

Adam T. Smith
Office Hours: Monday 8:30-11
Haskell Hall 205

Autumn Quarter 2009
Anthropology 26805/36805
Wednesday 1:30-4:20

MATERIAL CULTURES

This course explores recent efforts to theorize the materiality of human social, political, and cultural life. We will draw broadly from contemporary works in archaeology, socio-cultural anthropology, art, social thought, media studies, and literary theory to piece together a sense of the conceptual possibilities afforded by analytical engagement with the world of things. We will take the historical dynamics of things as our central concern, navigating between classic and contemporary debates over the social location, physical constitution, and agency of object worlds. Along the way we will take in contemporary arguments for objects as constitutive elements of mind, affect, and order. The goal of the course is to juxtapose the experience, perception, and imagination of materiality in order to re-structure critical anthropological problems. As such, we will attempt to forge a more archaeological sense of anthropology and plot new possibilities for anthropological archaeology. Prior experience with archaeological theory will be helpful but is not required.

Course Requirements

Student performance in the course will be evaluated based on four assignments.

- 1) Students are expected to have completed the required reading prior to each meeting and participate ACTIVELY in class discussions (20%).
- 2) All students will be required to lead class discussion twice during the quarter. Discussion leaders should begin with a brief presentation on the critical themes and ideas raised by the reading(s) AND illustrate these themes in relation to an assemblage of the presenter's choosing (i.e. not the critical assemblage of the week). Presentations should be no longer than 5 minutes and should lead into a sustained discussion of the texts (30% total).
- 3) At the end of week 6, students will hand in a 5 page material description of an assemblage of their choosing (ideally one which will lead into the final paper). The paper should focus on detailing the key parts of the assemblage (distribution, form, style, historicity etc.) that make it an intriguing set of objects for thinking through a social, political, or cultural problem. More details on this assignment will be provided in class.
- 4) All students are required to write a final paper that engages with a material culture assemblage of their choosing. Undergraduate papers should be 15-20 pages in length; graduate student papers should not exceed 25 pages. Topics should be discussed with the instructor during the 7th week of classes.

Texts

All students are expected to complete the readings required for each class period. The readings are available on the course CHALK site.

OBJECTS AND ASSEMBLAGES

I. SEPTEMBER 30: THE NATURE OF THINGS: ART, ARTIFACT, AND ARTIFICE

CRITICAL ASSEMBLAGE: "WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION"

II. OCTOBER 7: THINGS IN ORDER: CLASSIFICATION, COMPARISON, AND EXTENSION

CRITICAL ASSEMBLAGE: INTERNATIONAL METROLOGY PROTOTYPES

Thematic Readings:

Daston, L. and P. Galison

2007 *Objectivity*. Zone Books, New York. Ch. 1.

Foucault, M.

1989 *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Routledge, London. Ch. 5.

Glassie, H. H.

1999 *Material Culture*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington. Ch. 2.

Amplifying Text

Ucko, P.

1969 Penis Sheaths: A Comparative Study. *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 1969:27-67.

III. OCTOBER 14. THINGS IN SEQUENCE: HISTORY AND MAKING

CRITICAL ASSEMBLAGE: CABINETS OF CURIOSITY

Thematic Readings:

Ingold, T.

2000 *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. Routledge, London. Pp. 362-372

Kopytoff, I.

1986 The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process. In *The Social Life of Things*, edited by A. Appadurai, pp. 64-91. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Kubler, G.

1962 *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*. Yale University Press, New Haven. Ch. 2.

Amplifying Text

Sennett, R.

2008 *The Craftsman*. Allen Lane, London. Prologue & Ch. 1.

EXAMINING THINGS

IV. OCTOBER 21: SURFACES AND THE PROBLEM OF AUTHENTICITY

CRITICAL ASSEMBLAGE: PORTABLE AUDIO PLAYERS

Thematic Readings:

Benjamin, W.

- 1968 The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. In *Illuminations*, edited by H. Arendt, pp. 217-251. Schocken Books, New York.

Clifford, J.

- 1988 *The Predicament of Culture*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge. Pp. 215-251.

Ingold, T.

- 2007 Materials Against Materiality. *Archaeological Dialogues* 14(1):1-16.

Amplifying Film:

Russian Ark (2002, dir. A. Sukorov)

V. OCTOBER 28: INTERIORS AND THE ENCHANTMENT OF TECHNOLOGIES

CRITICAL ASSEMBLAGE: TOASTERS

Thematic Readings:

Gell, A.

- 1992 The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology. In *Anthropology, Art, and Aesthetics*, edited by J. Coote and A. Shelton, pp.40-63. Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Lechtman, H.

- 1977 Style in Technology: Some Early Thoughts. In *Material Culture: Styles, Organization, and Dynamics of Technology*, edited by H. Lechtman and R. S. Merrill, pp. 3-20. West Pub. Co., St. Paul.

Pfaffenberger, B.

- 1992 Social Anthropology of Technology. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21:491-516.

Amplifying Text

Masco, J.

- 2004 Nuclear Technoaesthetics: Sensory Politics from Trinity to the Virtual Bomb in Los Alamos. *American Ethnologist* 31(3):349-373.

VI. NOVEMBER 4: THE PROBLEM OF AGENCY

CRITICAL ASSEMBLAGE: AUTOMATA

Thematic Readings:

Hoskins, J.

- 2006 Agency, Biography, and Objects. In *Handbook of Material Culture*, edited by C. Y. Tilley, W. Keane, S. Küchler, M. Rowlands and P. Spyer, pp. 74-84. Sage, London.

Latour, B.

- 2005 *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. Pp. 63-86.

Snyder, J.

- 2004 Res Ipsa Loquitor. In *Things That Talk: Object Lessons from Art and Science*, edited by L. Daston, pp. 195-221. Zone Books, New York.

Amplifying Text

Hersey, G. L.

- 2009 *Falling in Love with Statues: Artificial Humans from Pygmalion to the Present*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago. Ch. 1-2.

MATERIALS IN MOTION

VII. NOVEMBER 11: GIFTS, COMMODITIES, AND VALUE

CRITICAL ASSEMBLAGE: THE APADANA AT PERSEPOLIS

Thematic Readings:

Appadurai, A.

- 1986 Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value. In *The Social Life of Things*, edited by A. Appadurai, pp. 3-63. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Carrier, J. G.

- 1995 *Gifts and Commodities: Exchange and Western Capitalism Since 1700*. Routledge, London. Ch. 1.

Mauss, M.

- 1990 *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. Routledge, London. Ch. 1.

Amplifying Text

Simmel, G.

- 1900 A Chapter in the Philosophy of Value. *The American Journal of Sociology* 5(5):577-603.

VIII. NOVEMBER 18: FEASTS AND THE POLITICS OF CONSUMPTION

CRITICAL ASSEMBLAGE: SPAM

Thematic Readings:

Dietler, M.

- 2001 Theorizing the Feast: Rituals of Consumption, Commensal Politics, and Power in African Contexts. In *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power*, edited by M. Dietler and B. Hayden, pp. 65-114. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C.

Douglas, M. and B. C. Isherwood

- 1979 *The World of Goods*. Basic Books, New York. Ch. 3-4.

Miller, D.

- 1987 *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*. Blackwell, Oxford. Ch. 6-7.

Amplifying Text

Veblen, T.

- 1994 *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Dover Publications, New York. Ch. 4.

RES IPSA LOQUITUR

IX. NOVEMBER 25: OBJECTS OF DESIRE

CRITICAL ASSEMBLAGE: MONEY

Thematic Readings:

Belk, R.

- 2006 Collectors and Collecting. In *Handbook of Material Culture*, edited by C. Y. Tilley, W. Keane, S. Küchler, M. Rowlands and P. Spyer, pp. 534-545. Sage, London.

Brown, B.

- 2003 *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago. Ch. 1

Frank, T.

- 1997 *The Conquest of Cool*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago. Ch. 1.

Amplifying Films: Scenes from

The Maltese Falcon (1941, dir. J. Huston)

Citizen Kane (1941, dir. O. Welles)

Kiss Me Deadly (1955, dir. R. Aldrich)

Pulp Fiction (1994, dir. Q. Tarantino)

Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring (2001, dir. P. Jackson)

X. DECEMBER 2: THINGS, SIGNS, AND MEMORY
CRITICAL ASSEMBLAGE: THE STILL LIFE

Thematic Readings:

Jones, A.

- 2007 *Memory and Material Culture*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Ch. 2.

Keane, W.

- 2005 Signs are not the Garb of Meaning: On the Social Analysis of Material Things. In *Materiality*, edited by D. Miller, pp.182-205. Duke University Press, Durham, N.C.

Knappett, C.

- 2005 *Thinking Through Material Culture: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia. Ch. 6.

Amplifying Text:

Bryson, N.

- 1990 *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge. Pp. 60-95.