

ENGL 290
MW 3:30-4:45 p.m.
Classroom: 101 Maguire Hall
Spring 2015

Professor: Gretchen Henderson
gretchen.henderson@georgetown.edu
Office: TBA
Office Hours: TBA

Writing and the Museum

Course Objectives

“Curating” has become a buzzword that extends beyond museums to the realm of thrift-stores, performances, blogs, and other venues. This course explores a range of literatures that utilize curatorial strategies and navigate “object lessons” in writing. Drawing upon museum studies, visual culture, and cultural studies, we will ground ourselves in a historic rhetoric of wonder (via global explorations, memory palaces, curiosity cabinets, natural and artistic collections), visit museums around Georgetown and Washington D.C., and examine fiction, poetry, nonfiction, and hybrid genres that imitate museums, enact curatorial gestures, and/or try to dismantle such structures. What objects and genres constitute these collections? How do authors and/or readers become engaged and implicated in the forms and contents of their projects? As students adopt the role of curators, projects will include writing an object biography, writing a field guide and ethnography of a museum, and imagining a hypothetical exhibition.

Learning Goals

- To explore fiction, poetry, essay, and hybrid writings through a curatorial framework.
- To interrogate the human impulse to collect and see how this impulse can be harnessed and honed for writing, art, technology, and other fields.
- To engage with actual and virtual museums and other collections as sites of creative practice and critical thinking.
- To effectively read, write, analyze, articulate, and critique work by writers, artists, and peers.
- To craft and hone writing by taking risks with form and content.

Required Texts (available in the campus bookstore):

- Charles Simic, *Dimestore-Alchemy* (poetry)
- Lawrence Weschler, *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Curiosity* (nonfiction)
- Additional readings are on Blackboard. Bring printed pages or digitally archived files with your marginal notes and noted quotations. Identify narrated and poetic methods of collecting and curating.
- Bring a bound journal or notebook to serve as your “Commonplace Book.”
- For additional resources, visit the LibGuide: TBA.
- **The course website will be hosted electronically: <http://writingandthemuseum.wordpress.com>**

Course Requirements & Grading

Written Assignments (75 points)

- 10 Exhibits (2 points each = 20 points)
- Object Biography (4 points)
- Museum Ethnography (22 points)
- Shoebox Museum (4 points)
- Imaginary Exhibition (25 points)

Written assignments are due printed at the beginning of class on the date they are due. Assignments explore different facets of writing around the museum. Each assignment encourages you to exercise different writing and thinking muscles. Think of texts as artistic mediums. Search for shapes and patterns among sentences, images, sounds, and rhythms. Every word counts. Avoid passive constructions to activate your language. Edit well. As the semester progresses, shorter writing assignments will build toward your midterm (museum ethnography) and final (imaginary exhibition). Graduate students will do additional readings and writings, including a book review and a 10-15 page profile of a curator. Please check with the instructor to arrange requisite assignments.

Participation & Commonplace Book (25 points): We meet only twice weekly and have precious little time together! It is expected for you to attend all classes. A class is nothing without its classmates, so you are expected to encourage and challenge yourself and your peers. Your grade will be based on your participation in every aspect of the class. If you come to class prepared to start on time, complete all assignments, prepare thoughtful questions, participate actively, challenge yourself with enthusiasm and effort, appreciate the efforts of your classmates and guests, and generally go the extra mile, you should expect to do well. If any of these efforts start to erode, it will be reflected accordingly in your grade. For every class, it is expected that at minimum you transcribe at least one quotation and 3 questions in your Commonplace Book. I will check at random, and if you don't have this, points will be deducted. For more information about commonplacing, see "note" at the end of this syllabus. You may use a computer, but if you are caught checking email, surfing the net, or otherwise distracting yourself, you will lose a whopping 5 points of your participation grade.

Attendance Policy: Attendance is key. Absences must be cleared far in advance and beyond three will result in reduction of your grade by one mark for every day over three: An **A** becomes an **A-** on the 4th absence. Be aware that some classes involve special tutorials and guests that cannot be replicated if you are absent. If you miss a class, you are still responsible for reading or viewing all materials and turning in your assignment on their original due dates. I will not track you down; it is your responsibility to approach me about this and make up the work in a timely fashion, or it will be reflected in your final grade. Punctuality is also key, and unusual lateness will count as an absence. Sometimes we meet elsewhere on campus, so please note alternate locations. You also are required to meet with me at least once for an individual conference. Please use proper email etiquette when corresponding. I will respond to emails within 24 hours, likely sooner, but do not wait until the last minute to contact me. Regarding snow days/inclement weather: Georgetown has a policy of academic continuity, so classes will not be cancelled. Instead we'll gather online—stay tuned for announcements.

Style & Writing Resources: Use MLA in-the-text citation form (**not footnotes**) for all papers. Always attach a Works Cited list in MLA style. Consult the MLA guide and Strunk and White regarding usage issues. To locate journal articles, consult: < <http://guides.library.georgetown.edu/articlesdatabases> >. Carefully judge the reliability of online sources. The Writing Center offers free peer tutoring to all enrolled students, where trained tutors will assist you at any stage of your writing process, from initial brainstorming to final revisions. The main campus Center is located on the second floor of Lauinger Library (217a).

Research/Library/Technology/Blackboard Assistance: If you have questions about research and resources, contact our liaison, Melissa Van Vuuren (Melissa.Van.Vuuren@georgetown.edu). Our contacts in Special Collections are the Curator of Art, LuLen Walker (llw@georgetown.edu), and Curator of Rare Books, Ethan Henderson (Ethan.Henderson@georgetown.edu). Our contacts in the Gelardin New Media Center include media specialists, Nikoo Yahyazadeh (ny86@georgetown.edu) and Ed Keller (efk3@georgetown.edu), and the director, Beth Marhanka (Beth.Marhanka@georgetown.edu). For questions about the Museum Studies program, please contact the director, Lisa Strong (Lisa.Strong@georgetown.edu). For Blackboard and tech support, contact UIS Help Desk by email: < help@georgetown.edu > or by phone: 202-687-4949.

Honor Code: I expect you to be fully aware and respect the University's standards of conduct. Please re-read the appropriate passages on the web site and/or on the Honor System pamphlet in regards to cheating, plagiarism, using false citations, submitting work for multiple purposes, submitting false data, falsifying documents, abusing library privileges and abusing shared electronic media: < <http://www.georgetown.edu/honor> >.

Students with Disabilities: The Academic Resource Center (ARC) coordinates academic accommodations and services for all eligible Georgetown students with disabilities. If you have a disability for which you wish to request accommodations and have not contacted the ARC, please do so as soon as possible. Information about their services can be found at < <http://academicsupport.georgetown.edu/disability> >. Once registered, please contact me privately in regard to your needs in this course. If you would like a large print copy of this syllabus, please don't hesitate to contact me.

SYLLABUS

The museum is the colossal mirror in which man, finally contemplating himself from all sides, and finding himself literally an object of wonder, abandons himself to the ecstasy expressed...

~ Georges Bataille, "Museum"

*** The course syllabus will be hosted electronically: <http://writingandthemuseum.wordpress.com>. Please regularly check the course site, which contains more detail than this hard copy with live links to readings, assignments, videos, and supplementary materials (not all listed below). The instructor reserves the right to change the syllabus. It also is expected that you regularly check your email.**

Class 1 (W January 7): Entering the Museum

Welcome! Starting with objects, we begin by thinking about them in varied contexts: from discovery to display, collecting to curating. How does literature relate to museums? Over the semester, we will read across genres and media to think about how individual and collective practices influence both writing and museums (where "writing" and "museum" are broadly defined). Considering our own impulses to collect things, we will engage different methods of research to organize knowledges and narratives around "object lessons."

Reading/ Viewing for today:

- "Commonplace Book" (collaged packet with writings by Sherman Alexie, Katherine Dunn, Ethan Canin, Vladimir Nabokov, Matt Hall, Pat Mora, Binnie Kirshenbaum, Tim O'Brien, James Walsh)
- Video: Chimamanda Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story"

Upcoming Assignment:

- Exhibit #1: "Object Lesson" (due M Jan 12)
 - Bring "Commonplace Book"—PLEASE NOTE: For every class, it is expected that at minimum you transcribe at least one quotation and 3 questions in your Commonplace Book. This is expected for every class (noted only on this date as reminder). CBs may be collected at random.
-

Class 2 (M January 12): Exhibit as "Living Room"

Considering the classroom as a kind of exhibition space, we will share our personal collections through "object lessons" to enact a variation on the artist Lee Mingwei's installation called "The Living Room." Starting to explore writing as a kind of curating, we will discuss catalogue poems, pop-up exhibits, and ways to engage the concept of the participatory museum.

Reading/ Viewing for today:

- Thalias Moss, "Poets Who Collect Things"
- Deborah Weisgall, "Please, Make Yourself at Home in the Art" (about Lee Mingwei's The Living Room)
- Video: "A Curator's Collections" (Vivien Greene of the Guggenheim)
- Press Release: "Figuring Color" (for exhibition @ Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston)
- Catalogue Poems: from Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself"; Carolyn Forché, "Museum of Stones"; and Charles Bernstein, "My/My/My"

Upcoming Assignment:

- Exhibit #2: "Curating Things" (due W Jan 14)
 - Commonplace Questions
-

Class 3 (W January 14): Curating Things

From birds to blizzards, bread to brains, "things" are everywhere in literature. How do objects and subjects get selected and arranged in different prose and poetic forms, and for what effect? Consider each text as a museum.

How do writers act as curators? What happens when we read a thing in isolation versus in different collections? If a thousand details add up to an overall impression (to quote the writer John McPhee), what space do you inhabit through these reading experiences? How might our own writings make such an “impression”?

Readings/Viewings for today:

- Margaret Atwood, “Bread”
- Bruno Schultz, “Birds” (from *The Street of Crocodiles*)
- Debra Marquart, “Thirteen Ways of Looking at Weather”
- Sara Michas-Martin, “The Empty Museum”
- Christina Schwartz, “A Close Read” (samples from *The Atlantic*)

Upcoming Assignment:

- Exhibit #3: “The Empty Museum” (due: W Jan 21)—remember to bring original and photocopy.

Class 4 (W January 21): Mapping Things

A ubiquitous phrase on maps is “You Are Here.” Today’s session considers museum mapping and other modes of visitor orientation. Reading about museum studies and perusing different ephemera from museums, we will consider their implied narratives and poetics, presences and absences. How does the two-dimensional page mimic a three-dimensional space? Can written media (without visuals) be considered what Katharine Harmon calls “creative cartography”? Making a book of productive failures, we will consider questions around mapping, illustration, erasure, collage, and ekphrasis.

Readings/Viewings for today:

- Neil MacGregor, from *A History of the World in 100 Objects*
- Donald Preziosi, “Collecting/Museums”
- Bettina Messias Carbonnell, “Museum/Studies and the ‘Eccentric Space’ of an Anthology”
- Skim: Katharine Harmon, from *You Are Here: Personal Geographies and Other Maps of the Imagination*
- In honor of Martin Luther King, Jr.:
 - a. Marcia Chatelain, “How to Teach Kids about What’s Happening in Ferguson”
 - b. Curating a Twitter feed: #FergusonSyllabus
 - c. American Alliance of Museums, “The Social Value of Museums: Inspiring Change”

Upcoming Assignment:

- Next week, meet in Murray Room of Lauinger Library (541)—leave extra time, in case you get lost!

Class 5 (M January 26): Object Biographies (*Location:* Murray Room, Lauinger Library, 5th floor—541)

This week brings us to Lauinger Library to meet with different curators. The Curator of Art, LuLen Walker, will discuss the campus art collection, sharing background about five paintings in Carroll Parlor (recently renovated into a new study room) and the Sculpture Garden on the Medical School campus. We also will meet with the Curator of Rare Books, Ethan Henderson, to delve into handwritten and printed collections bound as books. We will consider historical collections “curated” by intermixing text and images, including bestiaries, botanicals, chronicles, dictionaries, encyclopedias, atlases, and other catalogues. Working in groups, students will adopt a rare book to write an “Object Biography.” Since a biography usually refers to the story of a person’s life, how can we talk about the “life” of an inanimate object? What materials and circumstances influenced its creation and survival? What can we learn by spending extended time with a single work of art?

Readings/Viewings for today:

- Steve Ashby, “Artefact Biography”
- Susan Yee, “The Archive” (from Sherry Turkle’s *Evocative Objects*)
- Stephanie Rosenbloom, “The Art of Slowing Down in a Museum”
- John Berger, from *Ways of Seeing*

Upcoming Assignment:

- Research “Object Biography” (due W Feb 4)
- On Wednesday Jan 28, return to Murray Room in Lauinger Library (541)

Class 6 (W January 28): Conserving Collections (*Location:* Murray Room, Lauinger Library, 541)

Returning to the Library’s Murray Room, we will meet again with the Curator of Rare Books, Ethan Henderson, to revisit your adopted object and continue to discuss rare books and issues related to material and digital preservation. How do material originals compare with their digital surrogates? What gets lost and found in translation between media? How does an object’s materiality and reproduction impact its long-term preservation and access? How does the literal handling of history affect our relationship with the past, not to mention the future? We also will meet with the English department liaison, Melissa Van Vuuren, to discuss research methods and resources, some of which are included on our course’s LibGuide.

Readings/Viewings for today:

- Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”
- Digital surrogate of *The Sherborne Missal* at the British Museum

Upcoming Assignment:

- Continue work on “Object Biography”
- Optional: Artist’s Talk with Collette Fu on Thursday, January 29.

Class 7 (M February 2): Cabinets of Wonder

Today we immerse in a museum of a book—Lawrence Weschler’s *Mr. Wilson’s Cabinet of Wonder*—based on David Wilson’s Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles, California. How does the form of this book reflect its museological subject? What is the role of writer as curator and curator as writer? We will discuss historic rhetorics of wonder, the roles of narrative voice from page to placard, and architectures that have documented and displayed collections while engaging visitors (a.k.a. readers) in different ways.

Readings/Viewings for today:

- Lawrence Weschler, *Mr. Wilson’s Cabinet of Wonder*

Upcoming Assignment:

- Finish “Object Biography” (due W Feb 4)

Class 8 (W February 4): Ways of “Seeing” (*Location:* Gelardin New Media Center, Library, 1st floor—124)

Today we visit two different curatorial spaces on campus: the Gelardin New Media Center (in Lauinger Library) and the Art Gallery (in the Walsh building). In Gelardin New Media Center, we will meet with the director, Beth Marhanka, and multimedia specialist, Ed Keller, to discuss ways that museums are engaging technology: from 3D printing to Oculus Rift. Afterward, we will visit Georgetown’s art gallery and meet with the director, Evan Reed, to see the gallery’s current exhibit by pop-up book artist, Colette Fu. Recalling our visit to Georgetown’s collection of rare books, we will consider the “technology” of the book. How does this artist take a common object and turn it into a kind of *wunderkammern*? How does she explore and exploit the physical and conceptual bounds of her medium? How does a campus gallery or New Media Center fit into the larger life of the campus and related disciplines?

Readings/Viewings for today:

- Barbara Maria Stafford, “Revealing Technologies/Magical Domains” from *Devices of Wonder*
- “The British Museum Will Now Let You Print Famous Replicas of Its Artifacts” (Gizmodo)
- Colette Fu, “Artist Statement”

Upcoming Assignments:

- Select a museum for your “Museum Ethnography”

Class 9 (M February 9): Ethnography of a Museum

Looking ahead to our midterm projects, today we focus on a particular museum as a case study: the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, MA. We will consider the history of museums (as in “house of the muses”) with ties to Renaissance curiosity cabinets (*wunderkammern* and *kleinodkammern*), botanical gardens, and other repositories. After a virtual introduction, we will discuss the idea of a museum field guide and ethnography, also distinguishing between art museums and house museums and other types, missions and issues that arise in the lives of museums (like the Gardner Museum’s efforts to uphold its founder’s will in circumstances ranging from collection development to renovation to theft).

Readings/Viewings for today:

- Alan Chong, from *Eye of the Beholder* and “Mrs. Gardner’s Museum of Myth”
- Video: “Collective Vision: The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum”
- Comparative Videos: Boston’s Museum of Fine Art and Museum of Bad Art
- Alfred Corn, “Seeing All the Vermeers”

Upcoming Assignments:

- Exhibit #4: “A Field Guide to Getting Lost” (due W Feb 25)
- Midterm: “Museum Ethnography” (due W March 4)

Class 10 (W February 11): Field Guides to Getting Lost

Keeping in mind our virtual visits to the Gardner Museum and others, today we talk about movement through museum spaces. Edward Rothstein has described “museum mind” where “exhibitions are not just composed of objects on display; they are essays spread out in space.” How would an essay translate into an exhibition? If writing is linear and read page by page, how can it act three-dimensionally like a museum? If an exhibition is three-dimensional, how can we reduce it to the dimensions of a page? As you prepare to wander through a museum of your choice, consider various methods of “seeing” and strategies for getting lost and found.

Readings/Viewings:

- Rebecca Solnit, from *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*
- Mieke Bal, “Telling, Showing, Showing Off” (from *Critical Inquiry*)
- Edward Rothstein, “Extreme Museum: The Rigors of Contemplation” (*New York Times*)

Upcoming Assignment:

- Commonplace Book: include Questions for Hansel Bauman

Class 11 (W February 18): Sensory Architectures

Today we welcome Hansel Bauman, Executive Director of Campus Design and Planning for Gallaudet University, who will discuss his work with DeafSpace to help us thinking more broadly about sensory architectures. We will consider the work of artists and curators who are imagining different ways to engage the capacities of human bodies in museum settings, including breathing walls, squeeze chairs, vibrating ice floes, and blind shuttle walking tours. A common phrase in museums is “Do Not Touch,” and much of museum experience is built around sight. How do we think more broadly about multi-sensory engagement in exhibits?

Reading/Viewing:

- Amanda Caccia, “What Can a Body Do?” (introduction to exhibit at Haverford College)
- Video: Hansel Bauman, “Deaf Architecture: The Resonance of Place and the Senses”
- MFA Press Release for artist Wendy Jacob (including *Ice Floe*)
- Carmen Papalia, “The Blind Shuttle Walking Tour”

- Diane Ackerman, from *A Natural History of the Senses*

Upcoming Assignment:

- Exhibit 5: “Memory Palaces” (due M Feb 23)

Class 12 (M February 23): Memory Palaces

Turning our attention to the past, we’ll discuss the mnemonic device of the memory palace to generate a class collection of memories. What does it mean to re-member? How do writers reconstruct the past? How does chronology sift and shift through the sieve of memory, and what alternative narrative and poetic orders are suggested? Considering individual and cultural memory, how does “I Remember” differ from “We Remember,” along with notions of “self” and “other” in museum settings?

Readings/Viewings:

- Jonathan Spence, from *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*
- Carl Malamud, “Memory Palaces: A Millennial Metaphor?”
- Michael Ondaatje, from *Running in the Family*
- D.J. Waldie, from *Holy Land*
- N. Scott Momaday, from *The Way to Rainy Mountain*

Upcoming Assignment:

- Bring “Field Guide” (due W Feb 25). Ahead: “Field Guide & Museum Ethnography” (due W March 4).

Class 13 (W February 25): Envisioning Exhibits (*Location: New Media Center, Library, 1st floor—124*)

Today we return to the Gelardin New Media Center for a video-production workshop with multimedia specialist, Nikoo Yahyazadeh. In anticipation of our final project of designing hypothetical exhibitions, we will learn how to condense these imaginary exhibitions into a video presentation that acts as a virtual exhibit to highlight your key concepts and representative objects. Derived from the design presentation style of Pecha Kucha, your videos will condense the essence of your exhibit into a video (lasting 3 minutes). Bring your completed “Field Guides” in preparation of your midterm submission of your “Museum Ethnography.”

Readings/Viewings for today:

- Videos: “Stories”: Ola Faleti, “Embrace” and Liz Brindley, “Geometry” (St. Olaf College)

Upcoming Assignment:

- “Field Guide & Museum Ethnography” (due March 4)—bring placecard with name of museum for your desk; prepare 1 minute (timed and practiced!) summary of your findings to present in a lightning round.
- Reminder: No class on Monday. Instructor is available for individual conferences.

Class 14 (M March 2): No Class—Individual Conferences

- No class. Instructor available for individual meetings.

Class 15 (W March 4): Pop-Up Museum of Museums!

Come prepared to share your “Field Guides & Museum Ethnographies” through a class pop-up museum! The classroom will transform back into a “Living Room” as you share your expeditions and findings.

Upcoming Assignment:

- Exhibit 6: “Dime-store Alchemy” (M March 16)
- “Shoebox Museum” and Exhibit #7: “Handmade Museums” (both due W March 18)
- “Imaginary Exhibition” (video due M April 20; written paper due M April 27)

SPRING BREAK

Class 16 (M March 16): Dime-Store Alchemy

This week begins the second half of the semester and invites us to reflect upon different museum-models alongside the forms and contents of our readings and writings. How do visitors “read” the spaces and the objects in varied collections? What narratives and poetics arise? Our focus moves beyond institutional museums to informal collections: from neighborhood detritus to oral histories, television bytes to city planning tracts, even cluttered stuff in drawers. How do these collections figure in our conception of writing and the museum? What happens when we scavenge through texts to discover hidden gems? As we begin the second half of the semester, revisit your Commonplace Book with an eye toward your developing imaginary exhibition. How do objects in your developing “Shoebox Museum” shift through a different disciplinary or curatorial lens?

Readings/Viewings for today:

- Charles Simic, *Dime-Store Alchemy*
- Elizabeth Harris, “A Gallery of Scavenged Art”
- Artistic boxes: by Joseph Cornell, Marcel Duchamp’s *Box in a Valise*, Fluxkits
- J. Michael Kennedy, “Turkish Writer Opens Museum Based on Novel” (about Orhan Pamuk)
- Carolina A. Miranda, “Bert Rodriguez is turning his apartment into a museum—with him in it”

Upcoming Assignments:

- Exhibit #7: “Handmade Museums” (due W March 18)
- Bring “Shoebox Museum” to next class (due W March 18)

Class 17 (W March 18): Handmade Museums

Bring your “Shoebox Museum” to class to consider what narratives are implied within your developing collection. How can objects and their rearrangement fuel ways of thinking about a larger exhibition, essay, or other form of writing and ways of thinking? How do aspects of objects, like materiality and context and sequence, shift the focus of an observer? Focusing on writings that cross genres to navigate personal and cultural patterns of collecting, we will tease out some possibilities for your own developing projects.

Readings/Viewings for today:

- Brenda Coultas, “The Bowery Project” from *A Handmade Museum*
- Sandra Cisneros, “Little Miracles, Kept Promises”
- Claudia Rankine, from *Don’t Let Me Be Lonely* (includes “Museum of Emotions”)
- Paho Mann, “Junk Boxes & Medicine Cabinets”

Upcoming Assignment:

- Commonplace Book: include Questions for Maureen Stanton (due M March 23)
- Exhibit #8: “Curator’s Statement” (due W March 25)

Class 18 (M March 23): Traveling Museums

Today we travel virtually through Skype to meet an author who writes about collectors and collections. Maureen Stanton’s latest book, *Killer Stuff and Tons of Money*, follows an antique dealer through the fascinating subculture of flea markets, family attics, antique shops, Sotheby’s auctions, and roadside stands to scavenge among keepsakes and knickknacks to fathom hidden gems. Read Maureen’s writing, then ask the author questions. How does one person’s trash become someone else’s treasure? Where do we find alternative museum spaces and other types of curated collections? How does collecting shape the life of a collector? When does collecting go to extremes? As

you continue to work on your imaginary exhibition, think about larger related historic trends. What literature and critical works might you cite to bolster your developing “Curator’s Statement”?

Readings/Viewings for today:

- Maureen Stanton, from *Killer Stuff and Tons of Money*

Upcoming Assignment:

- Continue work on Exhibit #8: “Curator’s Statement” (due W March 25)
- Exhibit #9: “Traces: Etymologies & Keywords” (due W March 25)
- Video proof of Imaginary Exhibition (due M March 30)

Class 19 (W March 25): Virtual Museums (*Location:* Dubin classroom, Lauinger Library—1st floor—156)

This class meets with our liaison, Melissa Van Vuuren, in the Dubin classroom in Lauinger Library to explore virtual museums and personalized platforms (e.g., MyMuseum). As you think about curating an imaginary exhibition, bring selected key words to generate related content. What content do you expect to find, and what surprises you? What is the role of these platforms that invite the public to curate items from their collections? Beyond the benefit of access, are you creating new knowledge or rearranging what’s already there? How do you move beyond the gadget? We also will discuss copyright, permissions, creative commons, and public domain. Come prepared today to share your developing “Curator’s Statement,” as you develop your exhibition concept.

Readings/Viewings for today:

- Ellen Gamerman, “Everybody’s An Art Curator” (*Wall Street Journal*)
- Sample exhibition statement: “In the Holocene” from MIT’s List Center
- Peruse: MyMuseum platforms
- Peruse: Electronic Literature (and ELO), e.g. Shelley Jackson, *My Body: A Wunderkammern*

Upcoming assignment:

- Commonplace Book: include Questions for Nikoo Yahyazadeh
- Bring video prototype for final exhibition (due M March 30)

Class 20 (M March 30): Augmenting Realities (*Location:* New Media Center, Library, 1st floor—124)

Today we return to the Gelardin New Media Center to share your video drafts and troubleshoot issues with multimedia specialist, Nikoo Yahyazadeh. Be prepared to show your video prototypes, to ask questions about content and form, and to learn how to smooth over rough patches and maximize your presentation. This video should capture the essence of your imaginary exhibit (lasting 3 minutes, akin to the style of Pecha Kucha) to highlight your theme and some representative objects.

Readings/Viewings for today:

- Review LibGuide video production/editing resources

Upcoming Assignment:

- Exhibit #10: “Curating Place: A Meditation” (due M April 8)
- No class meeting on W April 1; write a meditation on “curating place.”

Class 21 (W April 1): Placing Collections (No class meeting—write a meditation on “curating place”)

What does it mean to curate place? Today we read a collection of writings rooted in different geographies. What markers of place arise, and how does that influence systems of classification and curation? What are ways to navigate place: on foot, by bus or train or car, and how else? If a place like Virginia or Nebraska or Saskatchewan could be embodied as a museum, what objects would lie at the heart of each collection? Who would curate its story? Think about previous readings and museum texts (captions, curator’s and artist’s statements, brochures,

art catalogues, maps, and other materials), and consider what stories lie behind the stories or between the lines. In lieu of meeting as a class, reflect and write a meditation on “curating place.”

Readings/Viewings for today:

- Barry Lopez, “Winter Count 1973: Geese, They Flew Over a Storm”
- Ron Hansen, “Nebraska”
- Andrew Wilson, “Hamish Fulton: Walking Journey”
- Travis MacDonald, “Rat Housing in Middle Virginia”
- W.G. Sebald, from *The Rings of Saturn*
- Skim: “Texts in Sebald’s *The Rings of Saturn*” (*Public Domain Review*)

Upcoming Assignment:

- Exhibit #10: “Curating Place” (due W April 8)
- Watch Video (due W April 8): *Rape of Europa* (on reserve at Lauinger Library and available online, including Netflix streaming)
- Send an e-card from the MoMA to celebrate this (or whatever!) holiday: <http://www.moma.org/ecards/>

Class 22 (W April 8): Museums as Mausoleums?

Having watched the documentary, *Rape of Europa*, today we will think about the comparison of museums to mausoleums. According to Theodor Adorno, the German word *museal* (“museumlike”) describes “objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying” (“Valéry Proust Museum”). Are museums merely repositories for dead artifacts, or how does their value live beyond their era of creation, the lifetime of the artist, or even beyond their own destruction? What assumptions do we make about collections when viewed from our own cultural reference? How do museums implicate us in their cultural framework? How do we move beyond being consumers to confront and curate difficult knowledge?

Readings/Viewings for today:

- Video: *Rape of Europa*
- Alice Friman, “At the Holocaust Museum”
- Carolyn Forché, “The Colonel”
- Review of Jonathan Lear, *Ethics in the Face of Radical Destruction*

Upcoming Assignments:

- Commonplace Book: include Questions for Lisa Strong (due M April 13)

Class 23 (M April 13): Possessors & Provenance

Today we welcome the director of Georgetown’s graduate program in Museum Studies, Lisa Strong, who will help us delve more deeply into the past lives of objects, issues around provenance, and curating difficult knowledge. Provenance is the origin and source of an object and history of its subsequent owners. How have museums changed in their approach to provenance? What is the role of museum studies in settings ranging from the museum to the university to the art market to international law? What professions are available to someone interested in museums?

Readings/Viewings:

- Adam Gopnik, “Stones and Bones”
- Sherman Alexie, “On the Amtrak from Boston to New York City”
- Zora Neale Hurston, “What White Publishers Won’t Print”
- “Romancing the Stones” and “Elgin Marbles” (from *New York Times* and *The Daily Beast*)

Upcoming Assignment:

- Videos of Imaginary Exhibitions! (due M April 20)

Class 24 (W April 15): Imaginary Museums (Gretchen @ Knox College in Illinois)

In anticipation of your imaginary exhibitions, today we immerse in imaginary collections: of cities, of species, and more. Consider different strategies for making narrative and poetic leaps between reality and imagination. What museums are present or implied in these literary works? From these excerpts, how do you perceive larger narrative architectures at work? What compels you about what you don't know about these collections? How do you envision museums of the future? As you plan your imaginary exhibition, will you include any imaginary objects—and how would you represent what exists only in the realm of imagination?

Readings/Viewings for today:

- Italo Calvino, from *Invisible Cities*
- Jorge Luis Borges, from *Book of Imaginary Beings*
- H.G. Wells, from *The Time Machine*

Upcoming Assignment:

- FINAL PROJECT DUE—PLEASE NOTE: Upload your video presentation to the requested site by Monday, April 20, at 9 a.m.—don't wait until the last minute because videos can take hours to load. The written part of the project will be due at the beginning of class on Monday, April 27.

Class 25 (M April 20): Video Exhibitions: A Film Fest!

Come witness a film fest of imaginary exhibitions! Be prepared to field questions about your exhibits.

Class 26 (W April 22): Video Exhibitions: A Film Fest!

Come witness a film fest of imaginary exhibitions! Be prepared to field questions about your exhibits.

Class 27 (M April 27): Video Exhibitions: A Film Fest!

Come witness a film fest of imaginary exhibitions! Be prepared to field questions about your exhibits.

NOTES:

What is a **commonplace book**? A commonplace book is a modern variation of an Early Modern form of writing from reading. Choose a notebook or journal to collect quotations and other ideas. Both in and outside of class, fill these pages with notes, questions, quotations from readings, analyses, thoughts, descriptions, dreams—any ideas that you find stimulating in relation to writing and the museum. Add diagrams or drawings, doodle, paste photographs or postcards or newspaper clippings, and consider juxtapositions as they occur, whether purposefully or as happy accidents. Always bring this notebook to class. *You may be asked to present your method of collecting in your Commonplace Book at any point in the semester, so you are required have it with you at every class.*

“Building a museum case and filling it with types of mussels is one way of knowing mussels; but on the shore, a mussel leads to a crab or a curious stone, which leads to another thing and eventually leads back to mussels, which is another and perhaps a more far-reaching way to know mussels. The sea that always seems like a metaphor, but one that is always moving, cannot be fixed, like a heart that is like a tongue that is like a mystery that is like a story that is like a border that is like something altogether different and like everything at once. One thing leads to another, and this is the treasure that always runs through your fingers and never runs out.”

~ Rebecca Solnit, from *Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscapes for Politics*