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**instructor:** Dell Upton  
**course title:** Introduction to Material Culture Studies  
**institution:** University of Virginia  
**date offered:** Spring 2003

  

**posted date:** June 2008  
**stable URL:** [www.vafweb.org/resources/syllabi/upton4.pdf](http://www.vafweb.org/resources/syllabi/upton4.pdf)

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## 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:

- Jules David Prown, “Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method,” *Winterthur Portfolio*, 17 no. 1 [spring 1982]: 1-20
- E. McClung Fleming, “Artifact Study: A Proposed Model,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 9 [1974]: 153-73
- Jeannette Lasansky, *Willow, Oak & Rye: Basket Traditions in Pennsylvania* [1978], pp. 12-21
- Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* [2001], chap. 10, “A Woodsplint Basket, Rutland, Vermont, after 1821”
- 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”
- Eugene S. Ferguson, *Engineering and the Mind’s Eye* [1992], chap. 1, “The Nature of Engineering Design”
- Michael Owen Jones, *The Handmade Object and Its Maker* [1975], chap. 2, “The Bookcase Masterpiece and the New Design”
- Michael Shanks & Christopher Tilley, *Re-Constructing Archaeology: Theory and Practice* [2d ed.; 1987], chap. 8, “Social Values, Social Constraints and Material Culture: The Design of Contemporary Beer Cans”

**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:

- Lothar Ledderose, *Ten Thousand Things: Module and Mass Production in Chinese Art* [2000], chap. 4, “Factory Art”
- David Pye, *The Nature of Design* [1964], chap. 5, “Techniques. Skill”
- 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"
- Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* [1988], chap. 4, "Clothing as Language: An Object Lesson in the Study of the Expressive Properties of Material Culture"
- Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion* [1994], chap. 8, "Fashioning Masculinity: Dressed for Comfort or Style"
- Martin Hall, *Archaeology and the Modern World: Colonial Transcripts in South Africa and the Chesapeake* [2000], chap. 4, "Substantial Identities"
- Italo Calvino, "Il Duce's Portraits: Living with Mussolini," *The New Yorker*, Jan. 6, 2003, pp. 34-39

**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"
- T. J. Jackson Lears, "Beyond Veblen: Rethinking Consumer Culture in America," in *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920* [1989], ed. Simon J. Bronner
- David Brooks, "Conscientious Consumption," in *The New Gilded Age: The New Yorker Looks at the Culture of Affluence* [2001], ed. David Remnick

- John Clammer, “Aesthetics of the Self: Shopping and Social Being in Contemporary Urban Japan,” in *Lifestyle Shopping: The Subject of Consumption* [1992], ed. Rob Shields
- Marlys J. Pearson & Paul R. Mullins, “Domesticating Barbie: An Archaeology of Barbie Material Culture and Domestic Ideology,” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 3 no. 4 [1999]: 225-59

## **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”
- Gary Laderman, *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883* [1996], chap. 6, “Morbid Obsessions”
- Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* [1995], chap. 4, “The Religious Symbolism of Laurel Hill”
- 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
- Iain W. Brown, “The Lamson-Carved Gravestones of Watertown, Massachusetts,” in *The Art and Mystery of Historical Archaeology: Essays in Honor of James Deetz* [1991], ed. Anne Elizabeth Yentsch & Mary C. Beaudry
- Barbara Rotundo, “Monumental Bronze: A Representative American Company,” in *Cemeteries and Gravemarkers: Voices of American Culture* [1989], ed. Richard E. Meyer

## **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”
- Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* [1960], chap. 3, “The City Image and Its Elements”
- Peter Bosselmann, *Representation of Places: Reality and Realism in City Design* [1998], chap. 3, “Images in Motion”

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

### **Reading:**

- Robert Layton, *The Anthropology of Art* [2d ed.; 1991], chap. 1, “The Art of Other Cultures”
- M. J. Morwood, *Visions from the Past: The Archaeology of Australian Aboriginal Art* [2002], chap. 4, “How We Study Australian Aboriginal Art”
- Howard Morphy, *Ancestral Connections: Art and an Aboriginal System of Knowledge* [1991], chap. 8, “The Components of Yolngu Art”
- Nancy Williams, “Australian Aboriginal Art at Yirrkala: Introduction and Development of Marketing,” in *Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World* [1976], ed. Nelson H. Graburn
- 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
- Finbarr Barry Flood, “Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm, and the Museum,” *Art Bulletin* 84 no. 4 [Dec. 2002]: 641-59
- Bruno Giberti, *Designing the Centennial: A History of the 1876 International Exhibition in Philadelphia* [2002], chap. 6, “The Exhibitionary Complex in Philadelphia”

## **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](http://www.mediahistory.umn.edu/advert.html)

\**American Antiquity*

Archaeology and Material Culture Links: [www.iupui.edu/~anthpm/links.html](http://www.iupui.edu/~anthpm/links.html)

Collier, John Jr., & Malcolm Collier. *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method* [rev. ed.; 1986]

Digital Library for the Decorative Arts and Material Culture:  
[decorativearts.library.wisc.edu/](http://decorativearts.library.wisc.edu/)

Glassie, Henry. *Material Culture* [1999]

\**Historical Archaeology*

Hodder, Ian. *Reading the Past: Current Approaches to Interpretation in Archaeology* [2d ed.; 1991]

\**Journal of American Folklore*

\**Journal of Material Culture*

\**Journal of Social Archaeology*

\**Latin American Antiquity*

Martin, Ann Smart & J. Ritchie Garrison, eds. *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field* [1997]

\**Material Culture* (formerly *Pioneer America*)

\**Material History Review*

Schlereth, Thomas J. *Artifacts and the American Past* [1980]

Schlereth, Thomas J., ed. *Material Culture: A Research Guide* [1983]

\**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](http://www.prairiebluff.com/aacemetery)

Association for Gravestone Studies: [www.gravestonestudies.org](http://www.gravestonestudies.org)

Carmack, Sharon DeBartolo. *Your Guide to Cemetery Research* [2002]

Connecticut Gravestone Network: [www.ctgravestones.com](http://www.ctgravestones.com)

“Essential Cemetery Resources from Genealogy Today”:

[www.genealogytoday.com/topics/cemetery.htm](http://www.genealogytoday.com/topics/cemetery.htm)

The Political Graveyard [where famous politicians are buried]: [www.potifos.com/tpg/](http://www.potifos.com/tpg/)

Saving Southern Cemeteries: [www.angelfire.com/ga2/cemetery/](http://www.angelfire.com/ga2/cemetery/)

Stones of Faith: Pennsylvania Germans and Their Gravestones: [www.pagstones.com](http://www.pagstones.com)

Tomb with a View: [members.aol.com/TombView/twav.html](http://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*

Miller, Daniel, ed. *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies* [1995]

## DRESS/FASHION/TEXTILES/BODY MODIFICATION

*\*Body and Society*

*\*Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body, and Culture*

Hecht, Ann. *The Art of the Loom: Weaving Spinning and Dyeing across the World* [1989]

Montgomery, Florence M. *Textiles in America 1650-1870* [1984]

Taylor, Lou. *The Study of Dress History* [2002]

*\*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/](http://www.ihrinfo.ac.uk/maps/)

IMAGES

- Burke, Peter. *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* [2001]  
Collier, John, Jr., & Malcolm Collier. *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method* [rev. ed.; 1986]  
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]  
Morgan, David. *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* [1998]  
Tufte, Edward R. *Envisioning Information* [1990]  
Tufte, Edward R. *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* [1983]  
\**Visual Anthropology*  
\**Visual Studies*  
\**Word and Image*