

AHIS/CLAS 415

Object-Worlds: Histories and Theories of Things

Fall 2014 ~ Tues 2-4:50, VKC 209

Prof. Yasin (yasin@usc.edu)

Office hours: in THH 256J, Thurs. 1:30-3:30, and by appointment



Description:

Tools, heirlooms, devices, clothes, valuables, buildings—these types of things make up the physical-cultural environment in which humans live. Objects, and what we do with them, condition our day-to-day life. They also affect our sense of self, our personal histories, our social relationships, and our understanding of others. We, like people of the recent and distant past, understand and make our way through the world by means of the objects that we observe, own, use, make, exchange, and display.

This seminar explores approaches to understanding the worlds of past peoples through the things they left behind. We will examine how life is conditioned by objects, and we will develop analytical tools for making sense of humans' relationships with the things that surround them. Students will sharpen critical reading and writing skills through the analysis of scholarly texts that approach the study of material culture from different disciplinary perspectives. They will then develop their own interpretations of past objects through the evaluation and application of these interpretative lenses to their own case-study artifacts.

Course Materials:

- Required texts (available for purchase at the University bookstore):
 - Daniel Miller, *Stuff*, Cambridge: Polity Pr., 2010 (ISBN: 978-0-7456-4424-0)
 - Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. trans. W. D. Halls. New York: Norton, 1990 [1950] (ISBN: 0-393-32043-X)
- Additional readings posted on the course Blackboard site.

Class Participation and Reading:

Your attendance and active participation are fundamental requirements of the course. Required readings are listed below the date for each class in the schedule below, and you should come to each class prepared to discuss the assigned reading for the day. *NOTE: Please be sure to bring a copy

of the assigned reading with you to class to facilitate discussion and close reading. At the professor's discretion, there may be occasional, in-class writing exercises related to the day's assigned reading. Your preparation and involvement in discussion of assigned readings and visual material during class form the basis of the class participation portion of the final grade.

Object Portfolio:

Students will create their own portfolios of three short "object reports" over the course of the term. In each of these 1000-word (roughly equivalent to 3 double-space pages) writing assignments you will confront and critique the course readings through the analysis of a case-study object of your choice. Each report should include an image of your object (with explanatory caption) with your paper and uploaded to the course Blackboard site.

Research project and Field Reports:

For the term project, students will work with a historical object (pre-twentieth-century), selected in consultation with the instructor, on display in a Los Angeles museum (see below). Over the course of the semester, students will present two 5-minute "field reports" on different aspects of their case-study object in class. The central aim of the different stages of the assignment is to develop creative and critical engagement with your artifact in light of the relevant issues of the course.

- Field Report I: Sensory Analysis: A phenomenological examination of your object (presented in class week 7).
- Field Report II: Museum Context: A critical reading of the display context of your object (presented in class week 12).
- Part II: Final Research Paper. What do historical objects help us understand about the worlds of the people who interacted with them? How do they shape relationships between self and other and between self and the world? Use your case-study object as the basis for a focused and clearly articulated thesis addressing some aspect of these "big questions" supporting your argument with visual, historical and comparative evidence. 10 pages, double-spaced.
 - o Object selection by week 6.
 - o Research presentation: 15-minute conference-style presentation of your research project in the project showcase in week 14 or 15.
 - o Final paper due: Friday, Dec. 5.

Museums:

For your research project you will choose, in consultation with the instructor, a historical object on display at one of the following local museums. Students are responsible for arranging their own tickets and transportation.

- Getty Villa Museum (Greek, Roman and Etruscan antiquities): The Villa museum is open Wed-Mon 10am-5pm (closed Tue). Admission to the Getty Villa is free, but timed-entry tickets are required in advance from the website (they cannot be obtained on site), and parking is \$15 per car (it pays to carpool!). Consult the museum website for additional details: <http://www.getty.edu/visit/>

- Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) (an "encyclopedic" art history collection): LACMA is closed Wednesdays; Mon, Tues & Thurs, open 11am-5pm, Fri from 11am-8pm and Sat-Sun from 10am-7pm. Student admission is \$10; free admission for all on the second Tuesday of every month, and free admission to LA County residents after 3pm on Mon, Tues, Thurs and Fri. Consult the museum website for additional details: <http://www.lacma.org/>

Evaluation:

Grades are not assigned on a "curve" (excellent quality work merits high marks no matter how many people achieve it), but do conform to University standards (A: work of excellent quality, B: work of good quality, C: work of fair quality, D-: work of minimum passing quality). Course evaluation will be determined according to the following scale:

Class Participation	15%
Object Portfolio	30%
Field Reports	15%
Final Paper	40%

Policies:

- **Course Blackboard:** Course documents, images and announcements will be posted regularly on the class Blackboard site. To access, sign in at <https://blackboard.usc.edu/>.
- **Electronic Devices:** Please turn off all cell phones before class. Laptop computers are allowed in class for taking notes and viewing assigned readings only. Do not send texts, check email, or surf the web in class. It is disrespectful and disruptive both to me and to your fellow students.
- **Office Hours and Email:** My office hours and email address are listed at the top of this document. You are welcome to drop by unannounced during office hours, but if I am with another student I may not be able to see you, so I would recommend that you email me in advance whenever possible. I do my best to respond to student email messages within 24 hours, Mon-Fri.
- **Special Needs:** Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP, located in STU 301 (open M-F 8:30-5; tel: (213) 740-0776). Please be sure that the letter is delivered to the professor as early in the term as possible.
- **Withdraw Date:** In keeping with University policy, you may not withdraw from a course after the 12th week of the semester. If an emergency occurs after this date, you may receive a grade of "Incomplete" if you have a documented illness or similar crisis. Please contact the professor as soon as you realize that you may not be able to complete the course requirements. Before the 12th week, if repeated absences or similar lack of preparation is detected, you may be advised to withdraw.

- **Paper Submission:** Papers must be submitted both in hard copy and uploaded to Turnitin (on Blackboard) by the due date (and time) to avoid being considered late. Late papers will be marked down one third of a letter grade (e.g. from A- to B+) per day.
- **Course Changes:** The terms of this syllabus may be changed at the professor's discretion at any time with written notice (via email or Blackboard posting).
- **Academic Integrity:** USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. In this class, any acts of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, will be handled in accordance to the guidelines and recommended sanctions listed in the Student Conduct Code, as published in the *SCampus* guidebook, section 11.00 and Appendix A (e.g. plagiarism or cheating on a test: an "F" for the course): <http://web-app.usc.edu/scampus/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. A description of the review process can be found at: http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/pages/students/review_process.html. Please read through carefully the guidelines published by the University for avoiding plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/pages/students/publications.html>.

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Schedule:

Wk 1	8/26	Introduction: What Do Things DO?
Part I: Objects, Bodies, Selves		
Wk 2	9/2	Making <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tim Ingold, "On Weaving a Basket," in <i>The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling, and Skill</i>. London and New York: Routledge, 2000, 339-48. - Pamela Smith, "In the Workshop of History: Making, Writing and Meaning," <i>West 86th</i> 19:1 (2012): 4-31. → Object Portfolio entry #1: Handmade Object
Wk 3	9/9	Materiality and the Senses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Christopher Tilley, <i>Body and Image: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology 2</i>. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Pr., 2008, Chap. 1,

		<p>"Body and Image: A Phenomenological Perspective," 15-51.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bissera Pentcheva, "The Performative Icon," <i>Art Bulletin</i> 88:4 (2006): 631-55.
Wk 4	9/16	<p>Presence, Permanence, Ephemerality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lynn Meskell, "Objects in the Mirror Appear Closer Than They Are," in <i>Materiality</i>, ed. Daniel Miller. Durham: Duke Univ. Pr., 2005, 51-71. - Peter Stewart, "The Image of the Roman Emperor," in <i>Presence: The Inherence of the Prototype within Images and Other Objects</i>, ed. R. Shepherd and R. Maniura. Aldershot, 2006, 243-58.
Wk 5	9/23	<p>Our Culture, Our Selves</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Miller, <i>Stuff</i>, Chap. 1, "Why Clothing is Not Superficial," 12-41. - Kelly Olson, <i>Dress and the Roman Woman: Self Presentation and Society</i>. Routledge, 2008, Chap. 3, "The Dangers of Adornment," and Chap. 4, "Self-Presentation, Status, and Power," pp. 80-116. <p>→ Object Portfolio entry #2: Article of Clothing</p>
Wk 6	9/30	<p>Individual Museum Visit Week - No Class Meeting</p> <p>→ Research project object selection due</p>
Wk 7	10/7	<p>Objectification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Miller, <i>Stuff</i>, Chap. 2, "Theories of Things," 42-78. <p>→ Field Report #1: Sensory Analysis</p>
Part II: Relationships and Environments		
Wk 8	10/14	<p>Social Things</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marcel Mauss, <i>The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies</i>. trans. W. D. Halls. New York: Norton, 1990 [1950], pp. 1-33 and 65-78. - Cecily J. Hilsdale, "The Social Life of a Byzantine Gift: The Royal Crown of Hungary Re-Invented," <i>Art History</i> 31:5 (2008): 603-31.
Wk 9	10/21	<p>In House</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Miller, <i>Stuff</i>, Chap. 3, "Houses: Accommodating Theory," 79-109. - Bettina Bergmann, "Greek Masterpieces and Roman Recreative Fictions," <i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i> 97 (1995): 79-120.
Wk 10	10/28	<p>Stuff of Religion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - David Morgan, "Art, Material Culture and Religion," in <i>The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts</i>, ed. Frank Burch Brown, New York: Oxford Univ. Pr., 2014, 480-97. - Colleen McDonnell, <i>Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America</i>, New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Pr., 1995, chap. 3, "The Bible in the Victorian Home," 67-102. <p>→ Object Portfolio entry #3: Religious Object</p>
Wk 11	11/4	<p>Exotic and Natural, Desired and Obtained</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Susan Stewart, <i>On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection</i>, Durham and London: Duke Univ. Pr., 1993, Chap. 5, "Objects of Desire, Part I. The Souvenir," 132-151.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, <i>Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150-1750</i>, New York: Zone Books, 1998, Chap. 2, "The Properties of Things," 67-108. - N. Saunders, "A Dark Light: Reflections on Obsidian in Mesoamerica," <i>World Archaeology</i> 33:2 (2001): 220-36.
Wk 12	11/11	Museums: Objects Organized and Displayed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley, <i>Re-Constructing Archaeology: Theory and Practice</i>. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 1992, Chap. 4, "Presenting the Past: Towards a Redemptive Aesthetic for the Museum," 68-100. - Fiona Cameron and Sarah Mengler, "Complexity, Transdisciplinarity and Museum Collections Documentation: Emergent Metaphors for a Complex World," <i>Journal of Material Culture</i> 14:2 (2009): 189-218. <p>→ Field Report #2: Museum Context</p>
Wk 13	11/18	Across Time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Susan E. Alcock, <i>Archaeologies of the Greek Past: Landscape, Monuments and Memory</i>, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 2003, Chap. 1, "Archaeologies of Memory," 1-35. - Tim Ingold, "The Temporality of Landscape," in <i>The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling, and Skill</i>. London and New York: Routledge, 2000, 189-208.
Wk 14	11/25	Research Project Showcase, part I (student presentations)
Wk 15	12/2	Research Project Showcase, part II (student presentations)
	12/5	→ Research Project Final Papers due in instructor's mailbox in the Art History departmental office, VKC 351