DIMENSIONS OF MATERIAL CULTURE
An Interdisciplinary, Team-Taught Course
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Fall Semester 2003

It's a material, a material, a material, a material world.

--Madonna

The whole factual world of human affairs depends for its reality and its continued existence, first, upon the presence of others who have seen and heard and will remember, and, second, on the transformation of the intangible into the tangibility of things.

--Hannah Arendt

Course Description: This course introduces the new and highly interdisciplinary field of material culture studies. It is intended for advanced undergraduate and graduate students who are interested in any professional endeavor that requires training in material culture, including careers in museums, galleries, historical societies, historic preservation organizations, and academic institutions. During the semester, students will have varied opportunities to contemplate "things"--the material world to which people give meaning and which, in turn, influences their lives. The course takes the perspective that what we make, see, inhabit, eat, acquire, cherish, and discard--all are important agents of communication and part of broad social and cultural contexts.

The class meets three times each week. Typically, each Monday a visiting faculty member will lecture on a phase of material culture related to his/her own scholarship. Wednesday and Friday class sessions are reserved for discussion of assigned readings, field trips, and student projects.

Development of this course was made possible by a Chancellor's Collaborative Teaching Award.

Supervising Faculty
Professor Beverly Gordon
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Office Hours: Mon. & Wed., 2-3pm; also by appointment

Jean B. Lee (Department of History)
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Office Hours: Wed., 11:15am to 12:30pm
also by appointment on Fri., 3:30-4:15
COURSE REQUIREMENTS & EVALUATION:

Class Participation: 20%

Students are expected to attend class regularly and to participate actively in discussions. Class absences are discouraged and must be explained to one of the professors in advance.

Assigned Readings: All assigned readings are available in PDF format via each student’s UW portal (http://my.wisc.edu/portal, then go to the following links: Academic/Library/Reserve). Selected books in which readings are assigned are also on reserve at the Kohler Art Library, Elvehjem Museum; an asterisk (*) precedes reference to these books on the syllabus.

Students are expected to come to class fully prepared to discuss the readings on the days they are assigned.

Doing-Seeing-Writing Notebook 50%

Each student will keep a loose-leaf binder, in which to accumulate two kinds of type-written assignments.

1. A synopsis of each assigned reading. On the day that each reading, or set of readings, is assigned (see the Class Schedule beginning on pg. 4), bring to class a typewritten synopsis of each item. In no more than 200 words for each reading, state the author(s)’ major argument (interpretation) and evaluate it. What does the reading tell you about material culture? Does it relate to other assignments and/or the lectures, and, if so, in what way(s)?

2. Members of the class will receive a list of relevant lectures and exhibits scheduled during the current semester. Attend at least one such event and write a synopsis of what you observed and learned; keep in mind the questions asked in the preceding paragraph.

Through these assignments you will enhance your ability to analyze, succinctly summarize, and recall scholarly writings and will create a readily accessible compilation of what you have read for the class. The synopses will be collected on the day each is due in class.

Material Culture Case Study Analysis: (three parts) 30%

In consultation with either Professor Gordon or Professor Lee, each student will develop an independent research project related to her/his area of academic specialization or interest.

No later than Consult with Professor Gordon or Lee about possible topics for your
Oct. 3 Case Study Analysis. For this you will need to schedule an appointment.

Oct. 31 Annotated bibliography, or resource list, due. This should be an
exploration of all sources you have identified and examined which promise to be useful your research project. For printed items, give the complete bibliographic citation for each. For objects or collections of objects, cite the location for each. If you conduct an interview, name the person, location, and date of the interview. In addition, state why each source appears useful for your topic.

Dec. 5 Undergraduates will present their findings in a typewritten paper due (2,000-3,000 words).

Dec. 1-10: Graduate students will offer a 20-minute class presentation about their research project (schedule to be arranged).

Dec. 10 Paper due from graduate students (4,000-5,000 words).

Grading policies:
Each project is due on the date it is assigned. Turning work in late will carry a reduction in the assigned grade, so it is best to plan on timely completion. Any student having special needs should make that known to the professors in the first two weeks of classes.

Religious Holidays:
According to University policy, any student who expects to be absent from class work because of religious holidays must, within the first two weeks of class, notify the instructor(s) of the specific date(s) on which s/he will be absent. Students bear the responsibility for arranging make-up assignments. If necessary, reasonable limits on the total number of days claimed by any one student will be set.
CLASS SCHEDULE:

THINKING ABOUT MATERIAL CULTURE

W/Sept. 3  Introduction to the Course  
HEB  Beverly Gordon and Jean B. Lee

F/ Sept. 5  Discussion Section:  What Can We Learn from Objects?  

MAKING THINGS SPEAK: PRIVATE AND DOMESTIC DOMAINS

M/ Sept. 8  The Fiber of Our Lives: Why Textiles Matter  
HEB  Beverly Gordon (Dept. of Environment, Textiles, & Design)


W/ Sept. 10  Field Trip: The Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection, at the School of Human Ecology. Gather in Room 118.

F/ Sept. 12  Discussion Section:  Bring to class an intriguing textile.
HEB

M/ Sept. 15  Ceramics in America  
HEB  Ann Smart Martin (Dept. of Art History)


W/ Sept. 17  Discussion Section, with Professor Martin:  bring to class your favorite coffee mug or cup.
LVM

F/ Sept. 19  Discussion Section:  Analyzing Objects 
LVM


W/ Oct. 8  Discussion Sections
HEB&LVM

F/ Oct. 10  Discussion Sections
HEB&LVM

M/ Oct. 13  A Different Perspective on Frank Lloyd Wright's Furniture
LVM  Virginia T. Boyd (Dept. of Environment, Textiles, & Design)


W/ Oct. 15  Field Trip: The Elvehjem Museum
LVM  NB: Assemble in L150 Elvehjem at the usual class hour.

F/ Oct. 17  Discussion Sections
HEB&LVM

**CULTURAL LANDSCAPES**

M/ Oct. 20  The Art and Artifact Dilemma
LVM  Judy Newland (Curator, Wright Museum of Art, and faculty in Museum Studies, Beloit College)

W/ Oct. 22  Field Trip: The Elvehjem Museum (gather in Paige Court)
LVM  Ann Lambert  (Curator of Education, Elvehjem Museum)

LVM

M/ Oct. 27  American Memory and Material Culture
LVM  Jean B. Lee (Dept. of History)
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>F/ Oct. 31</td>
<td>Discussion Sections</td>
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<tr>
<td>M/ Nov. 3</td>
<td>What Is Vernacular Architecture?</td>
<td>Anna Andrzejewski (Dept. of Art History)</td>
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<td>W/ Nov. 5</td>
<td>Considering the Ordinary and Sacred in Cultural Landscapes</td>
<td>Arnold Alanen (Dept. of Landscape Architecture)</td>
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<td>F/ Nov. 7</td>
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<td>M/ Nov. 10</td>
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<td>W/ Nov. 12</td>
<td>Flatboats as Occupational Tools on the Upper Mississippi River</td>
<td>Janet Gilmore (Dept. of Landscape Architecture)</td>
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<td>F/Nov. 14</td>
<td>The Silhouette and Quaker Identity in Philadelphia</td>
<td>Anne A. Verplanck (Curator of Prints &amp; Paintings, Winterthur Museum)</td>
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<td>Reading: Mary Anne Caton, “The Aesthetics of Absence . . .,” in Emma Lapsansky and Anne Verplanck, eds., <em>Quaker Aesthetics: Reflections in</em></td>
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M/ Nov. 17 TBA

W/ Nov. 19 TBA


M/ Nov. 24 Victorian Periodicals: A Cultural History Perspective

Memorial Library

Julia Chavez (Dept. of English)

NB: Class will meet, at the regularly scheduled time, in the Special Collections Department of Memorial Library.

W/ Nov. 26 Individual appointments with instructors.

F/ Nov. 28 Thanksgiving Vacation

M/ Dec. 1 Student Presentations

W/ Dec. 3 Student Presentations

F/ Dec. 5 Student Presentations

M/ Dec. 8 Student Presentations

W/ Dec. 10 Student Presentations

F/ Dec. 12 Wrap-up Gathering
Locating Material Culture. Sociology, psychology, design, and cultural studies are valued. Material culture is no longer the sole concern of museum scholars and archaeologists as researchers from a wide range of fields have now colonised the study of objects. These approaches ignore social-structural dimensions, however they do consider them in a contextualised, grounded way. As well as interpretive and textual work in the humanities and cultural anthropology (such as Clifford Geertz), the work of Foucault has been of major importance in this development, for it takes social scientists away from studying traditional macro, structural patterns and directs their interest to discourses, technologies and strategies that are applied at the level of ideas. Material culture consists of the tools, art, buildings, written records, and any other objects produced or used by humans. If all the human beings in the world ceased to exist, nonmaterial aspects of culture would vanish, but the material culture would still be present until it disintegrated. Encyclopaedia Britannica’s editors oversee subject areas in which they have extensive knowledge, whether from years of experience gained by working on that content or via study for an advanced degree. See Article History. Material culture, tools, weapons, utensils, machines, ornaments, art, buildings, monuments, written records, religious images, clothing, and any other ponderable objects produced or used by humans. Acquaintance with these four dimensions of culture is essential to an understanding of the basic concept. Pattern of Culture: At a fairly high level of abstraction, there are substantial similarities in the patterns of culture found among different groups of men. In addition to the symbolic traits that constitute an important part of every culture, there are non-symbolic or material traits that are associated with behaviour systems. Examples of non-symbolic or physical traits of cultural behaviour are buildings, bridges, dams, books, etc. The significance of non-symbolic cultural traits lies in the fact that they have an existence independent of the behaviour that produced them. Trompenaars Cultural Dimensions Model, also known as The 7 Dimensions of Culture, can help you to work more effectively with people from different cultures. Business is becoming ever more global, and as a result of this, teams are becoming more diverse. Thus, we are likely to need to work with people from other countries and cultures. Most of the time things will go well when you work with people from other cultures. But when things don’t, and misunderstandings arise, Trompenaars Cultural Dimensions Model can help. The model was first described in the book, Riding the Waves of Culture: Underst Material culture: past and present, partial and entire, in situ at an archaeological dig, on or of the landscape, or cached in a museum illuminates cultural phenomena in many ways. Material culture communicates, expresses meaning, conveys experience, disciplines, and exhibits agency. Just as material culture is various, so too the study of material culture reflects a broad array of perspectives, analytical stances, and underlying philosophical traditions. DESCRIPTION. For archaeologists, time, space, and form constitute three important descriptive dimensions of material culture. It is essential to know how old an object is and when it was used, recycled, or discarded. Chronology supplies part of the crucial cultural context of material culture.