

ANTHROPOLOGY IN AND OF MUSEUMS
PROGRAM IN MUSEUM STUDIES
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
SPRING 2016

Course Description:

This course considers “the museum” as an object of ethnographic inquiry, examining it as a social institution embedded in a broader field of cultural heritage that is perpetually under negotiation. We reflect on how museum principles of classification, practices of collection and exhibition, uptake of media, technology, and archiving have influenced the ways in which knowledge has been formed, presented, and represented; *and* interrogate the role of museums as significant social actors in broad anthropological debates on power, materiality, value, representation, culture, nationalism, circulation, aesthetics, science, history, and “new” technologies. The museum is never simply a repository of arts, cultures, histories, or scientific knowledges, but also a site of tremendous creativity and a field of complex social relations.

Relying on case studies as a springboard for discussion of broader theoretical interventions, this course is structured according to four overlapping themes. We begin with the history of museums and the emergence of anthropology, thinking about what it means to preserve, collect, perform, and exhibit “culture.” Secondly, we examine the different forms and functions of materiality embedded within the museum. What are the ‘objects’ that make up the museum and what are the different relationships and functions of them both within institutions as well as what kind of ‘knowledge’ they offer and also produce? We will consider these different genre’s of materiality with particular focus on that which was produced about Native peoples and cultures in the US as these provide a rich site for understanding the changing technology as well as the different networks of meaning making that they are embedded within. The final part of the course provides a consideration of the forms of re-assemblage and relationality that museums are currently embedded within especially through the digital return of cultural heritage. Throughout the semester, we will consider the strategies and tools through which museums care for and produce understandings of tangible artifacts (photographs, scientific specimens, artworks, archaeological remnants) and inspire reconsideration of collections, archives, personal memories, and national identities. Finally, we will maintain a materialist approach to developments in digital technologies, asking why and how digital innovations in this field are shifting the terms of access to and control of significant objects and stories.

This class also includes a semester long digital research project called *Shadow Lines*. In this project we collectively work to digitally map and visualize the relationships between researchers, collectors, collections and source communities. In this project we are actively making a free, open source, decolonial digital archive that can support Native American and First Nations communities’ gain better access to their cultural heritage collections.

Dr Jane Anderson
Assistant Professor
Anthropology and Museum Studies
New York University
Phone: [212 998 8397](tel:2129988397)

www.jane-anderson.info
www.localcontexts.org