

## **DIMENSIONS OF MATERIAL CULTURE**

An Interdisciplinary, Team-Taught Course  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

*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 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 artistic performance, museums, galleries, historical societies, historic preservation organizations, and academic institutions. During the semester, students have varied opportunities to contemplate "things" (the material world) to which people give meaning and which, in turn, influence 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 once each week. Sessions typically combine in some way (a) presentations from faculty members and other professionals on a phase of material culture related to their own work and (b) discussion of foundational readings in the field, readings assigned by visiting presenters, and students' individual research projects.

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

### **FACULTY:**

Professor Emerita Virginia Terry Boyd  
Design Studies Department  
245 Human Ecology  
262-9983  
[vtboyd@wisc.edu](mailto:vtboyd@wisc.edu)  
Office hours: Thursdays, noon-2:00 pm;  
also by appointment

Professor Jean B. Lee  
Department of History &  
Institute for Research in the Humanities  
263-1837 or 263-1800  
[jblee@wisc.edu](mailto:jblee@wisc.edu)  
Office hours: Tuesdays, 2:00-4:00 pm;  
also by appointment

**COURSE READER:** A packet containing required readings is available at Bob's Copy Shop, 616 University Avenue. In addition, the packet is on reserve at the Kohler Library (Chazen Bldg.).

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS & EVALUATION:**

**Class Participation** (20 % of course grade):

Students are expected to attend class regularly and to participate actively in discussions of assigned readings and in-class presentations. Absences are strongly discouraged, for each weekly class covers a great amount of information. If you must be absent for a valid reason, contact one of the professors in advance.

**Doing-Seeing-Writing Activities:** Each student will produce two kinds of assignments.

1. (30%) A synopsis of designated assigned reading. On the day each designated reading is assigned, bring to class a typewritten synopsis. In no more than 500 words for each designated 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)? You will receive further information about writing synopses during the first class meeting.
2. (10%) Faculty and fellow students will alert the class to relevant outside lectures and exhibits scheduled during the semester. Attend at least three such events and write a synopsis of what you observed and learned. Keep in mind the questions asked in the preceding paragraph. No later than the last day of class, turn in the reviews of outside lectures and exhibitions.

Through these assignments you will enhance your ability to analyze, succinctly summarize, and recall scholarly writings and will create a readily accessible compilation of class readings.

**Material Culture Case Study:**

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

1. No later than September 23, consult with Professor Boyd or Lee about possible topics for your independent case study. For this you will need to schedule an appointment.
2. Due October 21 at the start of class (10% of class grade): Turn in a list of all the sources you have identified, examined, and found useful for your research project. For published items, give the complete bibliographic citation for each. For objects or collections of objects, cite the location of each. If you conduct an interview, name the person, location, date, and topic of the interview. Briefly state (a phrase or two will do) why each source appears useful for your topic.
3. Due November 25 at the start of class (10%): Turn in a virtual exhibition entry for

your object. Include a visual, caption, and 200-word entry. Submit it to the course Project Assistant on a disc or flash drive.

4. (a) Beginning on December 2 (20%): Graduate students will offer a 20-minute class presentation on their individual research projects. (Schedule to be arranged.) Graduate student papers due on the day of the class presentation (4,000-5,000 words).
- (b) Due December 9 at the start of class (20%): Undergraduate papers due (2,000-3,000 words).

#### **GRADING POLICIES:**

Each project is due on the date it is assigned. Work submitted late will carry a reduction in the grade.

Evaluation of the synopses will be as follows:

- 1 – We think that you can get more out of the reading, as well as write about it more clearly and meaningfully.
- 2 – A completely adequate synopsis. You are getting out of the assignment what you need. This score will be given most frequently.
- 3 – Considerably more content is abstracted and evaluated. Writing is advanced.

#### **SPECIAL NEEDS:**

Any student having special needs should make them known to the professors in the first two weeks of classes so that reasonable accommodation can be arranged.

#### **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 – Fall 2009**  
**DIMENSIONS OF MATERIAL CULTURE**

**NOTE:** Access the MadCat library search engine at the UW-Madison Home page or "MyUW" (click on "Libraries")

Week 1	Sept. 2	Introduction to the course Discussion of successful analysis and writing
Week 2	Sept. 9	Preview of the field of material culture  <b>***Bring to class a favorite mug or other drinking vessel</b>  Readings: Robert Kunzig, "La Marmotta," <i>Discover</i> 23 (Nov. 2002): 33-41. John N. Wilford, "String, and Knot, Theory of Inca Writing," <i>New York Times</i> , Aug. 12, 2003. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Why We Need Things," in <i>History from Things: Essays on Material Culture</i> (1993), 20-29. Kenneth Haltman, "Introduction [to Prownian analysis]," in <i>American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture</i> , ed. Jules D. Prown and Kenneth Haltman (East Lansing, Mich., 2000), 1-9.
Week 3	Sept. 16	American ceramics as material culture <b>Guest: Prof. Ann Smart Martin (Art History)</b>  Readings: Ann Smart Martin, "The Role of Pewter as Missing Artifact: Consumer Attitudes Toward Tablewares in Late Eighteenth-Century Virginia," <i>Historical Archaeology</i> 23 (Fall 1989):1-27. Ann Smart Martin, "Magical, Mythical, Practical and Sublime: The Meanings and Uses of Ceramics in America," <i>Ceramics in America</i> 1 (2001): 29-46.
Week 4	Sept. 23	An archeologist's use of material culture <b>Guest: Nicholas Cahill (Art History and Classics)</b>  Readings: Nicholas Cahill, "Olynthus and Greek Town Planning," <i>Classical World</i> 94 (2000): 497-516. L. C. Nevett, "Gender Relations in the Classical Household," <i>Annals of the British School at Athens</i> 90 (1995): 363-81.
Week 5	Sept. 30	Working with visual documents (maps and photographs) <b>Guest: Prof. Matthew Edney (Director, History of Cartography Project, UW Dept. of Geography)</b>  Readings: Martin Bruckner, "The Material Map: Lewis Evans and Cartographic Consumer Culture, 1750-1775," <i>Common-Place</i> 8, no. 3 (April 2008). <b>Online</b> at <a href="http://www.common-place.org">http://www.common-place.org</a> Matthew H. Edney, "John Mitchell's Map of North America (1755): A Study of the Use and Publication of Official Maps in Eighteenth-Century Britain," <i>Imago Mundi</i> 60, no. 1 (Jan. 2008):63-85. <b>Online</b> at UW's MadCat > journals > imago mundi > EBSCOhost

Academic Search Premier > 2008 Issue 1 (Jan 2008)  
 Christina E. Dando, "Riding the Wheel: Selling American Women  
 Mobility and Geographic Knowledge," *ACME: An International E-  
 Journal for Critical Geographies* 6, no. 2 (2007): 174-210. **Online**  
 at MadCat > Journals > ACME . . .

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| Week 6  | Oct. 7  | <p>Exhibitions<br/> <b>Guests: Prof. Virginia T. Boyd (Design Studies) &amp; B.A. Harrington (MFA and Art History)</b></p> <p>Readings: Virginia T. Boyd, "The House Beautiful Idea: Introduction and Background," in <i>Frank Lloyd Wright and the House Beautiful</i> (Washington DC, 2006), 38-47.<br/>         "Hannah Barnard's Cupboard," in Laurel Ulrich, <i>Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth</i> (New York, 2001), 108-41.<br/>         Albená Yaneva, "Chalk Steps on the Museum Floor," <i>Journal of Material Culture</i> 8 (July 2003), 169-87.</p>   |
| Week 7  | Oct. 14 | <p>A curator's view of material culture<br/> <b>Guest: William Brewster (Curator, Wisconsin Veteran's Museum)</b></p> <p>Assignment: TBA</p>   |
| Week 8  | Oct. 21 | <p>Artistry<br/> <b>Guests: Prof. Jennifer Angus (Design Studies)</b></p> <p>Readings: Joan Fischer, "Insect Artistry" [interview of Jennifer Angus], <i>Wisconsin Academy Review</i> (fall 2003), 25-32.<br/>         Charlotte Perkins Stetson (aka Charlotte Perkins Gilman), <i>The Yellow Wall-paper</i> (Boston, 1899).</p>  |
| Week 9  | Oct. 28 | <p>History, memory, and material culture<br/> <b>Guest: Prof. Jean B. Lee (History and the Institute for Research in the Humanities)</b></p> <p>Readings: James E. Young, <i>The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning</i> (New Haven, Conn., 1993), vii-xiii.<br/>         David Lowenthal, "The Timeless Past: Some Anglo-American Historical Preconceptions," <i>Journal of American History</i> 75 (1989):1263-1280.<br/> <b>Online</b> at (1) MadCat &gt; JStor and (2) <a href="http://www.jstor.org/stable/1908640">http://www.jstor.org/stable/1908640</a><br/>         Jean B. Lee, "Historical Memory: Sectionalism, and the American Mecca: Mount Vernon, 1783-1853," <i>Virginia Magazine of History and Biography</i> 109 (2001):255-300. <b>Online</b> at (1) MadCat &gt; JStor and (2) <a href="http://www.jstor.org/stable/4249931">http://www.jstor.org/stable/4249931</a></p> |
| Week 10 | Nov. 4  | <p>Cultural landscapes as material culture<br/> <b>Guest:</b></p> <p>Reading:</p>  |

Week 11	Nov. 11	Textiles as material culture <b>Guest: Beverly Gordon (Design Studies)</b>
	Readings:	Beverly Gordon, "The Hand of the Maker: The Importance of Understanding Textiles from the 'Inside Out,'" in <i>Silk Roads, Other Roads</i> (Proceedings of the Textile Society of America Symposium, 2002).
Week 12	Nov. 18	A folklorist looks at foodways <b>Guest: Prof. Janet Gilmore (Folklore and Landscape Architecture)</b>
		<b>***IN ADVANCE OF CLASS:</b> Using the "Classlist" tab at the Learn@UW website for this course, email all class members and the professors a copy of a favorite Thanksgiving recipe.
	Readings:	
		The only contemporary accounts of the first Thanksgiving in English America, written by Edward Winslow and William Bradford. <b>Online</b> at <a href="http://www.pilgrimhall.org/1stthnks.htm">http://www.pilgrimhall.org/1stthnks.htm</a>
Week 13	Nov. 25	(1) Entry for virtual exhibition due, as per instructions to be given in advance (2) Research Day—class does not meet
Week 14	Dec. 2	Graduate student presentations
Week 15	Dec. 9	Virtual exhibition presentations