

The Materiality of History: Material Culture Theory and Practice

Lecturer: Caroline Frank
AMCIV 1903T



*Collections of the Haffenreffer
Museum of Anthropology*

Focusing on Native American, early American, and contemporary US material culture, this course develops critical methods for analyzing historic materials, not as silent monuments to the past, but as legible research materials for scholarly work. Who studies things and with what methods? From the invisible to the living to the monumental, what are the limits of “thingness”? What is the role of commodification and American consumerism? Through selected readings and site visits, we will identify ‘best practices’ for integrating artifacts, collectibles, and every day things with documentary research in narrating and exhibiting the past.

Class Location:

Class Meetings: Wed. 3-5:20

Office Hours: Tuesday, 10-12, 1:30-3:30, or by appt.

Office: 82 Waterman, 1st fl.

Contact Information: Caroline_Frank@brown.edu

Schedule and Reading Assignments

The readings listed for each week should be completed ahead of class meetings.

Books are for sale at the Brown Bookstore and on reserve at Rockefeller Library. All articles are available electronically (on JSTOR) or in a packet available at the Brown Bookstore.

Week 1: January 25

Course Introduction

Week 2: February 1

The Relevance of Material Life and the Limits of Thingness

- Leora Auslander et al, "Historians and the Study of Material Culture," *American Historical Review*, Dec. 2009: 1355-1404.
- Arjun Appaduri, "Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things*, 1988.
- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Why Do We Need Things," *History from Things* (Lubar and Kingery, 1993)
- Margaret Radin, "Property and Personhood," in *Reinterpreting Property*, 1994.

Week 3: February 8

Interpreting Past Lives through Stuff: Methods from five disciplines

- Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Hannah Barnard's Cupboard: Female Property and Identity in Eighteenth Century New England," in *Through a Glass Darkly*, Ron. Hoffman, ed., University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- Margaretta Lovell, "Money, Art, Family and the Cabinet Makers of Newport," in *Art in the Season of Revolution 2005*, pp.225-66.
- Robert St. George, "Embodied Spaces," in *Conversing by Signs*, 1998, pp. 115-204.
- Mark Leone, "Interpreting Ideology in Historical Archaeology: Using the Rules of Perspective in the William Paca Garden," in Miller and Tilley, *Ideology, Power, and Prehistory* (1984).
- Kavanagh, Gaynor. "Objects as Evidence, or Not?" In *Museum Studies in Material Culture*, vi, 174. Leicester University Press, 1989.

Week 4: February 15

[Personal material culture analysis due]

Theories and Practices of Collecting

- Gary Nash, *First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory*, 2002.
- Russell Belk, "Collectors and Collecting" in Tilley et al, *Handbook of Material Culture*, 2006 (online at google books)
- Hillier, Bevis (1981), "Why Do We Collect Antiques?," in *Our Pasts Before Us: Why Do We Save It?*, 70-82.

Week 5: February 22

Collecting Records: The Archive as Material Culture

- Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science II: 1-2* (2002), 87-109 (online)
- Rekut, Ala. "Material Literacy: Reading Records as Material Culture," in *Proceedings of the First International Conference on the History of records and Archives*, University of Toronto. 2003: pp. 11-29.
- John Bushman and Glorie Leckie, *The Library as Place: History, Community and Culture*, 2006, selections.

SITE VISIT: JOHN CARTER BROWN LIBRARY

Week 6: February 29

Native American Material Culture: Current Issues in Exhibiting and Researching

- Richard Hill, "The Museum Indian: Still Frozen in Time and Mind," *Museum News* (May/June 2000): 40–74. (online)
- Steven Conn, "Whose Objects, Whose Culture? The Context of Repatriation," in *Do Museum Still Need Objects*, 2010, pp. 58-86.
- Huhndorf, Shari. *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (2001) pp.19-64

SITE VISIT: PEABODY MUSEUM, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Week 7: March 7

Commodification of the Living: People as Material Culture

- Carol A. Breckenridge "The Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Collecting: India at World Fairs," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 31, No. 2, (Apr., 1989), pp. 195-216 (online)

SITE VISIT: MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, NEW YORK (optional)

Week 8: March 14

The Interaction of Archaeology and Historical Scholarship

- Bjornar Olsen, *In Defense of Things: Archaeology and the Ontology of Objects*, 2010.
- James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life* (1996)
- (or) Kenneth Feder, *A Village of Outcasts: Historical Archaeology and Documentary Research at the Lighthouse Site* (1994)

SITE VISIT: HAFFENREFFER MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY COLLECTIONS, BRISTOL

Week 9: March 21

[Final date for literature reviews]

"A Piece of the True Cross": Fakes, Replicas, and Authenticity

- Handler, Richard (1986), "Authenticity," *Anthropology Today*, 2 (February), 2-4.

- Jules Prown, “The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction,” *History from Things* (Lubar and Kingery 1993)

SITE VISIT: HAFFENREFFER MUSEUM AT MANNING HALL

SPRING RECESS

Week 10: April 4

Commodity States and Mass Consumption

- Cohen, Leah Hager. *Glass, Paper, Beans: Revelations on the Nature and Value of Ordinary Things*, 1997.
- Daniel Miller, *A Theory of Shopping*, 1998, selections.
- Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*, 1997, Part I

Week 11: April 11 [final paper prospectus due]

Self as Object: The Body and Personal Adornment

- Jane Schneider, “Cloth and Clothing” in Tilley et al, *Handbook of Material Culture*, 2006 (online at google books)
- William E. Simeone, James W. VanStone, “‘And he was beautiful’: contemporary Athapaskan Material Culture in the Collections of Field Museum of Natural History,” *Fieldiana*, Nov. 28 1986.
- Lesley Sharpe, “Commodification of the Body and its Parts,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 29, Oct. 2000: 287-328.

SITE VISIT: PROVIDENCE PLACE MALL

Week 12: April 18

The Material Culture of an American Ivy League University

- “How do I become Ivy League Material?” Web conversation.
- Robert Emlen, “Picturing Brown: The First Views of the College,” *Imago Brunoniana* (online)

SITE VISIT: BROWN CAMPUS TOUR

Week 13: April 25

Student Presentations and Parting Words

Final Paper: Due May 8

Requirements

1. Object interpretation (10%)
2. Literature review (25%)

3. Discussion participation and class leadership/ presentations (25%)
4. 15-20-page research paper, due Tuesday, May 8 (40%)

Students must complete all written assignments to receive course credit.

Assignments

1. Weekly posts on course website related to readings and bring to class responses to student posts in a course journal.
2. A 3-page essay exploring the meaning of a material item, or set of items, that is part of your everyday life, something you may take for granted but are intimate with. What does this item tell us about you, your life, or your community? How might scholars use it to understand you and your historical context 100 years hence? Cite one or more methodological models for your interpretive approach. Attach a photo of the object(s) to your essay.
3. A 4-5-page literature review—bibliographic essay—on a *particular topic*. Specify the history of a person, community, or place and the related materials while critiquing the methodological issues present in the material culture scholarship on this topic. (List of potential topics will be distributed). To be shared with class in weeks 4-11 (bibliographic essay due by March 21).
4. A 15-page (min.) research paper on a focused topic related to the histories and material culture of a historic place or group. A prospectus will be due a month prior to the due date. Students will present their research in the last few classes. (Must be a *somewhat* different topic than literature review).

Course Goals

There are three things I seek to accomplish together in this course. First, I hope we all gain an understanding of the different definitions of, approaches to, and uses of material culture in different disciplines. Secondly, we will critically examine the broad range of sources and methods used by historians, Americanists, archaeologists, and other material culture specialists in narrating history, or *histories*. Thirdly, in individual, focused research projects, I hope each student will make an original contribution to the “materiality of history” in American Studies or Museum Studies.

Course Format

Preparation for and active participation in discussions are the core of this course. By the Monday evening preceding each class, students will post on the course website questions, problems, and issues raised by the readings that they view as central. Each student will read the posts by other students and jot down responses in a “journal.” Journal notes will form the basis of our discussions. (I will periodically collect and review journals.) Students will each lead a class discussion based on their literature review during weeks 4-11. They will each also present their research topic at the end of the course.

Required Texts

(to come)

On Reserve, online, or posted w/ OCRA

(to come)