2002]
Clay, Grady.  *Close-Up: How to Read the American City* [1973]
Harley, J. B., & David Woodward, eds..  *The History of Cartography* [1987]
Harvey, P. D. A.  *The History of Topographical Maps: Symbols, Pictures and Surveys* [1980]
Hodgkiss, Alan G.  *Understanding Maps: A Systematic History of Their Use and Development* [1981]
*Imago Mundi:  *The International Journal for the History of Cartography
Map History/History of Cartography: www.ihrinfo.ac.uk/maps/
IMAGES

Burke, Peter. *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* [2001]
Elkins, James. *The Domain of Images* [1999]
*Invisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture*
*Journal of Visual Communication and Image Representation*
*Journal of Visual Culture*
Mirzoeff, Nicholas ed. *The Visual Culture Reader* [1998]
Tufte, Edward R. *Envisioning Information* [1990]
*Visual Anthropology*
*Visual Studies*
*Word and Image*