Anthropology, Museums and the Body: Lessons From an Experimental Teaching Environment

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Abstract

With increased interests in solving complex problems through interdisciplinary research—how best can museums use this approach to address critical social issues? In order to answer this question, an interdisciplinary group of curators, artists and students worked together at the Smithsonian Institution to create an experimental teaching environment to rethink the disciplinary boundaries around the study of the human body. Our aim was to use a range of anthropological, art and science collections and readings to undertake the issues of race, gender, genetics, and disability, and the historic inequities resulting from colonialism. We discuss this endeavor, including the public program we developed—the Face Cast Lab—as well as lessons learned about who affects change through this type of museum-based teaching.

Key words anthropology, social issues, the body, interdisciplinary teaching, museum ethics

Introduction

Lecture halls and classroom environments often remove us and our students from our subjects of study and, therefore, from the hands-on experiences we most highly value in our own research and work. In addition, when teaching about critical contemporary subjects—such as colonial histories and debates about who controls whose body—we need to ask how can we find strategies that help integrate these contemporary theories and practices into the institutions that, in part, still embody privileged power systems, such as museums?

To address these questions, a group of us designed an experimental pedagogical environment that merged museum collections and interdisciplinary teaching to test new ways of thinking about anthropological subjects. The course, titled 'Anthropology, Museums and the Body' emerged from this process and was co-taught by an anthropologist and an artist for a group of nine George Washington University (GWU) graduate students. We outline here the purpose of this experimental and collaborative teaching environment that incorporated curators from numerous divisions and disciplines across the Smithsonian Institution, and spanned three museums—the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH), the National Museum of American History (NMAH) and the National Portrait Gallery (NPG). This written analysis is intentionally co-authored with the participating graduate students. Our collaborative approach helped to reflect how, as a collective experimental group, everyone was instrumental in pioneering diverse ways of thinking across and unique synergies between these collections and disciplines.

What became apparent from this experiment was the significant potential of an interdisciplinary approach that combines anthropology, social theory, collections, and collaborative art practices to forge new areas of social research and practice, and moreover, the importance of its application in the museum setting. Topics that benefit from intersectional theories and interdisciplinary thinking—such as ancient DNA, disability, race and gender studies, historic trauma and health studies, and issues of defining and materializing identity—occupy positions at the highly charged edges where social science, art, and the humanities meet. With the students pushing into new areas and working across disciplines using social science methods, art, and creative writing, as a group, we worked to forge a productive collaborative

learning community. By employing a multimethod and multimedia approach with observation, interpretation and public engagement, we also identified hands-on strategies to actively engage with key issues that we believed would affect the future of interdisciplinary and multimodal approaches to social science research and teaching in museums.

We present here the origins and impetus of this pedagogical experiment, followed by an outline of the teaching structure—including the specific multimethod platform for the course, as well as a description of the interactive public program we developed for the NMNH that was based on specific aspects of the course. The students share their work here to ground the themes that were developed during the class, as well as to reflect on the application of lessons learned from the course and how these were employed in people's lives beyond the classroom.

Conception: The Origins of an Experimental Teaching Group

The initial stages of this experimental teaching project can be traced back to an encounter between the project leaders: Gwyneira Isaac, an anthropology curator from the NMNH, and Kate Clark, an artist who directs the public art project Parkeology. These two met in 2016 while they were independently working on a collection of anthropological face casts housed at the San Diego Museum of Man. The early twentieth century collections in San Diego contain numerous portrait busts and casts of Native Americans, African Americans, and Americans of European descent made by the anthropologist Aleš Hrdlička (1869-1943) for the Panama California Exposition of 1915. Having met via these collections, they initiated discussions about the ethical curation of data sets in museums stemming from human bodies, changing ideas about the display of racial categories and the relationship between specimens and personhood, as well as between the disciplines of anthropology and art. Isaac was exploring issues arising from the scientific duplications of bodies within museums, including face casts, mannequins, and models. Clark was producing collaborative live events and permanent installations that excavated and reinterpreted lesser known social histories within museums and public spaces in Balboa Park in San Diego—the park originally built to house the Panama California Exposition of 1915.[1]

From our ongoing conversations and collaborations, we determined that many of the critical social issues of our time were evident in museums and their stewardship of the human body. This was especially clear in areas of contemporary research and included ancient DNA, race, disability and identity studies, as well as human rights concerns like the disposition and treatment of human remains. While these topics do appear on syllabi and are discussed in the classroom, they do not necessarily benefit from the hands-on approach afforded by museum environments and community-based collaborative research. As a result, we determined the need for a graduate course that would explore and integrate ideas across a range of museums, using the concept of the body as a vehicle to traverse diverse collections, operating as a catalyst towards the exploration and production of new bodies of knowledge that would take into account ideas of agency and personhood, as well as social ethics.

This specific combination of interdisciplinary and museum-based approaches envisioned a teaching environment that would help us to relate and compare different knowledge systems spanning across the range of museums at the Smithsonian that represent science, history and art. Our methodology benefited from the work of Hallam (2016) for *Anatomy Museum* and Chatterjee (2008) on object-based-learning. By also building on Boddington, Boys and Speight (2013) on partnerships between museums and higher education, we embarked on developing an experimental pedagogical environment that could activate collections through multiple teaching practices. Once brought together, these various methods could better reflect the emerging pathways through which researchers and society have begun to remobilize these concepts in light of the current political issues that challenge ideas about control over racialized or gendered bodies. Additionally, we understood that 'new hybrid models and practices, new kinds of dialogue' were critical in building partnerships between museums and universities, and that this model would better address students' and the visiting public's growing expectation of the social relevance of scientific studies (Boddington, Boys and Speight 2013: 169).

Our resulting course and syllabus paid close attention to the history of research on humans and the relationship of this to museums, as well as the technologies used to study

human bodies alongside the data sets that now reside in archives and museums. We drew on a wide range of disciplinary lenses and theories from anthropology, contemporary art, medical science, queer and affective theories, and archaeology, to name a few. Authors chosen for the readings were selected to represent a wide and diverse range of backgrounds and minority perspectives. We employed these lenses to explore each theme according to both historic and new theoretical perspectives, providing a platform to analyze how social theory, anthropology and practice have changed and why, and how is this has been exhibited in the museum context over time.

We also sought to challenge the contradiction between the fluid nature of interdisciplinary research and the fixed categories presented in the museum world, such as science, art and culture. We asked the question, if museums are valued as permanent repositories that continue to play a critical role in sorting the world into identifiable categories, what role do they now have in interdisciplinary research, as well as in addressing contemporary social issues? If we think about their history, there is the common understanding that, throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, scientific cabinets and museums helped to create, shape and reflect disciplines like botany, anthropology, history and art (Impey and Macgreggor 1985; Foucault 1994; Isaac 2018). Today, collections curated according to the research interests of each discipline materializes and reproduces disciplinary objectives, boundaries and, as a result, disciplinary 'objects'. The conceptual and physical architecture of museums as repositories for collections, therefore, creates spaces and practices that reiterate and concretize these now well-established ways of thinking and doing.

Research today, however, is increasingly more interdisciplinary and cross-cutting and merges a diverse range of subjects as a means to tackle issues outside of or beyond the traditional disciplines. How then can curators and museums foster interdisciplinary research when their collections and research divisions are structured through distinct classifications and are divided according to pre-existing disciplinary boundaries, and often in separate museums? When considering the important relationship between museums, education, and universities, what role can museums play in pioneering interdisciplinary teaching? Along the same lines of thought, how does a museum bring into the public arena the complexities of the research behind the scenes and animate it in ways that address the social issues of the day?

To address these questions, we the tested the use of a creative platform that encouraged us to explore topics in anthropology and social history that were not necessarily addressed in the current models for teaching. Building this synergy, however, required a uniquely structured multimethod approach that supported students in their explorations of the course topics through a combination of social science analysis, art, collections research, journaling and creative writing. It also motivated us to work together as a team to create an educational outreach program for the general public at the NMNH. In the following sections, we outline the structure and theoretical impetus for the course, as well as the topics we explored and how these were applied within the public program.

The Skeleton: The Mechanics of the Course

Our goal with 'Anthropology, Museums and the Body' was to structure a course that would enable students to traverse and respond to different disciplines and sub-disciplines, all of which were seen as augmenting interdisciplinary informed anthropological thinking. This included bridging cultural and physical anthropology, introducing social theory, medical material culture theory, visual culture, museum studies, American history, and art. The central concepts we explored included anthropological theories of the body (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987; Haraway 2004; Sen 2009; Lock 2017), social theory (Sekula 1986; Foucault 1994; Mignolo 2009; Weisman and Keenan 2012), embodiment (Feldman 2006; Isaac 2010; McChesney and Charley 2011), as well as examining and evaluating sensory and affect theory (Sedgewick 2002; Edwards et al 2006; Howes 2014; Rutherford 2016). We incorporated critical theory on material culture, performance and the production of field notes and data to facilitate students in their exploration of subjects beyond their textual-based lives within museums and archives (Ingold 2007; Engelke 2008; Pink 2011; Schneider 2014).

To integrate these various veins of critical theory, we devised four theme-based nodes

that engaged museum collections through the concept of the body: 1) Taxonomy; 2) Medicalized Models; 3) Forensics, DNA and Rematerializing the Body, 4) Sensory Collections and Affective Artifacts. Each node brought together case studies through which we could move between the individuals and contexts from which the artifacts originated, and the ideas and actors that had transformed them into museum objects. Each topic was also engaged via three teaching modes: collections visits with curators, seminars, and workshops. We also encouraged cross-disciplinary practice, so that students from art and anthropology had the opportunity to communicate their research through mediums native and foreign to their practice, including writing, art, data analysis, performance, and video.

In the Taxonomy section, we introduced ideas about the classification and management of data about the human body within archives and museums (Eastwood 2010; Waits 2016). We used anthropometric photographs from the 1860s -1930s (Isaac 1997; Willmot 2005; Sera–Shriar 2015), as well as primary sources, such as correspondence from Hrdlička during his organizing of the physical anthropology exhibits for the Panama Exposition, all of which are housed in the National Anthropological Archives (NAA). This established the initial discipline-based context from which to explore how people over time had created and responded to categorizations of race, as well as theories and interventions designed to subvert these. We included the artwork of the Native American artist Erica Lord, who uses anthropological archives to explore the politics of identity. We found that the students affected by the anthropometric photographs became further interested in engaging with the colonial contexts that had produced images of bodies through scientific lenses. One of the students, David Gassett, looked at the ways in which individuals who had been photographed had subverted this lens—such as through smiling. Discussions around these objects resulted in the students conducting research on affect theory, as well as exploring their own personal narratives about body politics.

The Medicalized Models section was led by Katherine Ott, the curator and historian for the division of Medicine and Science at the NMAH. The aim here was to move beyond organizing principles and to explore ideas about restructuring or fixing the body, as seen through the lens of medicine and technology (Ott 2013; Martinez 2014; Serlin and Hickman 2017). Ott focused on interventions and the history of eugenics, and how collections in museums provide an important collaborative space in which people can use objects to gain permission to talk about difficult topics related to bodies and health. She also noted that museums often privilege lexism (word-based learning), including the relationship between what and how objects communicate, versus verbal descriptions, and that it is important to understand how accessing object knowledge is often tacit and extra-lingual. The objects she used for the class evoked suppressed histories, such as the treatment of inmates in asylums, or disability-based collections. One student, Emily Somberg, responded after this visit that she 'found it cathartic that objects can really give people permission to talk. Although objects themselves cannot speak, they can prompt us to disrupt the deepest of silences.'[2]

Through their encounters with artifacts such as an artificial heart, trephination kits, and a straitjacket, potent emotive responses surfaced in the group. Drawing upon sensory information gleaned from interacting directly with the artifacts, students were prompted to write from the perspective of an object itself, such as contraband keys from an asylum. This exercise produced distinct and compelling narratives demonstrating the importance of choosing between first, second or third person-voice in contextualizing and conveying the agency of the object/actor and the relationship between the two. The response by Delaney Cummings is shared here, written as an intimate letter to a key created by a ward of a mental hospital (Appendix A). The workshop component also allowed research, writing and artwork to be shared with the group. Several presentations and work purposely played with and subverted expected genres of gender and science, such as Amanda Quink's embroidered prosthesis limb that transformed a highly technological invention for a male athlete into a feminine object of domestic care (Fig 1). By keeping the back side of the embroidery visible—an unusual practice, as this is often considered too untidy to show—she also addressed her interest in sharing the creation process as an analogy to the construction of social networks between objects and people. Exploring the fractured values and meanings of one object, Heather Ashe wrote an essay that deconstructed a twentieth century child's clubfoot brace from the perspectives of a parent, a manufacturer, and a collections manager. Projects such as these helped students explore different vantage

Fig 1. Student Project

points, not only for the artifacts itself, but for the people that were involved in their production, and therefore, through a variety of specialist or empathetic lenses. Multimedia and multivocal, these works required equal amounts of academic rigor and innovation to underpin the critical explorations of method, form, and imagination.

The Forensics and DNA and Rematerializing the Body section introduced ideas about deconstructing and re-materializing the body to explore both individual and collective human histories, and how these are materialized through specific discipline-based methodologies (Braun 2007; Naghshineh et al 2008; Crossland 2009; Krmpotich, Fontein and Harries 2010). We explored DNA analysis and emerging social theory about genetics and race (Haraway 2004; El-Haj 2007; Weisman 2013; M'Charek 2013; Moreno-Mayar 2018). This section included working with Logan Kistler, the NMNH bioarchaeology curator, who introduced ancient DNA research (O'Rourke, Hayes and Carlyle 2010), and discussed ethical considerations that are at play within research today and the role of museums in developing appropriate guidelines and protocol to meet the needs of Indigenous communities and researchers (See Appendix B). In addition, Kistler led the students through a guided tour of his archaeogenomics lab, where they gained hands-on experience of a highly controlled lab environment designed to prevent contamination of genomic data (Fig 2).

Figure 2. Researcher with students in Archaegenomics Lab

Region	Ancestry	Family Tree	My Heritage
Europe West	51%	28%	62.6%
Scandinavia	30%	51%	1.5%
Southeast Europe	1%	14%	
British Isles	9%	6%	13%
North American (Indian)	0%	1%	
Finnish	0%	<1%	2%
Iberian	2%	0%	0%
Great Britain	<1%	<1%	15.3%

Fig 3. Student project DNA table. Heather Ashe: My Aunt's (father's sister) results from three different DNA sites (Same sample)

Figure 4. Student final project

Students used the subsequent workshop component to examine the new social territories introduced by DNA testing kits, such as 23andMe—which is one of the current companies in the United States providing at-home DNA testing kits. This company provides their customers with an analysis of their family genetic genealogy and ethnic make-up based on the at-home DNA tests they return to the lab. Students' projects considered how this new technology and customer products requires changes in anthropological research and theories about the ways in which ethnicity and race are being defined and, as Kelsey Adams suggested, 'consumed and embodied through the commercialization of DNA testing.'[3] Students compared and contrasted their personal reflections on identity—either passed down through family narrative or mapped out by 23andMe. For example, Heather Ashe worked with a relative who had her DNA tested by multiple labs to show the discrepancies between the results (Fig 3). Also inspired by the topic of DNA and multiple interpretations of DNA (personal, family, scientific, health, etc.), Francine Margolis created a self-portrait looking at these different lenses as both revealing and obscuring her sense of self (Fig. 4). Hannah Padulo created a family photo album using the aesthetics of a homemade scrapbook which outlined a disquieting but informative outline of her family's history of heredity, health issues and mortality as a familiar means to record and transfer this information to future generations.

The final section of the course, Sensory Collections and Affective Artifacts, focused on theories about embodiment, sensory and affect theory, and investigated how these could be applied to the study of collections, such as anthropological face casts (Feldman 2006; Fear Segal 2013). We arranged an in-depth collection visit to the physical anthropology casts led by the NMNH physical anthropology collections specialist, Dave Hunt, and the Smithsonian research fellow, Larry Taylor. Since 2004, Taylor has been working on the Native American casts and busts housed at the NMNH, documenting these as a means of reconnecting descendants with the plaster replicas of their ancestors, one of whom is his wife's family line. As one of the students remarked about this project:

> [Taylor] has been a driving force in not only opening discussions with tribes about the busts and casts, but also advocating to have reproductions recreated to give to the tribes… By reaching out about the busts and casts, [he] has sparked relationships between the museum and tribes that can be used for consultation on… the future of the collection.[4]

During this seminar, we discussed emerging debates in anthropology, art and museums about the control/display of the human body and how identity politics are handled differently in each museum context, whether it be art, science or history. Students visited and wrote about the exhibit at the National Portrait Gallery (NPG), *UnSeen,* in which the artist Ken Gonzales Day used NMNH anthropological face casts to look at the hidden history of the scientific study of Native Americans. Regarding applying affect theory, one student wrote: 'the most useful part of affect theory, however, may be that it allows us to take as legitimate evidence not only the emotions and senses of the subjects of our studies, but also of our own experiences.'[5]

The Flesh: The *Face Cast Lab* and Sensory Learning

'Who decided hands-on was only for kids? Hands on learning isn't something society should expect people to outgrow.' [6]

Often in courses relating to art production and museums, projects are treated as rehearsal space. Through this safety net, we try to engender experimentation and play, yet this can also have an insulating effect. Classroom discussions about engaging with a 'public' or a 'community' tend towards the general, and at worst, the presumptuous. In order to counteract this drift towards suppositional simulation, we organized the design and execution of a live public event as one of the central features of our course.

What materialized was the *Face Cast Lab*: a day-long event at Q?rius—the education lab at the NMNH focused on 'tween and teen' audiences, their parents and teachers.[7] Here members of the public witnessed the processes involved in making face casts: six volunteers from the NMNH were cast using modern techniques, involving a coating of alginate to form a

Figure 5. Face Cast Lab Participant survey

face mold and, once this is removed, plaster is used to fill the mold and create the cast. The *Lab* was also set up to engage the public around examples of historic casts from the collections and provide the opportunity to handle new casts that had been made by the GW students of each other. A survey was handed out that encouraged visitors to share their thoughts about how they wanted to be remembered in the future and how they related to their own bodies (Fig 5). These were transposed alongside museum accession forms that illustrated the kinds of information often collected from human subjects, such as age, gender and ethnicity and/or race— rather than the personal narratives solicited by the survey.

The *Face Cast Lab* was purposely held in the glass-enclosed visible lab located in the Q?rius education center, so that visitors could observe the casting taking place (Fig 6 and 7). This was to evoke both the idea of visible storage (i.e. the inside-out-approach to museums), as well as 'work-in-progress' labs that museums use with educational programming, like fossil preparation where visitors watch scientists at work. To provide a counterpoint to this voyeuristic lens on museum staff at work, we encouraged visiting student groups and participants from the public to enter the lab and have a more intimate experience with the casting process and ask questions at each station about the processes involved. This included having them don blue medical booties in order to evoke a clinical workspace, much like the archaeogenomics lab. Wearing blue lab coats to signify an experimental yet professional atmosphere, the students worked in shifts as technicians, interpreters, registrars, plaster mixers, and documentarians. Over the course of four hours, the *Lab* team facilitated the 250+ visitors and student groups who filtered in and out of the lab space. As it was a weekday afternoon, the majority of the visitors were schoolchildren between the ages of eight and sixteen accompanied by their teachers, and tourists visiting the Smithsonian during their trip to Washington DC.

Prior to holding the *Lab*, the GW students had discussions about designing how the public would experience the sensory and esthetic aspects of the *Face Cast Lab*. For example, when someone is having their face cast and is sitting with a heavy layer of alginate and plaster on their face, the only sense to which they have direct access is hearing: their ability to move, see, and speak is limited for about thirty minutes. The students decided to play music in order to heighten this aural experience. A debate arose surrounding what kind of music and, after much dispute, one student raised the point that the purpose of this project was to bring focus to individual experience, as compared to the prescriptive modes of nineteenth and twentieth century anthropology, which had objectified the individuals being cast as 'types', and not as individuals. They proposed and the group agreed that each person being cast should select their own music in order to create an individualized experience. As a result, one of their roles for the *Face Cast Lab* became the DJ, facilitating each persons' music requests, ranging from Cardi B to Miles Davis and Mozart.

Fig 6. Visitors at Face Cast Lab

Figure 7. Parkeology technician casting Smithsonian Research Fellow

During our preparation for the *Lab*, another challenging aspect included the development of the required highly accessible middle and high school level interpretive material for the Q?rius public program. There is nothing straightforward, however, about the history of the face cast collection at NMNH. This particularly includes the problematic historic power dynamics between scientists and subjects who may not have fully understood the implications or uses of their casts, as well as a lack of information collected about how these individuals felt about being cast—whether they were delegates of their tribe, or prisoners of war. When developing a 500-word summary for the public, students experienced the potential risk of defusing this painful social history in the name of accessibility. An intense discussion ensued that revealed the problems that curators and exhibit staff encounter when writing texts that must communicate sensitive topics to a general non-specialist youth audience. The subsequent text written by the students was circulated to museum specialists at the NMNH, who requested to have the term 'eugenics' removed, as it was seen to evoke a particular history that was beyond what could be communicated within the Q?rius format. After many revisions, the final text used the phrase: 'understanding population dynamics through a lens of racial hierarchy was common amongst scientists during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but this is seen as problematic today.'[8] Through this exercise, students experienced first-hand the process of developing challenging material within a highly public national museum context. As one student, Kelsey Adams reflected, 'prior to today, I did not know the difficulty of creating content for exhibits. Every word was carefully scrutinized and the class was careful to present information to the public.'[9] This experience paralleled our discussions during the class about who controls the interpretation of contested subjects in museum spaces, at the same time, allowing students to bring it into practice within a public arena.

Another theme within the course was the use of collaborative modes when working with community members, especially when addressing museum collections that relate to their personal or community's history. It is accepted practice that anthropologists, artists, or museums must consider these collaborative modes when shaping projects—and not use consultation with communities as a follow-up method (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2008).[10] For community engagement and in developing the live event, the students worked with the visiting Smithsonian research fellow, Larry Talyor, who is currently working to make these face casts and busts available to Native American communities. As summarized by one of the students,

> [Taylor] conceptualized each bust as a [person] subject first, and only secondly as a representation of something larger (colonial relations, plaster casting, historical Native/US relations, etc.). This shift amounts not just to a change in disciplinary outlook, but rather a fundamentally different way of ordering the world, a different knowledge system.[11]

Due to Taylor's outreach efforts to Kiowa family members, we were fortunate to connect with descendants of the casts as part of the *Face Cast Lab* program. One of the Kiowa family members who contacted us early in the development of the *Lab,* was the researcher and journalist, Tristan Ahtone, who is a descendant and great-grandson to Beah-ko—a Kiowa warrior who was cast while he was a prisoner of war from 1875-1878 at Ft. Marion, Florida. Alongside his father, Jeral Ahtone, Tristan visited the NMNH cast collections accompanied by anthropology curators during Clark and Isaac's preparations for the course. Following conversations that highlighted his shared interests in educating the public about this difficult history, he agreed to give a presentation for the *Lab*. During his talk, he maintained what could be viewed as a journalists' objective approach to storytelling, though he did not shy away from using the term 'eugenics' when discussing the methods of nineteenth and early twentieth century anthropologists. He also spoke to his ambivalent relationship with the cast of his great-grandfather, feeling at once fortunate that the plaster replica existed so that he could look upon the face of his ancestor, and on the other hand, conflicted knowing the circumstances in which his great-grandfather's cast was created. Ahtone also spoke about his role as a researcher descended from a lineage of family members with advanced degrees, and that he believed there was, most likely, positive multi-generational effects from Beah-ko's subsequent educational tenure at the Carlisle Indian Industrial Schools. It is too easy—he argued—to oversimplify influences and actors only to the 'good' or 'bad' categories when examining these charged social histories. Ambiguity was part of

this legacy. He suggested that programs such as the *Face Cast Lab* could start conversations in national and public spaces in order to unpack the diverse perspectives that make up these painful and problematic institutionally interred histories.

Muscle Memory: Moving Beyond the Syllabus

By introducing contemporary topics into established curricula, instructors can initiate student engagement and critical thinking within the classroom environment. Our aim, however, was to achieve a deeper level of action. We wanted to affect not only students' thinking, but also their behavior—muscle memory if you will—that could last beyond the classroom and within the students' post-graduate professional lives, as well as within the museum through public programming, such as the *Face Cast Lab*.

We initiated this by challenging students during the course to articulate their views from a range of vantages and mediums. As mentioned previously, prompts asked students to keep journals using the first-person perspective, as well as to write to artifacts they encountered in museum collections, or write from the perspective of the objects themselves. Although these projects first brought discomfort, they highlighted the importance of voice and perspective within anthropological studies and writing and yielded an abundance of boundary exploration. As a result, students created richly detailed and imaginative work, inspired by firsthand encounters with artifacts. As Delaney Cummings notes, 'whether it was someone interacting with a leg brace, a person interacting with the bust of their ancestor, or someone using their DNA in one way or another . . . this course surrounded the idea of people and their relationships with artifacts.'[12]

While use of first-person perspective and reflexivity as an analytical tool has been taken up within various areas of cultural anthropology (Karp and Lavine 1991; Marcus and Fischer 1999), it is still regarded cautiously within physical anthropology and bioarchaeology—specific subdisciplines with which we were attempting to bridge. Gassett reflected upon this challenge in his contemplations about the course:

> For much of the beginning of the class, I had severe difficulty figuring out how to combine the theoretical knowledge we read about in articles or learned about in class, with my personal experiences of our subject matter. I found myself vacillating between the two, unable to find a productive common ground. Exercises like writing letters to objects or writing from the object's perspective, however, slowly allowed me to become more comfortable with the style. As I became more comfortable . . . I was able to examine more deeply my own reasons, reactions, and vantage points as an anthropologist studying this material. It helped me be more cognizant of not only my personal and theoretical blind spots, but also the unique perspectives and critiques I could bring to various topics.[13]

What began as a sense of discomfort for this student—as a traditionally trained anthropologist—ultimately transitioned into a fine-grained approach that extended beyond their own experience to other research subjects, who had initially appeared to be entirely separate through differences of time, background, and experience (Appendix C). The subjective position of the viewer or author also became central to discussions. Another student, Francine Margolis, noted her discomfort at being part of a primarily Anglo-American and privileged group that was looking at anthropometric photographs housed in a collection curated primarily by Anglo-Americans.[14] Additional students acknowledged this dynamic within their journaling, noting that one difference and point of interest was that the student and curatorial group was now 90% female—a significant shift in the terrain and gender dynamics from when Aleš Hrdlička had been working during the development of anthropology as a professional discipline. Yet the continued issue of who has access to view and interpret archives drove Emily Somberg to dedicate their final project to this topic. Written in the unassuming type-case common to microfiche, Somberg wrote a letter resembling an elegy that explored how archives contain fragments of people's past lives that require vigorous and diverse perspectives and engagement, and ultimately, recognition of difference, in order to contextualize these within both their past and present settings. In describing this project, Somberg wrote: 'this letter is an acknowledgement of the ambiguity of the busts' meanings, identities, and intersections. It is a "draft" to emphasize that

discussions of who and how to acknowledge objects, histories, and communities is a necessarily ongoing and never-ending process.'[15] Her letter, which ended with the words, 'I acknowledge you' was inserted back into the archives microfiche collection, as an intervention specimen left 'in-situ' for future visitors to encounter and reflect upon among the otherwise customary archival documents (Fig 8).
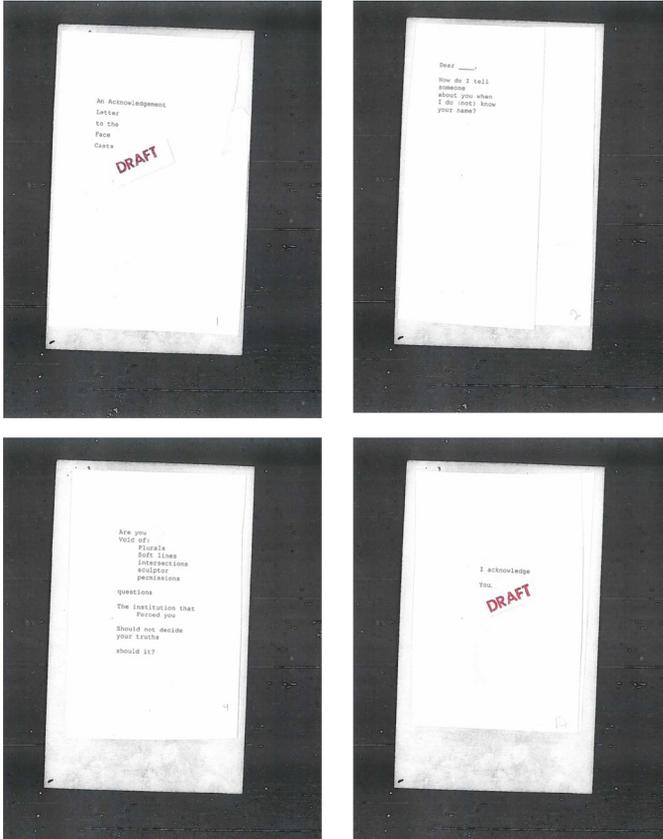

Figure 8. Student final project

Alongside the goal of helping students to think from different vantage points, we facilitated the group in exploring the benefits and challenges of collaboration. In particular, the *Face Cast Lab* proved that, when given latitude and agency and when properly supported, the students rose to the challenge of working competently as a team. As Katie Benz wrote in her course journal, 'everyone was willing to help one another throughout the workshop . . . I would have loved to have done more of this type of hands-on work in other classes, besides getting real museum experience, I got to interact more with my peers in the program.'[16]

A key outcome of teaching this course has been the development of a road map—or if we continue our analogies of the body—an anatomy or framework for interdisciplinary museum-based pedagogy for partnerships between museums and higher education. Our framework specifically focused on enriching graduate teaching and public engagement through issues of race, disability, gender and colonialism, and followed five recommended principles:

1. Interdisciplinary teaching strategies that work *across diverse collections* and curatorial divisions, disciplines that allow cross-semination of varied expertise and perspectives, thereby facilitating intersectional and innovative ways of thinking and producing knowledge.

2. Teaching methods that include *exploration of voice* (first, second and third-person) and how these affect and convey relationships between people and objects. This exercise builds awareness about the role of specific kinds of relationships that shape knowledge production and interpretation.

3. *Multimodal* responses to coursework—readings, lectures and collection visits—that allow for a range of approaches, such as writing, sketching, photography, sound, etc. This encourages students to situate themselves according to previously unfamiliar analytical frames, as well as how these affect disciplinary-based knowledge production and communication.

4. *Collaboration with community members* who have interests in the care, interpretation and disposition of collections involved in the course. Community experts need to be included in the preparation and development of the course, syllabus and public programming. Their inclusion in collection visits and public programs help to expand the kinds of narratives shared about social issues, as well as to locate these in a public space, such as a museum.

5. Developing *public programs* as part of the coursework and in partnerships between students, staff and community members helps realize interdisciplinary museum-based pedagogy and experiences within a public arena. This includes identifying and targeting specific audiences, as well as tracking subsequent feedback.

The next phase of our project is to develop additional partnerships with individuals and institutions interested in using this road map, and for us to learn how it materializes according to each educational and museum context. This phase includes developing a week-long teaching workshop at the Smithsonian with faculty, staff and community members to increase our understanding of the potential areas and conflicts presented by sensitive or problematic collections, as well as the ethics involved once the course is applied in other contexts.

The Postmortem: Developing Shared Bodies of Knowledge

The underlying principle of this course was to use interdisciplinary and hands-on object-based-learning to grapple with the diversity of politics surrounding the human body in the museum context—who controls whose body, as well as how and why meanings are created and have changed over time. As museums have become repositories for the anthropological, historical, political and artistic collections and interpretations of the body, they provide a productive space to position and review a range of historical practices and disciplines that have shaped how human bodies are studied, classified, replicated, extracted and exhibited. This context also allowed us to analyze these topics in light of the current political issues that challenge ideas about control over racialized or gendered bodies.

Challenges we faced included navigating the contemporary institutional politics at the Smithsonian, especially those concerning who has the power to represent whose body, both in terms of the curation of collections, as well as in public programming and exhibits. Topics such as racialized science that were being raised in exhibits such *UnSeen* at the NPG were difficult to navigate at Q?rius, the NMNH public education lab. We believe this was most likely due to the expected age-specific educational genres in science museums. Additionally, whereas an art museum might be able to embark on a critique of scientific practices, a science museum appeared to have less assumed latitude in this area—a topic we hope to explore more in the future workshops. We considered how one possible explanation for this was a form of self-censoring, where internal museum staff perspectives may be more conservative due to their awareness of the consequences of institutional change, as opposed to the external perspectives that benefit from and are, at the same time, less sympathetic due to their distance from internal politics and concerns. Other challenges included mediating between the seemingly fixed categories and disciplines of museums and the contemporary theoretical approaches outside the museum that are changing perceptions about disciplinary boundaries. We learned, however, that museums—while still subdivided into specific categories/disciplines—are able to provide diverse kinds of objects that are useful for re-materializing and therefore, realizing new theoretical areas that which, in return, open students up to new ways of thinking through this kind of interdisciplinary pedagogical exercise. Last, but not least, we found that co-producing public programs with community members and education staff provided a critical experience in building group rapport, applying class topics in a public space, thereby magnifying student agency in community engagement.

When thinking about how we might critically engage with difficult and painful histories as well as challenging social issues, risk is inherent. Projects may fail and attempts at finding new methods may be unnecessarily upbraided. Yet by developing a syllabus and experimental class structure that provided a supportive platform for open-ended creative research and co-production, we found surprisingly innovative and worthwhile relationships. These were formed not only amongst the students, but between faculty, museum practitioners, collections managers, and community members. Participants latterly commented that—although the exercise was to

explore and expand disciplinary boundaries and institutional museum practices—the greatest transformation was within the group as a whole, especially in regard to how it demonstrated to us the value of a diverse but inclusive research community.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1   See Parkeology's website: https://www.parkeology.org/, accessed Sept. 21, 2018.

2   Emily Somberg, class journal, February 2018.

3   Kelsey Adams, class journal, March 2018.

4   Hannah Padulo, class journal, March 2018.

5   David Gassett, final project, May 2018.

6   Delaney Cummings, class journal, April 2018.

7   See Q'Rius website at https://naturalhistory.si.edu/exhibits/qrius-coralyn-w-whitney-science-education-center (accessed July 2, 2019).

8   NMNH Q?Rius public program brochure for Face Cast Lab, April 2018.

9   Kelsey Adams, class journal, March 2018.

10   School of Advanced Research (SAR) guidelines for collaboration between museums and communities. https://sarweb.org/guidelinesforcollaboration/pdf/museum-community-guidelines.pdf, accessed Sept 21, 2018.

11   David Gassett, class journal April 2018.

12   Delaney Cummings, personal communication following the class, August 2018.

13   David Gassett, personal communication following the class, June 2018.

14   Francine Margolis, class journal April 2018.

15   Emily Somberg, final project May 2018.

16   Katie Benz, personal communication following the class, August 2018.

APPENDIX A

DELANEY CUMMINGS WORKSHOP 1 RESPONSE

Dear Owner of the Contraband Key:

Thank you very much letting me, my classmates, and my professors examine your key at the National Museum of American History on Wednesday. Your key was one of many objects we examined, but it stood out to me amongst all of the other artifacts. I appreciate your key because it probably has an interesting story behind it. I can imagine that since you were in a hospital for people who identify as neurodiverse, most people probably did not encourage or welcome you to tell your personal story. I would love to hear your story though because the stories of those who were always told to be quiet are in my opinion the most important stories to be told.

I have a few questions for you. Do you mind answering them? Please understand that I am asking these questions to become more educated and to learn more about you and your key, and never to judge you or make fun. Was this key for your hospital room, or another room in the hospital? Did you decorate the key because you wanted to hide what it really meant, or did you decorate it for another reason? If so, what was the reason? How long did you live in the hospital? Can I ask why you were sent there, and who exactly sent you there? What were the conditions like? Did you ever leave the hospital? Did you get to take this key with you when you left? What did you do with your key after you were in the hospital? Where did you go after the hospital? Do you think hospitals like the one you stayed in will improve in the future? I appreciate the time you take to answer my questions.

Sincerely, Delaney

APPENDIX B

ANTHROPOLOGY SAMPLING REVIEW COMMITTEE POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

Updated June 1, 2018

ADDITIONAL PROCEDURES FOR DNA/RNA SAMPLING REQUESTS

Unless otherwise specified by the Sampling Review Committee, all researchers requesting to sample objects to analyze nucleic acids (DNA, RNA, epigenetic data, etc.) must adhere to the following standard procedures for data availability. If compliance with these procedures is problematic, researchers must provide detailed justification for special data handling with supporting information as appropriate, and should provide an alternative strategy for data management and long-term curation in the Data Management Plan (see below).

1. All raw data from high-throughput sequencing experiments must be deposited to the NCBI Sequence Read Archive (SRA) or EBI European Nucleotide Archive (ENA). Uploaded files must be complete raw reads: fastq files or equivalent un-modified base call files from sequencing platforms. Default adapter trimming during base calling (or platform-specific equivalent) is the only allowable modification to uploaded reads. We encourage release of any other data types such as read alignments and variant call summaries that would be useful to researchers, but complete raw reads must be made available in all cases. Read metadata should include SI accession numbers, and researchers should provide nucleotide archive accession details to collections staff to be linked to the SI anthropology collections database. It is advised to consult with collections staff at the time of data archiving.

2. Sanger-sequenced fragments must be deposited in GenBank.

3. Data deposition should happen at the time of publication, including to preprint servers. However, data must be released within 3 years after the sampling date regardless of publication status. Data can be restricted under Ft. Lauderdale and Toronto Agreement guidelines to reserve the first right to publish for an additional 1 year. Extensions to these deadlines may be requested from the Sampling Review Committee but are not guaranteed, and researchers should present a clear plan for timely data analysis and release in the Data Management Plan (see below). The requirement to report results and progress to the Department of Anthropology within 1 year after sampling also applies to DNA/RNA requests, in addition to the 3 year data deposition requirement.

4. If SI Anthropology collections are analyzed in publications along with non-SI samples, modern or ancient, ALL of them are subject to the data release requirements in 1 and 2 above (the non-SI samples are not under the 3-year limit). This is necessary for full replicability of studies for which SI collections were destructively sampled.

5. Raw data must be backed up at all times until stable archiving on SRA or ENA to ensure that data generated from destructive sampling are safe from accidental loss. Backup should be either on a stable commercial platform (e.g. Amazon AWS, Dropbox, Google Cloud Storage) or on a physical backup in a separate location from primary data storage. For example, a redundant server in the same room is not sufficient, but a second-site server or external hard drive that is regularly checked for data integrity are sufficient. Institutional IT and high-performance computing departments can usually help provide options for data backup if needed.

6. In addition to the sampling request form and project proposal, requestors must submit a brief (<300 word) data management plan outlining the specific strategy and timeline of data collection, backup, and release. Please include the intended data repository as well as the intended data backup mechanism including type (commercial cloud storage or physical redundant storage).

7. As with all sampling requests, the Sampling Review Committee will consider nucleic acid sampling requests strictly in context of ethical requirements. These may include consultation with and approval from descendant communities and institutional review boards, when applicable. Researchers should provide supporting documents as appropriate.

APPENDIX C

DAVID GASSET'S EXCERPTS FROM FINAL PAPER

I was flipping through a folder in the National Anthropological Archives when I came upon two photographs of an Osage young man, Charles McDougan, who is part of a series of anthropometric photographs taken for racial science. Frank Mic̆ka created them to record measurements and details of his subjects to help in the creation of plaster busts of their heads and shoulders for Curator, Aleš Hrdlička, of the United States National Museum (USNM) to exhibit at the Panama-California Exposition. All of these photographs are exactingly posed, one with the subject straight-on and one in profile, devoid of unnecessary movement or even expression. They were meant to be purely physical, objective descriptions of their subjects, mimetic representations of bodies.

In one photograph, McDougan stares directly at me, while in the other he faces sideways, but in either one, the ghost of a smile haunts his face—a hint of tightness in his right cheek and the merest narrowing of twinkling eyes. It is an arresting look given the folder in which it resides. This enigmatic portrait of Charles McDougan's smile, however, is something else. It is a unique and individual act, a performance of his personality that continues to leave traces to his identity outside of a measured body and acts as a potential symbol of his agency in a colonial situation. It is a smile that I, as a Biracial man, can recognize.

Growing up Biracial, I have become accustomed to ascribing to multiple and even hybrid identities as I shift between various contexts and scenarios. More off-putting, however, are these moments when my identity is chosen for me. Suddenly, my identity is frozen around some trait that someone else has decided is all-important and all-encompassing, almost always my "Black" traits chosen by the largely White circles I've grown up in. It is always uncomfortable and always disempowering, as I rarely feel I have the social capital to refuse or perhaps that my refusal would eliminate me from that group. So, I play along. That smile, however, has become my way of pushing back, of positioning myself as the only one who truly knows everyone's hidden motivations or biases and so regaining some of my social power, my agency. Through that smile I negotiate, as best as I can, my own agency in the fraught realm of racial power relations.

Of course, everything from our personal histories to the exact power relations involved, our races, our relationships to photography, and the myriad other changes that come from such a large gap in time and space differ. Some things, however, do resonate across them. Both Charles and I had our photographs taken in situations of unequal power relations and both of us performed some small act that although seemingly irrelevant departs from the norm of that situation; the rest of the subjects in the anthropometric series maintain the expressionless pose As an act of genre subversion, then, we can think of Charles' smile as part of his bodypolitics. His smile is only one example of a vast variety of bodily performances that enact his relationship with not just the physical but also social worlds around him. It directly negotiates his experience of and response to the material, intellectual, and emotional components of colonialism. In this way, Charles' smile functions as a decolonizing technology, helping him to negotiate the oppressive dynamics of a colonial system. Its power, however, comes not from the fact that it was a carefully thought-out mental construct but rather that it was a lived, sensory performance, an affective experience. This does not diminish its status as an act of agency, though, but rather enhances it. In line with body-politics, epistemic disobedience, and the logics of ghostly matters, we have to recognize these everyday slight actions as the significant components of the lives of colonial subjects and as such performances of their agency. Although hidden behind the grand, recorded gestures of either resistance or cooperation, these emotional and affective bodily cues are the true signs of the complex negotiations of an always complicated past social world.

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Gwyneira Isaac (D.Phil. Oxford University) is the Curator of North American Ethnology at the National Museum of Natural History at the Smithsonian Institution. Her research looks at how culturally different knowledge systems intersect through social institutions like anthropological and tribal museums. Central to this research is her book, Mediating Knowledges: Origins of a Museum for the Zuni People (2007), which examines the challenges faced by Zunis who had to negotiate the differences between Zuni and Anglo-American approaches to knowledge. Currently, she is researching the history of face casting in the 19th and 20th century and the intersecting histories with which these now engage—especially where descendant communities, cultural and physical anthropologists and museums must reconcile the complex legacies of these duplicated bodies.

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