instructor: Dell Upton

course title: Material Culture Theory & Methods

institution: University of Virginia

date offered: Fall 2003

posted date: June 2008

stable URL: www.vafweb.org/resources/syllabi/upton5.pdf
ANTH 759/ARH 759. Material Culture Theory & Methods

Dell Upton

Office hours: Thursdays, 2-4 in 111 Campbell (odd-numbered Thursdays), or 202 Brooks (even-numbered Thursdays)

Instructor’s e-mail: du2n@virginia.edu

Course meets Tuesdays 3:30-6pm in Brooks Hall Library

Material culture is a term originally coined by archaeologists to stand for “the vast universe of objects used by mankind to cope with the physical world, to facilitate social intercourse, and to benefit our state of mind” (James Deetz). In recent decades, material culture studies have grown into a thriving field that considers every aspect of the ways people imagine, create, use, and interpret their physical surroundings.

In this graduate seminar we will read and discuss a variety of theoretical and practical approaches to material culture, ranging from traditional formal analyses of artifacts to the most recent studies focusing on consumption, perception, and social self-definition. Our readings will examine many kinds of artifacts, including architecture, cultural landscapes, furniture, painting, clothing, decorative arts, and the ephemera of daily life.

Student Responsibilities:

1. This is a graduate seminar. It requires extensive reading (the equivalent of a book a week, on average) and its success depends on faithful completion of the reading leading to active intellectual engagement and participation in discussions by all members.

N.B.: If you have not taken an academic (as opposed to a design) seminar before, please consult the instructor before enrolling.

2. Each week (excluding the first), each person will write a one-page reaction paper to the week’s readings. This should neither be 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 opportunity to skip the paper (but not the reading or participation in the discussion) one week of his or her choice.
3. At the beginning of our weekly meetings, each member of the seminar will contribute a question or issue derived from the readings. We will write these on the board and use them to structure our discussions.

4. The seminar requires a final 20-25-page term paper on a topic of your choice related to the seminar. It is due December 2.

**READINGS:**

I have requested that all readings be posted on **Toolkit**, except those in the books assigned to buy and a few that cannot legally be posted there (readings of more than a single chapter in one book). Everything not on Toolkit will be placed on reserve in the **Fine Arts Library**. (I will file all Toolkit readings, messages, etc., under the ANTH759 number.)

Where a topic continues over two or more weeks, you will notice that the assigned readings below are separated by extra spaces to indicate which readings are assigned for which weeks.

**BOOKS TO BUY:**

The following books, of which we will read all or most, are available for purchase at UVa Bookstore. All are paperbacks except the Miller, which is a hardback at a paperback price. I will also place them on reserve in the Fine Arts Library.

- Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* [1997]
- George Kubler, *The Shape of Time* [1962]
- Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* [1987]
- Christopher Tilley, *Metaphor and Material Culture* [1999]
Schedule of Topics and Readings

ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING (Sept. 2)

NB: DENIS COSGROVE LECTURE, 5PM, SEPT. 5, CAMPBELL 153 & 158

ISSUES & CONCEPTS (Sept. 9)

• Ian Hodder, *Reading the Past: Current Approaches to Interpretation in Archaeology* [2d ed.; 1991], chap. 1, “The Problem”
• Ian Hodder, “Introduction: A Review of Contemporary Theoretical Debate in Archaeology,” in *Archaeological Theory Today* [2001], ed. Hodder

INTERPRETING CHANGE (Sept. 16, 23)

• Julian Thomas, *Time, Culture, and Identity: An Interpretive Archaeology* [1996], chap. 3, “Material Things and Their Temporality”
• George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* [1962]
• Peter F. Galison, *Image and Logic: A Material Culture of Microphysics* [1997], chaps. 1, 6, 9
• Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *On the Line* [1983]: “Rhizome”

**WORDS AND THINGS** (Sept. 30, Oct. 7, 21)

• James Deetz, *Invitation to Archaeology* [1967], pp. 83-101
• David Summers, “Conditions and Conventions: On the Disanalogy of Art and Language,” in *The Language of Art History* [1991], ed. Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell
• Timothy Yates, “Jacques Derrida: ‘There is Nothing Outside of the Text’,” in *Reading Material Culture: Structuralism, Hermeneutics, and Post-Structuralism* [1990], ed. Christopher Tilley
• Christopher Tilley, *Metaphor and Material Culture* [1999]

**OCT. 14 READING HOLIDAY – NO CLASS**
LANDSCAPE (Oct. 28, Nov. 4)

- Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* [1997], Preface & parts 3-4 (rec: parts 1-2)
- John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* [1984], “A Pair of Ideal Landscapes”
- Julian Thomas, “Archaeologies of Place and Landscape,” in *Archaeological Theory Today* [2001], ed. Ian Hodder

NB: DIANNE HARRIS LECTURE, 6 PM, NOV. 5, 153 CAMPBELL

ENGAGING THE MATERIAL (Nov. 11)

- Steven Mithen, “Archaeological Theory and Theories of Cognitive Evolution,” in *Archaeological Theory Today* [2001], ed. Ian Hodder
- Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933* [2002], chap. 4, “Noise and Modern Culture, 1900-1933”
- John Cage, “The Future of Music: Credo” [1937], in *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage* [1961], pp. 3-7
CONSUMPTION (Nov. 18, 25)

- Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* [1987]


- 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


CONCLUDING DISCUSSION (Dec. 2)