

5A—AESTHETICS AND MATERIAL CULTURE STUDIES IN LIS #1

Material Culture Studies and Librarianship: Taking Objects Seriously

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This presentation will explore Material Culture Studies, particularly the work of Bruno Latour, in an attempt to critically examine object agency. Objects are ubiquitous in libraries: think of the amount of paper it takes to make a book, the heavy metals that make up a server, and the plastic moulded in air by a 3-D printer. These objects are essential partners in scholarly work. Despite this, librarians have a difficult relationship with objects, and we, like the world at large, rarely consider them with a critical eye. This presentation will address the difficulty of seeing objects clearly and the impact this has on professional identity, especially in relation to book history and culture, digitization, and the current budget crisis facing academic libraries. Despite the difficulties, librarians must take objects seriously; as the theory of Material Culture Studies shows, their agency is tied up with our own.