

Thinking with Things



HPAN5013 / HPAN6013

2024

Thinking with Things

Credit: 20

Lecturer

Prof. Louise Steel

Block 2

21st October to 15th November

Lectures, Seminars and Workshops: Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays 10.00-1.00

Fridays are your research and preparation for assignment day

Arts 1

Module Outline

This module examines the complex relationships between people and things. It critiques approaches which emphasise how people's lives are inextricably linked with their object worlds, looking in detail at how people engage physically with the material world and how they are shaped through these interactions.

Aims

- To examine a range of theoretical approaches to objects, material culture, materiality and the new materialisms;
- To reflect upon the application of these approaches to case studies drawn from ethnographies and the archaeological record.

Learning Outcomes

Upon the successful completion of this module you should be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how archaeologists and anthropologists explore and make sense of the material world;
- Demonstrate understanding of current theories and approaches to material culture studies and Materialities and their application to the specific case studies;
- Develop an understanding of how interpretations and narratives of the material world are constructed with reference to theoretical concepts and debates
- Develop skills in presenting theoretically informed discussions using a variety of media.

Assessment

Portfolio (80%): Details on moodle.

Show and Tell (20%): Details on moodle.

Recommended Reading

This is a literature-heavy module and the sooner you begin reading the easier you will find it to follow the theories! This is really an indicative reading list – there is plenty more available in the library and I have uploaded readings on moodle to prepare you for each session.

Essential Background Reading

This looks like a lot of reading but there is no single text that prepares you for the module. So it is a bit from here a bit from there and some books are complementary: as long as you read a couple of these you will be well-grounded for “thinking with things”! I recommend starting with Boivin 2010.

Appadurai, A. (ed.) 1986. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge: CUP. (articles by Kopytoff and Appadurai)

Attala, L, and Steel. 2019. *Body Matters: Exploring the Materiality of the Human Body*, L. Attala and L. Steel (eds). Cardiff: University of Wales Press

Boivin, N. 2010. *Material Cultures, Material Minds: The Impact of Things on Human Thought, Society, and Evolution*. Cambridge: CUP. (reprint)

Govier, E. and Steel, L. 2021. Beyond the Thingification of Worlds. New Materialisms for the Archaeologist. *Journal of Material Culture* 26(3): 298-317. DOI:10.1177/13591835211025559

Govier, E. and Steel, L. Different Ontologies, Shared Foes. *Journal of Material Culture* 26(3): 321-3. DOI: 10.1177/13591835211042203

Ingold, T. 2013. *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*. London: Routledge.

Steel, L. 2024. Archaeology and the New Materialisms. In E. Nikita, T. Rehren (eds) *Encyclopedia of Archaeology* 2nd Edition. 176-82. London: Academic Press.

Steel, L. and Attala, L. 2024. *Earthy Matters: Exploring Human Interactions with Earth, Soil and Clay*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Recommended Reading

The latter part of the module focuses on the new materialisms. A good starting point is Coole and Frost 2010. Also good for a basic understanding of the agency of matter are Gell 1998 and Drazin 2015.

Barad, K. 2007. *Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Bennett, J. 2010. *Vibrant Matter, A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Coole, D., and Frost, S. 2010. Introducing the New Materialisms. In *New Materialisms. Ontology, Agency and Politics*, eds. D. Coole, and S. Frost. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1-43.

Delanda, M. 2010 *Assemblage Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press

Drazin, A. 2015. Preface: Material Transformations. In *The Social Life of Materials*, eds. A Drazinn and S. Küchler. London: Bloomsbury, xvi-xxviii.

Gell, A. 1998. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ingold, T. 2012. Towards an Ecology of Materials. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41: 427-42.

Malafouris, L. 2013. *How Things Shape the Mind: A Theory of Material Engagement*. MIT Press.

Sessions

Week One

Monday 21st October: Introduction

Tuesday 22nd October: Things, Objects, Stuff

Thursday 24th October: Sensory Archaeology/Anthropology

Friday 25th October: Research, Reading, Reflecting

Week Two

Monday 28th October: Fragmentation

Tuesday 29th October: Object Biography or Itinerary of Object

Thursday 31th October: Actor Network Theory and Material Engagement Theory

Friday 1st November: Research, Reading, Reflecting

Week Three

Monday 4th November: Agency and Vibrant Matter

Tuesday 5th November: Assemblages

Thursday 7th November: Agential Realism

Friday 8th November: Research, Reading, Reflecting

Week Four

Monday 11th November: Summing Up. What Have we Learned?

Tuesday 12th November: Show and Tell Presentations

Thursday 14th November: Show and Tell Presentations

Friday 15th November: Final Preparation for Coursework.