

AMCV0265 Introduction to Public Humanities

Steven Lubar

Spring semester 2008

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

Office Hours: Thursday 2-4

This graduate seminar addresses the theoretical bases of the public humanities, providing a background that will help students understand the choices made in preserving, interpreting, and presenting art, history and culture.

It is focused, this year, on the notion of curatorship, in all its senses. Curators select, look after, preserve, and present. Curators consider what is worth saving, and for whom; they are mediators between art, artifact, and audience; they serve culture, shape it, interpret it, steward it, and save it. The course defines curatorship in its broadest sense, considering the relationships between culture, community, objects and audiences.

While most of the course is theoretical, curatorship is also a calling and a career. We will consider the practical and personal side of curatorship by considering contemporary work in the field, and by writings that will encourage you to explore your own ideas about curatorship.

Each student will be responsible for:

- Reading assigned work and participating in class
- Preparing an introduction and questions for readings for one week, *or* preparing a presentation of images useful as an example of the readings for one week
- Writing four papers, due as indicated on the syllabus
- Reading, 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*, aamd.org/, or www.artsjournal.com/culturegrll/ and bringing to class each week an article of interest for possible discussion

Grading will be based 10 percent on your participation in class discussions, 10 percent on your class presentation or introduction, and 20 percent on each of the four papers. 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 website: http://blogs.brown.edu/course/spring08_amcv2650s01/

Books with a * are available in the bookstore. Chapters, articles, etc., are available on OCRA. Articles marked @ are available online through the library. Most “other readings” are in the JNBC library or available on line. Password on OCRA: public.

Introduction

Week 1 First class 1/23

Introductions, expectations, etc. What is Public Humanities? What is curatorship?

I: Remembering and Saving

What is the relationship between history, heritage, and memory, and between individual memories, history, and way a society remembers? How do we as a society decide what's worth remembering, what objects are worth saving? These theoretical overviews will be useful to us as we consider specific examples later in the course.

Week 2: Archiving 1/30

*Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*
Achille Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and its Limits," in Carolyn Hamilton et al., eds, *Refiguring the Archive*

Other readings:

Carolyn Hamilton et al., eds, *Refiguring the Archive*
Jacque Derrida, *Archives Fever*

Ron and Pat are ready to handle this. Annie would appropriate, too.

Week 3: Memories 2/6

*Edward Linenthal, *Preserving memory: The struggles to create America's Holocaust Museum*

Glassberg, David, 'Public history and the study of memory', *The Public Historian*, 18 (Spring 1996), pp. 7-23. @

"Roundtable: Responses to David Glassberg's 'Public history and the study of memory'," *The Public Historian*, 19 (Spring 1997), pp. 31-72. @

Other readings:

Kerwin Lee Klein, "On the emergence of memory in historical representations," *Representations*, 69 (Winter 2000), pp. 127-50. @

David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in America*, 1, "Sense of History"

Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations*, No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory. (Spring, 1989), pp. 7-24. @

Museums and memory, ed. Susan A. Crane

James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, Chapter 12

David Thelen, "Memory and American History." *Journal of American History* 75 (1989): 1117-29. @

Gaynor Kavanagh, *Dream Spaces: Memory and the Museum* (London and New York, 2000)

This is just what Jim Campbell's interested in now--do you think he'd be willing to take on a week?

Michael Kammen, "Some Patterns and Meanings of Memory Distortion in American History," in *In the Past Lane*, pp. 200-212
 Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 102, No. 5. (Dec., 1997), pp. 1386-1403. @

Week 4: Collecting 2/13

*Bruce Altshuler, eds, *Collecting the New: Museums and Contemporary Art* (Princeton University Press, 2005), esp. 1-64, 103-161.
 Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking my Library," from *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, 1969 @
 Joseph D. Lewandowski, "Unpacking: Walter Benjamin and His Library," in *Libraries and Culture*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Spring 1999) @
 Select one article of your choice from the *Journal of the History of Collections*, online at <http://jhc.oxfordjournals.org/> @

Double-click here to edit text.

Other Readings

Clifford, James. "On collecting art and culture." In *The Culture and the Critic*, ed. Simon During. London: Routledge, 1993, pp. 49-74
 Teresa Barnett, "Tradition and Individual Memory: The Case of the Sanderson," in *Acts of Possession*
 Mark P. Leone and Barbara J. Little, "Artifacts as Expression of Culture: Subversive Genealogy and the Value of Historical Things," *History from Things*
 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Chapter 5)
 Steven Lubar and Peter Liebhold, "What do we keep," in *American Heritage of Invention and Technology*
 Philipp Blom, *To have and to hold: An intimate history of collects and collecting*, Overlook Press, 2002

Paper 1: Due 2/20. Reflect on the challenges of preserving the past, either in memories or collections. Draw on the readings for class, the supplemental readings, and class discussions for the paper. Your paper might be theoretical (like Derrida), political (like Trouillot), practical (like Linenthal and Altshuler), or personal (like Benjamin), or some combination of them... 8-12 pages

II. Classifying and Valuing

Week 5: Worth 2/20

Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (Verso, 1996), Section B: The Non-Functional System, or Subjective Discourse), pp. 75-113

- Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in Arjun Appadurai, ed. *The Social life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*
- Rachel P. Maines and James J. Glynn, "Numinous Objects," *The Public Historian* 15 (1) 1993
- Thatcher Freund, "The Tales a Table Could Tell," *New York Times Magazine*, January 16, 1994

Other Readings

- George Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*
- Haidy Geismar, "What's in a price?: An Ethnography of Tribal Art at Auction," *Journal of Material Culture* 2001; 6; 25
- Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and their possessions*, Chap. 6, on antiques

Week 6: Categories 2/27

- Franz Boas, "The Principles of Ethnological Classification," *Science* 1887
- Susan Vogel, "Always True to the Object, in our fashion," from Karp and Lavine, *Exhibiting Culture*
- Lisa Corrin "Mining the Museum: Artists Look at Museums, Museums Look at Themselves" in *Mining the Museum*, 1992.
- Donna Haraway, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy for the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936," *Social Text*, No. 11. (Winter, 1984-1985), pp. 20-64. @
- "Some tricks of the trade in analyzing classification," Bowker, Geoffrey C. and Susan Leigh Star (1999). *Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 33-50
- Curatorial Reorganization Plan, Brooklyn Museum, 2007

Other Readings

- Jules Prown - Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method, *Winterthur Portfolio*, 1982 –
- A.-H. Pitt-Rivers, "Principles of Classification," in *The Evolution of Culture and Other Essays of the Late Lt.-Gen. A. Lane-Fox Pitt-Rivers*, ed. J.L. Myres (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), 1-19; reprinted from *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, 4 (1875): 293-308.
- 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 P, 1991. 386-443.
- Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Random House, 1973. (p. 137-)?
- Stephen T. Asma, *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads: The Culture and Evolution of Natural History Museums*
- David Jenkins, "Object Lessons and Ethnographic Displays: Museum Exhibitions and the Making of American Anthropology", in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 36, No. 2. (Apr., 1994), pp. 242-270.

Paper 2: Due 3/5. *Reflect on the issues of classification and value by either considering an existing museum or exhibition (how does the Boston Museum of Fine Art organize its art? How about the Harvard Museums? Or the Smithsonian?) or by writing a proposal for an exhibition or museum that calls attention the ways in which museums, libraries, or society more generally value and organize their collections/possessions. Consider using the Museum Loan Network files for this paper. 8-12 pages*

III. Preserving and Conserving?

Week 7: Stewardship 3/5

Michael A. Mares, "The moral obligations incumbent upon institutions, administrators, and directors in maintaining and caring for museum collections," in Genoways, *Museum Philosophy for the 21st century*, pp. 79-98

Stephen L. Williams, "Critical Concepts concerning non-living collections," in *Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archives Professionals* 1 (2004): 37-66

Karen J. Warren, "A Philosophical Perspective on the ethics and resolution of cultural properties issues," in *Whose Property? Whose Culture? The Ethics of Collecting Cultural Property*, ed. Phyllis Mauch Messenger

Other Readings

James B. Gardner and Elizabeth E. Merritt, *The AAM Guide to Collections Planning*

*Bruce Altshuler, eds, *Collecting the New: Museums and Contemporary Art* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 65-102 and 163-177.

Gaynor Kavanagh, *History Curatorship*, Leicester University Press, part 2

Week 8: Cultural Policy 3/12

Lawrence Rothfield. "Cultural Policy Studies?! Cultural Policy Studies?! Cultural Policy Studies?! A Guide for Perplexed Humanists," white paper from the Cultural Policy Institute, University of Chicago, April 1999@

Michael Kammen, "Culture and the State in America," in *In the Past Lane*, pp. 75-98

Getty Conservation Institute, *Economics and Heritage Conservation*, December 1998@

Paper 3: Due 3/17. *Reflect on either the purposes of collections, or the policies that shape them, or both. 5-8 pages*

IV. Interpreting and Exhibiting

Week 9: Civic Dialog 3/17

*Americans for the Arts, *Critical Perspectives*

John Cotton Dana, *The New Museum* (Elm Tree Press, 1917) available at Google Books

Other Readings

*Americans for the Arts, Civic Dialogue: Arts and Culture

Also: Case studies from Americans for the Arts, *History as Catalyst for Civic Dialogue* or *Art, Dialogue, Action, Activism*

Week 10: Curatorial Community 4/2

Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *OCTOBER* 110, Fall 2004, pp. 51–79. @

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

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

Ciraj Rassool, "Making the District Six Museum in Cape Town," in *Museum International*, (58:1) May 2006. @

Other Readings

James Cuno, *Whose Muse?: Art Museums and the Public Trust*

Amanda Cobb, "The National Museum of the American Indian," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 57, No. 2

Jacki Thompson Rand, "Why I Can't Visit the National Museum of the American Indian" <http://www.common-place.org/vol-07/no-04/rand/>

Week 11: Interpretive Spaces 4/9

*James Putnam, *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium*

Additional readings

Svetlana Alpers, "The museum as a way of seeing," in Karp & Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting cultures: The poetics and politics of museum display*

Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," from *New Formations*, no. 4 (1988), 73-102 (reprinted in *Representing the Nation: A Reader*)

Week 12: Objects on display 4/16

Spencer Crew and James Sims, "Locating Authenticity: Fragments of a Dialogue," in Karp and Lavine, *Exhibiting Cultures* @

Elaine Heumann Gurian, "What is the Object of this Exercise?" in Gurian, *Civilizing the Museum* @

Ruth B. Phillips, "Re-placing Objects: Historical Practices for the Second Museum Age," *The Canadian Historical Review* 86, 1, March 2005 @

Matthew Roth, "Face Value: Objects of Industry and the Visitor Experience," *The Public Historian*, Vol. 22 No. 3 (Summer 2000) @

Week 13: Art on display 4/23

*David Carrier, *Museum Skepticism: A History of the Display of Art in Public Galleries*

Additional readings

Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*

Victoria Newhouse, *Art of Placement*

Janet Marstine, *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction*

Week 14: Stories on display 4/30

*Andrea Witcomb, *Re-imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum*

Additional readings

Lawrence Weschler, *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder*.

Inhaling the Spore: A Journey through the Museum of Jurassic Technology DVD

Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," in Karp and Lavine, *Exhibiting Cultures*

Svetlana Alpers, "The museum as a way of seeing," in Karp & Lavine, eds.,
Exhibiting cultures: The poetics and politics of museum display

Paper 4: Due 4/15. *Write a paper that draws on the books and articles and class discussions about exhibitions and interpretations, as well as on exhibitions you've seen, to build a personal philosophy of exhibit curation. Balance the roles of community and curatorial expertise, objects and story, design and message, as well as all of the other concerns the curator must keep in mind...*