

HIST 469: MUSEUMS AND THE SHAPING OF KNOWLEDGE (SPRING 2013)

Museum Visits & Museum
Critiques

Final Assignment



Pitt Rivers Museum (Oxford, UK)

Class meets: Wednesdays, 7-9 pm (except where noted), King 325

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 11-noon; Wednesdays, 2:00-3:00 PM; Thursdays, 1:30-2:30 PM, and by appointment.

Contact me: Please note that I answer email regularly, but not after 10pm at night; in emergencies you can call or text to: 440-910-5056; if you can't make office hours and want to Skype, send me a note.

Email: svolk@oberlin.edu

Phone: 68522

Office: Rice 309

...wonder is defined as a constriction and suspension of the heart caused by amazement at the sensible appearance of something so portentous, great, and unusual, that the heart suffers a systole... This effect of wonder... spring[s] from an unfulfilled but felt desire to know the cause of that which appears portentous and unusual... Now the man who is puzzled and wonders apparently does not know. Hence wonder is the movement of the man who does not know on his way to finding out, to get at the bottom of that which he wonders and to determine its cause...

Albert the Great, Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle

This course is designed to introduce students to the museum as an particular kind of institution which arose at a specific historical moment (late 18th and early 19th century) in a specific location (Western Europe). Its changes over time often mirror (and occasionally prestage) changes in the larger societal context in which it is located. At the heart of our inquiry (and it is an inquiry which we will carry on together) is a discussion of the museum as a set of practices, understandings, aesthetics, and narratives which are organized around a desire to collect and preserve, and which embody, produce, and structure "knowledge" (epistemology, culture, hegemony, resistance).

Because of its historically situated nature, the museum has been entwined with "modernity" in a number of ways: (1) it developed as a "public" (even democratic) space; (2) it embodies modernity's classificatory desires (the production of taxonomies, systems of organization, hierarchies, disciplines); (3) it emerged alongside modern (western) colonialism and therefore reflects and recreates colonialism's binary separation of peoples and nations into superior and subordinate, civilized and barbarian, those capable of classifying and those who are classified; (4) it is a product of, and helps authorize, the narrative of the nation and, as such, serves critical legitimizing and authorizing functions.

When we look at museums, what we can see (if we are looking!) is not only a building and its collected artifacts, but the narratives of many of the contested practices that underlie modernity. In that sense, it is not at all surprising that by the 21st century, the museum has emerged as a site of controversy over what is represented and who does the representing, as well as raising questions about who owns the museum, who is excluded from its spaces, and what meanings it privileges. The more authority the museum holds (the Smithsonian vs. the Leaning Tower Museum, for example), the more intense the conflicts will be, and the more that many who work with and in museums will attempt to challenge some of its practices while upholding or transforming others. While we can only trace a few of these points (and controversies), students should get a sense of what is at stake and why museums matter.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

"Course objectives" are usually thought of as what teachers hope you walk away with at the end of the course. My objectives go a bit farther – they are based on what I like for you to remember about what you did in this course ten years after it ended. In that sense, my course objectives are few, broad, and ambitious:



Head of Mary Davis of Saughb, Museum of Jurassic Technology

* You will never be bored in a museum again, regardless of how awful the museum is. That is because you will always be looking at how those particular museum works, how it structures its narrative, what traditions it draws upon.

* You will have a set of tools that you will take with you and think about in the museums you visit. These will help you analyze the museum's narrative, design, flow, history, context, as well as your own experiences as a visitor.

* If you go on to work in museums, you will be appreciative of the history they belong to, respectful of their financial limitations, demanding in terms of their democratic and democratizing premises, and creative in terms of your approach to museum work.

* You will also further your work on clear and expressive writing, collaboration, presentation, and observation.

ASSIGNMENTS

(1) Leading the class: Two students will be in charge of each class session beginning on Feb. 13 [a date we will need to change since I'll be out of town!]. Each of the two will write a separate, 3-5 page paper on any analytic or historiographic issue raised in the readings assigned for that week. The two participants will want to coordinate who will cover which readings. I expect that you will select among the readings - there is no requirement that you cover them all (although that is also welcome). Together you will develop and post the questions that will help focus class discussion. These papers and the questions will be posted to the Blackboard "Discussion Board" by the Tuesday afternoon (no later than 6:00 PM), and prior to each Wednesday evening's class at which point we will all discuss the readings and the three papers. The two class leaders will be in charge of organizing and stimulating the discussion. The two will have to meet before class to coordinate and plan the class, and can also meet with me to talk about approach. Since the purpose of the class discussion is to create an environment that supports student learning, and not just to show off how much you know, it is important that you think about pedagogy (how you plan to organize the class), as well as content. Each session you lead will count 15% of your grade, and you will be given an evaluation based on a rubric in the week after your class. Students will also be asked to evaluate your class so that you can learn from their comments. **NOTE:** since we will be visiting some museums during Wednesday night class times, we will discuss student leadership during those nights.

(2) Museum Critiques (three). You will be responsible for writing three museum critiques over the course of the semester. At least one is due before spring break. You can find information on the writing of museum critiques on the digital syllabus at "Museum Visits & Museum Critiques". The critiques can be written about museums that we visit as a class or museums you visit on your own. I would strongly, strongly recommend that you write your critiques based on visits undertaken after this course has begun, rather than from the memory of a previous visit, since note taking during the museum visit is quite important. Each critique will count 10% toward your final grade.

(3) Museum Blog. You will be expected to post with some regularity (details to be discussed in class) on a blog set up for discussions about materials covered in class and museum visits you make. Your participation on the blog will count toward 10% of your final grade.

(4) Final Project: Your final project (which you can do with one other person) is to design a gallery or other limited or defined space in a museum. Any proposals that plan to be larger than this (i.e. designing a museum) will need my approval. See "Final Assignment" for details. The project is due in stages, with final assignment due on Sunday, May 19 at 11:00 AM. Absolutely no extensions beyond this day and time without an official incomplete in the course. This project will count for 30% of your grade.

Most assignments have flexible due dates. For those with fixed due dates, assignments are to be turned in on (or before) the date noted in the syllabus. I will mark your grade down if you don't turn in museum critiques or blog posts in a timely fashion (as noted in each assignment), similarly if you don't turn in the parts of your final project on time. The final project must be turned in on time or it won't be graded. All but your final assignment (all critiques and blog entries) must be turned in by the last day of the Reading Period, May 14, or they won't be counted. I will not allow an "incomplete" in the course to allow you to finish those assignments.

Except for the two class sessions you lead, I won't be giving you a participation grade, although I expect that you will participate to the best of your ability since the course will depend on it. As a community of practice, I expect that all will contribute equally to the success of our learning, and that a participation grade is not a very good means of encouraging you to be responsible to your classmates. That said, I will take into account absences without good explanation or an unwillingness to engage in the class when I am calculating your final grade.

ACCESSING COURSE MATERIALS

You can access the course texts in a variety of ways: (1) Books recommended for purchase are on sale at the bookstore (or can be purchased on-line). (2) All required readings that aren't in the recommended for purchase books are on Blackboard under "Readings" (and not on ERES). (3) You can find all the books recommended for purchase on Reserve in Mudd. (4) Books can also be obtained through OHIO LINK. Please let me know if you are having any difficulties accessing any materials.

Plagiarism and the Honor Code: "The word plagiarism derives from Latin roots: *plagiarius*, an abductor, and *plagium*, to steal. The expropriation of another author's work, and the presentation of it as one's own, constitutes plagiarism and is a serious violation of the ethics of scholarship." [American Historical Association, Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct]. Copying the work of others goes against everything that a liberal education is about. It is a serious affront to the other students in the course, to me as a member of the course, and to the plagiarizer him/herself. The college requires that students sign an "Honor Code" for all assignments. This pledge states that "I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment." The full Honor Code is posted to Blackboard. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, particularly in the context of joint or collaborative projects, please see me or raise it in class.

Students with Disabilities:

Appropriate accommodations will always be granted to students with documented disabilities. Any questions about the necessary process of documenting disabilities should be addressed to Jane Boomer, Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities (Peters G27-28; 45-5558). If you have a documented disability, please see me early in the semester.

Research help:

If you need help finding information or conducting library research, you may wish to schedule an appointment with a reference librarian. Librarians can help you plan a research strategy, search databases effectively, and locate books, articles, quality web sites, data, and other resources for any type of research project. Fill out the form on the library's web site to get started. Drop-in research assistance is also available in all campus libraries.

Scheduling and Museum visits:

Museum visits will be a regular part of the course. I have arranged this class to be on Wednesday evenings, when some Cleveland museums are open late. We will coordinate schedules and arrange all museum visits at the start of the semester.

Books Recommended for Purchase:

Lawrence Weschler, *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder: Pronged Ants, Horned Humans, Mice on Toast, and Other Wonders of Jurassic Technology* (Vintage 1996).

Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (Routledge, 1990).

Beatrice Messias Carboneil, ed., *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell), 2012. [NOTE: Must be 2nd edition since it is considerably different than the 1st.]



Science Museum (London)



SYLLABUS

Feb. 6: Introduction. What are we hoping to learn and what museums can tell us. What is a museum? Museum memories: museums you have known and loved.

- Margaret Lindauer, "The Critical Museum Visitor," in Janet Marstine, ed., *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 203-225. [This is a good background for our museum visits]
- Kenneth Hudson, "Attempts to Define 'Museum,'" in David Bowie and Jessica Ewins, eds., *Representing the Nation: A Reader. Histories, Heritage and Museums* (London and NY: Routledge, 1998), pp. 371-379.
- John Cotton Dana, "The Museum as Art Patron," in Bettina Messias Carbonell, ed., *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), Ch. #3 (pp. 421-424) [1929] [Hereafter, MS]
- Benjamin Ives Gilman, "Aims and Principles of the Construction and Management of Museums of Fine Art," in MS, Ch. 42 (p. 413-420) [1903].
- James Panero, "Future Tense, VII: What's a Museum," *The New Criterion* (March 2012).

NOTE: Fred Wilson, the conceptual artist, will be speaking at the Cleveland Museum of Art on Friday, Feb. 6 at 7:00 PM. (Tickets \$15/\$10 members)

Feb. 13 [NOTE: I will be presenting at the College Art Association meetings in New York on this day, so we will need to reschedule the class]

Collecting: We will begin with psychology and explore some of the reasons or reflections on why people collect "stuff," whether the drive to collect is an inherent desire or reflective of time, place, and culture.

- Susan M. Pearce, "Collecting: Shaping the World," in *Museums, Objects, and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 1992), pp. 63-88.
- Susan M. Pearce, "Collecting as Medium and Message," in Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, ed., *Museum, Media, Message* (NY and London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 15-23.
- Jean Baudrillard, "The System of Collecting," in John Eisner and Roger Cardinal, eds., *Culturas of Collecting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 7-24.
- D.H. Lawrence, "Things," *The Complete Short Stories*, Vol. III. (London: Heinemann, 1955), pp. 844-853.
- *Optional:* Orhan Pamuk, *The Innocence of Objects. The Museum of Innocence, Istanbul* (NY: Abrams), 2012.

Feb. 20: Modernity and the Museum. As suggested above in the syllabus, museums are an important part of modernity, in a variety of senses. We begin to explore some of them here, and continue with this theme next week as well.

- Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (Routledge, 1995), Chapter 1 (pp. 17-58).
- Paula Firden, "The Museum: Its Classical Etymology and Renaissance Genealogy," in Carbonell, ed., MS, pp. 23-50.
- Frederik N. Bohrer, "The Times and Spaces of History: Representation, Assyria, and the British Museum," in Daniel J. Sherman and Iril Rogoff, eds., *Museum Culture. Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 197-222.
- *Optional:* Carol Duncan, "The Art Museum as Ritual," in *Civilizing Rituals. Inside Public Art Museums* (London and NY: Routledge, 1993), pp. 7-20.

Feb. 27: Classification. More on modernity and the museum: Here we focus on what the development of multiple museum projects tells us about the ways that knowledge is produced, challenged, and shaped.

- Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (Routledge, 1995), Chapter 2 and 3 (pp. 59-103).
- Carbonell, ed., MS, Chs. 10-15 (pp. 123-162).
- Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," in Karp and Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures*, pp. 383-413 (only those pages - article is longer).

March 6: Display: Narrative and Ways of Seeing. Museums are texts. In order to appreciate how museums do their work, we will pay specific attention to how museums shape their narratives, using particular rhetorics of design to demonstrate authoritative knowledge or to allow visitors to raise questions, to assert strategic understandings or to call attention to their own procedures.

- Tony Bennett, "Museums and Progress. Narrative, Ideology, Performance," in *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London and NY: Routledge, 1995), Ch. 7 (pp. 177-209).



Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and Museum (Cleveland), Mark Duncan/Associated Press

- Svetlana Alpers, "The Museum as a Way of Seeing," in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures. The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Press, 1991), pp. 25-32.
- Geby Porter, "Seeing Through Solidity: A Feminist Perspective on Museums," in Carbonell, ed., *MS*, Ch. 4 (pp. 62-72).
- Susan M. Pearce, "Meaningful Exhibition: Knowledge Displayed," in *Museums, Objects, and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 1992), pp. 136-143.
- Michael Baxendale, "Exhibiting Intention: Some Preconditions of the Visual Display of Culturally Purposeful Objects," in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures. The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Press, 1991), pp. 33-61.
- Susan Vogel, "Always True to the Object, in Our Fashion," in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures. The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Press, 1991), pp. 191-204.

March 13: Authenticity: The authority of the museum often derives from its authenticity. But this hasn't always been the case. Does authenticity matter? Why? Why not?

NOTE: Class today will invite a guest conversation, Steven Plank, from the Conservatory, into our discussion. Prof. Plank, an expert on historical performance, will bring in the question of authenticity in musical performance to bear on our own discussion of authenticity and the museum.

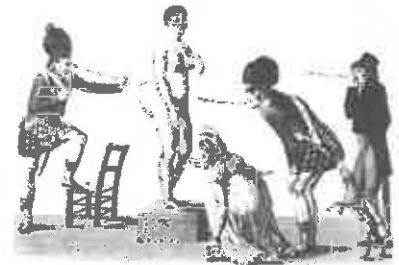
- Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in Maenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, eds., *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 48-70.
- Spencer R. Crew and James E. Sims, "Locating Authenticity: Fragments of a Dialogue," in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures. The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Press, 1991), pp. 159-175.
- Hilda Kohn, "Museums: From Object to Experience," in Carolyn Korsmeyer, ed., *Aesthetics: The Big Questions* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1993): 103-115.
- Mike Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imagination and Authenticity in American Culture, 1820-1940* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), Part III: Introduction and Chapter 5.

Optional:

- Sean Kingston, "The Essential Aikawa: Authenticity in Primitive Art, Ethnographic Performances, and Museums," *Journal of Material Culture* 4 (1993): 335-351.
- Alan Wallach, "The American Cast Museum: An Episode in the History of the Institutional Definition of Art," in *Exhibiting Contradiction. Essays on the Art Museum in the United States*, pp. 38-56.

March 20: The Nation. Because of their fundamental investment in taxonomy and its inherent hierarchies, museums have long played an important role in the practices of nationalism and colonialism. This is evident in the way that museums collect and classify "the other" in relation to "western" culture, and the way that museum narratives create privileged discourses about self and other.

- Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum," in *MS*, Ch. 3 (pp. 46-81).
- Donald Preziosi, "Narrativity and the Museological Myths of Nationality," in *MS*, Ch. 8 (pp. 82-91).
- Carbonelli, ed., *MS*, Part III: The Status of Nations and the Museum, Chs. 22-31 (pp. 213-299).
- Richard D. Allick, "National Monuments," *Representing the Nation: A Reader. Histories, Heritage and Museums* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), 240-267.
- Selected readings on the "New American Wing" of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (opened Jan 2012)



"La Belle Rebabit," Fernand Pezet

Metropolitan Museum of Art

Prospero (P.V.) @ The Economist "America the beautiful—and homogenized" (Jan. 17, 2012);

Holland Cotter, "The Met Reimagines the American Story," *New York Times* (Jan. 16, 2012);

John Bloom, "Exhibition Review: The National Museum of the American Indian," *American Studies* 46: 1 (Fall 2008-Feb/Winter 2008): 327-338.

New American Wing (YouTube):

SPRING BREAK

April 3: History and Memory: Not all museums are publicly funded, but they are, by virtue of their origins, public spaces. Therefore, they can court controversy at every turn. Some museum controversies are emblematic and therefore allow us to appreciate what is at stake in the field of museum display. One of the most notable conflicts in the culture wars that have turned museums into battlefields the museum was the "Enola Gay" exhibit at the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum.

- Carbonelli, ed., *MS*, Part IV: Locating History in the Museum, Chapters 32, 33, 35, 36.
- Images for Fred Wilson's "Mining the Museum" (Ch 35) (Note: scroll down on the page to see images)
- The Enola Gay controversy at the Air & Space Museum, Smithsonian. Edward J. Gallagher website "How Do We Remember a War That We Won": specific articles to be assigned.

April 10: Proposal for final project due

April 10: Memory and Memorial. Memory (and occasionally memorial) is an essential component of what museums do. Most often, when we enter the museum, we are entering a space of memory even if the works in them are relatively of recent vintage. While examining the way in which museums work with and through memory, we also understand that the exploration of the past can open pathways to exploring particularly traumatic or conflictual times. Museums that confront criminal histories confront a set of difficult choices when coming to terms with their objectives.

- Foui Williams, "The Memorial Museum Identity Complex: Victimhood, Culpability, and Responsibility," in Carbonell, ed., *MS*, Ch. 8 (pp. 97-116).
- Alica Priman, "At the Holocaust Museum," in Carbonell, ed., *MS*, Ch. 9 (pp. 116).
- Francoise Lionnet, "The Mirror and the Tomb: Africa, Museums, and Memory," in *MS*, Ch. 10 (pp. 158-198).
- Nicolai Ouroussoff, "A Forest of Pillars, Recasting the Unimaginable," *New York Times*, May 2, 2008.
- Brandon Hambar, "Conflict Museums, Nostalgia, and Dreaming of Never Again," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 18:3 (2012): 263-281.
- Patrizia Violi, "Trauma Site Museums and the Politics of Memory: Tuol Slung, Vila Gimballi, and the Bologna Ustica Museum," *Theory, Culture & Society* 23:1 (2012): 36-75.
- Optional: Lecture by James P. Young: The Stages of Memory and the Monument: From Berlin to New York (1 hr, 24 minutes, but well worth it):

April 17: Museums and the Community: The Museum of the American Indian. The process by which the Smithsonian launched a museum "of the American Indian" can suggest ways in which representation and narrative are critical for communities which make up museum visitors and their subjects.

- Gerald McMaster, "Museums and the Native Voice," in *MS*, Ch. 39 (pp. 377-392).
- Gwyneth Isaac, "Technology Becomes the Object: The Use of Electronic Media at the National Museum of the American Indian," in *MS*, Ch. 54 (pp. 533-543).
- Nancy Marie Mithlo, "'Red Man's Burden': The Politics of Inclusion in Museum Settings," *American Indian Quarterly* 28: 3/4 (Summer/Autumn 2004): 742-762.
- Thomas Hayden, "National Museum of the American Indian: By the People," *Smithsonian* (Sept. 2004).
- Edward Rothstein, "Museum with an American Indian Voice," *New York Times*, September 21, 2004.
- Edward Rothstein, "Who Should Tell History: The Tribes or the Museum?" *New York Times*, Dec. 21, 2004.

April 24: Bibliography and Resource Guide for final project due

April 24: Museums and the Visitor. We continue the discussion of the museum and the communities it serves by expanding beyond museums built to explicitly represent a single community to the task of serving many.

- Elaine Haumann Gurian, "Noodling Around with Exhibition Opportunities," in Ivan Krip and Steven D. Levine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Press, 1991), pp. 170-190.
- Eric Guala, "How We Study History Museums: Or Cultural Studies at Monticello," in Janet Martine, ed., *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 108-126.
- Fred Wilson, "Guarded View," Installation at the Whitney Museum, 1991 (audio)
- Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, "Changing Values in the Art Museum: Rethinking Communication and Learning," in *MS*, Ch. 53 (pp. 517-522).
- Richard Sandell, "Museums as Agents of Social Inclusion," in *MS*, Ch. 56 (pp. 562-574).
- Claudine K. Brown, "The Museum's Role in a Multicultural Society," in Anderson, ed., *Rethinking the Museum*, Ch. 11 (pp. 143-146).

May 1: New Museum Practice: Museums as Meta. The Museum of Jurassic Technology



Museum of Jurassic Technology

Lawrence Weschler, *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder: Pronged Ants, Horned Humans, Mice on Toast, and Other Wonders of Jurassic Technology* (Vintage 1996).

May 8: The Future of the Museum: The context which surrounds the museum is one which is inherited from the past, particularly to the extent that the museum is a public space which exhibits artifacts and places them on display. Yet the museum has been under attack, not just in its class-bound terms as a space of high culture, but in terms of its ability to confront those hierarchies and narratives that have long defined its existence. We consider some possibilities.

- Robert R. James, "Museums, Corporatism, and the Civil Society," in *MS*, Ch. 56 (pp. 549-564).
- Lianne McTavish, "Visiting the Virtual Museum: Art and Experience Online," in Janet Marston, ed., *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 220-246.
- Chris Bruce, "Spectacle and Democracy: Experience Music Project as a Post-Museum," in Janet Marston, ed., *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 129-151.
- Jens Andermann and Silke Arnold-de Simine, "Introduction. Memory, Community and the New Museum," *Theory, Culture & Society* 29:1 (2012): 3-13.

May 10, 11:00 AM. Final project due. NO extensions without an official incomplete.

Proudly powered by Weebly