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
242 Human Ecology Bldg.
262-2015
bgordon@wisc.edu
Office Hours: Mon. & Wed., 2-3pm; also by appointment

Jean B. Lee (Department of History)
5102 Humanities Bldg.
263-1800; 263-1837
jblee@wisc.edu
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 typewritten 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 Oct. 3 Consult with Professor Gordon or Lee about possible topics for your 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)

Reading: [1] Jane Schneider and Annette Weiner, eds., Cloth and Human
       Civil War: A Portrait for Contemporary Understanding,” Clothing and Textiles

W/ Sept. 10 Field Trip: The Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection, at the School of
       HEB 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)

Reading: [1] Ann Smart Martin, “Magical, Mythical, Practical, and Sublime:
       The Meanings and Uses of Ceramics in America,” in Robert Hunter, ed.,
       Missing Artifact: Consumer Attitudes Toward Tablewares in Late Eighteenth-
       Makers and Users: American Decorative Arts, 1620-1860, from the Chipstone
       Collection (1999)—available online at www.chipstone.org

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
M/ Sept. 22 The Archaeology of Ancient Households
LVM Nicholas Cahill (Dept. of Art History)


W/ Sept. 24 Discussion Section, with Professor Cahill
LVM


M/ Sept. 29 Continuing Discussion of Methodology
HEB&LVM

W/ Oct. 1 Photography
HEB Richard L. Pifer (Director of Reference and Public Service Wisconsin Historical Society)


F/ Oct. 3 The Artist’s Intent
LVM Michael Podmaniczky (Senior Furniture Conservator, Winterthur Museum)

**MAKING THINGS: DESIGN AND CRAFTSMANSHIP**

M/ Oct. 6 Artists Presentation: One-of-a-Kind Furniture: Quoting History to Develop Meaning
LVM Thomas Loeser (Dept. of Art)

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)

F/ Oct. 31  Discussion Sections

M/ Nov. 3  What Is Vernacular Architecture?
LVM  Anna Andrzejewski (Dept. of Art History)


W/ Nov. 5  Considering the Ordinary and Sacred in Cultural Landscapes
HEB  Arnold Alanen (Dept. of Landscape Architecture)


F/ Nov. 7  Discussion Sections

M/ Nov. 10  Discussion Sections
HEB&LVM

W/ Nov. 12  Flatboats as Occupational Tools on the Upper Mississippi River
Janet Gilmore (Dept. of Landscape Architecture)


F/ Nov. 14  The Silhouette and Quaker Identity in Philadelphia
LVM  Anne A. Verplanck (Curator of Prints & Paintings, Winterthur Museum)

Reading: Mary Anne Caton, “The Aesthetics of Absence . . . ,” in Emma Lapsansky and Anne Verplanck, eds., *Quaker Aesthetics: Reflections in

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
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. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions. Understanding Different Countries. Imagine this scenario: Sayid's boss has asked him to manage a large, global team. Psychologist Dr. Geert Hofstede published his cultural dimensions model at the end of the 1970s, based on a decade of research. Since then, it's become an internationally recognized standard for understanding cultural differences. Hofstede studied people who worked for IBM in more than 50 countries. Initially, he identified four dimensions that could distinguish one culture from another. Later, he added fifth and sixth dimensions, in cooperation with Drs Michael H. Bond and Michael Minkov. These are: Power Distance Index (high versus low).

Locating Material Culture. Sociology, psychology, design and cultural studies are valued. Material culture is no longer the sole concern of museum scholars and archaeologists. Researchers from a wide range of fields have now colonised the study of objects. These approaches do not 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 refers to the objects created and kept by ancient societies, that hold a wealth of information about the people who made them. Material Culture - Artifacts and the Meaning(s) They Carry. What Can the Material Culture of a Society Tell Scientists? Share. Flipboard. Email. Print. Floridians Bring Their Material Culture to Antiques Roadshow in 2001. Tim Chapman / Getty Images Entertainment / Getty Images. Social Sciences.