
MATERIAL CULTURE & VALUES in Spring 2021 (CM5033)

Course Code	CM5033	Professor(s)	Robert Payne
Prerequisites	None	Office Number	Grenelle level 4
Class Schedule	M: 16:55-18:15 in G-002 R: 09:00-10:20 in G-002	Office Hours	Thurs 12.00-14.00
Credits	4	Email	rpayne@aup.edu
Semester	Spring 2021	Office Tel. Ext.	

Course Description

How do material objects communicate value? This course will define essential aspects of the material and analyse different theoretical approaches to the study of material culture. We will investigate how the stuff of material culture (objects, clothing, landscapes, paraphernalia of the everyday environment) mediates contemporary identity in the context of globalised cultures and examine how the interplay between design, form, and function is represented by media as embodying cultural value. We will reflect on the nature of consumption and dynamics of consumerism, consider the politics of value of commodities, and explore how media are transformed into signs of global material culture.

Course Learning Outcomes

Knowledge of important topics related to the study of material culture, consumer culture, and commodification.

The ability to evaluate and apply critical theories and concepts related to the study of material culture.

An improved capacity for developing independent research.

An improved ability to debate new ideas and problematics with colleagues.

General Education

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE GRADUATE PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES AND

THE COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES:

This course's assignments contribute to the following student learning outcomes of the MAGC program:

- to understand and be able to use qualitative Communications research methodologies;
- to be aware of key issues in debates about globalization and their relationship to forms of global media and culture;
- to develop critical perspectives on the major concepts and theories in Media Studies, Communication Studies and Cultural Studies.

Course Outline

INTRODUCTION TO MATERIAL CULTURE Week 1: Objects, Meanings and Values How do material objects communicate? What does material culture tell us about identity, social differences, kinds of power, and what we value?	Monday 18 January Course introduction	
THE LIFE CYCLE OF OBJECTS Week 2: Design What factors go into designing objects? How does design communicate value? How is good design evaluated?	Monday 25 January <u>Required reading:</u> Ashby and Johnson, <i>Materials and Design</i> , Chp	
Week 3: Production What kinds of value emerge from the capitalist production process? What are the relative values of commodities and labour? How visible is the labour behind commodities?	Monday 1 February <u>Required reading:</u> Woodward, Chp 3 Marx, "Estranged Labour" and "The Fetishism of Commodity and its Secret"	

Week 4: Circulation How does circulation change the value and meaning of objects? How do objects become commodities? How does the social life of a commodity differ from its economic life?	Monday 8 February No class: Mini-break 1	
Week 5: Consumption What does consumption tell us about identity and social differences? What determines taste? How do taste and preference relate to social status and class?	Monday 15 February <u>Required reading:</u> Woodward, <i>Understanding M</i> <i>Culture</i> , Chapter 5-6	
Week 6: Disposal What is the value of disposed goods? How do we designate waste, and how does it mediate social relationships? What are the social and economic realities of recycling?	Monday 22 February <u>Required reading:</u> Gregson and Crewe, "Redefining Rubbish" Reno, "Your Trash is Someone's Treasure"	
Week 7: Object Biographies	Monday 1 March Presentations	
Week 8: Starting final projects	Monday 8 March Project workshop	
CONSUMPTION AND CONSUMERISM Week 9: Consumer Society What is the consumer society? How are consumers positioned within the consumer society? What role does the consumer society play in individual identity and style?	Monday 15 March <u>Required reading:</u> Bauman, "Consumerism versus Consumption" Woodward 73-77 <u>Recommended reading:</u> Baudrillard, "Towards a Theory of Consumption"	
Week 10: Ethical Consumption	Monday 22 March	

What is ethical consumption, and what drives it? How do brands communicate their claims about ethically produced goods, and how do consumers construct themselves as ethical?	<u>Required reading:</u> Littler, <i>Radical Consumption</i> : Chp 1 Cole, "Ethical Consumption in the Global Age"	
SPACES OF MATERIAL CULTURE Week 11: Consumer Spaces How are particular spaces designed to serve consumerist objectives? How does the materiality of these spaces mediate social, cultural and economic values? How do they help to construct consumer identities?	Monday 29 March <u>Required reading:</u> Sassatelli, <i>Consumer Culture</i> 163-170 Second reading to be confirmed	
Week 12: Urban spaces What social, cultural and political factors shape the construction of urban space? How is urban space appropriate by residents?	Monday 5 April No class: Easter	
Week 13: Home What does the material space of a home communicate about its occupants? How does the construction of home spaces reflect cultural values and social differences?	Monday 12 April <u>Required reading:</u> Miller, Portraits 1 and 2 in <i>The Comfort of Things</i> Rosselin, "The Ins and Outs of the Hall"	
Week 14: Object relations What do our relations with objects tell us about human agency, control and desire? Why are object intimacies a source of human anxiety?	Monday 19 April <u>Viewing and discussion in class:</u> <i>Guys and Dolls</i> or <i>Married to the Eiffel Tower</i>	
Week 15	Monday 26 April Final project workshop	
Final exam	Thursday 6 May, 15.30-18.00	

Textbooks

This course doesn't have any textbook.

Attendance Policy

Students studying at The American University of Paris are expected to attend ALL scheduled classes, and in case of absence, should contact their professors to explain the situation. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of any specific attendance policy that a faculty member might have set in the course syllabus. The French Department, for example, has its own attendance policy, and students are responsible for compliance. Academic Affairs will excuse an absence for students' participation in study trips related to their courses.

Attendance at all exams is mandatory.

IN ALL CASES OF MISSED COURSE MEETINGS, THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR COMMUNICATION WITH THE PROFESSOR, AND FOR ARRANGING TO MAKE UP MISSED WORK, RESTS SOLELY WITH THE STUDENT.

Whether an absence is excused or not is ALWAYS up to the discretion of the professor or the department. Unexcused absences can result in a low or failing participation grade. In the case of excessive absences, it is up to the professor or the department to decide if the student will receive an "F" for the course. An instructor may recommend that a student withdraw, if absences have made it impossible to continue in the course at a satisfactory level.

Students must be mindful of this policy when making their travel arrangements, and especially during the Drop/Add and Exam Periods.

Grading Policy

1. Critical Reading Responses: 15%

To show your capacity for critical engagement with ideas and arguments, you will submit four critical responses to class readings. Each response (500 words) corresponds to one section of class content: choose any two scholarly readings set for the corresponding section. Format and

submission information will be distributed. See class schedule for due dates.

2. Object Biography Presentation: 25%

At the start of semester, you will be allocated an object. Your task is to research its life cycle – through design, production, circulation, consumption and disposal – in order to understand how communicates meanings and values. How do you selectively organise an object's life into a compelling and critical biography? You will present your multimedia biography to the class in Week 7. Assignment guidelines will be distributed.

3. Final Project: 40%

Based on the theme of Consumption and Consumerism, you will design and carry out an independent research project through the second half of semester. Creative and multimedia approaches are welcome. Assignment guidelines will be distributed. Due 29 April.

4. Final Exam (Plenary Discussion): 10%

In this session, each student will present a brief report on another student's final project. Thursday 6 May.

5. Class Participation: 10%

This grade measures:

- (1) your active and constructive participation in class discussions,
- (2) your ability to show evidence of your preparation for class,

Other
