

London Semester – Spring 2009
LOND 934: Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge [Updated 13 Feb 2009]

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Class Times: Normally Mondays 1-3 at Steve's
flat; Wednesdays at museums.

Objectives:

Museums and the Structuring of Knowledge:

This course is designed to introduce students to the museum as a history-specific institution which arose in the late 18th and early 19th century in Western Europe (and then, the United States). At the heart of our enquiry is a discussion of the museum as a particular set of practices and institutions which produce, organize, and structure knowledge. The birth of the museum is entwined with the birth of the modern and its systems of organization and classification, i.e., with taxonomies. At the level of natural science, this begins with the Linnaean systems of classification, but it also carries over into ways of classifying humans, human societies, and nations. In that fashion, museums help shape the ways in which we understand history, geography, cultural difference, social hierarchy, what is art and what is ethnography, dominance and subordination.



Charles Wilson Peale, "The Artist in His Museum" (1822) – Oil on Canvas (Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia)

Museums, Collecting and Display

Museums are centrally associated with western practices of collecting and display. (Other cultures have different practices, and while we will talk about them, they are not a part of this course.) To the extent that all museums are involved in practices of collecting, we will focus on the cultures that collected and the (material and human) cultures that were collected.

Museums and the Rhetoric of Display

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

Museums and History

Most museums are about the past. We will explore the way that the past is located in museums and how they work with and through memory to engage specific narratives.

Museums, the Nation, Colonialism

Because of their fundamental investment in taxonomy, museums in the West have long played an important role in the practices of nationalism and colonialism. This is evident in the way that museums collect “the other,” but it is also clear in the fashion in which museums historically have classified other cultures in relation to “western” culture. This is a central feature of British museums, which are not only among the first “modern” museums, but which have long played a critical role in the presentation of the colonial other for consumption in the metropolis.



- Goals:
- * To help students “read” museums as socially constructed texts
 - * To understand the history of museums and museum practice
 - * To view museum practice as shaped by multiple contexts
 - * To appreciate the potential of the museum as a powerful institution in shaping how publics understand their world
 - * To introduce students to work in the world of museums and public history sites

Meeting times:

The class will meet regularly on Mondays and Wednesdays. Normally, on Mondays, we will meet from 1:00-3:00 at Steve Volk’s flat (2B Bridge Approach; Chalk Farm Tube stop), unless otherwise noted in the syllabus. Most Wednesdays will be devoted to museum visits, and

the time and meeting point will be determined the week before if not already listed in the syllabus. See the [Schedule of Museum Visits](#).

Course Requirements:

Attendance. As with any Oberlin seminar, this one *requires* your attendance. The basic point is that the class can't work *without* you. Absences will figure into your grade. This is true both for the class meetings and the museum visits/field trips. PLEASE NOTE: The Monday classes begin at 10:00 am. You're now living in a big city and need to plan accordingly for tube problems, traffic, horse parades, terrorist threats, etc. By the start of classes, you should have sorted out how long it normally takes you to get to the Centre.

Reading. You are expected to do the reading, and to complete it in a timely manner (i.e., prior to the Monday meeting of the class). All articles are posted to Blackboard (look under the week the article is assigned) and will be available in pdf format on a CD-ROM which I will have prepared for each of you.

Class Participation. Class participation is essential and will be reflected in your grade. I understand that not everyone finds it as easy to participate actively, but this is a small class with a lot of interesting things happening. As very bright people, I'm confident that you'll all have wonderful things to contribute to the course. If you feel that something is preventing your full and eager participation in the course, please see me and we will try to sort it out.

Writing Assignments: You will need to turn in **five assignments** over the course of the semester, approximately one every two weeks. Each assignment will engage the readings with a specific museum visit (see: [Museum Visit Ethnographies](#)) and will focus on a specific topic. Among the topics are the following (choose only 5), or you can suggest an alternative topic:

- The history of the museum (collecting, the notion of public space, etc.)
- The narrative design of museums (internal display and organization)
- The museum as a democratic space
- The nation and the museum
- Colonization and museum practice
- The artifact and the museum (authenticity, meaning)
- New museum practices/possibilities

You are responsible for turning in the five papers by the end of the class (there are no assigned due dates), but I will get on your case if you haven't started turning in your papers by mid-semester. Each paper will be approximately 3-5 pages long (double spaced). You can turn it in either as a regular paper or, if you don't have access to a printer, you can email me your paper as an attachment. If neither of those work, we'll find a different method.

Museum Journals: You will also be expected to keep museum journals of your museum visits. We will discuss format and what I'm looking at the start of the class.

Final Grade.

Each paper: 15% (total = 75%)
Participation: 25%

Syllabus

Friday, Feb. 6: Orientation, 10:00 AM
Saturday, Feb. 7: Orientation activities, 9:30-1:30
Sunday, Feb. 8: London markets walk, 9:30 AM
Monday, Feb. 9: Classes Begin

A good listing of London Museums can be found at the following site. Each museum will have its own specific website with information about current exhibits, on-line exhibitions, directions, etc.:

<http://www.londonnet.co.uk/ln/guide/about/museums.html>

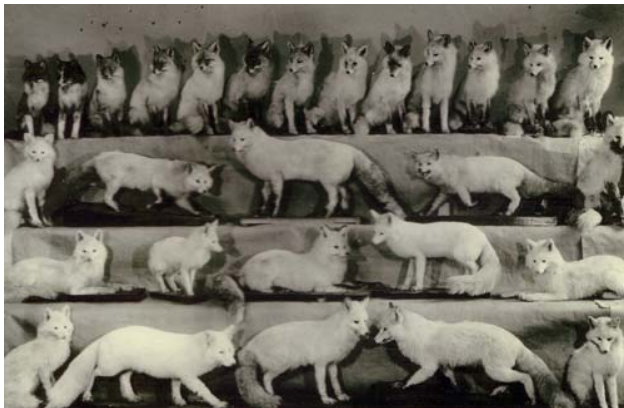
READING PRIOR TO THE START OF CLASS TO HELP YOU THINK ABOUT VISITING THE MUSEUM

Emily Stokes-Rees, "Methods for a Multi-Sited Study of New National Museums: A Fieldworker's Experience," *Museological Review* [Leicester, UK] 10 (2004): 67-73.

Margaret Lindauer, "The Critical Museum Visitor," in Janet Marstine, ed., *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 203-225.

PART I: THE MUSEUM IN ITS CONTEXTS: COLLECTING, CONSUMING, DISPLAY

Feb. 9, 11: "The Primary Function of Any Museum Is...?"



What is a museum? What is fitting to "put" in a museum? Why does one put things in a museum? Why does one go to museums? In this opening section, we will explore the idea of a museum via the your experiences and some reading. Are the Elgin Marbles in the British Museum, your collection of Nike ads, and a web site from the Exploratorium all "museum" exhibits? Are there differences between "collections" and "museums"? What have

you liked about museums and what not? After all is said and done, what is the museum, and what is the museum experience?

Feb. 9 – What is a museum?

Feb. 11 – Visit "War and Medicine" exhibition at the [Wellcome Collection](http://www.wellcomecollection.org/visitus/index.htm) (Note: Exhibition closes on Feb. 15). Meet inside the entrance at 1:00 PM. (183 Euston Road. Closest tubes are **Warren Street Station** and **Euston Station**. [Map: <http://www.wellcomecollection.org/visitus/index.htm>]

Website: <http://www.wellcomecollection.org/index.htm>

Readings:

“What is a Museum?,” entry at “Found History” blog:
<http://www.foundhistory.org/2006/09/18/what-is-a-museum/>

Kenneth Hudson, “Attempts to Define ‘Museum,’” in David Boswell and Jessica Evans, eds., *Representing the Nation: A Reader. Histories, Heritage and Museums* (London and NY: Routledge, 1999), pp. 371-379.

James A. Boon, “Why Museums Make Me Sad,” in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures. The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Press, 1991), pp. 255-277. [NOTE: In its style, almost more than in its content, it mimics the museum and the process of museum going. Read it first, without stopping to “figure everything out.” You might want to return to this article at the end of the course and see what you make of it then.]

Sharon Macdonald, “Introduction,” in *Theorizing Museums. Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, ed. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), pp. 1-18.

Carol Duncan, “The Art Museum as Ritual,” in *Civilizing Rituals. Inside Public Art Museums* (London and NY: Routledge, 1995), pp. 7-20.

Feb. 16, 18: Collecting in a Consumer Society

Collecting is a culturally driven practice. Here we will be discussing the nature of collecting in the “West,” i.e., in consumerist, market-oriented cultures. The primary question is: Why do we collect? What does collecting tell us about the societies in which we live, and why do the practices of collecting change over time. What do we do with our collections? How do we think about them?



Feb. 16 – Why collect? Discussion of readings, 1:00 PM Steve’s flat.

Feb. 18 – Meet at 2:00 at the [Freud House and Museum](http://www.freud.org.uk/fmopene.htm) (Note: £5 admission). 20 Maresfield Gardens, NW3, near Finchley Road Underground Station (Jubilee or Metropolitan lines). Directions at: <http://www.freud.org.uk/fmopene.htm>

Website: <http://www.freud.org.uk/>

Readings:

Susan M. Pearce, “Collecting: Shaping the World,” in *Museums, Objects, and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 1992), pp. 68-88.

Susan M. Pearce, "Collecting as Medium and Message," in Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, ed., *Museum, Media, Message* (NY and London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 15-23.

Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," in Bettina Messias Carbonell, ed., *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), Ch. 51 (pp. 541-555).

Jean Baudrillard, "The System of Collecting," in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, eds., *Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 7-24.

Russell W. Belk, "A Brief History of Collecting," in *Collecting in a Consuming Society* (London and NY: Routledge, 1994), 22-64.

Readings on the Freud Museum

Barbara J. Black, "Coda: In Freud's Study," in *On Exhibit: Victorians and Their Museums* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), pp 186-196.

OPTIONAL: John Forrester, " 'Mille e tre': Freud and Collecting," in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, eds., *The Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1994), pp. 224-251.

Further Optional Readings

John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Viking), 1972.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett "Objects of Ethnography" in Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington: Smithsonian Press, 1991), pp 386-443 (note: We will return to this article later).

Philipp Blom, *To Have and to Hold: An Intimate History of Collectors and Collecting* (NY: Penguin), 2002.

Feb. 23, 25: Museums and Their Histories

In this section we will explore the relationship of the museum to modernity - in particular we want to explore the relationship of museums to the notion of public space, both its historical creation and its specific location in the late-18th and early 19th century. We will move from the practices of aristocratic collecting (the princely cabinets of curiosity, the *Kunstkammer*, the *studiolo*) to focus on institutions which help create the notion of the modern: consumption, circulation, reproduction. We will consider department stores, the press, fairs, and circuses as institutions which develop along with the museum. We also want to examine the political promise of museums as related to their location in modernity, that of democratic representation (both in the museum and in terms of museum goers).



Interior of Olaus Worm's museum. Engraved frontispiece to Olaus Worm, *Museum Wormianum, seu Historia Rerum Rariorum* (Leiden, 1655). British Library.

Sometime before class this week visit a grand old department store – Harrods is the best, particularly the food court or the Egyptian Room – and think about this quote from Miles Orvell: “At the center of the web of consumption, especially for the growing urban population, were the department stores, their majestic interiors, modeled on palaces and temples and cathedrals, giving to the act of buying a sacred character” (*The Real Thing*, p. 41).

Feb. 23: Museums and their History – Modernity and the notion of a public. Class at 1:00 PM at Steve's; after we will go to the British Museum (just down the block from the teaching center) to visit the [“Enlightenment”](#) room with the full (joint) class (3:00 PM).

Feb. 25: Meet at 1:00 PM in front of [Sir John Soane's Museum](#) (13 Lincoln's Inn Fields; nearest Tube stop: Holborn) [NOTE: There is a candelit opening for the museum the first Tuesday of each month from 6-9 PM. Long queues.]
Website: <http://www.soane.org/>

Feb. 26: “Taking Liberties: The Struggle for Britain's Freedoms and Rights” exhibition at the British Library. Meet inside entrance of BL at 3:30 PM (after joint class).

Readings:

Paula Findlen, “The Museum: Its Classical Etymology and Renaissance Genealogy,” in Bettina Messias Carbonell, ed., *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 23-50.

Jürgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere – An Encyclopedia Article,” in Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, eds., *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 102-107.

Kevin Walsh, “The Idea of Modernity,” *The Representation of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Post-Modern World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 7-38.

Carol Duncan, “From the Princely Gallery to the Public Art Museum. The

Louvre Museum and the National Gallery, London,” in *Civilizing Rituals. Inside Public Art Museums* (London and NY: Routledge, 1995), pp. 21-47.

Peter Burke, “Classifying Knowledge: Curricula, Libraries, and Encyclopedias,” *A Social History of Knowledge from Gutenberg to Diderot* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2000), pp. 81-115.

Barbara J. Black, “Introduction,” *On Exhibit: Victorians and Their Museums* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), pp. 1-19.

Readings on the Sir John Soane’s Museum:

John Elsner, “A Collector’s Model of Desire: The House and Museum of Sir John Soane,” in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, eds., *The Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 155-176.

Philipp Blom, “Mr. Soane is Not at Home,” in *To Have and to Hold: An Intimate History of Collectors and Collecting* (NY: Penguin, 2002), pp. 220-231.

PART II: THE DISCURSIVE POWER OF MUSEUM NARRATIVES

March 2, 4: Museum Design - Ways of Narrating, Ways of Seeing. The Rhetoric of Space



Science Museum, London

Two main issues need to be discussed in this section, both of which build on the idea of the museum as a product of modernity: (1) The idea of the museum as a narrative structure (Roberts): much like the novel (itself a 19th century phenomenon), the museum is designed around a narrative structure which is fundamentally implicated in interpretation. (2) The design and space of the (modern) museum is bound up with its existence as a public space (Bennett). In that sense it is expected to be open to publics (i.e. to serve a public function) at the same time that those who control museums are concerned with how the publics will behave in and *use* museums. In other words, and quite importantly, the museum is by design a fundamentally democratic space which is most often used for elite culture. We will explore these issues in terms of the design of the interior museum space (rather than its external architecture), and as relates to the transmission of certain “privileged” forms of knowledge, e.g., science (Macdonald). We will continue to think of how to use museum spaces to enhance (rather than stifle) democracy throughout the course.

March 2: Meet at 1:00 PM outside the [Science Museum](#) [Exhibition Road, South Kensington, London SW7 2DD; the nearest tube station is **South Kensington** on the District, Circle and Piccadilly lines. After a visit to the “Future Food” exhibition, we will break for lunch, and go down the street to the [Natural History Museum](#) to visit the “Hall

of Birds.” [We will arrange a time to visit the “Darwin” exhibit constructed for his bicentenary, for a fee.]

Website: <http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/> [Science Museum]; <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/> [Natural History Museum]

March 4: Discussion of Museum Narratives, 1:00 PM at Steve’s flat.

Readings:

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.

Lisa C. Roberts, *From Knowledge to Narrative. Educators and the Changing Museum* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), pp. 56-67, 131-150.

Susan M. Pearce, “Meaningful Exhibition: Knowledge Displayed,” in *Museums, Objects, and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 1992), pp. 136-143.

Sharon Macdonald, “Exhibitions of Power and Powers of Exhibition. An Introduction to the Politics of Display,” in Sharon Macdonald, ed., *The Politics of Display: Museums, Sciences, Culture* (London & NY: Routledge, 1998), pp. 1-17 (only).

Camilla Mordhorst, “The Exhibition Narrative in Flux,” *Museological Review* [Leicester, UK], 8 (2002): 1-20.

Michael Baxandall, “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. 33-41.

On the “Future Foods” Exhibit:

Les Levidow, “Domesticating Biotechnology: How London’s Science Museum has Framed Controversy,” The European Association for the Study of Science and Technology,” pdf.

Optional:

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

Seth Koven, “The Whitechapel Picture Exhibitions and the Politics of Seeing,” in Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff, eds., *Museum Culture. Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (London: Routledge, 1994) pp. 22-48.

March 9, 11: Locating Authenticity in the Museum: Objects, Narratives, Experiences

In general, the objects preserved in most museums are both *solid* (i.e., three dimensional) and originate in the past, so that the observer experiencing them in three-dimensional space must somehow also bridge a time gap. In this sense alone, then, museums are not the same as, say, illustrated books. A particular modernist assumption is that museums, by providing their visitors with the artifact, present them not just with “the real thing,” but with the “truth”: the museum is about “truthful” objects and “accurate” messages. Authenticity quickly comes to be at the heart of these questions: what is “real,” what is “authentic” (we can also be dealing with art and the question of forgeries), and how do we relate to material objects? Do objects have meaning *sui generis*?

For contemporary museological theorists, the essence of the “authentic” is not the artifact, but the museum experience itself, and the use of replicas, simulations, performances, and electronic media intertwined with real objects – techniques in which theme parks excel – help recreate, reconstruct, or re-represent near-authentic experiences. According to Macdonald museums should give more attention to presenting real experiences with the assistance of people from those cultures being represented. The readings all involve objects (artifacts) and their meanings – the relationship between artifact and meaning, how meanings are shaped by history and, within the museum context, by where they are situated.

March 9: Discussion of reading, 1:00 PM, Steve’s flat

March 11: Meet at 3:00 PM at the [Imperial War Museum](http://london.iwm.org.uk/server/show/nav.00b002001), Lambeth Road. Nearest Tubes: Lambeth North (Bakerloo Line); Waterloo (Bakerloo, Northern, Jubilee Line); Southwark (Jubilee Line); Elephant & Castle (Bakerloo, Northern Line). Map at: <http://london.iwm.org.uk/server/show/nav.00b002001>.

Website:

<http://london.iwm.org.uk/server.php?show=nav.00b&PHPSESSID=4361ab8c1b6aac5d2dd77d7c11b782ba>

Reading:

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 Hein, “Museums: From Object to Experience,” in Carolyn Korsmeyer, ed., *Aesthetics: The Big Questions* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998): 103-115.

Michael M. Ames, “Museums in the Age of Deconstruction,” in Gail Anderson, ed., *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift* (Walnut Creek, CA: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), p. 88-98.

Sean Kingston, “The Essential Attitude: Authenticity in Primitive Art, Ethnographic Performances, and Museums,” *Journal of Material Culture* 4 (1999): 338-351.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Objects of Ethnography,” in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures. The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Press, 1991), pp. 386-416.

William Lindsay, “Ethics and authenticity in natural history exhibits: The public wants what the public gets,” unpublished paper (head of Royal College of Art/Victoria and Albert Museum Conservation), also available at:
[http://www.nhm.ac.uk/hosted_sites/natSCA/training/events/2006/Authenticity_WL.pdf]

Joseph H. Pine II and James H. Gilmore, “Museums and Authenticity,” *Museum News* (May-June 2007), pdf.

Optional:

Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, eds., *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 48-70.

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

Alan Radley, “Boredom, Fascination and Mortality: Reflections Upon the Experience of Museum Visiting,” in Gaynor Kavanagh, ed., *Museum Languages: Objects and Texts* (Leicester, London and NY: Leicester University Press, 1991), pp. 65-82.

J. Trant, “When all You’ve Got is “The Real Thing”: Museums and Authenticity in the Networked World,” *Archives and Museum Informatics* 12 (1998): pp. 107-125.



Visitor at “World War I Experience” at
Imperial War Museum, London

March 16, 18: The Architecture of Display: Victorian Science

We have already located the birth of the museum historically, in the collecting classification impulse of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. These processes hit their stride during the

Victorian age, and the central London museums are a central part of this process, particularly as concerns the assertion of British scientific authority (which itself becomes an important part of the insistence on British imperial superiority). Think, in this regard, of the important London museums: the Natural History Museum, the V&A, the British Museum, and the National Gallery of Art (the Tate will come along a bit later). Here we will focus in particular on the presentation of science, focusing on the Natural History Museum and the specifics of architecture and display as “all of the earth” is collected, categorized, and displayed.

March 16: Discussion of reading, 1:00 PM, Steve’s flat.

March 18: I will be out of town. Plan your own return visit to [Natural History Museum](http://www.nhm.ac.uk/). But you should also try to visit the [Grant Museum of Zoology](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums/zoology/) at the University College, London. Open 1-5 pm every weekday afternoon. It is the only remaining university zoological museum in London. It houses around 62,000 specimens, covering the whole Animal Kingdom. Founded in 1827 as a teaching collection, the Museum is packed full of skeletons, mounted animals and specimens preserved in fluid. Many of the species are now endangered or extinct including the Tasmanian tiger or thylacine, the quagga, and the dodo. [The Museum's entrance is on Malet Place off Torrington Place (entry is no longer accessible from Gower Street), a short walk from the Teaching Centre.

Website: <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/> [Natural History Museum];
<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums/zoology/> [Grant Museum of Zoology]

Readings:

Carla Yanni, *Victorian Science and the Architecture of Display* (NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), Introduction, Chapters 1 and 5.

Philipp Blom, “This Curious Old Gentleman,” in *To Have and to Hold: An Intimate History of Collectors and Collecting* (NY: Penguin, 2002), 77-91.

March 23, 25: Spring Break

PART III: THE CULTURE AND POLITICS OF MUSEUMS – SHAPING HISTORIES, IDENTITIES, PERCEPTIONS

March 30, April 1: Museums and National Identity

Since the late in the 18th century, museums have served as an important way of defining the nation, both in the sense of displaying its treasures and in terms of mapping it off from the (colonial) Other. We can see this in the formation of the vast art collections that come to be known as “universal survey museums” (e.g., the National Gallery in London, the Louvre in Paris, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, etc.), as well as in natural history museums, heritage sites, etc. Probably the most impressive national display in this regard was the Great Exhibition of 1851, an exhibition which would later give rise to the South Kensington museum complex, specifically the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Albert Memorial

March 30: Discussion of readings, 1:00 PM, Steve's flat.

April 1: Meet at 3:00 PM (with joint class) at the [V&A](http://www.vam.ac.uk/), particularly to the "British Galleries: 1760-1900" on Level 4. (Website: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/>)

April 3: "Atlantic Worlds" and "Nelson's Navy" galleries, [National Maritime Museum](http://www.nmm.ac.uk/), Greenwich (Website: <http://www.nmm.ac.uk/>). Meet with joint class at 11:00 AM (location tba) for trip to Greenwich.

Readings:

Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum," *Art History* 3:4 (December 1980): 448-469.

Annie E. Coombes, "Museums and the Formation of National and Cultural Identities," in *The Oxford Art Journal* 11:2 (1988), pp. 57-68.

Kylie Message and Ewan Johnston, "The World with the City: The Great Exhibition, Race, Class and Social Reform," in Jeffrey A. Auerback and Peter H. Hoffenberg, eds., *Britain, the Empire and the world at the Great Exhibition of 1851* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pubs., 2008), pp. 27-46.

Henry Balfour, "Presidential Address to the Museums Association, Maidenstone Meeting, 1909," in Bettina Messias Carbonell, ed., *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 252-259.

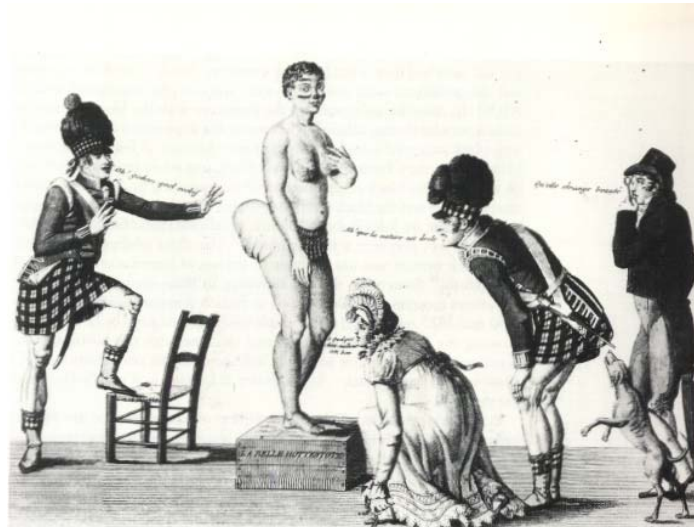
Richard D. Altick, "National Monuments," *Representing the Nation: A Reader. Histories, Heritage and Museums* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), 240-257.

April 6, 8: Temples of Empire

Last week we looked at the way the nation is narrated in its museum practices. This week we will look at how it marks off and defines its colonial Other. Indeed, the museum in general (and British museums in particular) is a primary institution through which both scholarly and popular discourses make explicit the distance between the nation and its colonial Others. Taxonomies which helped scientists catalog the world's flora and fauna are similarly employed to chart the "evolutionary" chain from "savage" to "civilized." Museums become a location through which local populations can see the value of and need for the colonial enterprise. Not surprisingly, there are a considerable number of British museums which brought the empire home for "scientific" classification and popular consumption.

The question to be examined is how a particular artifact/people/culture/time becomes available to a population which is unfamiliar with them. The exoticizing of the unfamiliar (i.e., its separation from a presumed familiar) is often mediated by specific ideological institutions among which museums are central. We will first approach this issue through an uncommon route, an examination of the way in which "Assyria" was made available to the mid-19th century British via a series of institutions: the British Museum, the *Illustrated London News*, and popular theater. In the words of Bohrer, we will be "tracking a sign through the inflection of its

signifiers.” This can give an appreciation both for the locations of “exoticness” (temporal as well as spatial difference), the ways in which a public can contest elite aesthetic notions, and the specific role of the museum in introducing the “other” into a presumed homogeneous British public.



The “Hottentot Venus” (Saarjite Baartman) and the Colonial Gaze

While Bohrer traces this creation of difference via artifacts, Coombes examines this process with people and cultures. At the same time that the British are mounting major efforts in the construction of international fairs and exhibitions, they are grappling mounting some of their most important ethnographic museum collections, particularly the famous Pitt River collection in Oxford (which hopefully will open in spring 2009 for a visit), the Horniman Museum, and others. These collections and others will help forge a “national” subject by insist on the relationship between race and culture, and stressing their educational role among the masses.

April 6: Discussion of readings, 1:00 PM, Steve’s flat.

April 8: Visit to “African Worlds Galleries,” at the [Horniman Museum](http://www.horniman.ac.uk/) (100 London Rd, Forest Hill, London, SE23 3PQ. Train from London Bridge to “Forest Hill” train stop – not the Tube). Meet at the entrance of the museum at 2:00 PM. Website: <http://www.horniman.ac.uk/>

Readings:

Frederick N. Bohrer, “The Times and Spaces of History: Representation, Assyria, and the British Museum,” in Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff, eds., *Museum Culture. Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 197-222.

Annie E. Coombes, “Temples of Empire: The Museum and its Publics,” and “Containing the Continent: Ethnographies on Display,” in *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994): 109-160.

Craig Clunas, "China in Britain. The Imperial Collections," in Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn, eds., *Colonialism and the Object. Empire, Material Culture, and the Museum* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 41-51.

James Fenton, "The Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford," from *Museum Studies*, Bettina Messias Carbonell, ed., pp 307-309.

Optional:

Barbara J. Black, "An Empire's Great Expectations: Museums in Imperialist Boy Fiction," in *On Exhibit: Victorians and Their Museums* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), pp. 148-166.

April 13, 15: Museums, Memory and History: Locating History and Memory in the Museum

"... every history museum must resolve such issues as how to define and explain the past; to what purposes the past should be put; how the past and present are related; and in what material contexts these synergistic relationships should be explored and illuminated. Dealing with these problems, and doing so in a coherent fashion, is – or should be – central to an institution's creation and mission." [Jackie R. Donath, "The Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum: The Problem of an Authentic Western Mystique," *American Quarterly* 43:1 (March 1991): 82-102; p. 82.]

April 13: Discussion of readings, 1:00 PM, Steve's flat.

April 14: "War to Windrush" exhibition, Imperial War Museum (directions, see March 11). Meet inside entrance to museum with joint class at 4:00 PM.

April 15: "London Sugar and Slavery" exhibit at [Museum of London-Docklands](http://www.museumindocklands.org.uk/English/) - Meet inside museum at 2:30 PM at (West India Quay, Canary Wharf: Tube: Canary Wharf). Website: <http://www.museumindocklands.org.uk/English/>

Readings:



Susan A. Crane, "Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum," *History and Theory* 36:4 (1997): 44-63.

Thomas J. Schlereth, "Collecting Ideas and Artifacts: Common Problems of History Museums and History Texts," in Bettina Messias Carbonell, ed., *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2004): 335-347.

John Urry, "How Societies Remember the Past," in *Theorizing Museums. Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, Macdonald and Fyfe, eds., pp.45-65.

Lisa C. Roberts, *From Knowledge to Narrative. Educators and the Changing Museum* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), pp. 88-103.

PART IV: WHOSE MUSEUM?

April 20, 22: Gender and the Museum

Gender representations in museums have most often been discussed in the context of art museums and whose work is located in those museums. Here we will focus on broader questions of gender and museum practices. For example, using a somewhat thick theoretical approach, Porter explores the ways in which museums constitute masculine and feminine and then describes a series of contemporary exhibits in Britain and northern Europe that challenge conventional readings. Deepwell and Smith raise interesting questions about how feminist perspectives have been and can be represented in museum work. Also included is the Museum of London's "Gender Equality Scheme," a document that all major museums are required to prepare and post publicly.

April 20: Discussion of readings, 1:00 PM, Steve's flat.

April 22: The [Museum of London](http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/English/) (main branch) has been one of the London museums that have taken museums and the question of representation most seriously. It has been redoing its exhibits for more than a decade, bringing new museum practices to bear on their narrative and design. Unfortunately, it is undergoing a major renovation and all of its post-1666 exhibitions are currently closed. Depending on which of its exhibitions are open at this point, we will either visit the London Museum or select another.

Website: <http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/English/> [Worth a visit, in any case]

Readings:

Gaby Porter, "Seeing through Solidity: A Feminist Perspective on Museums," in Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe, eds., *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers and the Sociological Review, 1996), pp. 105-126.

Katy Deepwell, "Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices since the 1970s," in Janet Marstine, ed., *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 64-84.

Laurajane Smith, "Heritage, Gender and Identity," in Brian Graham and Peter Howard, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity* (Ashgate, 2008), 159-180.

Museum of London "Gender Equality Scheme" – pdf.

"Defining Gender" exhibits at Pitt Rivers Museum:

<http://webprojects.prm.ox.ac.uk/arms-and-armour/s/Defining-Gender/>

April 27, 29: New Museums, New Communities

We have focused almost exclusively on the historic museum, particularly in the 19th century, the moment of its greatest impact and importance. At one level, it is not hard to critique museums and museum practices in the way in which they solidify discourses about difference, hierarchy, and power. But the museum (particularly in its largest sense as museum or exhibition or fair or theme park or heritage site, etc.) remains an important, even vibrant, institution which *can* offer its visitors new insights and which *can* destabilize the discourses that museums have created in the past. The articles this week offer suggestions, from the curators' viewpoint, as to how this can be accomplished. Gurian wonders how best to design exhibits that can help people learn and realizes that curators must work against the discipline that has taught them what "appropriate behavior" in museums is. Vogel argues that museums always "recontextualize and interpret objects," and one should not apologize for this. Rather, by discussing specific exhibits, she suggests how curators must be "self-aware and open about the degree of subjectivity" in their collections. Jones suggests how exhibitionary practices can rework the British colonial legacy, and the Simpson and Gaither articles further the discussion of re-working the museum to represent a pluralistic perspective, in that sense coming full circle to the initial promise of the museum as a democratic space.

April 27: Discussion of readings, 1:00 PM, Steve's flat.

April 29: You should plan to visit one or more any local or borough museum to see the ways in which the community has been brought into the museum and into museum practice. Among the possibilities:

Museum of Croydon ("Croydon Now" exhibit): Level 1, Croydon Clocktower, Katharine Street, Croydon CR9 1ET [Train to East Croydon Center]

Hackney Museum ("World on Your Doorstep" exhibit): Technology and Learning Centre, 1 Reading Lane, E8 1GQ. Open Tues, Weds, Fri: 9.30am - 5.30pm. Thur: 9.30am - 8pm, Sat: 10am - 5pm. Closed: Sun, Mon and Bank Holidays.
[<http://www.hackney.gov.uk/museum-permanent-displays-2.htm>]
[Hackney Central, Rail]

Islington Museum: Islington Museum, 245 St John Street, London EC1V 4NB

Jewish Museum (Camden): Raymond Burton House, 129-131 Albert Street, NW1 7NB

NOTE: Black Cultural Archives (scheduled to open in Brixton, 2011)

Readings:

Elaine Heumann Gurian, "Noodling Around with Exhibition Opportunities," in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures. The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Press, 1991), pp. 176-190.

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.

Jane Peirson Jones, “The Colonial Legacy and the Community: The Gallery 33 Project,” in Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Museums and Communities. The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), pp. 221-241.

Moir G. Simpson, “History Revisited,” and “Voices of Authorship,” in *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 15-34; 51-69.

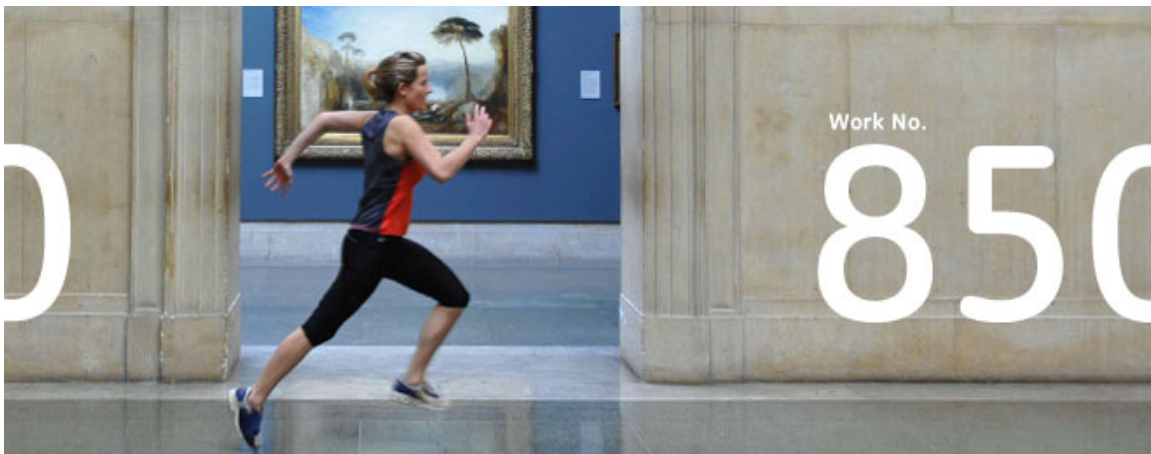
Edmund Barry Gaither, “Hey! That’s Mine”: Thoughts on Pluralism and American Museums,” in Gail Anderson, ed., *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift* (Walnut Creek, CA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), pp. 110-117.

May 4, 6: Closing discussions – The Future of the Museum

May 4: Discussion at 1:00 PM, Steve’s flat.

May 6: Museum visit to be announced

No readings this week.



“Work No. 850” by Martin Creed. Installation in Tate Britain’s Duveen Galleries, summer 2008. For four months, assigned runners sprint as fast as they can through the gallery at 30-second intervals.