

**HIST 8890 Special Topics in History: Material Culture**  
**Spring 2009**  
**Tuesday, 7:15-9:45 PM**  
**Classroom South 505**  
**Kathryn Wilson**

**Office Hours**

Thursdays 3-5 PM, and by appointment  
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**Description and Course Objectives**

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This course will provide an overview of historical and anthropological approaches to diverse material culture traditions including furniture, architecture, decorative arts, clothing and adornment, foodways, and other aspects of material life. We will explore issues of material form and structure, geographic diffusion, function, construction techniques, and multiple ways of understanding material objects in context, including cultural landscapes, performance theory, consumption, embodiment, and the role of the senses. This course will emphasize material culture as a means of understanding everyday life historically, as well as contexts for the exhibition and interpretation of material objects in contemporary public contexts such as museums.

In this class students will:

- Gain exposure to a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches to material culture study in the fields of history, folklore, art history, and anthropology
- Analyze and understand material objects and their contexts
- Apply material culture methods to the study and interpretation of the past
- Reflect on the exhibition and interpretation of objects in public history, museums, and other collecting contexts

The course syllabus provides a general plan for the course; I reserve the right to make changes as necessary.

**Assignments**

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Reading responses: short 1-2 page reactions to readings, as assigned

In -class presentations: presenting and framing discussion of assigned readings

Object analysis: thick description of a material object with analysis of form and design

Contextualization paper: situate object in time and space, identify provenance, contextualize object using one or more approaches explored in class

Final project: building on previous papers, present a final project representing the meanings or stories embodied by your object of choice. This can be a paper, exhibit script, annotated bibliography, or other end project that is meaningful to you.

### **Required course materials**

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These books are available for purchase:

James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life*. Anchor, 1996. This book is also on reserve at the library.

Henry Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the United States*. Penn Press, 1971. This book is also on reserve at the library.

Robert B. St. George, ed. *Material Life in America, 1600-1860*. (MLIA) This book is also on reserve at the library.

Arjun Appadurai, ed. *The social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective*. Oxford U Press, 1986. This book is also on reserve at the library.

Sidney Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Power, and the Past*. Beacon Press, 1996. This book is on reserve at the library and also available as an e-book.

Our ERes password is: ecveqzhqS

### **Course Schedule\***

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*\*this schedule is tentative pending confirmation of our visit to the Atlanta History Center for hands-on component*

#### **1/6 Intro**

#### **1/13 Introduction to Method**

Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter" in *MLIA*

Leora Auslander, "Beyond Words" *American Historical Review* 110 issue 4 (available online through History Cooperative)

Henry Glassie, "Material Culture" in *Material Culture*

### **1/20 Form and pattern**

Henry Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the United States*.

### **1/27 Form over time**

James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten*.

### **2/3 Design, aesthetics, and craftsmanship**

Thomas Hubka, "Just Folks Designing: Vernacular Designers and the Generation of Form" in *Common Places*

Dell Upton, "Pattern Books and Professionalism: Aspects of the Transformation of Domestic Architecture in America," *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 19, No. 2/3 (Summer - Autumn, 1984), pp. 107-150

Kathryn Wilson, "Commodified Craft, Creative Community: Women's Vernacular Dress in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia" in *The Culture of Sewing*, 141-156

John Michael Vlach, "Quilting," in *The Afro-American Tradition in the Decorative Arts*, Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978, 44-75

### **2/10 Landscapes**

Robert St. George, "Artifacts of Regional Consciousness in the Connecticut River Valley, 1700-1780" in *MLIA*, 335-356

Dell Upton, "Black and White Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia" in *MLIA*, 357-369

Elizabeth Blackmar, "Rewalking the 'Walking City': Housing and Property Relations in New York City, 1780-1840" in *MLIA*, 371-384.

Leora Auslander, "Regeneration through the Everyday? Clothing, Architecture and Furniture in Revolutionary Paris" *Art History* 20 no. 2 (April 2005): 227-247.

Joseph Sciorra and Martha Cooper, "I Feel like I'm in My Country": Puerto Rican Casitas in New York City," *TDR (1988-)*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Winter, 1990), pp. 156-168

### **2/17 Fashion, taste, and consumption**

Ann Smart Martin, "Makers, Buyers, and Users: Consumerism as a Material Culture Framework" *Winterthur Portfolio* 28 no. 2/3 (Summer/Autumn 1993): 141-157.

Rodris Roth, "Tea-Drinking in Eighteenth-Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," in *MLIA*, 439-463

Timothy Breen, "The Corrosive Logic of Choice: Living with Goods," in *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence*, 148-192.

Kevin M. Sweeney, "Furniture and the Domestic Environment in Wethersfield, Connecticut, 1639-1800," in *MLIA*, 261-309.

### ***Object analysis due***

**2/24**

**Spring Break – no class**

### **3/10 Style and signification**

Dick Hebdige, "Style as Signifying Practice," *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*

Steve Chibnall, "Whistle and Zoot: The Changing Meaning of a Suit of Clothes," *History Workshop* 20 (Autumn 1985), 56-81.

Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Fashioning the Colonial Subject: The Empire's Old Clothes," in Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution* (Chicago, 1991), vol. 2, chap. 2, 218–273

### **3/17 Adornment and the body**

Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones, "The currency of clothing" in *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* Cambridge 2000: 17-33.

Leslie Shannon Miller, "The Many Figures of Eve: Styles of Womanhood Embodied in a Late-Nineteenth-Century Corset," in Jules Prown, ed. *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture*, 129-148

Iris Marion Young, "Women Recovering our Clothes," in *Throwing like a girl and other essays in feminist philosophy and social theory*, Indiana University Press, 1990

Shane White and Graham White, "Swingin' like Crazy," in *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit*. Cornell University Press, 1998: 125-152.

### **3/24 Foodways**

Sidney Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Power, and the Past*.

### **3/31 Exchange**

Karl Marx, "Commodities" in *Capital: Volume One*.

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm>

Peter Stallybrass, "Marx's Coat" in *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Places*

Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: commodities and the politics of value" in *The Social Life of things*, 3-63

### **4/7 Cultural biographies**

Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things" in *The Social Life of things*, 64-91

Case studies in *The Social Life of things*: Gell, Geary, Spooner, Reddy, Bayly

### **Contextualization paper due**

#### **4/14 Recontextualization: Collection, display, exhibition**

Barbara Kirshenblatt Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography" in *Destination Culture*, 17-78.

Constance Classen and David Howes, "The Museum as Sensescape: Western Sensibilities and Indigenous Artifacts," in *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums, and Material Culture*. Ed. Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden, and Ruth B. Phillips. Berg, 2006: 199-222.

Susan Stewart, "Objects of Desire" in *On Longing : Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Duke U Press, 1993: 132-169.

#### **4/21 Student presentations**

#### **Final project due May 1**