

Thinking with Things



Introduction

Module Aims...

- Thinking about the material world...
 - ...and our place within it
- How we manipulate materials to create objects
- Human-object-material entanglement
- Questioning notions of human dominance over material world



Module Aims...

- To trouble you!
 - ...challenge your preconceptions and understanding of the world...



Module Outline

- Lectures & workshops
 - What is a Thing?
 - Sensory Archaeology/Anthropology
 - Fragmentation
 - Object Biography/Itinerary
 - Object Agency & Vital Materialism
 - ANT & MET
 - Assemblages
 - Agential Realism



Readings...

- There is no single textbook to cover this module...
- ...but plenty to read!
- A nice (but by no means complete overview)...
 - Bovin, N. 2008. *Material Cultures, Material Minds: The Impact of Things on Human Thought, Society, and Evolution*. Cambridge: CUP
- Plenty of articles on Moodle for individual sessions
- But please look at some of the recommended readings on the handbook
- ...you will need them for your assessments

Assessment: Level 5

- **4000-word portfolio (80%) due 17th November**
- 1500-word summary and review of an article (40% of portfolio mark)
- 2500-word glossary (60% of portfolio mark)
 - Illustrated glossary for an undergraduate textbook (*Material Culture Studies, Materiality and the New Materialisms*). Identify 20 key theoretical terms & provide a clear, concise definition in your own words
- **Show and tell: 6 minute presentation: week 4 (20%)**
 - Please choose and bring in a personal possession. You will have 6 minutes to present this object to the class and to discuss it from the perspective of one of the theoretical approaches covered in this module

Assessment: Level 6

- **4000-word portfolio (80%) due 17th November**
- **2000-word book review (50% of portfolio mark)**
- **2000-word encyclopedia entry (50% of portfolio mark)**
 - Please choose one of the theoretical approaches covered in the module. Write an illustrated entry that explains this approach for a handbook on **Material Culture Studies, Materiality and the New Materialisms**. Illustrate this with reference to a specific archaeological or anthropological case study of your choice
- **Show and tell: 6 minute presentation: week 4 (20%)**
 - Please choose and bring in a personal possession. You will have 6 minutes to present this object to the class and to discuss it from the perspective of one of the theoretical approaches covered in this module

Material Culture Studies

- Focuses attention on the things/objects made by people
- Anthropocentric approach:
 - Objects created by, belonging to & imbued with meaning by people
- Explores how objects are socialised within people's lives:
 - Fragmentation
 - Object biography



Materiality

- “describes the quality or character of the material of which a thing is made – what we might call its material-ness” (Attala 2019, ix)
- Explores the entanglement of people & objects & how the two shape each other in recursive relationships



New Materialisms

- Relational ontology
- Moves away from objects/things (as bounded entities)
- A 'turn to matter'
- Questions anthropocentric privileging of human agency
- Acknowledges agency of matter
- Explores the transformative role played by matter in the creation of material & social worlds



What is a Thing?

- For tomorrow's workshop we would like you to bring something that you would identify as an **object...**
- ... & something that you would identify as a **thing...**



