Material culture has been part of a distinctively human way of life for more than two million years. Recent symbolic and social analyses have drawn much attention to the role of material culture in human society, emphasising the representational and ideological aspects of the material world. These studies have, nonetheless, often overlooked how the very physicality of material culture and our material surroundings makes them unique and distinctive from text and discourse. In this study, Nicole Boivin explores how the physicality of the material world shapes our thoughts, emotions, cosmological frameworks, social relations, and even our bodies. Focusing on the agency of material culture, she draws on the work of a diverse range of thinkers, from Marx and Merleau-Ponty to Darwin, while highlighting a wide selection of new studies in archaeology, cultural anthropology, history, cognitive science, and evolutionary biology. She asks what is distinctive about material culture compared with other aspects of human culture and presents a comprehensive overview of material agency that has much to offer to both scholars and students.

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Material Cultures, Material Minds

The Impact of Things on Human Thought, Society, and Evolution

NICOLE BOIVIN
University of Cambridge
To my parents, Janet and Joseph Boivin
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