



Journal of Documentation

Third-party classification: Exposing likeness between satellites dishes, troll figurines and mass-produced bedspreads in a Romanian local museum

Cheryl Klimaszewski

Article information:

To cite this document:

Cheryl Klimaszewski , (2016), "Third-party classification", Journal of Documentation, Vol. 72 Iss 1 pp. 156 - 171

Permanent link to this document:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JD-02-2015-0030>

Downloaded on: 10 November 2016, At: 20:35 (PT)

References: this document contains references to 29 other documents.

To copy this document: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

The fulltext of this document has been downloaded 115 times since 2016*

Users who downloaded this article also downloaded:

(2016), "Borrowing tools from the public library", Journal of Documentation, Vol. 72 Iss 1 pp. 140-155
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JD-01-2015-0010>

(2016), "Reading as dialogical document work: possibilities for Library and Information Science", Journal of Documentation, Vol. 72 Iss 1 pp. 127-139
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JD-01-2015-0019>

Access to this document was granted through an Emerald subscription provided by emerald-srm:563821 []

For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit www.emeraldinsight.com/authors for more information.

About Emerald www.emeraldinsight.com

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

*Related content and download information correct at time of download.

Third-party classification

Exposing likeness between satellites dishes, troll figurines and mass-produced bedspreads in a Romanian local museum

Cheryl Klimaszewski

Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to foreground the ways in which material objects emerged as a kind of classificatory force during a visit to a local museum in rural Romania. It considers ways in which classification both influences and is influenced by the spatio-temporal assemblages of things.

Design/methodology/approach – Visual and textual ethnographic field data collected to document the museum tour are interpreted using a phenomenological approach. Jane Bennett's agency of assemblage is used to contextualize these instants of interruption within the space/time arrangements of objects within the museum.

Findings – The "marginal" category of translator commentary emerged during data coding to reveal "instants of interruption." These instants exhibited classificatory tendencies that revealed relationships between seemingly disparate elements. As such, the translator acted as a kind of third-party classificatory force that illuminated how relationships between physical assemblages of things in the world can act as a force for new knowledge production.

Originality/value – This paper contributes to the literature on social classification and document theory by revealing how alternative approaches to classification can open up additional avenues for research and knowledge discovery.

Keywords Romania, Classification, Museums, Ethnography, Document theory, Phenomenology

Paper type Research paper

This paper considers the relationship between human and non-human classificatory activities that emerged during a recent visit to a local museum[1] in Romania. Where classification is central to library and information science (LIS), it is assumed to be something that people do. The tendency to categorize and classify is fundamental to human understanding (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003) yet it takes place often unintentionally, remaining invisible to us (Bowker and Star, 2000). Here, I suggest another kind of classification that remains invisible to us: the classificatory activities of things. Outside the processes of human thought and activity, non-human things, actual physical objects, work to shape human classification and understanding by virtue of how things assemble in the world. Jane Bennett (2010) characterizes these activities as an agency of assemblage, the constitutive force that emanates from things as they come together. In this paper, the agency of assemblage is observed through the analysis of data grouped into the coding classification "translator commentary," a category originally intended to distance these findings from the "more meaningful" research data contained in the words and actions of the local museum proprietors.



Data were collected in May, 2014, when I toured one local museum, a private collection of traditional peasant objects arranged and presented within several buildings on one family's property in the village of Horodnic de Jos, Romania. My translator during this visit was a young male Romanian University student native to the region. Though the translator said he was unaware of what a Romanian local museum was, it became apparent during the museum tour that he held certain expectations of what this museum experience should be. These impressions came to comprise the coding category "translator commentary." Most generally, this category includes comments that came at points where "the new" appeared in close proximity to "the old" and where "modern" and "traditional" objects assembled within the same physical space. This proximity of objects expressed a sense of agency that challenged the human-constructed categories of how things should be within this museum space.

This paper examines this problem of proximity through the analysis of data in the coding category "translator commentary" along with photographs that recorded the assemblage of objects that spurred narrative commentary. A phenomenological approach operationalizes these moments as instants of interruption that represent a kind of opening of time/space that both transcend and challenge the human classifications of museum, old/new, traditional/modern and even past/present/future. A review of literature situates this study in the context of pertinent works on classification and document theory. Methodology and methods are outlined and findings are presented in the context of the museum tour, employing elements of Geertz's (1973/2000) thick description that complement an ethnographic approach to data collection. The concluding discussion suggests that paying closer attention to non-traditional classificatory activities, such as those implied by a third-party or implicit in assemblages of objects, has the potential to reveal different kinds of knowledge production happening in the local museum and elsewhere, expanding opportunities for research and knowledge discovery. First, the phenomenon of the Romanian local museum is introduced, including a discussion of how the classification of local museums as "museum" alone has a tendency to overshadow the less-traditional classificatory activities, such as those foregrounded here, happening in local museums.

Theory and background

The phenomenon of the local museum, whereby private citizens collect and exhibit traditional objects within their homes and/or on their family properties, has become increasingly common in villages and small towns in Romania since 2000, if not before (Mihăilescu, 2009; Mihalache, 2009). Objects presented in these museums most illustrate the way of life of the peasant, a national symbol of Romania. The genesis of collecting for many museum makers often begins when she sees others in the community discarding traditional household objects or handicrafts. This activity seems to be as much a coming to terms with the communist legacy of systemization in Romania that threatened to bulldoze villages and move inhabitants to industrialized town centers (a threat stymied by the 1989 revolution) as it is a coming to terms with the great socio-economic changes Romanians are experiencing as the country embraces a free-market economy and democratic government (for instance, entering the European Union in 2007). Collecting and maintaining traditional objects is one way individuals and families attempt to construct and maintain continuities between past and future. Presenting one's collection as a public museum is an entrepreneurial act undertaken as much to preserve elements of cultural heritage for the next generation as it to connect to existing tourist routes, introducing tourists the finer points of peasant life.

In 2008, 24 local museums were brought together under the Network of Private Village Collections and Ethnographic museums in Romania (*Rețeaua Colecțiilor și Muzeelor Etnografice Sătești Particulare din România – ReCoMEsPaR*) an association created by that country's Museum of the Romanian Peasant (*Muzeul Țăranului Român*) (ReComESPaR, 2013). One goal of the association is to support and foster legitimization of these local museums (Mihăilescu, 2009). For continuity's sake, here, as they are elsewhere in the literature (see, e.g. Klimaszewski and Nyce, 2014; Mateescu, 2009; Mihăilescu, 2009; Mihalache, 2009), these new institutions will be referred to collectively as local museums though their official names vary. The most common designations for each of the 24 association members include: house museum (*casa-muzeu*), ethnographic collection (*colecția etnografică*) or museum (*muzeu*), sometimes adding qualifiers such as village museum (*muzeul satului*), living museum (*muzeul-viu*) or museum of ethnography and religion (*muzeul etnografic și religios*). However, these names are lacking mainly because no one term adequately grasps the nuances of what these local museums are (Mateescu, 2009; Mihăilescu, 2009). Other names that have been suggested to describe this phenomenon include family museums, personal museums, author museums, eco- or community museums, unofficial museums and even “could-be” museums (see Klimaszewski and Nyce, 2014; Mateescu, 2009; Mihăilescu, 2009). The one constant in this continuum is the inclusion of the term (often initially self-applied) museum – a classification which most strongly emphasizes the idea that local museums represent a place of collection, a place where things from the past come together for redemption and preservation.

Given this emphasis, it is not surprising that the “museum” notion of an assemblage of objects stands out over the other kinds of collecting and assembling happening within the space of local museums. However, it is important to emphasize that one hallmark of local museums is that they most often exist in very close proximity to (if they do not share) the everyday living space of their creators. In this way, local museums stand in stark contrast to the idea of the museum as a pristine, climate-controlled, temple-like space where objects are cloistered from everyday experience. The local museum is not a controlled space where curators and other professionals exhibit a kind of mastery over objects; instead collection objects mingle with the non-museum objects, those things of everyday life, and this proximity opens up a different space of possibilities.

In the local museum, it will be shown, traditional notions of classification break down, allowing things to assemble in ways that expose the “efficacy of objects in excess of the human meanings, designs or purposes” (Bennett, 2010, p. 20). Bennett's (2010) agency of assemblage requires one to dispense with the idea that humans have mastery over things. In the spirit of Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2007), the space of the social is flattened so that humans and things exist on the same level, though Bennett's (2010) work is chosen because of its focus on the ways in which objects exist with purpose in their own right. In Bennett's (2010) terms, the agency of each assemblage becomes apparent through consideration of its “distinctive history of formation” as well as its “finite lifespan” (p. 24). This means that evidence of the agency of things is found through the investigation of how, why, where, when and for how long objects assemble. The local museum is, in effect, made up of myriad assemblages of objects, the history and lifespan of each showing traces of the ways in which proximity can signal how these things have been classified, unclassified, declassified and reclassified. Human beings are not the only ones subject to the rich experience of subjectivity, with objects or things relegated to the realm of mere commodities. As others have recognized, things as well as people have rich experiential life stories to tell (Appadurai, 1988; Douglas and Isherwood, 1996).

Literature review

This work connects to a selection of LIS literature dealing with classification (Mai, 2011) and document theory (Briet, 2006; Frohmann, 2009; Grenersen, 2012; Latham, 2012; Lund, 2010; Olsen *et al.*, 2012) that foreground the tension between reductionist and emergent tendencies with LIS as a field. One example of this tension can be found in Jens-Erik Mai's (2011) critique of the "modernity of classification." Mai (2011) encourages us to move from the tradition of classification-as-ontology to that of classification-as-epistemology. His work suggests that the goal of classification must move from being about laying down boundaries that attempt to delineate an objective reality, and instead must emerge as a process that reflects the malleability and plurality of knowledge comprising multiple truths and multiple realities. This idea has historical precedent, for instance in Briet's (1951/2006) description of the two tendencies in documentation: as increased abstraction and "algebraic schematization" found in classification vs the "massive extension of 'substitutes for lived experiences'" (p. 31) found in non-book materials like films and photographs. Briet's description suggests that non-book objects have the potential to provide different kinds of experiences, leading to expanded opportunities for understanding and meaning-making, as opposed to attempting to capture and preserve only those that are deemed most essential. Mai (2011) describes as "disquieting" (p. 717) this separation between how we interpret meaning and how we construct classification schemes. His description emphasizes the need for epistemology-based classification processes that are malleable and fluid, that question and challenge classificatory boundaries at the same time these boundaries are (re)inscribed.

As classification embraces epistemology, document theory reconsiders the ontology of material objects, echoing Bennett's (2010) notion of the efficacy of objects. This requires us to reframe "information-as-thing" (Buckland, 1991) from within the assumption that that things, by their nature, are informative – and not only to human beings, but also within and between themselves. Latham's (2012) discussion of objects as documents then becomes self-evident. As with classification-as-epistemology, so, too, must documentation processes emphasize a document's multiple ways of being as opposed to its singularity (Frohmann, 2009). Objects are no longer seen as singular beings, untethered, awaiting human experience to endow them with meaning; instead, objects are in motion, assembling, de-assembling and reassembling across space and time. A thing's "document-ness" arises as it is both "physical and mentally configured as well as socially understood" (Olsen *et al.*, 2012, p. 113) within a continuum of experiences (Latham, 2012) and where "social" is inclusive of material things (as in Appadurai, 1988 and Latour, 2007). Lund (2010) describes the document as comprising "the human agents, the means, the modes and finally the resulting documents" (p. 745). Conceptualizing documents in this way also illustrates the need for a more holistic approach to documents and their production, one that also focusses on the "inter-documentary" existence of documents (Briet, 2006, p. 16; also Olsen *et al.*, 2012).

In order to embrace the ontology of objects while simultaneously enacting classification-as-epistemology, in essence overcoming classification's "modernity" (Mai, 2011), is to reconsider classification as an inclusive process of negotiating boundaries, as opposed to erecting them. This is sometimes implicit in the language used to describe classification and document institutions. For instance, Mai (2011) suggests that "a robust theory of classification is one that does not separate between how things really are and people's cognitive constructions of how things are" (p. 717, emphasis added). In another instance, Grenersen (2012) describes how document institutions "must cross the borders between the texts (the library), artifacts

(the museum), files (the archive) and performance (the theatre/classroom)” (p. 130, emphasis added). This language supports the idea of classification as a process negotiating liminal and interstitial spaces in which tensions within and around human understanding often arise. In this way, classification emerges within the experiential exchange that occurs as we confront various assemblages, such as those found in a local museum. As the discussion of Bennett’s work has emphasized, material objects by nature resist such boundaries in the ways they assemble, often without regard to human-produced orders. This study provides one example of how we can study the experience of objects-as-they-are and objects-as-we-think-they-should-be as, perhaps, one post-modern breed of classificatory activity.

Methodology

This analysis employs a phenomenological approach in an attempt to expose the non-traditional classificatory activities of objects and assemblages as they were experienced by the translator during the tour of the local museum. Phenomenology suggests that inquiries about the nature of experience are best contemplated through a holistic lens, one that encompasses the range of interactions that take place between individuals (the parts) and the world (the whole) (Merleau-Ponty, 2012; Sokolowski, 2000). This part/whole relationship also overlaps with Bennett’s (2010) agency of assemblage, that posits the coming together of objects as occasions that provide opportunities for “new conceptualizations of the part-whole relationship” (p. 23). Invoking Bennett implies, then, that the part/whole relationship here includes non-human things (i.e. physical objects; material goods) as active “parts” to be investigated. Bachelard’s “poetic instant” (Kearney, 2008) provides the basis through which experience emerges. The poetic instant represents a moment of “vertical” time that stands out or becomes visible during the course of experience (Kearney, 2008). During this local museum visit, the poetic instant is operationalized as an instant of interruption represented by moments of translator commentary often punctuated with an accompanying photograph that illustrates the point in space of the comment. It is most important to note that these instants of interruption first emerged as a coding category meant to marginalize these comments within the scope of the investigation. That is to say, these comments were made by a seemingly disinterested third-party, the translator, who was there “merely” to mediate between the Romanian-speaking museum proprietors and this non-Romanian-speaking researcher/museum visitor.

During this local museum visit, these instants of interruption could also be described as “complex instants” that “gather and concentrate many simultaneities at once” (Kearney, 2008, p. 38). This notion of simultaneous gathering is also implied in Bennett’s agency of assemblage, where an assemblage becomes foregrounded so much so that it cannot be ignored. Instants of interruption could be described as being “knit” (Kearney, 2008, p. 39) or “like a net whose knots progressively appear more clearly” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 12). Like a knot, these instants stand out as nubs of interruption in an otherwise smooth flow of experience. They feel both visible and tactile. In this example, instants of interruption appear as bumps, knots or jolts that act as points of classification. These knitting and knotting metaphors may suggest something important about the nature of how experience holds together as a series of interconnected, woven and difficult-to-separate instants, and that we need to consider both what makes these instants stand out as well as what binds them together. These points of binding echo those instants of assemblage, of things coming together in a way that demands our attention (Bennett, 2004, 2010).

Methods

Field research took place in Horodnic de Jos, Suceava County, Romania in May, 2014, during which time two visits were made to the local museum. This paper focusses on the first of the two research visits and more specifically, on an originally “marginalized” set of data from this field experience. This work employed an ethnographic approach to data collection that builds upon, for instance, methodologies employed by Hartel (2011) in her work studying gourmet cook hobbyists. Data collection documented visual, narrative and material elements of the museum tour narrative. As noted by Hartel (2011), the tour format provides exceptionally rich data over interviewing alone as research participants interact with objects, grounding the data and connecting it to the space of research. The museum tour was audio recorded and photographed and supplemented by related informal conversations and observations documented in the form of field notes. Work was done in translation, with tours and interviews conducted in Romanian and translated by native Romanian speakers[2]. Suceava County, Romania was chosen as a study site because of the researcher’s familiarity with the presence of at least one local museum gleaned during a previous research visit in 2011.

A grounded theory approach to data coding employed the constant comparative method, a method “concerned with generating and plausibly suggesting (but not provisionally testing) many categories, properties, and hypotheses about general problems” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 104). In particular, this method emphasizes the construction and integration of coding categories that emerge as much from the researcher’s experiences and conceptualizations as from the language and experiences of research participants. As noted, here I focus on one set of responses originally coded as “translator commentary,” a category created to segregate these comments from the “real” data. Because these comments were made in response to something visually remarkable, photographs were taken to record the instants and provide sites of discussion in the following account of this local museum visit. The findings are presented in the spirit of Geertz’s (1973/2000) thick description in order to situate the instants of interruption in context.

Findings: encountering instants of interruption during the local museum tour

We arrive at the museum site to find it fronted by a large, traditional-looking wooden gate with worn red paint and carvings. A small dog jumps up onto the fence next to the gate, bringing my attention to the small wooden sign officially marking this place as the museum. Further on down the fence, ceramic pots are placed upside-down on the fence pickets and a quick glance into the yard reveals a bevy of traditional artifacts scattered about. A man – the museum proprietor – appears in the yard to welcome us in through a smaller gate to the left of the large one that marked this place. The translator makes introductions and explains the visit and my research interest in the museum. As the proprietor prepares for the tour, he notices his granddaughter, who is making a bit of a fuss and crying for him on a small patch of grass in the yard near the house. The proprietor walks over and scoops up his granddaughter, us with her in his arms. The translator jokes good-naturedly that she, the granddaughter, will show us the museum. This image of the granddaughter became the first in what was to become a series of instants of interruption within the local museum. She was happy to be near her grandfather, but generally non-plussed with what I would describe as the magic of local museums. For her, the museum is merely an extension of her playground (Plate 1).

Plate 1.
Museum proprietor's granddaughter in front of traditional objects display at the local museum in Horodnic de Jos



As we walk through the yard toward the museum entrance, the proprietor tells us that this is his family's house, and that the collection contains 3,000 pieces from the village "and beyond" (Proprietor, Horodnic de Jos museum visit, May 13, 2014). The collection is housed across several buildings on the property, with the bulk of the pieces being displayed outside and within the 100-plus-year-old barn, which is attached to an equally old home that is not part of the museum. The tour begins outside the barn entrance, where the proprietor begins his narrative by pointing out the different tools and implements, explaining how they were used *pe vremuri* (literally, in past times, often translated as "in days of yore" or "back in the day"). Implicit in the narrative are the peasants, expressed as a generalized "they" whose lives these objects, tools, and artifacts once inhabited. The connection between peasant and object centers around doing or, more accurately, how things were done, how life was lived, how the peasant experienced the everyday *pe vremuri*.

What is less clear is the proprietor's place in this narrative, namely, which time he is "of" – past or present – within the narrative of doing. He seems knowledgeable about how the tools were used, enough so to provide short demonstrations that show how various tools were used[3]. During this visit, we are shown a portable whetstone that hooked onto the peasant's belt so that he could it with him in the field to keep his scythe sharp. My translator describes this implement as "innovative." We are also given a demonstration of how to make wooden roof shingles that we are told will last, if treated properly with an oil coating, 70-80 years. When asked, the proprietor does say that he has used some of these old-fashioned tools himself, but he notes that "now we have machines" to do the same work (Proprietor, Horodnic de Jos museum visit, May 13, 2014) (Plate 2).



Third-party
classification

163

Plate 2.
Looking in to the old
barn to see
the bulk of the
museum collection

As we enter the barn, moving from exterior to interior both physically and in terms of where the “doing” would happen with the kinds of artifacts displayed, elements of the peasant interior home life emerge, eventually leading the proprietor to hand over the tour to his wife, this museum’s “expert” in the women’s realm of textiles. She shows us various traditional clothing and outfits, displayed, as with the agricultural tools, “just as the peasant would have” displayed them (Proprietress, Horodnic de Jos museum visit, May 13, 2014)[4]. Though they are in the barn, the style of display copies what we see in the good room (Iuga, 2010) in old as well as some new houses even today. Textiles extend to the realm of textile production, whose implements are now kept in another building, an old stable, where a display of tools for spinning and weaving is set up. Samples of flax and hemp cloth are offered to me as takeaways and we are shown the tools that the peasant would have used to transform raw wool and flax into yarn and thread to weave the clothing and other goods we saw in the barn. The proprietor comments that he used to have to help his mother line up all of the threads in the loom, a very tedious and time consuming job. This is, in essence, the message of this area of display – the time it takes to produce fabrics and textiles – the kind of time which seems to be in short supply today.

We next move through the yard and around the back of the stable, to see in the middle of the yard an old well (which we later learn has been replaced by an electric pump) and an old washing “machine” in the form of a hollowed-out tree trunk. I make my usual joke about how none of us want to give up the washing machine to go back to the old days of doing laundry by hand and it elicits the usual laugh from both the proprietress and the proprietor’s sister, who has now also joined us on the tour. Flanking the perimeter of the yard are three recently built cabins, two that have been

completed for a time and a third upon which construction is just being completed. This third cabin, we are told, is to become “the house of the peasants” (Proprietor, Horodnic de Jos museum visit, May 13, 2014) to be used for storage and display of the traditional clothing and other textiles currently in the barn. In this new space, we are told, objects can be more accurately displayed. We are told that this cabin will not be electrified and that mannequins will be constructed to model the clothing within this new/old cabin (Plate 3).

The other two cabins, however, emerge as sort of multi-purpose or cross-over sites. Unlike the hundred-year-old barn that houses the collection, these cabins are often used by guests (and by the family to sleep in when it is very hot in the summer). One is even embellished with a satellite dish, which my translator notes “somehow ruins the overall atmosphere” of the place, he thinks for guests who come and stay. However, the cabins also house touches of tradition in the form of an old dowry chest, embroidered handkerchiefs made into pillows, embroidered tablecloths and some reconditioned and repurposed furniture, such as a chicken coop that has been turned into a desk. One of the cabins also houses the proprietress’s collection of embroidered shirts[5], and she wastes no time opening up the trunk to show me this collection in some detail. Details are given about each shirt – what it is made of (hemp or cotton; embroidered with cotton, silk, beads or metallic thread). I am intently focussed on each shirt, wanting to record the details, and the proprietress offers to lay each one out on the bed so I can photograph it (Plate 4). While I am worried about accurately framing the details of the embroidery, it is my translator who points out: “It’s a beautiful contrast those two, of modern and traditional”.

As the proprietress folds up the shirts and puts them back in their trunk for safekeeping, my translator moves around the cabin and notices some of the trinkets



Plate 3.

The new “house of the peasants” (left) and a cabin for visitors (right)



Third-party
classification

165

Plate 4.
A decades-old
hand-embroidered
shirt is laid out on
an air-force-themed
bedspread so that it
can be photographed

displayed on a hutch in the corner, his attention grabbed when he notices something that resembles an object he had as a child. During his investigation, he opens a cabinet flanking the hutch to reveal a collection of troll figurines, which he points out to me with a laugh (Plate 5). The proprietress laughs, too, and explains that the trolls have been relegated to the cabinet because “they don’t fit the overall theme” (Proprietress, Horodnic de Jos museum visit, May 13, 2014).

The tour continued with the presentation of additional clothing and other items stored in a one-hundred-year-old dowry chest, with the invitation for me to wear some of these old clothes, if I wished. The proprietress continued her tour, showing hand-embroidered handkerchiefs, usually worn by brides on their wedding day, that had been made into pillows, which led to a discussion of marriage customs and how some, such as the use of horse-and-cart to transport the bride and groom, were being revived. As we completed the tour of this cabin, coffee was offered, a signal we had seen most of what the museum had offered and that, shortly, our visit to the museum should come to an end.

Discussion

During this local museum visit, my translator made several statements that suggest he holds certain expectations about what a local museum visit in a Romanian village should be. His statements stood out as instants of interruption in what was expected (consciously or unconsciously) to be a more contiguous (and implied more authentic) experience of the traditional within the local museum. Most generally, these instants of interruption emerged at places where old and new or traditional and modern things assembled in close proximity to each other. These instants mainly centered around a newly built guest cabin (the “problem” cabin) on the museum owners’ property that one



Plate 5.
Troll figurines
(right) are kept in a
cupboard because
“they don’t fit the
overall theme”
of the room

could have argued, from a more traditional classificatory standpoint, were only peripherally a part of the museum, since the bulk of the collection was housed in the 100-year old barn. Nevertheless, this “problem” cabin now stood next to the newly built “house of the peasants” – a new space that would eventually display traditional objects in the museum’s collection in a more traditional or authentic setting. Around this “problem” cabin, three instants of interruption arose: a satellite dish mounted on the exterior of the cabin; an embroidered peasant blouse laid out on a mass-produced bedspread inside the cabin; and a cabinet full of troll figurines that were hidden from view.

These instants of interruption all centered on an area of the museum property where the new got mixed up with the old. This mixing expresses the agency of assemblage (Bennett, 2010), where the close proximity of traditional and modern exuded a force that challenged some aspect the translator’s sensibilities about how things should be in this context. Instead, the problem of unencumbered proximity

had the tendency to blur if not obliterate the boundaries between what should hang together as part of the museum experience and what should not. Further, it was often unclear to what extent such a delineation existed in the minds of the proprietors. This lack of clarity made way for more disparate kinds of assemblages. It also interfered with the translator's mental map (Zerubavel, 1996) of existing classifications of what belonged in the categories of old and new, traditional and modern and even past/present/future. This also suggested expectations about what constitutes a good local museum experience and what does not.

The most egregious categorical challenge occurred around the presence of a satellite dish mounted on the newly built cabin that both stored some traditional objects and that served as a place for visitors to stay, ostensibly to have some sort of "traditional" authentic village experience. In this instance, something like a satellite dish appeared as too much modernity, setting the visitor too far away from what he might have wanted to escape from during this visit to the village. The translator's relatively severe reaction, in the statement that the presence of the satellite "ruined the overall effect" implies a negation of that which is traditional, peasant and rural in the space. This aspect of modernity, of progress, emerges as something that is too difficult to overcome, suggesting that the tiny village cabin and the satellite dish cannot come together for any reason other than to spoil the mood of the rural or the traditional, leading almost to a negation of *pe vremuri* (past times).

However, the contrast between an old, hand-embroidered blouse laid out on a mass-produced, air-force themed bedspread for a photograph became a case for a remark about an interesting contrast between modern and traditional as opposed to an effect-ruining experience. That the translator took the time to note this contrast shows his attunement to the categories of past and present, old and new, but that the contrast need not always be something entirely negative. This may be because the satellite was mounted on the cabin in a more permanent kind of assemblage, while the shirt was momentarily laid out on the bedspread – a temporary kind of assemblage, one that was quickly rectified as the fine shirt was folded up quickly after its picture was taken and tucked back into its trunk for safekeeping. In this case, *pe vremuri* is allowed to mingle but is, in the end, put back into storage for safekeeping.

The final instant noted here, the troll figurine collection that was relegated to a cabinet, emerged as something to laugh about: this entire collection of trolls could not find a place to assemble within this museum landscape outside of a closed cabinet, out of sight. That the proprietress noted their inability to fit in, and yet did not discard them entirely, likely has other implications for the processes of collecting in the local museum that are beyond the scope of this paper. The kitsch inherent in these figurines seems to express a wider kind of expanse between old and new, one in which these disparate elements come together, but that in the end, remain aesthetically so far apart that their absurdity appears laughable and, in essence, non-threatening. These ideas were challenged, however, during my second visit to this local museum, when I was surprised to come back and see these trolls displayed across the cabinet in the same cabin, exposed and publicly visible, freed from exile (Plate 6).

When asked about why these troll figurines were allowed to be on display when they obviously did not fit, the proprietress explained that the granddaughter had noticed them and showed an interest, so they took them down so that she could play with them. After the granddaughter was finished playing, the trolls were reassembled on the cabinet top for her amusement. This brings back one other instant of old and new that was more subtle in the museum – the presence of a little girl amidst artifacts

Plate 6.

On the second visit to the museum, I notice that the trolls have been freed from their previous exile



from a past she could know only through these artifacts and through her grandparents' narration of them. The contrast between old and new represented by the little girl who accompanied us on our visit seemed to represent a "safer" (and certainly cuter) kind of proximity between old and new because she was a linking element that also provided a promise for the future. The little girl provided something of a diversion from the narrative of the peasant past and her presence suggested one way this past might live on into the future, since, as her grandfather (the museum's proprietor) pointed out, this would all be hers someday.

Conclusions and implications

The "instants of interruption" described here around a satellite dish, an air-force-themed bedspread and troll figurines shows how interruptions inserted into a research visit by a third-party act as a kind of classificatory force. It is not simply that these instants find likeness between disparate elements; more so, this example reveals something about the relationship between the physical assemblage of things in the world and the mental assemblage of things within our minds can act as a force for new knowledge production. Thinking of this as an exercise in naïve classification for knowledge discovery (Beghtol, 2003), what can be concluded from this local museum visit is that those things that are clearly not of *pe vremuri* (past times), which here form a category that includes satellite dishes, troll figurines and mass-produced bedspreads, can jolt our sensibility when they are assembled with objects from the category of local museum artifacts or, more specifically, peasant things.

Findings suggest that the ways in which local museum collections assemble within the everyday livespace of the proprietors exposes the ways in which seemingly disparate

things find ways to connect. These places of connection act as a sort of post-modern exercise in classification, illuminating how the coming together of things often thought of in dichotomous terms (old/new; traditional/modern) can lead us to rethink how we conceptualize knowledge creation around memory, culture and heritage. By bracketing the local museum as a slice of vertical time in which contrasts emerge as opposed to a museum space that focusses on nostalgia for the preservation of the past, local museums emerge as places of knowledge production through which new connections between past, present and future can be forged and through which the dichotomy between old and new becomes a locus for knowledge discovery.

Before this museum visit, my concept of “translator” was as a vehicle through which I could access non-English-speaking museum proprietors. During data coding, the category of translator commentary was originally created to marginalize statements because they seemed, at first, to detract from my “real” focus on the proprietors’ museum tour narrative. However, upon review of the translator’s comments in relation to the photographs taken to note his insights, this series of statements/reactions of my translator emerged as an important analytic tool. As I waded through the data, the translator emerged as an integral third-party, one whose less formal yet still distinctive approach to classification highlighted details on which I might not otherwise have focussed. This project reveals how social classification and the agency of assemblage expose different kinds of knowledge production and how less formal approaches to classification can open up additional avenues for research and knowledge discovery.

Notes

1. Absent from this paper are discussions of historical background and nationalism that emphasize the Romanianness of the local museum phenomenon. In order to narrow the focus to classification, these essential-related elements have been omitted (purposely) from this paper but deserve a mention here in order to suggest what shape future research will take.
2. Translators included one student at the Department of Foreign Languages, Suceava University and a doctoral student in anthropology at Indiana University – Bloomington.
3. It is interesting to note that during the tour, both translators, who were in their early-to-mid-twenties, had trouble translating many of the technical terms used by the proprietor to describe the role and uses of artifacts, indicating to me that these were not terms that they commonly came across during their translation work.
4. This idea of display “just as the peasant would” have left things was also used to describe the display of tools and implements displayed on the outside of the barn.
5. I am told that the Museum of the Romanian Peasant “has evidence” of this collection in their records, but even after trying to clarify what this means over two visits, it remains unclear.

References

- Appadurai, A. (1988), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, reprint ed., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, NY.
- Beghtol, C. (2003), “Classification for information retrieval and classification for knowledge discovery: relationship between ‘professional’ and ‘naive’ classifications”, *Knowledge Organization*, Vol. 30 No. 2, pp. 64-75.

- Bennett, J. (2004), "The force of things: steps toward an ecology of matter", *Political Theory*, Vol. 32 No. 3, pp. 347-372.
- Bennett, J. (2010), *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press Books, Durham.
- Bowker, G.C. and Star, S.L. (2000), *Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Briet, S. (1951/2006), "What is documentation?: English translation of the classic French text", (Trans. by R.E. Day, L. Martinet and H.G.B. Angheliescu), Scarecrow Press, Lanham, MD.
- Buckland, M.K. (1991), "Information as thing", *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, Vol. 42 No. 5, pp. 351-360.
- Douglas, M. and Isherwood, B.C. (1996), *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption: With a New Introduction*, Routledge, London and New York, NY.
- Frohmann, B. (2009), "Revisiting 'what is a document?'" , *Journal of Documentation*, Vol. 66 No. 2, pp. 291-303.
- Geertz, C. (1973/2000), "Thick description: toward an interpretive theory of culture", *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*, Basic Books, New York, NY.
- Glaser, B.G. and Strauss, A.L. (1967), *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, Aldine Transaction, New Brunswick, NJ, Third paperback printing.
- Grenersen, G. (2012), "What is a document institution? A case study from the South Sami community", *Journal of Documentation*, Vol. 68 No. 1, pp. 127-133.
- Hartel, J.K. (2011), "Information in the hobby of gourmet cooking - four contexts", in Aspray, W. and Hayes, B. (Eds), *Everyday life information*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, available at: http://works.bepress.com/jenna_hartel/7
- Iuga, A. (2010), "'The peasant room' and the revival of tradition", *Martor*, Vol. 15, pp. 195-204.
- Kearney, R. (2008), "Bachelard and the epiphanic instant", *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 52, Supplement, pp. 38-45.
- Klimaszewski, C. and Nyce, J.M. (2014), "Towards a study of 'unofficial' museums", in Hastings, S.K. (Ed.), *Annual Review of Cultural Heritage Informatics*, AltaMira Press, Lanham, MD, pp. 179-189.
- Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. (2003), *Metaphors We Live By*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL and London.
- Latham, K.F. (2012), "Museum object as document", *Journal of Documentation*, Vol. 68 No. 1, pp. 45-71.
- Latour, B. (2007), *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, NY.
- Lund, N.W. (2010), "Document, text and medium: concepts, theories and disciplines", *Journal of Documentation*, Vol. 66 No. 5, pp. 734-749.
- Mai, J.-E. (2011), "The modernity of classification", *Journal of Documentation*, Vol. 67 No. 4, pp. 710-730.
- Mateescu, O. (2009), "Evidence in the museum: subjects, objects and memories in Vrancea", *Sociologie Românească*, Vol. 7 No. 3, pp. 51-71.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2012), "Introduction: classical prejudices and the return to phenomena", (Trans. by D.A. Landes), *Phenomenology of Perception*, Routledge, London and New York, NY, pp. 3-27.
- Mihăilescu, V. (2009), "Local museums? Village collections in recent Romania", *Martor, Patrimony and Local Identity*, Vol. 14, pp. 11-18.

-
- Mihalache, C. (2009), "Museums and village collections of Romania. A pleading for initiative", *Martor, Patrimony and Local Identity*, Vol. 14, pp. 123-130.
- Olsen, B.I., Lund, N.W., Ellingsen, G. and Hartvigsen, G. (2012), "Document theory for the design of socio-technical systems", *Journal of Documentation*, Vol. 68 No. 1, pp. 100-126.
- ReComESPaR (2013), "ReComESPaR", available at: www.recomespar.ro/index.html (accessed July 9, 2013).
- Sokolowski, R. (2000), *Introduction to Phenomenology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, NY.
- Zerubavel, E. (1996), "Lumping and splitting: notes on social classification", *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 11 No. 3, pp. 421-433.

Third-party
classification

171

About the author

Cheryl Klimaszewski studies the relationship between cultural heritage, cultural institutions, collecting, classification and memory. She has studied libraries, information use and heritage preservation in Romania since 2007. She is currently a Doctoral Candidate in Library and Information Science at the Rutgers University, New Brunswick. Cheryl Klimaszewski can be contacted at: ck482@rutgers.edu

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com