



Understanding Material Culture

Ian Woodward

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"In his interdisciplinary review of material culture, Ian Woodward goes beyond synthesis to offer a theoretically innovative reconstruction of the field. It is filled with gems of conceptual insight and empirical discovery. A wonderful book."

- Jeffrey C. Alexander, Yale University

"A well-grounded and accessible survey of the burgeoning field of material culture studies for students in sociology and consumption studies. While situating the field within the history of intellectual thought in the broader social sciences, it offers detailed and accessible case studies. These are supplemented by very useful directions for further in-depth reading, making it an excellent undergraduate course companion."

- Victor Buchli, University College London

Why are i-pods and mobile phones fashion accessories? Why do people spend thousands remodelling their perfectly functional kitchen? Why do people crave shoes or handbags? Is our desire for objects unhealthy, or irrational?

Objects have an inescapable hold over us, not just in consumer culture but increasingly in the disciplines that study social relations too. This book offers a systematic overview of the diverse ways of studying the material as culture. Surveying the field of material culture studies through an examination and synthesis of classical and contemporary scholarship on objects, commodities, consumption, and symbolization, this book:

- introduces the key concepts and approaches in the study of objects and their meanings
- presents the full sweep of core theory - from Marxist and critical approaches to structuralism and semiotics
- shows how and why people use objects to perform identity, achieve social status, and narrativize life experiences
- analyzes everyday domains in which objects are important
- shows why studying material culture is necessary for understanding the social.

This book will be essential reading for students and researchers in sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, consumer behaviour studies, design and fashion studies.

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