# Material and cultural studies

## Prof. Emanuela Mora; Prof. Silvia Mazzucotelli Salice

***COURSE AIMS AND INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES***

The course introduces the two areas of material culture that constitute the pillars on which the degree program is based, namely fashion and food. For this reason, the course aims to offer students the tools to understand how fashion and food shape our daily life and the socio-economic systems in which we live. The fashion system and the food system are in fact also two important sectors in the economies of many countries all over the world. The reasons are innumerable: in the very first place these sectors employ a large number of people, in very diversified positions and with differentiated professional profiles. In addition, their products incorporate elements typical of the cultures of their countries of origin such as raw materials, craftsmanship, knowledge, values and meanings significant for local populations. In the present time, the industrial systems of fashion and food have undergone noteworthy transformations due to globalization processes, the introduction of new digital technologies, the pressure for the transition toward sustainability and, last but not least, the increasing focus on the circularity of the business process.

The course aims to:

1. Illustrate what material culture is and the central role played by artifacts in organizing social life and in carrying out people's daily lives.

2. Illustrate the role of the digital turn in contemporary forms of material culture.

3. Illustrate the main methods of studying material culture, to bring out the role of specific material culture artifacts in contemporary societies.

4. Illustrate the intertwining of material value and symbolic value of clothing and food.

5. Present the specific production chains of fashion and food, distinguishing the processes of creating material added value and those of creating symbolic added value.

6. Present the pillars of the sustainability culture for fashion and food companies in the relationships with their consumers.

At the end of the course students will be able to:

1. recognize the role of material culture in organizing the social daily life;

2. understand the effects of the digital turn on material culture;

3. set up an empirical study to understand the role of specific artifacts in the social contexts in which they operate;

4. distinguish the material and symbolic components of fashion and food products;

5. orienting themselves in the complex production chains of fashion and food, distinguishing the material and symbolic added value of their products;

6. master the main problems related to the transition towards the sustainability of the fashion and food supply chains;

***COURSE CONTENT***

The study of material culture has emerged in the last decades as an interdisciplinary field. It sees materiality as an integral dimension of culture and explores the complex and multi-dimensional relationship between the social world and the material world. The course will introduce key theories and analytical methodologies in this field and it will address and discuss central issues with which the field of cultural and material studies is concerned such as:

1. The definitions of culture;

2. The definition of material culture;

3. Representation and the construction of identity through material culture;

4. The production of meanings and the communicative function of cultural products;

5. Creative development of the cultural industries.

6. Convergence between practices of cultural consumption and production.

The course will approach each topic through relevant theoretical and interpretative contributions, as well as through practical examples.

In the second module, a specific focus will be dedicated to Fashion and Food industries and thus to Fashion and Food Studies. First of all, the module will present the contributions anthropologists and sociologists who have questioned fashion and food’s ability to convey meaning and represent individual and social identity. Afterwards the lectures will investigate the impact of industrialization in textile and food production with the intention of showing: a) how the goods of these two sectors have progressively become hybrid products (that is industrial products, but with a cultural content); b) and how the textile and food industries have gradually incorporated creative and communicative processes into organizational routines aimed at enhancing the material component of their goods, thus assuming characteristics and operating dynamics similar to traditional cultural and creative industries. A peculiar attention will be devoted to the ethics of creative industries, and in particular to issues such as sustainability, social rights, and social and cultural valorisation.

***READING LIST[[1]](#footnote-1)***

A reading list for the preparation of the exam will be provided during the course and collected by the professors in a lecture note; the latter will be made available on the Blackboard page of the course itself. The slides of the lessons and any additional didactic material used will also be available on Blackboard.

***TEACHING METHOD***

The course includes lectures, practical exercises, webinars with experts from the fashion and food sectors, and discussion sessions with students to deepen the topics covered in the lessons.

The practical exercises will be introduced during classes and will then be carried out by the students independently and uploaded onto the platform.

***ASSESSMENT METHOD AND CRITERIA***

The learning outcomes acquired by the students are verified through ongoing assessment. In each module students will face a practical assignment (specifically an individual assignment in the first module; and a group assignment in the second module); each of these two constitutes 25% of the final evaluation; in addition, students will take a written exam at the end of each teaching module for a total of 2 written tests (each written exam provides 25% of the final assessment).

Further information or clarifications in this regard will be provided by the professors during the course; the answers to the most frequently asked questions will be available in the Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) section on the Blackboard page of the course itself.

***NOTES AND PREREQUISITES***

No prior knowledge is required; however, intellectual curiosity for the study of material cultures and cultural dynamics and a minimum knowledge of sociological terminology are desirable. To this end, the consultation of a Sociology Dictionary is recommended.

Students are encouraged to regularly consult the Blackboard platform for alerts and updates. In the event that the sanitary emergency relating to the Covid-19 pandemic will not allow face-to-face teaching, distant learning will be guaranteed.

Place and time of consultation hours

Prof. Emanuela Mora: By appointment, on Wednesdays, at 10.30 am. Department of Sociology, Franciscanum Building, III Floor. If necessary, by appointment on Skype and/or Teams. Please, ask the Secretariat for Prof. Mora’s office directions.

Prof. Silvia Mazzucotelli Salice: by appointment, Department of Sociology, Franciscanum Building, III Floor or on Skype and/or Teams.

1. I testi indicati nella bibliografia sono acquistabili presso le librerie di Ateneo; è possibile acquistarli anche presso altri rivenditori. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)