Collecting The World: 
Assembling Objects from Antiquity to the Present

History 510:541: Colloquium in Global History: Spring 2013

Department of History, Rutgers University, New Brunswick

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Thursdays 16h30-19h30: RCHA Seminar Room, 88 College Avenue, New Brunswick

Office Hours: Tuesday 16h30-17h30, Van Dyck Hall 104 + by appointment

Description

Why do human beings collect objects? How has this activity varied across time and space? How have objects – whether of knowledge or taste – functioned as actors in human societies? And what are the most productive ways for scholars to engage with material cultures? This colloquium explores a vital cluster of themes in contemporary critical inquiry: the relation between objects, knowledge, culture and society. Our approach will be both historical and theoretical. One aim is to move beyond Euro-American geographies to think about constructions of the universal and the global, and their relationship and reconfiguration of locality. Considering objects’ movement, and the mechanics of this mobility, will therefore be essential. So too will be the relation between collecting things and collecting people: making orders of objects and orders of society. We will examine recent approaches to thing theory that consider the co-agency of nonhuman and human actors. And above all, we will focus on the question of value: how can we understand the production of value in objects (whether economic, scientific, aesthetic, political, and so on) through social histories of labor and exchange, whether visible or hidden? Specific topics include spoils and the triumph in ancient Rome; icons and relics in medieval Europe; Baroque universalism in European cabinets of curiosity; early modern exchanges through global commerce; the first universal public museums in the eighteenth century; imperial Victorian exhibitions and their postcolonial aftermats; non-western collections and ontologies (India, the Pacific, China, Amazonia and the Middle East); gender and sexuality; commodity fetishism and commodification in the 19th and 20th centuries; the modern art museum and its sociology; postcolonial restitution politics; the relationship between art-work and artifact; and globalized collecting and museums today. We will read broadly to generate a wide-ranging discussion. There will be a fieldtrip to a New York museum. We will also draw from the instructor’s experience researching the history of collecting in collaboration with different museums.
Required Readings: Books

Alexander Library Reserves and New Jersey Books (37 Easton Ave):

Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (California)
Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre* (California)
Andrew McClellan, *The Art Museum* (California)

Readings: Articles and Documents

Mostly on Sakai marked thus *
https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal

Assessment

Discussion and Participation: 50%
Short paper (due 25 Feb) and a term paper (discuss themes with instructor): 50%

SCHEDULE

24 Jan: Introduction: What do Objects Mean to Us?
* Citizen Kane (1941), dir. Orson Welles: Finale – “Rosebud”
* Marcel Proust, *The Way by Swann’s* (Paris, 1913-): the madeleine
* Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke UP, 2010), chap. 2

31 Jan: Ancient Collections
* Trevor Murphy, *Pliny the Elder’s Natural History: The Empire in the Encyclopedia* (Oxford University Press, 2004), chaps 1, 3-4
* Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*: sections on Africa and Asia; Black Sea, India, Far East; Trees; Gold and Silver
7 Feb: Medieval Relics and Iconoclasm
* Leslie Brubaker, *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Bristol Classical Press, 2012), chaps 4, 6, 7

14 Feb: Inside the Cabinet of Curiosity

21 Feb: Early Modern Global Exchanges

*****Short paper due*****

### 28 Feb: The Universal Public Museum
* James Cuno, Museums Matter: In Praise of the Encyclopedic Museum (University of Chicago Press, 2011), chap 1

### 7 March: Victorian Exhibitions and Pacific Worlds
* Nicholas Thomas, Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific (Harvard University Press, 1991), chaps 1-2, 4

### 14 March: The Social Lives of Commercial Things
* David Graeber, Toward An Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams (Palgrave, 2001), chap. 2
* Karl Marx, Das Kapital, vol. 1 (1867): commodity fetishism
* Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class (New York, 1899), chap 4

### 21 March: Spring Break
28 March: Art and Taste in the Modern Era
Andrew McClellan, The Art Museum from Boullée to Bilbao (University of California Press, 2008)
Howard Becker, Art Worlds (University of California Press, 1982)
* Andrea Fraser, “There's No Place Like Home / L'1% C'est Moi” (2012)

4 April: Colonial Legacies – Art, Artifact and Restitution
James Clifford, The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art (Harvard University Press, 1988), selections
* Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown, eds., Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader (Routledge, 2003): introduction; intro to sections 1, 3; chaps 2, 11
* Universal Museums Declaration and related documents, Museum Frictions, pp. 247-256
“Museums and Restitution” University of Manchester Conference Documents (2010):
http://www.arts.manchester.ac.uk/museology/museumsandrestitution
http://culturalpractice.wordpress.com/?s=museums+and+restitution
Kwame Opoku on James Cuno, Who Owns Antiquity?:
http://www.elginism.com/20080608/kwame-opoku-deconstructs-cuno

11 April: No Class – Reading Week

18 April: Non-Western Ontologies + Gender and Sex
* Fernando Santos-Granero, ed., The Occult Life of Things: Native Amazonian Theories of Materiality and Personhood (University of Arizona Press, 2012): introduction, chapters 2, 4, 9
http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/e-misferica-101/viveiros-de-castro
* Amy Levin, ed., Gender, Sexuality and Museums: A Routledge Reader (Routledge, 2010), selections
* Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough, eds., The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective (University of California Press, 1996), introduction

25 April: Globalized Exhibitions
* Exhibiting Cultures: introduction; Yamaguchi, “Poetics of Exhibition”; Goswamy, “Another Past”; Ybarra-Frausto, “Chicano Movement”; Munjeri, “Refocusing or Reorientation?”
* Sonja Mejcher-Atassi and John Pedro Schwartz, eds., Archives, Museums and Collecting Practices in the Modern Arab World (Ashgate, 2012); introduction, chaps 2, 7-9
2 May: Global Publics and the Museum Experience
* Andrea Fraser, “Isn’t This a Wonderful Place? (A Tour of a Tour of the Guggenheim Bilbao)” (2003), in Museum Highlights: The Writings of Andrea Fraser (MIT Press, 2005), pp. 233-260
* Fred Myers, “Complicity of Cultural Production,” Museum Frictions
* Tony Bennett, “Exhibition, Difference, and the Logic of Culture,” Ibid.
* Svetlana Alpers, “The Museum As a Way of Seeing,” Exhibiting Cultures
* Carol Duncan, “Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship,” Ibid.

Saturday 4 May, 10h30: Visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

*****Term paper due*****