During the nineteenth century in Europe and its colonies, “object lessons” emerged as a form of progressive, alternative pedagogy, designed to help school-age children develop skills of observation and description in a rapidly changing world. By the end of the century such classes were common among all academic levels across the social sciences. A rock sample might serve as the basis for a lesson on geology, geography, and natural history; imported tobacco, tea leaves or a swatch of cloth might be used to prompt discussion of agricultural and industrial processes, trade routes, economics and exchange. The recent twenty-first century interest in “object-based learning” (OBL), which has often been driven pedagogies used in museums and public collections, inspired this article’s exploration of the role OBL might play in teaching students at tertiary level, especially in teaching the history of emotions. What happens when we move away from text-oriented models of emotions history to not just practicing but teaching methodologies that attend centrally to material forms? This piece is in part an account of, in part a reflection on, my own recent experience — as a medievalist who works on emotions — teaching outside of my own immediate field. It contemplates a series of related questions prompted by this experience about the potential of OBL in teaching the history of emotions to students from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds: what might medievalists working in the history of emotions contribute to pedagogy in the wider field? And how might materially-aware modes of inquiry particular to medieval studies be useful in “teaching feeling” across a range of disciplines in the humanities?
In the twenty-first century, pedagogical models that value OBL have become vital to the public engagement work of museums and other collections. More recently, its methods have been the subject of discussion in forums on higher education, and universities are increasingly turning to the study of materiality as a foundation for learning across a variety of fields in the humanities and social sciences. In mid-2016, my own institution, the University of Melbourne, unveiled a new Arts building as home to the undergraduate Arts Degree. The accompanying “Arts West Teaching Development Program” privileges group seminar-based delivery modes for existing undergraduate subjects, with the design of the new building promising to “provide dynamic spaces, which [will] enable a wide variety of future, directed forms of learning including object and media based teaching” (http://arts-west.arts.unimelb.edu.au/teaching-and-learning — my italics).

The study of material culture has been essential to the modern discipline of medieval studies since its foundation in the nineteenth century. The history of the field is deeply invested in the investigation and analysis of production and consumption, of ritual and religious practice. Medievalists have particular disciplinary experience and expertise to offer in wider discussions of object-based learning, from primary through to tertiary education. Often highly trained in working with artifacts and objects from the past, medievalists are familiar with the use of material sources in the understanding of social, cultural and political histories across the sub-disciplines of the broader field. It is only very recently, however, that objects have been considered as sources in emotional histories. A collection on material culture and the emotions published in 2003 featured the work of a number of scholars of pre-modern European history, especially medieval history, but few critics since have considered objects from the perspective of the history of emotions. A recent major publication on “doing” emotions history aimed at a student audience addresses the uses of material culture in a single paragraph-long discussion of mourning practices.
It is fair to say that the history of emotions has developed as a discipline which depends on a largely textual corpus, which includes letters, diaries, and chronicles; manuals on philosophy, science and medicine; and, increasingly, literary texts. Of course, text itself may be a crucial type of object, and attention to the materiality of text in a range of disciplines across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has led to increasingly nuanced studies of textual production, circulation and reception, although few of these have been specifically framed with reference to the history of emotions. And yet, with the exception of non-textual objects that have been inscribed with some form of retrospectively legible emotional expression, such as a dedication or memorial, the emotional value of objects has rarely been theorized or even discussed by emotions historians. To date, the majority of scholars who have considered objects as sources for understanding emotion in the past tend to frame their work within the field of material culture studies, rather than the history of emotions.

Most scholars identifying as historians of the emotions, however, whatever their disciplinary background, would agree that objects played a crucial role in human emotional experience in the past. Emotions, Ute Frevert writes, “connect human beings to one another, but also to nature and to objects.” In Rosenwein’s introduction to the 2003 volume Emotions and Material Culture, she observes that “[t]he dual challenge for our enterprise is to put the many objects of material culture together with the many emotions that are expressed, shaped, and disregarded by the community that prizes or demeans those goods.” The history of emotions itself has come into being as a highly inter-disciplinary field, which has especially emphasized change in the experience and expression of emotion through time.

This exploratory article is particularly concerned with such inter- and extra-disciplinary teaching. It is interested primarily not in teaching emotions history to students of medieval history and culture, but in teaching as specialists in the history and culture of the Middle Ages. My own preliminary experience of such teaching has been at the graduate level, to students who are developing as graduate researchers. It has tended to focus on object-based learning through
reference to my own research on the materiality of medieval texts. My teaching in this area thus far has attempted to draw more generally on attention to materiality as a method of ‘doing’ emotions history, or, in my case, to the material environment of the medieval text and its readers.

This brief exploration of the pedagogical possibilities that teaching the history of emotions affords medievalists in general emphasizes the advantages of object-based approaches in such teaching. Three key questions arising from my teaching, and discussed with both colleagues and students, prompted this further reflection on my recent extra-disciplinary teaching experience: in the case of graduate students, how might learning about methodologies in a new field (the history of emotions) and a field at some remove from their own (medieval history) serve them in turn to develop as researchers? How useful is teaching emotions, pedagogically, for students from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds? And finally, what can medievalists bring to pedagogical practice in the history of emotions? Or, more precisely put, what can I, as a medievalist, a literary historian, and a historian of the emotions, contribute to graduate student learning in other disciplines?

Accompanying much new research on emotions in the past is an awareness of the researcher’s emotions in the present, increasingly liberated to scrutinize the role of his or her own emotions in understanding history. This self-reflection (which may be framed as self-revelation) is often especially true of historians who work closely with materiality: the archeological field and the archive are deeply emotional spaces in which to work. The necessarily tentative answers to the questions asked above might be partly resolved through deeper exploration of my own emotional experience(s) of the archive — the subject of another, as yet unwritten, paper — but need first to be contextualized here with reference to my immediate work environment, where my recent teaching — an equally emotional arena — has taken place.

In 2010, the University of Melbourne implemented the “Melbourne Model,” a series of major reforms to both undergraduate and postgraduate (the Australian equivalent of the US “graduate”) programs on campus. Under the new model, students in the Arts Faculty would take
coursework as part of a doctoral research degree. For an Australian university and its students, the introduction of compulsory coursework radically changed the degree structure. The new Research Higher Degree (RHD) at Melbourne required students to enroll in and successfully complete at least three of the specially offered PhD "electives" in the first year of their candidature. Previously, no coursework component was necessary for successful completion of an RHD, and a student had three years to research and write their PhD thesis (dissertation), usually under the guidance of a single primary supervisor. At the University of Melbourne, PhD coursework subjects were offered across the faculty, and aimed to bolster and support student research through exposure to alternative research methods and practices as well as other staff members. Staff were given a considerable amount of freedom in developing new courses in their own area of specialization or interest. The electives were made available to students across a wide range of Arts Faculty disciplines, including media and communications, archaeology, literature, music, South East Asian Studies, French, Gender, Creative Practice, modern history and politics.

In 2012, the Melbourne-based node of the Australian Research Council’s Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions put in an expression of interest for an intensive PhD course. The course would be run by myself and two other medievalist colleagues based in the Centre, Prof. Stephanie Trigg, also in the Department of English, and Dr. Sarah Randles, another postdoctoral fellow working with the Centre from within the Department of History. We elected to run the minimum number of teaching contact hours over two weeks instead of twelve, and to include a single piece of written assessment, to be submitted several weeks after the completion of the face-to-face program. The guidelines stipulated that successful course completion should be assessed on a pass/fail basis, although we chose to give students additional individual feedback by scoring their written work out of a hundred.

What could we, as medievalists, offer our wide range of students? In 2012 these included an international student researching women’s lives in post-Mao China; a film studies student
(whose brilliant final essay scrutinized scenes of Scarlett Johansson’s expressive face in the 2003 film, *Lost in Translation*); literature students working on nineteenth-century British fairy tales and on the social dynamics of tea-drinking in E. M. Forster’s novels; and a budding archaeologist of foodstuffs in the Neolithic Near East. One problem with the “intensive” format of extra-disciplinary teaching — 12 hours over two weeks — was that we had limited time to find out what our students were working on, and little sense of how methodologies and critical approaches associated with the history of emotions might serve them in their research. The students needed to make these connections themselves. This meant that our method was essentially student-centered, enabling a level of active participation from students in their own learning. Rather than delivering specific knowledge sets to the group, we chose to present ourselves to the students as fellow researchers, offering them examples of some of the advantages and pitfalls of certain methods of emotions research drawn from our experiences.

The course we developed started with a basic introduction to the current state of the history of emotions. It attempted to get students talking and thinking about the field, and its problems, through its sources. We asked them: What are our sources for the history of the emotions? What are yours? How should/can we use them most productively/appropriately? How might even an *awareness* of this new field of humanities research be useful at this stage in your academic development? We distributed a working bibliography, which we intended to be expanded by and shared among students themselves, and assigned a number of set readings. These included the work of medievalists, and encouraged discussion of particular features of medieval culture and society, such as affective piety using work by Sarah McNamer and Fiona Somerset, or medieval romance and narrative representations of the art of love using work by Tracy Adams.14 Throughout the course, the students helped to flesh out the bibliography we had provided for them, adding and sharing with each other the resources that they had found most useful and that were most relevant in their own areas of interest.
The third of the six, three-hour sessions took students out of the classroom to a nearby gallery, the Ian Potter Museum of Art, which is located on campus at the University and open to members of the public. Students were encouraged to view certain pieces in the gallery (visual, sculptural) and to discuss their representation or evocation of various emotional states; their significance as a source for thinking about feeling in the past/present. During a general discussion after this exercise, one of our teaching team passed around a personal object of her own, a medieval thimble, which she had brought along to encourage the students to reflect on the ontological differences between viewing and handling historical artifacts. The thimble was an object that had special significance to her, as a researcher, but that enabled our group to discuss other kinds of transhistorical value as well, especially following philosopher Guy Fletcher’s concept of “sentimental value,” which we expanded in our discussion to include “emotional value.”

The thimble was a hand-made object, used in the production of other hand-made goods. We began the session by passing this object around the group, and asking students to think about materiality and making, and about both emotional and material “process(es),” using cultural historian Monique Scheer’s 2012 article, “Are Emotions a Kind of Practice, and is that what Makes them have a History?”

In the first iteration of the course, only one session focused specifically on material culture in the history of emotions. Subsequent sessions highlighted other modes of research, allowing us as a teaching team to capitalize on our individual areas of research specialization with the aim of encouraging students to reflect more deeply on their own. On the basis of student feedback received in 2012, which especially emphasized the positive aspects of object-based learning and teaching, in 2013 we redeveloped the course to deepen its interrogative focus on “sources” for emotions history, including further reference to texts and images as material artifacts (“Teaching the History of Emotions”). In the final session, we invited students to bring in, either physically or virtually, “an object, an image, a text, or an idea” directly related to their
research, and to discuss their chosen source in relation to the approaches to the history of emotions explored on the course.

One student of the Chinese cultural revolution spoke about a butterfly pressed between the pages of a diary kept by a young woman in post-Mao China. The diary is housed in the University of Melbourne’s Baillieu Library Special Collections, and was found by the student in that archive in 2013. Another talked about textual and “emotional communities,” following Barbara Rosenwein, in eighteenth-century print; another brought in a Chinese Propaganda poster collection, “Selling Happiness,” which he equated to the development of certain cultural and political economies of friendship and feeling in twentieth-century China. The students interpreted our open-ended directive intelligently and resourcefully, conducting their own research into the ways in which the history of emotions might productively enrich their work. In our feedback in 2013 we reported still higher levels of student satisfaction in the course than in 2012, especially in relation to the course’s ability to help them develop research methodologies.

One crucial caveat is that for a program of this nature to work most successfully class sizes should kept to a minimum. Where possible, numbers of teaching staff might be increased, as in our case, in order to decrease the staff to student ratio. We found that with three teachers – a rare luxury – the students in our group (between 12 and 17) were able to connect with the individual researcher whose interests or approaches spoke most meaningfully to their own. In the present era of research collaboration, collaborative teaching methods might also be productively embraced for inter- and extra-disciplinary teaching, with benefits for both sides of the pedagogical divide.

Conclusions

Medievalists in various kinds of tertiary institutions, from smaller liberal arts colleges to larger national colleges and universities, are increasingly required to teach outside their immediate research specializations. This exploratory article has aimed to show how medievalists
might use certain methodological tools of “object-based learning” (OBL) to teach the history of emotions in both inter- and extra-disciplinary ways. The model sketched briefly here may be more broadly applicable to a large number of fields in history and the social sciences, but emphasizes in particular the learning potential of attending to material culture in teaching about research into human social and emotional experience in the past.

Historians of the emotions often interrogate the history of their discipline, revisiting the work of those early twentieth-century critics who first saw the recovery of emotional narratives as crucial to an understanding of past culture and society. They return to discussions of the work of historians pre-modern culture and society such as Johan Huizinga, Norbert Elias, and Lucien Febvre in framing their own processes. Those teaching the history of emotions may benefit from similarly retracing the development of the pedagogies that preceded those popular in the present. As early as 1870, Calkins’ *Primary Object Lessons* first argued for greater attention to the natural processes of education, and for shifting the focus of learning gradually from the simple to the complex; from known to unknown entities, and from facts to causes. His methodology sought to emphasize things before names, ideas before words, and principles before rules. Calkins felt strongly, moreover, that the best incentive to learning was the association of pleasure with instruction — a primary lesson for a medievalist, a historian of the emotions, and a teacher to remember. While we reflect both on our research methodologies and on ways to encourage our students in developing those that are most appropriate for them, it is worth recalling that emotions themselves play a role in effective learning, just as they drive us, intuitively, in research. There may be something still to be learned from pedagogies of the past – or at least, some “object lessons” to reflect on in the present — as teaching practices are reshaped in response to new models of tertiary education in our universities.
This paper was first delivered at a TEAMS sponsored session on ‘Teaching the History of Emotions’ at Kalamazoo in 2015. Thanks to Thom Goodman for organizing and running the session and for inviting me to be a part of it. Thanks also to the other panel members for provoking stimulating discussion on the day, and to the audience for their participation and insight during that discussion. Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues in teaching and research at the ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions in Melbourne: Prof. Stephanie Trigg, and Drs Sarah Randles and Giovanni Tarantino.


Those of which I am aware include University College, London, where the usefulness of object-based learning has been emphasized in the development of educators and teaching staff. The UCL website hosts a comprehensive and growing list of e-resources (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums/learning-resources/higher-education/object-based-eresources).


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**Bibliography**


