

Inventories, catalogues and art historiography: exploring lists against the grain

Francesco Freddolini and Anne Helmreich

Introduction

This special section of the *Journal of Art Historiography* aims to expand upon scholarly approaches to inventories and catalogues by exploring the multi-faceted nature of these texts as narratives and as material objects.¹ Catalogues and inventories are essential building blocks for much scholarship in art history, including histories of collecting, museums, the art market, as well as economic and material histories of art. They are drawn upon frequently as empirical sources for such endeavors as provenance research, the reconstitution of lost collections, and the analysis of patronage. While recognizing the vital significance of such documentary questions, this collection of essays proposes to read inventories and catalogues ‘against the grain’ by implicitly asking what constitutes an inventory and a catalogue, and what other research possibilities these genres hold, and explicitly exploring what new meanings and concerns emerge when these texts are understood as multivalent.

In particular, we are concerned with these texts as narratives, which demands attention to issues of language, rhetoric, argument, and discourse, as well as temporal, spatial, and socio-historical contexts, that can be obscured when inventories and catalogues are treated as purely empirical documents. Such approaches allow us to revisit sources, particularly those from the early modern period, that formerly seemed to offer up little ‘information’ when queried specifically for questions of attribution or provenance. In other words, is the

¹ This collection of essays has its origins in a session organized for the annual meeting of the College Art Association in 2013. Although not all of the original speakers were able to participate in this publication, we want to acknowledge and to thank those who could not for their intellectual contributions to the development of our ideas and stimulating conversations: Morna O’Neill (Wake Forest University), Cinzia Maria Sicca (Università di Pisa), and Ruth Bernard Yeazell (Yale University). We would also like to thank our peer reviewers for their useful feedback from which the collection has benefitted greatly. All translations are our own, unless otherwise noted.

provenance or attribution of an artifact *always* the only—and right—question to ask when reading an inventory or catalogue?

Our goal is twofold: to understand how catalogues and inventories functioned as texts and, in doing so, to consider how they produced meaning for the objects they described. Art historians have traditionally engaged with inventories through a very partial and narrow lens, focusing often on specific categories of objects: paintings, sculptures, and the decorative arts, despite the diversity of objects described on these pages. Indeed, Barbara Furlotti, in her study of the self-fashioning of Paolo Giordano I Orsini, Duke of Bracciano, through his collections, observes of Giordano's first inventory of 1577-81 that the 'succession of the items is rigorously egalitarian... The decision to adopt this format reflects the reason for which the inventory was made: to map the quantity and quality of *all* of the objects present at court from 1577 and 1581'.² Moreover, catalogues and inventories often used language as well as graphic display and other material means to account for the assemblage and even the arrangement of objects both spatially and temporally.³ Only recently has the entire complex network of things included in these texts captured the attention of art historians, following the examples of historians of material culture.⁴ The practice of art historiography, we contend, would gain considerably by seriously investigating both the inventory and the catalogue as things in their own right, with their own ontological frameworks.

A methodological approach that acknowledges—and explores—the multivalency of inventories and catalogues leads to a number of significant questions that inform the essays here: What is the role of authorship and who constitutes the author(s)? Who are the additional protagonists involved and how did each contribute? How is the reader understood at the original point of

² Barbara Furlotti, *A Renaissance Baron and his Possessions, Paolo Giordano I Orsini, Duke of Bracciano (1541-1585)*, Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2012, 211. Kristen B. Neuschel also points to the obliteration of hierarchies among objects in sixteenth-century French inventories. See 'From 'Written Record' to the Paper Chase? The Documentation of Noble Life in the Sixteenth Century', *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques*, 27: 2, Summer 2001, 201-218.

³ See, for example, Thomas Gaetgens and Louis Marchesano, *Display and Art History: The Düsseldorf Gallery and its Catalogue*, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2011, which explores the making of a catalogue, the text as a genre, and the relationship between text, objects, and their display (which was historically innovative) in the context of the European Enlightenment.

⁴ Some pioneering exceptions have been Peter Thornton, *Seventeenth-Century Interior Decoration in England, France, and Holland*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978; and Peter Thornton, *The Italian Renaissance Interior*, New York: Abrahams, 1991. Recent studies include Erin Campbell, Stephanie R. Miller, and Elizabeth Carroll Consavari, eds, *The Early Modern Italian Domestic Interior, 1400-1700. Objects, Spaces, Domesticities*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013; and Gail Feigenbaum with Francesco Freddolini, eds, *Display of Art in the Roman Palace, 1550-1750*, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2014.

production and in subsequent reception histories? How is meaning produced at the linguistic, semantic, rhetorical, visual, and material levels? How were these texts developed as multivalent strategies (to celebrate, preserve, or disperse collections; to impress, seduce, or persuade readers)? How do these texts relate to legal, financial, and other institutional regulations and how did these relationships evolve? How were these texts materially manifested and how do they, as physical entities, reflect changing ideas and attitudes, as in the form of annotations, addenda, erasures, or strike-outs? Such questions reveal that these texts are dynamic and not static. Furthermore, such questions lead us to reconsider the relevance of textuality in relation to inventories and catalogues, and induce us to explore them as genres, investigating traditions, conventions, and layers of meaning. How do these realizations shape how art historians utilize such documents as evidence in their arguments?

The essays that follow explore case study examples drawn from a diverse range of geographic and temporal conditions and differing fields of cultural production and reception. Despite the differences, similar questions emerge concerning authorship, purpose, function, and interpretation associated with the production, development, and circulation of these texts. These queries clearly establish that catalogues and inventories are not inert documents but active agents in the field and, moreover, are not fixed in use and meaning, but instable and fluid.

Inventories and catalogues: two faces of the list

Both inventories and catalogues can be defined as organized lists of things. Robert Belknap, in his study of literary lists, reminds us that 'at their most simple, lists are frameworks that hold separate and disparate items together. Lists are plastic, flexible structures in which an array of constituent units cohere through specific actions generated by specific forces of attraction'.⁵ Belknap goes on to distinguish between pragmatic and literary lists, the former driven by utilitarian purposes and the latter found within literary texts and self-consciously shaped by authors.⁶ Here, we want to collapse such distinctions, acknowledging the use-value of lists while also attending to their material and literary properties, that is the role of language, convention, and genre, among other factors.

In this approach, we are building on recent scholarship, including that of Giorgio Riello, Renata Ago, and those authors who contributed to a recent collection of essays dedicated to the study of early modern inventories edited by Jessica

⁵ Robert Belknap, *The List, The Uses and Pleasures of Cataloging*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004, 2. We want to thank Morna O'Neill for bringing this text to our attention.

⁶ Belknap, *The List*, 2-7.

Keating and Lia Markey.⁷ Giorgio Riello, in his useful historiographical analysis of the study of early modern inventories, encourages scholars to adopt a critical stance when analyzing these texts, regarding them as neither ‘uncontaminated records of an objective reality, nor simply literary manifestations divorced from materiality’.⁸ They are, he reminds us, ‘not entirely detached from what they describe’.⁹ What is more useful, he argues, is to consider these texts as representations, an approach our authors also follow here. In the act of representing (rather than purely describing or only presenting), these texts are implicated in their social-historical context; they are, Riello persuades us, ‘forms of representation that are influenced by social and legal conventions and by the specific economic values attributed to artifacts and commodities in the early modern period’.¹⁰ And, we would hasten to add, such acts of representation are not exclusive to the early modern period; indeed, one of our aims here is to extend the scholarly discussion of inventories and catalogues beyond this temporal moment and Europe.

As Keating and Markey argue in their introduction, early modern inventories ‘share one crucial characteristic: inventories attempt to translate material things into linguistic statements’.¹¹ As these authors rightly assert, ‘inventories are not simply lists that can be taken at face value. Indeed inventories catalogue a plethora of things, but they were authored documents compiled under particular temporal, legal, political, and social constraints that affected their organization and the ways in which the objects they list were described’.¹² For example, Christina Normore investigates the rhetorical strategies of the inventories assembled by the Burgundian Valois ducal administration over the second half of the fourteenth century, Keating and Markey probe the ‘textual signifiers of foreignness’ through analyzing the inclusion of ‘Indian’ objects in Medici and Austrian-Habsburg inventories of 1580-1750, and Alessandra Russo considers inventories associated with objects sent by conquistador Hernán Cortés from Mexico to the Iberian peninsula and beyond as ‘spatial narratives’.¹³ Ago, in pointing to the significance of

⁷ Recent scholarship on this topic also includes Cinzia Maria Sicca, ed, *Inventari e Cataloghi. Collezionismo e stili di vita negli stati italiani di antico regime*, Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2014.

⁸ Giorgio Riello, ‘“Things Seen and Unseen”: The Material Culture of early modern inventories and their representation of domestic interiors’ in Paula Findlen, ed, *Early Modern Things, Objects and their Histories, 1500-1800*, London and New York: Routledge, 2012, 125, 127.

⁹ Riello, ‘Things Seen and Unseen’, 135.

¹⁰ Riello, ‘Things Seen and Unseen’, 127.

¹¹ Jessica Keating and Lia Markey, ‘Introduction: Captured Objects, Inventories of early modern Collections’, *Journal of the History of Collections*, 23: 2, 2011, 209.

¹² Keating and Markey, ‘Introduction’, 211.

¹³ See, Keating and Markey, ‘“Indian” objects in Medici and Austrian-Habsburg Inventories, a case-study of the sixteenth-century term’, *Journal of the History of Collections*, 23: 2, 2011, 283-300; Christina Normore, ‘On the archival rhetoric of inventories, Some records of the Valois Burgundian court’, *Journal of the History of Collections*, 23: 2, 2011, 215-227; and Alessandra

inventories in revealing the material history of seventeenth-century Rome, suggests that these texts record the moment at which the object received a particular kind of inalienable status, having been removed, albeit often temporarily, from the world of commodified exchange.¹⁴

The pragmatic list conjoins with its literary brethren around the concept of value since value often drives the formation of a list: in other words, both inventories and catalogues have been compiled, historically, to select or distinguish particular objects above others and assemble these parts into a new collective whole with signifying capacity. As Belknap asserts 'the list is simultaneously the sum of its parts and the individual parts themselves. By accretion, the separate units cohere to fulfill some function as a combined whole, and by discontinuity the individuality of each unit is maintained as a particular instance, a particular attribute, a particular object or person.'¹⁵ The list, once constructed, changes the objects it includes, imbricating them within a new discourse and defining relationships between these things as well as between these things and their owners, and between these things and the author or reader of the list. Art historical inventories and catalogues often functioned to preserve the memory and the material existence of things, or to mobilize them through forms of exchange *because* such objects were deemed valuable. Such lists thus became the textual means to sanction the value, or—put another way—such lists can be viewed as active agents able to define and construct value through language, image, and the materiality of the text.

As the essays by Elizabeth Pergam and Francesco Freddolini show, an illustrated and expensive catalogue or inventory—a valuable object in its own right—could cast its aura on the objects grouped within its pages. Princely inventories could enhance the value of the included items through both their material existence as elegantly bound volumes and the use of specific textual frameworks. Even during the Middle Ages, as Joseph Salvatore Ackley demonstrates, treasure inventories were often included in evangeliaries, lectionnaires, or pontificals—the church's most precious books. The *mise-en-livre*, as Ackley argues, symbolizes, and defines the value placed on these textual records, in addition to the value of the objects themselves. And inventories and catalogues, in recording the formation of collections, could signify cultural capital as well as fiscal value. The latter could be made explicit, as Allison Stielau explains, when inventories were compiled for the explicit purpose of extracting wealth from a collection.

Russo, 'Cortés's objects and the idea of New Spain, Inventories as spatial narratives', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 23: 2, 2011, 1-24.

¹⁴ Renato Ago, *Gusto for Things, A History of Objects in Seventeenth-Century Rome*, trans. Bradford Bouley & Corey Tazzara with Paula Findlen, foreword by Paul Findlen, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013, 7-9.

¹⁵ Belknap, *The List*, 15.

In creating and assigning value, inventories and catalogues, as several of the authors assert here, also functioned epistemologically, contributing to the formation of knowledge by putting information into circulation, establishing taxonomies, and other analogous processes. Furthermore, by defining standards of aesthetic, material, and monetary value, as well as forming, negotiating, and evolving descriptive conventions, inventories and catalogues contributed to the formation of discourses on art and its historiography, perhaps most obviously in the case of connoisseurship. The vocabulary used in inventories can unveil ontological approaches to the represented objects and enrich our understanding of theoretical and historical approaches to art, style, materials, and materiality, as the close reading of entries and their semantic values performed by Ackley unveils.

Inventories and catalogues, as already suggested, share an etymology as lists—texts that relate words to things—but also can be distinguished from each other. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, an inventory is ‘A detailed list of articles, such as goods and chattels, or parcels of land, found to have been in the possession of a person at his decease or conviction, sometimes with a statement of the nature and value of each; hence any such detailed statement of the property of a person, of the goods or furniture in a house or messuage, or the like’.¹⁶ The catalogue is instead defined as ‘A list, register, or complete enumeration [...] usually distinguished from a mere list or enumeration, by systematic or methodical arrangement, alphabetical or other order, and often by the addition of brief particulars, descriptive, or aiding identification, indicative of locality, position, date, price, or the like’.¹⁷ As Belknap explains, ‘the catalogue is more comprehensive, conveys more information, and is more amenable to digression than the list’.¹⁸

Inventory derives from the Latin word ‘*inventārium*’, which comprises the verb ‘*invenīre*’, to find. The etymology evokes a process of perambulation of a physical space, to record the things that inhabit that space, and this action impacted the material existence of inventories. Catalogue derives from the ancient Greek ‘*κατάλογος*’, meaning register or list, but the verb associated with this noun, ‘*καταλέγειν*’, meaning to choose or to enroll, is extremely revealing about the difference between the acts of (1) recording things found in a space, as in an inventory, and (2) compiling a list through the process of selecting a group of things, as in a catalogue.¹⁹

The catalogue of the collection of Manfredo Settala in Milan, published at the end of the English translation of Giacomo Barri’s *Viaggio Pittresco d’Italia—The Painters Voyage of Italy*, clearly articulates this action of selecting categories of things.

¹⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary*, sub vocem *Inventory*, <http://www.oed.com>, accessed 20 February 2014.

¹⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary*, sub vocem *Catalogue*, <http://www.oed.com>, accessed 20 February 2014.

¹⁸ Belknap, *The List*, 2-3.

¹⁹ The Greek *καταλέγειν* comprises the verb *λέγειν*, which means picking, or choosing.

The text begins by asserting that ‘This closet abounds with variety of Rarities, in Nature, as well as in Art, I shall only take notice of the best Paintings, being only proper to the thing in hand’.²⁰ The author’s curatorial act bestows upon the paintings a special place in the hierarchy of value among the objects in the collection. Furthermore, although Settala maintained the format of the list—deploying a text that looked quite similar to a legal inventory—he highlighted aspects such as authorship or aesthetic quality, and constructed a text that would cater to the connoisseur rather than the notary.

The notion that an inventory recorded what was found in a given space should not suggest that these lists were uncritical compilations. As recent studies have shown, early modern inventories often started their topographical description with the ground floor of an urban dwelling, and then proceeded to the upper floors, and commenced their description of the rooms with the leather and textile wall hangings, and then moved to the other objects populating the interiors.²¹ Such conventions not only indicate the spatial circuit within the architecture, but also articulated notions of value, reflecting that leather and textile wall hangings were the most distinctive—and most expensive—material elements of the early modern European interior.²² In addition to charting space, inventories could track time as in the case of the church inventories discussed by Stielau, which could be amended over centuries. Moreover, inventories often *exclude* non-valuable things in the interior space. As historians of material culture have shown, very rarely would we find food in an inventory: it perishes, and its volatile nature cannot be quantified as monetary value that would persist through time. And, as the essays by Freddolini and Stielau reveal, inventories might be completed at a distance from the objects with which they engage so that the author or scribe could include additional information, perhaps derived from other documents such as contracts, or even previous inventories, thus inducing scholars to explore productive intertextualities.

²⁰ Giacomo Barri, *The Painters Voyage of Italy*, London: Thomas Flesher, 1679, 145. On the Settala Collection see Alessandra Squizzato, ‘Tra arte e natura: il Musaeum di Manfredo Settala, spazio di memoria, ‘esperienze’ e ‘trattenimento’ nella Milano seicentesca’, in Lavinia M. Galli Michero and Martina Mazzotta, eds, *Wunderkammer. Arte, natura, meraviglia ieri e oggi*, Milan: Skira, 2013, 45-49; and Antonio Aimi and Vincenzo de Michele, eds, *Septalianum Musaeum. Una collezione scientifica nella Milano del Seicento*, Florence: Giunti, 1984.

²¹ Cinzia Maria Sicca, ‘Da notaio a maestro di casa: la ‘confezione’ degli inventari a Firenze durante il principato’, in Sicca, *Inventari e cataloghi*, 20-21.

²² Thomas Campbell, *Tapestry in the Renaissance. Art and Magnificence*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002. On the importance of textiles see also Tristan Weddigen, ed, *Unfolding the Textile Medium in Early Modern Art and Literature*, Emsdetten and Berlin: Edition Imorde, 2011; Tristan Weddigen, ‘Textile Spaces: Interior and Exterior’, in *Display of Art*, 162-165; Caterina Volpi, ‘Dressing the Palace: *Parati* and their Role in Display’, in *Display of Art*, 166-177; James Gordon Harper, ‘Tapestry and Temporality’, in *Display of Art*, 178-181; and Alessandra Rodolfo and Caterina Volpi, eds, *Vestire i Palazzi. Stoffe, tessuti e parati negli arredi e nell’arte del Barocco*, Vatican City: Edizioni Musei Vaticani, 2014.

Frequent consistencies in structure, vocabulary, and physical appearance on the pages of inventories lead to the conclusion that inventories belong to a particular genre. In early modern Europe, for example, an inventory usually appeared as a discrete list in which every entry occupies a separate line, and was very seldom articulated like prose, as a continuous stream running from left to right and occupying the entire surface of the page. In addition to adhering to the conventions of a literary genre, inventories, historians of material culture remind us, can be 'fictional'²³ and function as 'subjective representations'.²⁴

The catalogue is a selection of things, but, as the etymology suggests, these entities are not necessarily related in their material existence within a space. A catalogue could function as a virtual collection, an anthology of selected objects existing on the paper on which it is written.²⁵ In the early modern period, therefore, the catalogue defines a different relation for objects than the inventory, detaching them from their specific spatial existence as well as from their relation to other things found at that particular site. The text itself can reflect this aspect as the title of the *Collection of Various Recipes of Unique Secrets*, investigated by Amy Buono, suggests: in this case the collection is created only by the text, and exists as a textual entity within the pages of the volume. In today's art historical usage, the term catalogue, often associated with museums or the auction trade, even more emphatically points to the collective whole represented by the accumulated objects (perhaps framed, albeit temporarily, by a shared physical space).

Materially, the inventory and catalogue also evolved differently in the western European context. The inventory, primarily a legal document, was almost never illustrated or printed. The *Inventary of the Cospi Museum*, printed in Bologna in 1680, is a notable exception,²⁶ and reveals a productive intersection between catalogue and inventory. Buono's essay shows how materiality, modes of production, and textual conventions are also inherently interwoven with the list's function. In that sense, the *Collection of Various Recipes of Unique Secrets*, while organized along the lines of published catalogues, is analogous to an inventory as it exists only as a manuscript, in one copy, to preserve the memory of rare and secret recipes and at the same time to prevent the inevitable circulation of information that a printed catalogue would fuel.

²³ Lena Cowen Orlin, 'Fictions of the Early Modern English Probate Inventory', in Henry S. Turner, ed, *The Culture of Capital: Property, Cities, and Knowledge in Early Modern England*, New York: Routledge, 2002, 51-83.

²⁴ Riello, 'Things Seen and Unseen', 135-140.

²⁵ The etymology of the word 'anthology' also goes back to the verb λέγειν, to gather. (*Oxford English Dictionary*, sub vocem *Anthology*, <http://www.oed.com>, accessed 20 February 2014: 'Latin *anthologia*, < Greek *ἀνθολογία* (< *ἄνθος*-ς flower + *-λογία* collection, < *λέγ-ειν* to gather)').

²⁶ Lorenzo Legati, *Inuentario semplice di tutte le materie esattamente descritte che si trouano nel museo Cospiano*, Bologna: Giacomo Monti, 1680.

In contrast to the inventory, catalogues rapidly evolved into printed texts, ready to be multiplied to serve increasingly literate audiences and an appetite stimulated by the growing art market and the founding of museums, especially from the eighteenth century onwards. As Pergam explores here, catalogues eventually became illustrated, which enhanced their value as texts and as objects. These catalogues' self-containing rhetoric and potential for iteration and dissemination contributed to the formation of a textual space for the development of antiquarian and connoisseurial discourses, articulated in both text and image.

To return to an earlier point, while we recognize the ontological and material differences between inventories and catalogues, we also observe that establishing and sanctioning the value of things sits at the intersection between inventories and catalogues. Therefore we argue, it can be very productive to explore them in tandem, reflecting on reasons for their production, exploring their authorship and their publics, and investigating their material existence and literary conventions. Furthermore, acknowledging their shared narrative frameworks not only unveils the overlap between inventories and catalogues, but enables art historians to reflect upon these sources as types across Western and Non-Western cultures, and long time spans—from the Middle Ages to the Modern period, and to start exploring theories of reading such texts. Indeed, focusing on function and rhetorical strategies allows the authors here, when necessary, to sidestep the issue of nomenclature. Several of our authors have selected texts that may not be readily identified as inventories or catalogues and yet argue that these texts functioned in precisely the same fashion – assigning value, establishing epistemologies, operating within recognized legal structures, or making judicious choices. Anne Helmreich, Tim Hitchcock, and William Turkel, for example, make a case for reading trial indictments as inventories of circulatory material culture, focusing on eighteenth-century London. By turning their attention to this body of evidence, they bring to light that which is often overlooked in studies of material culture, particularly those associated with inventories – the experiences of the middling and lower classes and the material culture of the quotidian.

Thus, while we have called upon the etymological histories of inventories and catalogues, we aim to expand the scope of their presence and use in global contexts and do not attempt to definitively define these genres in order to acknowledge their ever evolving forms. Although these two words have a western history, we ask here, can we recognize these forms of list making in other cultural contexts? Can these concepts become productive epistemological frameworks and art historiographical categories to explore non-Western forms of articulating knowledge as well as the multifold and ever-changing relations between people and things? We propose that the answer is yes and, indeed, encourage the field to continue this mode of exploration.

Historically, the catalogue has been an intellectual tool for Western cultures to explore, categorize, appropriate, and even colonize non-Western cultures as Buono argues in the first part of her essay concerning the *Natural History of*

Brasil, which catalogues knowledge along the lines of European categories and colonial interests. Buono considers natural histories and recipe books associated with Brazil and the colonial project as descriptive not only of the botanical bounty of the new world but also the interlocked systems of knowledge (iconographic, linguistic, scientific, and cultural) production and socio-political power then operating. Her analysis illuminates how the rhetorical function of the list impacts the significance of the object; botanical specimens accrue different significances when regarded as exemplars of natural history or ingredients in medicinal recipes. We could add many examples to further enrich this discussion. One instance could be the illustration of a Mixtec Mask (Rome, Museo Preistorico Nazionale Etnografico Luigi Pigorini) in Ulisse Aldrovandi's *Musaeum Metallicum*.²⁷ In this volume the 'Larua Indica' or 'Indian theatre mask' is not only (mis)interpreted according to European conventions, but also becomes part of ontological frameworks that change the significance and meaning of the object. Another example is Lorenzo Pignoria's addition to Vincenzo Cartari's *Images of the Ancient Gods*, published in 1615.²⁸ Pignoria added an illustrated catalogue of 'Indian Gods' that were associated with the pagan gods of classical antiquity as a means to grasp these new and unexpected deities, as well as to define them as belonging to a past culture, conquered and surpassed by Christianity.

Jeffrey Moser's essay on catalogues produced in 12th-century China shows how the relationship between image and text articulated discourses of antiquarianism and connoisseurship well before they developed in Europe. Moser examines the practices of early Chinese antiquarianism and the production of compilations of *jinshixue*, literary studies of inscriptions on metal and stone. These texts reveal the degree to which the authors looked to the ancient objects themselves as sources of knowledge, that is, drawing on 'self-naming' or self-referential inscriptions to establish formal and functional typologies that eventually encompassed non-inscribed objects. Furthermore, Moser's essay contributes methodologically to prove how 'inventory' and 'catalogue' define intellectual tools that, although stemming from the Western tradition, prove to be very productive for

²⁷ Ulisse Aldrovandi, *Musaeum Metallicum in libros III distributum*, Bartolommeo Ambrosini, ed, Bologna: Ferronius, 1648, 550.

²⁸ Vincenzo Cartari and Lorenzo Pignoria, *Le vere e nove imagini de gli dei delli antichi di Vincenzo Cartari Reggiano. Ridotte da capo a piedi in questa nouissima impressione alle loro reali, & non piu per l'adietro osseruate simiglianze. Cauate da' marmi, bronzi, medaglie, gioie, & altre memorie antiche; con esquisito studio, & particolare diligenza da Lorenzo Pignoria padovano. Aggiunteui le annotationi del medesimo sopra tutta l'opera, & vn discorso intorno le deità dell' Indie orientali, & occidentali, con le loro figure tratte da gl'originali, che si conseruano nelle gallerie de' principi, & ne' musei delle persone priuate. Con le allegorie sopra le imagini di Cesare Malfatti padouano, migliorate, & accresciute nouamente. Et vn catalogo del medesimo di cento piu famosi dei della gentilità. Il tutto ridotto a somma perfettione, come si può facilmente vedere nella prefatione al lettore*, Padua: Appresso Pietro Paolo Tozzi, nella stampa del Pasquati, 1615. On Cartari see Caterina Volpi, *Le immagini degli Dèi di Vincenzo Cartari*, Rome: De Luca, 1996.

construing different relations between words and images in Chinese culture and understanding different modes of textual organization – chronological or taxonomical.

Ackley, Freddolini, and Stielau draw upon sources more easily recognized as inventories in the Western tradition. Such inventories are typically affiliated with either persons/families – such as legal documents compiled after the death of a person (probate inventories) or in relation to dowries – or institutions, particularly the church and state, to keep track and control of their possessions. Inventories were not just means to preserve a patrimony; often they were the first step leading to its dispersal.²⁹ As legal documents, inventories were strictly regulated as to their function, legal value, and the form and structure of their content. Entire legal treatises were devoted to inventories, such as the one published by the Italian lawyer Fanuccio Fanucci in 1574 and printed several times in the following century, German lawyer Johannes Fuchs' treatise *De Inventario Tractatus Brevis*, published in 1672, or the twelfth book of *La science parfaite des Notaires* (1692).³⁰ These authors devote most of their attention to the possible uses of an inventory in a trial and on the typologies of inventory in relation to the protagonists involved (heirs, widows, children), but at least Fanucci does address the conventions of producing an inventory, stating that all the objects must be described with extreme care, indicating weight, quantity, dimensions, and general qualities.³¹

As Stielau's essay shows, weight could be an important element in inventory entries and was particularly closely linked to notions of fiscal value. Although Stielau's case study is centered upon Germany, her methodological approach can be applied to many other geographical areas. The still unpublished inventory of a goldsmith's workshop in Lucca, dated 1709, mentions finished metalwork by

²⁹ For example the *post mortem* inventory of the Florentine courtier Rocco Vatrini, gentleman of the bedchamber and secretary of the bedchamber to Grand Duke Cosimo III de' Medici, was compiled to send all his possessions to public auction. Florence, Archivio di Stato, Magistrato Supremo, 1981, fols. 1005r-1024r. Rocco Vatrini established a trust to provide dowries for poor Florentine women, and all his possessions were sold to establish the endowment. On Vatrini see Francesco Freddolini, 'Imperio fideique sacer. Il busto reliquiario di San Ferdinando Re nella chiesa dei Trinitari a Livorno e il suo committente', in L. Casprini, D. Liscia Bemporad, E. Nardinocchi, eds, *I volti della fede. I volti della seduzione*, Florence: Polistampa, 2003, 59-73.

³⁰ Fanuccio Fanucci, *Tractatus the Inventario ac eius beneficio*, Venice: Haeredes Vincentii Valgrisi, 1574, 16; Johannes Fuchs, *De Inventario Tractatus Brevis*, Cologne: Joachim Reumann, 1672, 89-90; and Claude de Ferrière, *La Science Parfaite du Notaire ou, Le parfait notaire: contenant les ordonnances, arrêts & réglemens rendus touchant la fonction des notaires, tant royaux qu'apostoliques: avec les stiles, formules & instructions pour dresser toutes sortes d'actes, suivant l'usage des provinces de droit écrit, & a celles du pays coutumier, tant en matiere civile que bénéficiale*, Paris: Charles Osmont, 1692. For a case study on the notarial practices in early modern Pisa see Manuel Rossi, 'De inventario faciendo. Teoria e prassi inventariale a Pisa in età moderna', in Sicca, *Inventari e cataloghi*, 35-42.

³¹ Fanucci, *Tractatus*, 104.

weight, and appraises its monetary value according to weight, separating fiscal value from the actual production cost, which was much lower.³² This convention was so significant that it was not limited to notarial language. In 1749, when the artists Vincenzo Foggini and Massimiliano Haiger appraised two silver bas reliefs in the collection of the Florentine nobleman Giovanni Vincenzo Borgherini and attributed the pieces to a Roman artist after a very detailed description and stylistic analysis, they still quantified the monetary value on grounds of weight.³³

A similar textual approach driven by the materiality of things can be extended along many other trajectories, including the trial indictments of the Old Bailey court of London as analyzed by Helmreich, Hitchcock, and Turkel. Indeed, the computational methodology adopted by the three authors allows them to identify hitherto obscured patterns associated with materiality that also necessitates attending to the semantic variability of material descriptions. Ackley, in his analysis of medieval church inventories, draws out the complex issues authors faced when accounting for metalwork while he also attends closely to the language of these inventories.

As many of our authors acknowledge, the task of probing these texts is complicated by their relative brevity and seemingly low information density. In early modern inventories, for example, paintings were described in a very laconic and standardized fashion according to the protocols of the day: ‘A painting representing the Virgin with walnut frame, 2 braccia wide’ could be a plausible early modern inventory entry, drawn from sources that rarely included masterpieces, which belonged to the privileged few. The legal language of the notaries tended to remain cold and distant, largely because the quality of works of

³² Lucca, Archivio di Stato, Notari, parte seconda, Notaio Paolino Pellegrino Sergiusti, 4680, fols. 881r-881v, 940r: ‘11 August 1709. Inventory and appraisal made by the undersigned Francesco Farina and Giovanni Lorenzo Massoni of the gold and silver in the workshop of Sig.r Bianco Francesco Bianchi

No. 23 earrings, weight <i>denari</i> 4.3, <i>lire</i> 3.6 each <i>denaro</i> , value	<i>lire</i> 326:14
The making of the earrings	<i>lire</i> 18
No. 3 rosettes in 25, weight <i>denari</i> 1.8, <i>zecchini</i> 3.6 each <i>denaro</i> , value	<i>lire</i> 105:12
The making of the rosettes	<i>lire</i> 12
No. 6 rosettes in 13 and 2 in 19, weight <i>denari</i> 1.8, <i>zecchini</i> 3.6 each <i>denaro</i> , value	<i>lire</i> 165
The making of the rosettes	<i>lire</i> 24

[...]

No. 4 pairs of earrings with stones, weight <i>denari</i> 11, <i>lire</i> 3.6 each <i>denaro</i> value	<i>lire</i> 36:6
The making of the said [earrings]	<i>lire</i> 12’.

³³ Florence, Archivio di Stato, Ufficiali del Biado poi Magistrato dell’abbondanza, 124, no. 219: ‘28 April 1749 Description of the four silver bas reliefs, with frames in gilded bronze, decorated with silver elements, made in Rome by an unknown author [...]

The weight of the silver of the big bas reliefs is about *libbre* 26, *once* 6, and we appraise it 11 *ducati* 3 *lira* each *libbra*

The weight of the oval bas reliefs is about 14 *libbre*, and we appraise it similarly 11 *ducati* 3 *lira* each *libbra*’.

art was understood to be conditional, circumscribed by time and space, and potentially highly unstable, able to vanish within a generation. Moreover, inventories needed to cover an immense ground, from the house of the poorest to the palace of the Emperor, and the guidelines for producing inventories anticipated such possibilities. Exceptional circumstances might, of course, impact the language and the conventions of the inventory, as the essay by Freddolini shows. Pergam's account of the rise of the illustrated auction catalogue demonstrates how eighteenth and nineteenth-century auctioneers working in Britain and France sought to recover notions of significance and increasingly, albeit slowly, called upon images to enhance their persuasive rhetoric that, like that of early modern inventories, tended toward brevity.

Pergam's essay is also an excellent reminder of the role played by technology in the construction and distribution of the inventory and catalogue. Pergam points to how auctioneers adopted newly available techniques for the reproduction of images, including lithography and photography. Indeed, historian Kristin Neuschel points out that the explosion of documentation associated with Western European nobility in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries depended on the relatively ready availability of paper.³⁴ Hundreds of years earlier, in Song China, printing technology enabled the collation and circulation of inscriptions from bronze vessels and stone steles and tablets described by Moser. Technology also lies behind the texts that circulated in and from the 'New World' discussed by Buono.

Inventories and catalogues, as these authors collectively argue, established geographic, temporal, and discursive spaces for the circulation and exchange of material culture and for the formation of epistemologies and taxonomies. These texts established frameworks in which objects could signify both individually and within the context of collections. They document accumulation and loss – acts of buying, gift giving, selling, pawning, thieving, etc. – that point not only to the mobility of objects but also to processes of knowledge formation, patterns of consumption, changing concepts of value, and the relationship of material culture to expressions of identity, ranging from the personal to familial, class, national, and even imperial.

Inventories and catalogues are indicative traces of debates concerning the links between language and materiality – the limits and possibilities language holds for describing things. They direct us to an object-oriented ontology and concomitantly raise questions of individual agency. The authors of many of these lists were self-consciously writing histories through objects and these acts of representation should make us critically alert as we employ these texts in writing our own histories. As we have argued, while inventories and catalogues are often used in art history as archaeological tools for excavating layers of the past and treated as empirical sources, these texts should be subjected to same modes of analysis as other objects of material culture.

³⁴ Neuschel, 'From 'Written Record' to the Paper Chase?', 206.

Francesco Freddolini is Assistant Professor of Art History at Luther College, University of Regina. His recent publications include his monograph *Giovanni Baratta, 1670-1747. Scultura e Industria del Marmo tra la Toscana e le Corti d'Europa* (2013) and contributions to *Display of Art in the Roman Palace, 1550-1750* (2014), edited by Gail Feigenbaum with Francesco Freddolini. He has received fellowships from the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Huntington Library, and the Getty Research Institute.

Anne Helmreich is Senior Program Officer, Getty Foundation. She is currently exploring the applicability of tools and techniques of the digital humanities for art history. She recently co-authored with Pamela Fletcher 'Local/Global: Mapping Nineteenth-Century London's Art Market', *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, and the edited collection *The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London, 1850-1939* (2011).

francesco.freddolini@uregina.ca alhelmreich@gmail.com