Course description
This course is a research seminar that explores the relationship between material objects and cultural meaning. Several of the readings concentrate on objects that index personal and group identity, exchange valuables that mediate social interaction, and movable and non-movable artifacts that represent cultural meanings. We explore these classes of objects both from ethnographic and archaeological case studies. A central theoretical problem of the course is how material objects that express culturally coded meanings (whether contextual, formal, or conventional) can be adequately studied in the relative absence of indigenous interpretation. The course has a major research component that will expose students to museum practices, including cataloguing, researching the historical and anthropological background of objects, developing an exhibition script, and designing and installing the exhibit. The research project revolves around the collection of objects in the department’s Material Culture Research Center.

Learning goals
The learning goals of this course are to make students reflect on the ways in which objects and things provide insights into human societies and cultures, as well as to delve into the comparative method that is central to the anthropological discipline. Students have the opportunity to experience the work that is done in museums by practicing on collection management tasks, on the curation and research of objects, and in designing and implementing an actual exhibit. The specific learning objectives are:
• To equip students to think critically about anthropological interpretation, historical processes, and cultural and linguistic diversity, stressing the role of comparative methods in this inquiry.
• Help students develop concise analytical skills in their assessments and interpretations of varied historical and cultural contexts.
• To further students’ skill in writing, including the formulation of an argument and its clear and concise written presentation. The emphasis is on combining clear organizational techniques with creative interpretive approaches to the material.

Course Outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sessions</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug Th 27</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Session in the MCRC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept Th 3</td>
<td>Biographies of objects</td>
<td>Gosden and Marshall 1999; Rival 1998</td>
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<td>Sept T 8</td>
<td>Things as bodily projections</td>
<td>Bergh 1983; Weismantle 2004</td>
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<td>Sept Th 17</td>
<td>Engendered objects</td>
<td>McDermott 1996; MacDougall 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept T 22</td>
<td>Objects and social prestige</td>
<td>Helms 1993: 28-51 &amp; 89-127; Walker and Schiffer 2006</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct Th 1</td>
<td>Project session in the MCRC</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct T 6</td>
<td>Commodities and Inalienables</td>
<td>Kopytoff 1986; Hauser 2004; Callahan 1999; Sharp 2000; Graeber 2001</td>
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<td>Oct Th 8</td>
<td>Enchainment and Entanglement</td>
<td>Chapman 2000; Hodder 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct T 13</td>
<td>Objects and agency</td>
<td>Knappett 2002; Mills and Ferguson 2008; Sabelli 2010</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Midterm take-home available on Latte</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct Th 15</td>
<td>Objects of memory</td>
<td>Hill 2007; Williams 2004</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Midterm Take-home due no later than Friday October 16 at 5 pm</strong></td>
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Oct T 20  The making of objects  Lechtman 1993; Munn 1997; Ingold 2010

Oct Th 22  The unmaking of objects  Elsner 2003; Caviness 2003

Oct T 27  Bones of desire  Geary 1986; Bynum and Gerson 1997; Hill 2003

Oct Th 29  Objects and place-making  Bryan-Wilson 2003; Parker-Pearson et al. 2006

Nov T 3  Big world of miniatures  Barthes 1972; Millhouser 1983; MacCannel 2005

Nov Th 5  On collecting  Baudrillard 1996; Smith 2005

Nov T 10  Re-presenting Culture  Jones 1993; Duncan and Wallach 1978; Hudson 1991; Alberti 2005

Nov Th 12  Student presentations  (5 presentations)

Nov T 17  Student presentations  (5 presentations)

Nov Th 19  Student presentations  (4 presentations)

Nov T 24  Brainstorming the exhibition script  TBA

Dec T 1  Museographic project session  TBA
Dec Th 3  Museographic project session  TBA
Dec T 8  Museographic project session  TBA

Dec F 18  Final paper due (No final exam)

Students with extra challenges
If you are a student with a documented disability at Brandeis University and if you wish to request a reasonable accommodation for this class, please see me immediately. Keep in mind that reasonable accommodations are not provided retroactively.

Use of Laptops, tablets, and other devices
You are welcomed to use a personal Laptop or tablet for note taking. If a student is found using these devices for purposes other than those related to the class, his or her privilege for using it will be immediately suspended for the rest of the semester. The use of mobile phones (calls and text messaging) is not allowed.

Assignments and Grading
•  Class Participation
Students are expected to attend and participate in class discussions. Throughout the
semester, you will reflect critically on the readings and generate thoughtful questions about the material. Pre-Class questions covering the assigned readings are due at the start of each class. You should prepare three thoughtful questions that both reflect your comprehension of the readings and highlight salient points that you think will contribute to the discussion of the readings. Participation is graded based on your submissions. Because participation is integral to the course, students who miss classes need to justify their absence at least 24 hours in advance and if necessary present relevant evidence. No more than two unexcused missed classes will be accepted; otherwise the final grade goes down half a letter for each additional missed class.

- **Midterm exam**
The midterm will be posted electronically on Tuesday October 13 and is due in printed form no later than Friday October 16th at 5 pm (no electronic versions will be accepted). The goal is for the student to read and make a 4-5 page review of an article.

- **Research project**
Each student will select one object from the collection held in the Material Culture Research Center (Anthropology department room 230) and do extensive research on it, producing a final paper 10-15 pages long of text. The paper should be supplemented with photographs, drawings, and maps. Both a printed and a digital version, including the visual aids, are due no later than Friday December 18 at 5pm.

- **Museographic project**
Students will present in class a summary of their research. This exercise will allow us to brainstorm on Monday November 18 on the script for an exhibition, focusing on a specific theme or themes. Three subsequent class sessions will be devoted for the physical installation of the exhibition in the Anthropology department.

**Summary of Grading**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research project</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museographic project</td>
<td>30%</td>
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</table>

**Four-Credit Course (with three hours of class-time per week)**

Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

**Academic integrity**

Academic integrity is central to the mission of educational excellence at Brandeis University. Each student is expected to be familiar with, and to follow, the University’s policies on academic integrity. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities (http://www.brandeis.edu/studentaffairs/srcs/rr/) for all policies and procedures. All policies related to academic integrity apply to in-class and take home
projects, assignments, exams, and quizzes. Students may only collaborate on assignments with express permission. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university.

Readings (posted on Latte)

Alberti, Samuel, J.M.M.
http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=8&hid=17&sid=a1a3c3ab-ece9-4a76-ba47-0a255a51f257%40SRCSM1

Bergh, Susan

Boivin, Nicole
2004 Collapsing the mind-matter dichotomy in material culture studies. In Rethinking materiality: the engagement of mind with the material world, edited by Elizabeth DeMarrais, Chris Gosden, and Collin Renfrew. McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, Cambridge.

Bryan-Wilson, Julia

Bynum, Caroline W., and Paula Gerson
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0016-920X%281997%2936%3A1%3C3%3ABRABPI%3E2.0.CO%3B2-R

Callahan
http://mcu.sagepub.com/resources.library.brandeis.edu/cgi/reprint/4/1/57

Caviness, Madeline, H.

Chapman, John
Duncan, Carol, and Alan Wallach

Elsner, Jaś

Faraone, Christopher, A.

Geary, Patrick

Geismar Haidy

Gosden, Chris, and Ivonne Marshall
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0043-8243%28199910%2931%3A2%3C169%3ATCBOO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Q

Graeber, David

Guidieri, Remo

Hauser, Kitty
http://mcu.sagepub.com/resources.library.brandeis.edu/cgi/content/abstract/9/3/293

Helms, Mary
1993 *Craft and the Kingly Ideal: Art, Trade, and Power*. University of Texas Press.
Herzfeld, Michael

Hill, Erika
http://mcu.sagepub.com/resources.library.brandeis.edu/cgi/reprint/8/3/285

Hill, Jude
http://mcu.sagepub.com/resources.library.brandeis.edu/cgi/reprint/12/1/65

Hodder, Ian

Hudson, Kenneth

Ingold, Tim
2006 Matreials against materiality. *Archaeological Dialogues* 14 (1) 1-16.


Jones, Anna Laura

Knappett, Carl
http://mcu.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/7/1/97

Kopytoff, Igor
Lechtman, Heather  

MacDougall, Paige, J.  

McDermott, LeRoy  

Meskell, Lynn  

Mills, Barbara, J., and T. J. Ferguson  

Munn, Nancy  


Parker-Pearson, et al.  

Parmentier, Richard  

Preucel, Robert  
Rival, Laura

Sabelli, Alessandra

Sharp, Lesley A.

Smith, Claire

Walker, William, H., and Michael Brian Schiffer

Weismantel, Mary

Williams, Howard