

in the context of contemplating art. This gaze however is usually understood to be one-sided, whereas in the Indian context, the figures are believed to gaze back at the audience. *Darshan* is also usually accompanied by ritualistic behavior whether in a temple, a storefront, or a makeshift street altar. A statue representing Ganesh or Shiva, for example, is shown reverence by touching the statues' feet, by folding one's hands in front of the image, and by silent prayer. To understand whether a person is viewing an image as sacred or secular involves careful observation of behavior, demeanor, and sight. Davis' historical accounts of the shifting notions of the Hindu images do not take into account important clues that reveal how an image is being regarded. Although Davis's methodology works for the select objects he analyzes, his general premise, especially if applied to present-day images, falls short without a serious analysis of *darshan* and related behaviors that accompany the act of seeing.

Davis has a straightforward goal, to demonstrate that Indian religious images have a social life: "[if] I convince the reader that these objects may be animated as much by their own histories and by their varied interactions with different communities of response as by the deities they represent and support, I will have achieved my purpose" (p. 13). The book therefore seems to be of interest primarily to scholars of Indian art and those interested in the lives of the specific objects described or other objects which have similar cultural biographies. Unfortunately Davis misses a great opportunity to shed light on the larger issues plaguing scholars and museologists today: the public display of the sacred. A more sophisticated exploration of the gradation of attributed meanings and experiences of audiences of religious images in differing environments would provide a framework for examining the complexities of displaying sacred arts from different cultures. For example, the display of sacred Aboriginal art or the many objects currently being reclaimed by Native Americans under NAGPRA.

The idea that objects are viewed as either sacred or secular in the two settings of temple or museum, respectively, seems overly simplistic. The "sacred" object, wherever it is displayed, does not cease to be hallowed in the eyes of the people whose spiritual needs it serves. In a museum, it may not be regarded and treated in the same way it is in a religious setting, but it might retain some of its sacred

qualities nonetheless. The above example of the Pathur Nataraj beautifully illustrates that these categories are in a constant state of flux. This point is further exemplified by the UCLA Fowler Museum's recent exhibition *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* which closed at the American Museum of Natural History in December 1998. Although Haitian and other museum visitors realized that they were in a museum, not a Vodou temple in Port-au-Prince, they nonetheless showed reverence to three reconstructed altars and their spirits by leaving coins and currency, cigarettes, and even letters as offerings and invocation. In fact, so much money was collected at this venue (\$2,300) that AMNH donated it to a Haitian relief fund.

Exploration into the many lives of religious art objects helps us understand, study, and display them. *Lives of Indian Images* clearly shows that Indian religious objects have changed in the many environments they have occupied, both in India and abroad. While providing a rich and often entertaining historical biography of specific objects, the book unfortunately neglects to comment on broader topics of interest to students of art and material culture.



Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage. BARBARA KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1998. xviii + 326 pp. 90 halftones, notes, index. \$50.00 (cloth), \$18.95 (paper).

JEFFREY D. FELDMAN
University of Virginia

Few would disagree that the 1988 "Exhibiting Cultures" conference at the Smithsonian was a key turn in museum studies after which disciplinary priorities shifted from the construction of exhibitions and analysis of material culture, to the analysis of representation and the social construction of culture. One of the essays that defined both the substance and mood of that conference was Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's "Objects of Ethnography," recently re-issued by the University of California

Press as the opening chapter in *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (1998), a volume which brings together eight major works produced by the author from 1988 to 1995.

Despite the eclectic itinerary of *Destination Culture*—which travels through museum history, Jewish art, Ellis Island, Plimoth Plantation, the Los Angeles Festival of the Arts, and kitsch—the collection maintains a sharp focus on the “political economy of showing.” (p. 1) Accordingly, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett seeks to describe, situate historically, and theorize “the agency of display.” (p. 1) In so doing, she provides a language and scope to an intellectual project that, ten years after its inception, now describes one of the vital centers of anthropology and cultural studies.

“Objects of Ethnography” has long since become a museum studies classic, but in *Destination Culture*, it provides an argument structure and discursive space in which the subsequent essays develop. Ethnographic objects are not found, but are created by the ethnographer through the “art of excision,” whereby objects are detached from one location and placed in another (p. 18). Detachment, however, creates a tension between the fragment and the instruments of display.

Objects, therefore, are performance—a dynamic set of social relations with social roles that are shared and enacted by presenter, presented, and public. Objects are textualized, historicized, typologized, and exoticized. In this way, “Objects of Ethnography” reformulates the equation of pre-1988 museum studies, so that object no longer equals static, but now equals dynamic. The goal, then, becomes to find the means through which the power relations in that dynamism can best be interrogated.

Largely through the analysis of exhibition catalogues, the chapter “Exhibiting Jews” (pp. 79–128) situates the invention of the modern category of Jewish art at the nexus of immigrant history, western colonialism, and the proliferation of mass culture. These catalogues and displays directed public discourse on Jews to the surface details of ritual objects, and away from the ritual contexts in which they were used. Judaism was, thus, represented as a chapter in the history of style, while Jews were posited as valuable patrons of western culture. Accordingly, the social construction of Jewish art in international exhibitions posited Judaism as a

participant in rather than a potential threat to the process of civilization.

The three essays that form Part Two, “A Second Life as Heritage,” analyze the global tourist market with extended critiques of Plimoth Plantation and Ellis Island. Here Kirshenblatt-Gimblett examines how the museum provides a set of categorical assumptions and imperatives for the production of tourist experience. Museum destinations take precedence over actual locations because exhibitions can be stripped of social dirt or carefully controlled with just the right amount. The point is that contexts no less than objects are social texts constructed through the agency of display.

Overall, these critiques and descriptions of tourism are most compelling when Kirshenblatt-Gimblett plays with the distinction between history and corporate property, particularly in her analysis of Ellis Island. Like the other chapters in the volume, “Ellis Island” (pp. 177–87) undermines assumptions about the passivity of objects and contexts. Ellis Island—with its walls of honor, snack bars, and gift shops—is a total system of production and consumption working to transform junk food and junk commodities into American heritage.

Yet, Ellis Island is more than a link between the desire to touch history and the ravenous hunger for corporate profits. It is a place where supposedly sacred ideas, such as American citizenship and democracy, intermingle freely with presumably banal concepts, such as cardholder status with American Express. In the end, therefore, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett not only questions whether or not the distinction between commodities and heritage is ethnographically viable, but actually redirects studies of history from the context of the nation to the context of wealthy multinationals. “Ellis Island”, thus, is not just an important case study about a major American tourist site. It engages a crucial debate about the relationship between corporations and the politics of culture.

In “Confusing Pleasures” (pp. 203–48), the first essay in Part Three, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett shifts her gaze from the object as performance to the performance-made object. The goal of this essay is to understand how the avant-garde—in this case the producers of the 1990 Los Angeles Arts Festival—attempted to “prepare audiences to watch and value what they did not know how to react to” (p. 11). The problematic solution for these festival produc-

ers was to create a relationship between audience and performance that emphasized an encounter with beautiful and stimulating objects rather than an understanding of their context or purpose of production.

Through Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's careful ethnography, the categorizing of avant-garde art is similar to the categorizing of Jewish or African art (p. 249–56). Both processes accent general categories of culture and surface detail, draw attention away from individual cultural subjects, and assume certain standards of taste.

The Los Angeles Festival, therefore, opens onto the broader theoretical issues of dislocation and juxtaposition, "procedures that give to ethnography its surreal quality and to surrealism its ethnographic character" (p. 239). In other words, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett identifies in the marketing of the avant-garde—just as she does in the manufacture of museum display and tourist experience—the tension between subject and context. The maneuvers which create ethnographic objects are also the basic processes whereby modernist conceptions of culture and counter-culture emerge.

If the point of departure of *Destination Culture* is the ethnographic object, its point of arrival is no less than the social dynamics which inform everyday distinctions. The chapter "Disputing Taste" (pp. 259–81), which constitutes Part Four, examines two books, one representing the consumer trappings of good taste, the other of bad taste. The point is to understand how kitsch becomes valuable, how objects on the bottom of the scale of taste shift to the top, and what this movement signifies.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's argument hinges on the idea that distinction is not something natural to objects. As she suggests, meanings and values "are anchored not in the social space of...consumers, but in the conceptual space of the inventory, a quality they have in common with museums and encyclopedic projects more generally," as well as in the ethnographic subject relocated as the avant-garde (p. 12).

Consequently, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's analysis of style cuts a cleaner path out of the entropy of structuralism than, say, Pierre Bourdieu's much celebrated theory of taste in *Distinction* (Routledge 1984). If, for Bourdieu, particular consumer pro-

files reckon class status, for Kirshenblatt-Gimblett it is the generation of that inventory—the privilege to move through and manipulate category relations—that constitutes a cultured elite.

Furthermore, it is in the narrative on style—punctuated by images including "The Milk-Bone Dog Biscuit" (p. 269) and "Solid Milk Chocolate Cross" (p. 277)—that most clearly brings to light another compelling contribution of this book: the central role of the author's writing style as a theoretical strategy. Through humor, a patient reflexive voice, and a massive layering of visual evidence, *Destination Culture* constructs and then inhabits the analytical struggle between delight and disdain. Thus, although there is a sustained critique of corporate power in this volume, these are not rehashed materialist arguments. The more uncomfortable the misfits, the more important it becomes to see those dynamics as social texts. The challenge, then, is to savor these paradoxes through the narratives, and then to see through the politics of authenticity to the voices that those politics deny.

In this respect, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett is masterful at teasing out the openings where counter discourses seep through the façade. The best example is the lesson of Mrs. Matt, a Native American from Northern California who chides a group of folklorists intent on learning from her a technique for making baskets. After weeks of being taught to sing rather than learning to make baskets, the students finally ask Mrs. Matt if she will ever show them what they came to learn. "You're missing the point," she responds, "A basket is a song made visible" (p. 166).

The larger point, however, is that the agency of display—although proliferated and performed in museums—is not confined to them. Hence, the power of *Destination Culture* is that it starts with just a simple list of objects, "Moon rocks, a few small strips of meat dried Hidatsa-style before 1918, dust from Jerusalem," (p. 17) and yet arrives at a layered description and analysis of modernity itself. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's theoretical trajectory, therefore, does more than tease out the uncomfortable relationships that characterize institutions of display. It drops readers into the jagged terrain of those relationships, thereby issuing an intellectual imperative to react.