

Texts and Textiles: Cloth as a Medium of Communication

MIT 4030G

Mondays, 12:30-3:30

Professor Torres

FNB 4027

Please message me via OWL (link: <https://owl.uwo.ca/x/PgDj4D>)

Office hours (via Zoom) Thursdays 5-6 p.m.

Go to <https://sashatorres.as.me/undergrad-office-hours> to book a meeting

The Zoom meeting ID for office hours is **902 227 4014** and the passcode is **9vNgPG**

Course Description

This course will help students understand what cloth is, how it is made, and why it's been so important to the history of human societies and culture. Through readings, hands-on work with cloth, and assessments of the work of contemporary textile artists, we will further explore how and why cloth has been used to communicate ideas.

Learning Outcomes

Students in this course can expect to:

- Learn what cloth is and how it is made
- Learn about the history of textiles and the centrality of cloth to human societies and cultures
- Develop hands-on skills in creating textiles
- Discover some the many ways women and other marginalized groups have used textiles as a medium of communication to record history, encode messages, tell stories, grieve losses, critique injustice, and express identity

Required Texts

- Elizabeth Wayland Barber, *Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years* (WW)
- Virginia Postrel, *The Fabric of Civilization* (FC)
- Additional readings available through OWL

Requirements

Assignments (40%)

Two short (1000 word) essays, each worth 20%, due February 3 and March 10.

Engagement (10%)

For our purposes, student engagement refers to **the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and excitement you show when you are learning or being taught.**

As opposed to “participation,” which focuses on in-class behaviors that are visible to others (attendance, speaking in class, active participation in small-group work), engagement is a more wholistic category that encompasses behaviors and experiences that may not be visible: for example, careful reading and listening, getting excited about new information, encouraging and supporting others’ learning, applying ideas in creative ways, or working hard to acquire a new skill (like the hands-on skills you’ll be learning in this class).

If much of what constitutes “engagement” may not be apparent to others, it follows that you are the best judge of your engagement in this course. So you will be grading your own engagement in the course. I ask that you do your best, but only you know what “your best” actually means.

You will base your engagement mark on weekly self-tracking and a short self-assessment (500 words), *due on April 3.*

Hands-on practice (5 points each for a total of 20%).

Over the course of the term, you will learn to spin a short length of yarn using a drop spindle, weave two small cloths on a simple loom, and knit a small swatch. We may cover basic hand sewing techniques as well. Due dates will depend on your making group and are noted in the syllabus.

Final project and written rationale (30%).

Your final project will be to create a cloth that communicates an idea that’s important to you, using the making techniques taught in class (and/or others, if you like).

You will give a short presentation discussing your central idea and the materials and techniques you've chosen to express that idea **in class on April 3 (10%)**

Your cloth and a short accompanying rationale (1000 words) are **due April 10 (20%)**.

Course delivery with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic

The changing COVID-19 landscape may necessitate some or all of the course to be delivered online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will not change. Any assessments affected will be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

Schedule

This schedule is subject to change; announcements regarding scheduling changes will be made via OWL and email.

Date	Topic	Reading	Making
Jan 9	Introduction		Making groups assigned
Jan 16	Why Textiles Matter	Beverly Gordon, "The Very Fabric of Civilization" (OWL) Virginia Postrel, "Preface" and "Afterword" (FC)	Group 1 weaves Group 2 spins
Jan 23	Cloth in the Ancient World I	Barber, "Introduction" + chapters 1-6 (WW)	Group 1 weaves Group 2 spins
Jan 30	Cloth in the Ancient World II Paper 1 due February 3 at 5 p.m.	Barber, chapters 7-12 (WW)	Group 1 weaves Group 2 spins
Feb 6	Fiber, Thread, Cloth	Postrel, chapters 1-3 (FC)	Group 1 spins Group 2 weaves Making project 1 due
Feb 13	Dye, Traders, Consumers, Inventors	Postrel, chapters 4-7 (FC)	Group 1 spins Group 2 weaves

Date	Topic	Reading	Making
Feb 20	Reading Week I No Class		
Feb 27	Cloth as Text: Faith Ringgold	Ovid, Philomela story (OWL) Hemmings, "That's Not Your Story: Faith Ringgold Publishing on Cloth (OWL)	Group 1 spins Group 2 weaves
Mar 6	Indigenous Textile Traditions Paper 2 due March 10 at 5	Hanson, "Exploring Intergenerational Learning in Indigenous Textiles" (OWL)	Group 1 spins Group 2 weaves
Mar 13	Barb Hunt	Cahill, "The Elsewhere War: Art, Embodiment, and the Spaces of Military Engagement." (OWL) Black and Burisch, "Craft Hard Die Free" (OWL)	Groups 1 and 2 knit Making project 2 due
Mar 20	The Craftivist Collective	Robertson, "Rebellious Doilies and Subversive Stitches" (OWL)	Groups 1 and 2 knit
Mar 27	The Quilters of Gee's Bend	Sohan, "'But a Quilt is More: Recontextualizing the Discourse(s) of the Gee's Bend Quilts" (OWL) Chave, "Dis/cover/ing the Quilts of Gee's Bend Alabama" (OWL)	Groups 1 and 2 knit Making project 3 due in class
Apr 3	In-class presentations on final projects Engagement self-assessment due in class		
Apr 10	Wrapping Up Final project and rationale due in class		