



The Social Life of Materials: Studies in Materials and Society

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Materials play a central role in society. Beyond the physical and chemical properties of materials, their cultural properties have often been overlooked in anthropological studies: finished products have been perceived as 'social' yet the materials which comprise them are considered 'raw' or natural'. *The Social Life of Materials* proposes a new perspective in this interdisciplinary field. Diverting attention from the consumption of objects, the book looks towards the properties of materials and how these exist through many transformations in a variety of cultural contexts.

Human societies have always worked with materials. However, the customs and traditions surrounding this differ according to the place, the time and the material itself. Whether or not the material is man-made, materials are defined by social intervention. Today, these constitute one of the most exciting areas of global scientific research and innovation, harboring the potential to act as key vehicles of change in the world. But this 'materials revolution' has complex social implications. Smart materials are designed to anticipate our actions and needs, yet we are increasingly unable to apprehend the composite materials which comprise new products.

Bringing together ethnographic studies of cultures from around the world, this collection explores the significance of materials by moving beyond questions of what may be created from them. Instead, the text argues that the materials themselves represent a shifting ground around which relationships, identities and powers are constantly formed and dissolved in the act of making and remaking.

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