

## Books Briefly Noted\*

Complementing *Museum Anthropology Review*'s "Book Reviews" section, "Books Briefly Noted" offers non-evaluative overviews of recent books in the fields of museum anthropology and interdisciplinary material culture studies.

### ***Body Art.* Nicholas Thomas. London: Thames and Hudson. 2014. 208 pp.**

Nicholas Thomas, Director of the University of Cambridge's Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, provides the latest addition to the World of Art series with this survey of body art. In each chapter, Thomas uses select examples—primarily tattooing—to explore body art as it relates to humanity, society, theatricality, beauty, criminality, and identity around the world. Body art, in this survey, is the purposeful "temporary or permanent aesthetic modification to the body" (11), but this definition does not include daily "self-decoration" (14). *Body Art* contains 186 images of historical and contemporary examples including Tahitian tattoos as de-sanctification, nudism as a political statement in Germany, Harlem drag balls as minority empowerment, foot binding as part of the ideal of elegance in China, American rapper Tupac Shakur's "Thug life" and other gang-related tattoos as criminal deviance, and the cross-cultural exchange apparent in contemporary Samoan tattoos. [JEJ]

### ***Ownership and Appropriation.* Veronica Strang and Mark Busse, eds. Oxford: Berg. 2011. 299 pp.**

This book is an ASA (Association of Social Anthropologists) volume born from an international conference seeking to re-envision anthropological investigations of and preoccupation with property by focusing on the "notions and acts of owning and appropriating which precede, underwrite and inform property relations" (1). The resulting anthology includes 17 authors and 13 chapters, organized into three major subsections: Subjects, Personhood and Peoplehood; Materiality and Immateriality; and Ownership as Social Communication.

Some chapters explore concepts primarily through location-specific ethnographic data from places including Micronesia, Indonesia, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Nepal, and Ireland. Others utilize cross-cultural, large-scale data to address policy and practice across a continent, like Australia, or hemisphere, like Latin America. Many challenge bounded ideas of place, culture, and identity and look at the fluidity of the relationships and understandings between owners, the appropriated, and the appropriators. [KS]

---

\* These editorially reviewed contributions were accepted for publication in *Museum Anthropology Review* between June 1, 2014 and August 12, 2015. The work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. Contributors to this compilation are Jessica Evans Jain [JEJ], Kate Schramm [KS], Kanya Wattanagun [KW], and Sarah M. Hatcher [SMH].

***The Spirit of Things: Materiality and Religious Diversity in Southeast Asia.* Julius Bautista, ed. Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications. 2012. 220 pp.**

The diversity of objects of worship in Southeast Asia is not merely reflective of the pluralistic and multifaceted religiosity of the peoples in this part of the world. It is also indicative of the dynamic process in which religions and belief traditions interact with different agents in the age of capitalism and globalization. *The Spirit of Things* is a collection of essays delineating how materiality provides a clue to the interplay between religious faith and the surrounding influences in the secular domains of life. How does the commodification of religious objects and the flow of these objects in the market affect people's religiosity? How does the State and its homogenizing project invoke the increased variability in the way people materialize and individualize their faiths? How does materiality demarcates boundary between competing religious ideologies? These questions are addressed by the essays in *The Spirit of Things*, all of which indicate that an insightful outlook on religious practice requires a meticulous analysis of the relation between materiality and faith. [KW]

***The Objects of Experience.* Elizabeth Woods and Kiersten F. Latham. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2014. 165 pp.**

Asking questions like, “What kind of experiences can objects evoke?” (19) museum scholars Elizabeth Woods and Kiersten Latham explore objects within the museum setting and how museum professionals might alter their thinking about objects to create different visitor experiences. The first of the three sections offers the opportunity to consider the “Object Knowledge Framework” and the interdisciplinary fields that informed it, while the second section explores the relationships between people and objects, how objects and memories are intertwined, and how artifacts can inspire feelings of reverence. The final section includes maxims such as “Do Cool Things” (119) and “Start with an End in Mind” (158), which are unscored with both exercises to encourage execution of the maxims and brief examples of what they look like in action. [SMH]

***Attention and Value.* Stephen Bitgood. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2013. 213 pp.**

Understanding the concept of visitor attention and its implications are at the heart of this book. From the start, Bitgood emphatically states “*Learning is a byproduct of attention.* Focusing exclusively on the learning processes is putting the horse before the cart. To understand learning we must first understand attention” (original emphasis,10). His breakdown of the various historical studies done around visitor attention and concepts like “museum fatigue” provide helpful background before moving into an examination of contemporary studies (including his own) on value and motivation. Not content to simply present studies and discussion, Bitgood offers suggestions on capturing and holding visitor attention through various exhibit techniques and strategies. Appendix B., Checklist for Managing Visitor Attention, may hold particular interest to exhibit teams. [SMH]

***Museums and Public Value.* Carol A. Scott, ed. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2013. 189 pp.**

Mark Moore published *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government* in 1995. In the edited volume *Museums and Public Value: Creating Sustainable Futures*, Carol A. Scott leads a variety of museum practitioners, leaders, and scholars in an examination of what public value is, why it must be considered, and what it looks like in practice. By including museums from around the world the point is made that public value is not a uniquely European or uniquely American concept—the idea that funding authorities must get something of public value out of their investment of resources is global. Scott’s opening acknowledges the challenges of applying this model, which was created for governmental agencies, while also acknowledging the good that has come out of its adoption. Looking at public value and how it can be thought about takes many forms. Chapter 3, *Creating Public Value through Intentional Planning* discusses a form of leadership that fosters a culture of inquiry while also allowing the mission of the museum to be met and public value to be articulated. Case studies in Section Two provide evidence that public value can be created and what that process looks like. [SMH]

***The Museum Experience Revisited.* John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2013. 416 pp.**

This updated version of the *Museum Experience* builds upon the concepts introduced in the now 20+ year old original. In this volume, leading scholars in the field of free-choice learning, John H. Falk, and Lynn D. Dierking introduce the contextual model of learning. Comprised of the personal, sociocultural, and physical contexts, the model provides a lens through which to examine the complexities that surround museum audiences and how the choices that institutions make, or do not make, affect the visitor experience, and ultimately the life of the museum. The book looks at known issues like the demographics of museum goers (chapter 3) and the extent to which visitors read labels (chapter 5) as well as making a call for change and acknowledging the challenges of the 21st century (chapter 12). Dierking and Falk use their own research, which spans more than 25 years, as well as the growing body of knowledge in visitor behavior, choices, and learning to substantiate their thinking. Each chapter ends with a summary as well as suggestions for practitioners; extensive references and notes conclude the book. [SMH]

***Creativity in Museum Practice.* Linda Norris and Rainey Tisdale. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2014. 247 pp.**

Opening with a *Spinal Tap* reference, Norris and Tisdale, liken creativity to Tufnel’s magic amp. Creativity is what makes our work as museum professionals sound and reverberate through public life. It captures audiences, old and new, and invigorates staffs, veteran or newbie. But what is creativity, and how do we engage with it and make it part of our everyday work? The introduction answers the first portion of that question, while subsequent chapters attempt to help us answer the rest. Whether you read those chapters sequentially or in a more random fashion (an idea the authors validate in their introduction) you will find not only stories from museum

practitioners, identified with callout boxes titled “Your Creative Practice,” but also low or no-cost activities and experiments designed to encourage your own creativity. [SMH]

***Interpretive Planning for Museums Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2013. 176 pp.***

Rather than being an exhaustive how-to, this book seeks to explore the need for interpretive planning and suggest ways that it might be achieved. Through the use of what the authors term “The Triangle,” they outline outputs and outcomes that should be considered during the course of the planning process. Chapter 2 helpfully provides an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of interpretation and learning theories while subsequent chapters focus on what interpretive planning is, why planners must approach projects with visitor perspectives in mind, and an exploration of why both demographic and psychographic information needs to be considered. [SMH]

***Museums and Higher Education Working Together. Anne Boddington, Jos Boys, and Catherine Speight, eds. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2013. 209 pp.***

While based on research in museums and institutions of higher education (HE) in the United Kingdom, elements of this edited volume should speak to educators in both museums and universities worldwide. Organized into four parts, Policy, Pedagogies and Possibilities; Strategic Alliances, Knowledge Exchange and Opportunities; Curating, Collecting and Creative Practices and Expectations, Assumptions and Obstructions, the chapters reflect on potentially unexpected topics like audience attitudes as well as obvious ideas like internships. The final chapter of the book, “Object Based Learning: A Powerful Pedagogy for Higher Education” should be of interest to professors and instructors in HEs across disciplines. It provides a compelling case for the use of objects in the classroom, for doing so is at the heart of engaged and active learning—modalities that typically result in better retention, higher interest, and more fun. [SMH]

***Museums and Silent Objects: Designing Effective Exhibitions. Francesca Monti and Suzanne Keene. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2013. 333 pp.***

Museum objects within an exhibit are not evenly viewed. Some receive ample attention and praise, while others are ignored. These latter objects are referred to as “silent objects” by Monti and Keene. Attempting to bring greater voices to these silent objects, the authors engaged in both cross-disciplinary and theoretical research as well as in-gallery studies. Helpfully illustrated, the introduction explores the four-stage model for visitor interaction as well as providing an explanation for the fields of study from which the authors drew: architecture, design, cognitive science, and museology among others. Subsequent chapters in part one explore these ideas in greater depth while part two, From Concepts to Practice, explores how the authors studied three London museums. (The appendices provide copies of the worksheets used in the studies.) These studies allowed for the development of tools that were examined in part three, while part four considers a successful museum exhibition and what made it so. [SMH]

***Museums, Health and Well Being.* Helen Chatterjee and Guy Noble. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2013. 146 pp.**

Recognizing that “a track record of delivering social and learning outcomes shows that museums are effective agents of social change” (123). One aspect of social change includes empowering people to care for their own health or providing direct or indirect services to those experiencing health challenges. Written by London-based scholars Helen Chatterjee and Guy Noble, the book suggests that in the changing economic and political climates currently impacting health care in the UK museums should be prepared to take a greater role in promoting and providing health. Citing a wide variety of both qualitative and quantitative studies in museology, learning sciences, neuropsychology, epidemiology, public health, public policy, and numerous other fields, the book proposes that the work of museums in the realm of healthcare can take many forms. While drawing on a wealth of existing information regarding the interplay between culture/arts and health, the authors also call attention to the fact that there is still room for research in this field. [SMH]