

AMCV2650 Introduction to Public Humanities
Fall semester 2011

Steven Lubar

Class: Wednesday 3:00-5:20, Nightingale-Brown House

Office Hours: Thursday 2-4 lubar@brown.edu

This graduate seminar addresses some of the big questions in the public humanities, providing a background that will help students understand the choices made in preserving, interpreting, and presenting art, history and culture. We address those issues by reading and discussing case studies to see how theory plays out in practice.

Unlike some graduate seminars, the point of this course is not to critique the literature, but to learn from it in order to understand the issues in making decisions in connecting the public with culture. As you read, and in class discussions, try to come up with a set of rules, concerns, techniques, and considerations for public humanities work. How might what we read be applied to exhibits, collections, performance, in understanding the build environment, for preserving and interpreting the world around us? How do these authors think about culture, the public, the past, and the institutions in which they work?

How the course works: there's a book, or several articles, to read each week. In each class, we'll discuss the reading, and have a presentation or two, as outlined below. During each week, take advantage of web tools for group discussion. At the end of the semester there are a few weeks to focus on writing the final paper.

Here's what is required for the class:

Reading

- Read assigned work.
- Read, throughout the semester, newspapers, journals and websites that address issues related to the class, for example, the *New York Times*, *Art in America*, *Artsjournal.com*, *Museum News*, *The Public Historian*, *CRM*, <http://www.aamd.org>, <http://museumanthropology.blogspot.com/>, or www.artsjournal.com/culturegrl/. Browse the books in the JNBC library. Follow appropriate Twitter feeds. Keeping up with the literature, online and in print, is a professional responsibility.
- Read the student papers posted on the blog each week.

Discussion (35 percent of grade)

- Participate in class discussion.
- Participate in out-of-class discussion, online. Occasionally post links and comments on the class reading, and on events, exhibits, programs, and articles you find interesting on the class blog, Twitter, or Google+. Use Twitter to call our attention to a few interesting ideas from the reading, or from other sources. Follow the Twitter feeds from others in the class. Hashtag: #AMCV2650. Tweets are preserved at <http://twapperkeeper.com/hashtag/amcv2650>.
- Participate in group note-taking during class on Google docs.

Presentation (15 percent of grade)

- Present a not-to-exceed 10-minute illustrated talk sometime during the semester. The syllabus includes some presentation ideas, and I'm open to others, any topic appropriate to the readings. This is graded both on content and style!

Short writing assignment (15 percent of grade)

- For one class, write a short paper, 2-3 pages, to provide some theoretical or historiographical background to the book assigned that week, or on a related topic - a case study, perhaps. Meet with me to discuss this after you've read through the book, preferably on the Thursday before class; I can recommend background reading for you. Post your paper on the class blog the Monday before class.

Long writing assignment (35 percent of grade)

- Write a research/practice paper, due on December 20. This should be roughly 5000 words, on a topic of interest to you and appropriate to the class. It could be a case study of a public humanities project or institution, either historical or contemporary; a comparative study of several projects or institutions; a theoretical exploration; or something else. It might should include considerations and guidelines for institutions doing this kind of work. I'm also open to formats other than straightforward research papers. In any case, it should draw on original research and should reference, in some way, the readings and discussions from the class. Consider modeling your paper on one of the books or essays we read during the semester. A 2 - 3 page proposal is due November 16. (Note: Your paper should be your original work. Footnote anything you use from books, articles, interviews, or the web. Note ideas that came from other people. Failure to do so can result in failing the class.)

Class blog website: <http://2011amcv2650.wordpress.com/> Note: this is open to outside readers.

Books are available in the bookstore. Most chapters, articles, etc., are available on OCRA, available online through the library, or are in the JNBC library. All of the books are in the Rockefeller Reserve. Password on OCRA: public. Note that there are a great many related books and article on reserve in the library and on OCRA and in the JNBC library.

Readings Schedule

Introduction

Week 1. (September 7)

Introductions, explanations, etc.: What is public humanities" Curating an exhibition: "What is Public Humanities? A History" Rewriting the Wikipedia page on Public Humanities.

Whose past?

Week 2. (September 14) - Creating the past

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*.

Note: follow 10th anniversary commemorations of 9/11 for discussion in class next week.

Presentations: Disney's America, Haiti's bicentennial

Week 3. (September 21) - Memorializing the past

Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero*

And also: Public humanists respond after 9/11: read from the articles below, or find others that are similar:

James B. Gardner and Sarah M. Henry, "September 11 and the Mourning After: Reflections on Collecting and Interpreting the History of Tragedy," [*The Public Historian*, Aug 2002, Vol. 24, No. 3: 37-52.](#)

Elizabeth L. Greenspan, "Spontaneous Memorials, Museums, and Public History: Memorialization of September 11, 2001 at the Pentagon" *The Public Historian* [Vol. 25, No. 2 \(Spring 2003\) \(pp. 129-132\)](#)

Janet A. McDonnell, National Park Service: Responding to the September 11 Terrorist Attacks,

http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/mcdonnell/911.pdf

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/september11/>

<http://www.911digitalarchive.org>

James Cuno, "A World Changed? Art Museums after September 11," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Summer, 2002), pp. 17-36

"September 11 and the Academic Profession: A Symposium," *Academe* [Vol. 88, No. 1 \(Jan. - Feb., 2002\), pp. 18-23](#)

Setha M. Low, The Memorialization of September 11: Dominant and Local Discourses on the Rebuilding of the World Trade Center Site," *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Aug., 2004) (pp. 326-339)

Presentations: Museum exhibits after 9/11 and the present state of the national 9/11 memorials

Week 4 (September 28) - Preserving the past

Stephanie E. Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston*.

Phyllis K. Leffler, "American Memory on the Abolition of the Slave Trade: Is There Common Ground in American Museums?" *Museum History Journal*, Volume 3, Number 1, January 2010, pp. 33-60. Online

Presentation: Charleston's new museums and memorials

Week 5 (October 5) - Brown's slavery memorial

Slavery and Justice and Memorial publications at

http://www.brown.edu/Research/Slavery_Justice/

Presentations: Slavery memorials elsewhere; potential artists

Who owns culture?

Week 6 (October 12) – Cultural heritage?

Derek Gillman, *The Idea of Cultural Heritage*

Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Whose Culture is it?" in the *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 53, No. 2, Feb. 9, 2006. OCRA

Also consider:

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. "Objects of Ethnography." *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991. 386-443.

James Clifford "Museums as Contact Zones" in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, 1997.

Steven Conn, "Whose Objects? Whose Culture? The Contexts of Repatriations," in Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects*, pp. 58-85.

Lisa Corrin "Mining the Museum: Artists Look at Museums, Museums Look at

Themselves" in *Mining the Museum*, 1992. OCRA

Ruth B. Phillips and Marl Salber Phillips, "Contesting Time, Place, and Nation in the First Peoples' Hall of the Canadian Museum of Civilization," in Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Maya Knauer, ed., *Contested Histories in Public Space*

Week 7 (October 19) - Collecting and displaying the exotic

Sally Price, *Paris Primitive: Jacques Chirac's Museum on the Quai Branly*

Paula Heredia and Coco Fusco, "The couple in the cage" video (through MyCourses)

Also consider:

Susan Vogel, "Always True to the Object, in our fashion," from Karp and Lavine, *Exhibiting Culture* OCRA

Nélia Dias, "Double erasures: rewriting the past at the Musée du quai Branly," *Social Anthropology* Volume 16, Issue 3, pages 300–311, October 2008

New York Times articles at: <http://bit.ly/D8UWA>

How to connect?

Week 8 (October 26) – The ethics of connection

Hilda Hein, *Thinking Museums Differently*

Week 9 (November 2) – Sharing authority

Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, Laura Koloski, *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*

Also consider:

Claire Bishop: 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents', *Artforum*, February 2006, pp. 179-185

John Durel and Anita Nowery Durel, "A Golden Age for Historic Properties," *History News*, December 2008 OCRA

CLASS PROJECT: A review of *Letting Go* for *Curator: The Museum Journal*. Look at the journal online, and think about how a class might write a review of a book for them. Blog? Survey? Exhibit? Video?

Week 10 (November 9) – Connecting in a digital world

Harry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*

Choose from the articles in "Involving Users in the Co-Construction of Digital Knowledge in Libraries, Archives, and Museums": *Library Trends* Volume 59, Number 4, Spring 2011

Achal R. Prabhala, "People are Knowledge," video, <http://vimeo.com/26469276>
<http://smithsonian-webstrategy.wikispaces.com/>

Presentation: Interfaces today

Note: 2-3 page paper proposal is due.

Week 11 (November 16) and Week 12 (November 23)

NO CLASS – work on your papers. During this time meet with me to discuss progress, and to do a trial run of your presentation.

Week 13 (November 30) and Week 14 (December 7)

Paper presentations; 10 minutes each.

Note: Final paper is due December 20.