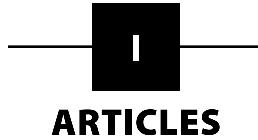

ARTICLES

Critical Museology

A Manifesto

Anthony Shelton

ABSTRACT: Synthesizing work carried out by the author over the past twenty-five years, this article proposes a tentative disciplinary definition of critical museology, distinguishing its related methodological interdictions and describing its distinctiveness from what is here defined as operational museology. The article acknowledges the diverse intellectual sources that have informed the subject and calls for a reorientation and separation of critical museology from the operational museologies that form part of its area of study.

Critical museology, it is argued, is not only an essential intellectual tool for better understanding museums, related exhibitionary institutions, fields of patrimony and counter patrimonies, and the global and local flows and conditions in which they are embedded, but is also crucial for developing new exhibitionary genres, telling untold stories, rearticulating knowledge systems for public dissemination, reimagining organizational and management structures, and repurposing museums and galleries in line with multicultural and intercultural states and communities.

KEYWORDS: complexity theory, critical museology, deconstructionism, heritage, museum anthropology, museum studies, museum theory

There is not one but three museologies, critical, praxiological, and operational, each defined by a particular epistemological position, method or technique, communicative media, and practice. Critical and praxiological museologies are focused on the study and exploration of operational museology—critical museology from a narrative multidisciplinary perspective, and praxiological museology through visual and performative media.

Praxiological museology is closely related to 'institutional critique' and the work of artists like Marcel Broodthaers, Lothar Baumgarten, Andrea Fraser, Jimmie Durham, Fred Wilson, Hans Haacke, and Joseph Kosuth; it is also closely related to new realism through the work of Edward Paolozzi and Martial Raysse, as well as other artists as diverse as Peter Greenaway, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Gabriel Orozco, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Mark Dion, particularly his archaeological digs (Fribourg 1995; Umbertide 1976; Venice 1997–1998; London 1999) aimed at ques-

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tioning established classificatory systems and the relation between empirical knowledge and 'amateur' fictions. Since these three museologies have been discussed in earlier publications (Shelton 1997, 2001a), I will focus for the purpose of the manifesto only on critical museology and its relationship to operational museology.

Operational museology is that body of knowledge, rules of application, procedural and ethical protocols, organizational structures and regulatory interdictions, and their products (exhibitions and programs) that constitute the field of 'practical' museology. In addition, it comprises the related professional organizations; accredited courses; systems of internship; mentorship and peer review; conference cycles; and seminars and publications by which it regulates and reproduces its institutionalized narratives and discourses. Operational museology combines, rationalizes, and essentializes different discourses derived from epistemologically distinct systems of knowledge and ethical interdictions into a seemingly discrete and coherent subject that over the past half century has been increasingly taught in universities, credited by professional associations, and applied in museums and galleries internationally. In the past twelve years operational museology has stimulated an avalanche of professional and academic conferences, books, papers, and readers in English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish. However, with few exceptions (Ames 1986, 1992; Macdonald and Silverstone 1991; Macdonald 1998; Hainard and Gonseth 2002; Handler and Gable 1997; Porto 2009; Guasch and Zulaika 2005), the disciplinary architecture and institutional cultures of operational museology have escaped sustained analysis or deconstruction (Hainard and Gonseth 2002: 15; Padró 2003: 51; Díaz Balerdi 2008: 15).

Critical museology has as its subject the study of operational museology. As a field of study it interrogates the imaginaries, narratives, discourses, agencies, visual and optical regimes, and their articulations and integrations within diverse organizational structures that taken together constitute a field of cultural and artistic production, articulated through public and private museums; heritage sites; gardens; memorials; exhibition halls; cultural centers; and art galleries (Bennett 1995; Canclini 1995). These fields are clearly related to competing subfields of power relations and economic regimes that are made partially visible through ideas and counter ideas of patrimony and social identity (Bourdieu 1993: 30; Canclini 1995: 108).

Critical museology is distinct from Peter Vergo's (1989) *The New Museology* (cf Lorente 2003: 15, 2012: 70), which never defined a distinct field or method of study, or subjected the 'old' museology to sustained critical evaluation. Given the title's promise, it is curious that the theoretical apparatus, previous critiques formulated against the 'old' museology, or organizational reorientations implemented or discussed by protagonists like Georges-Henri Rivière, Pierre Mayrand, André Desvallées, Jan Jelínek, or Vinos Sofka were largely unacknowledged (Gómez Martínez 2006: 274–275; Lorente 2012: 50–51). In Britain, it was the contributors to a different volume, Robert Lumley's *The Museum Time Machine,* which appeared the year prior to Vergo's work, who better expressed the growing disquiet about traditional museological presuppositions and operations. The volume's critical trajectory was anticipated by the conference organized by Brian Durrans, Making Exhibitions of Ourselves: The Limits of Objectivity in the Representation of Other Cultures (British Museum, 1986), and through the questions raised by Malcolm McLeod and Edward Paolozzi in their *Lost Magic Kingdoms* exhibition (Museum of Mankind, 1985), as well as the curatorial practices of Charles Hunt, undertaken just a little after Jacques Hainard's experiments at the Museum of Ethnography in Neuchâtel. In his useful synopsis of the international development of museological thinking, Pedro Lorente (2012: 80) rightly confirms anthropology's importance to the emergence of critical museology in the English-speaking world. Nevertheless, the discipline's cross-fertilization with critical theory, sociology, history, historiography, and cultural studies, and the influence of Hainard's own work, which was openly discussed at the Museum of Mankind during this period, should not be underestimated.

Critical museology is predicated on four general epistemological positions that stand in sharp contrast to those endemic to operational museology, and seven basic methodological interdictions that might initially guide its application.

Epistemological Positions

1. History does not exist independent of human perception and cognition, and is constructed by society. It is governed neither by revelation or laws, and is neither spiritually nor materially transcendent of humanity. Furthermore, history is not unitary or unified, but is constructed in distinct ways by different societies. Neither is history necessarily linear nor cumulative. History is composed through the articulation of structures of events that orchestrate causal relations between different conditions, actions, and mentalities to create explanatory frameworks of the past. These frameworks exist as distinct event structures, which are sorted and rationalized to constitute national, minority, or universal histories, each legitimated by supposed truth criteria, which impute it conviction and ensure its reproduction and dissemination through museums, galleries, archives, print and electronic media, and the educational system. Certeau (1988) argues for the absolute incommensurability between the alterity of the past and the 'operations' of historical discourses to capture it, 'operations' that inevitably conclude by being overwhelmed themselves by the enormity of such alterity. This has led the historian Ged Martin to conclude that history is "[s]ocially necessary, but intellectually impossible" (2004: 14), a position not unlike that espoused by Michael Ames (1992: 110) for museums of anthropology.

In *The Savage Mind* (1966), Claude Lévi-Strauss, anticipating part of Certeau's later critique, had already argued that 'history' does not possess a uniform or homogeneous consistency, but is constituted through different 'densities' of events. Some historical periods have left rich documental legacies that provide materials with which causal relations can be constructed, and the resulting interpretations compared to others assembled from like documentation to test the original causal hypothesis. Other periods, however, with a paucity of documentation and their consequent 'lighter' temporal density, are only able to support a thinner and more fragile structure of events. All such structures may be supplemented by archaeological or art historical 'evidence', but in so doing become epistemologically heterogeneous. 'History' then brings these causally inflicted event structures together in a linear projection to compose master narratives, which are appropriated and manipulated by specific interest groups or national and global communities.

History is not only internally differentiated and made up of different densities of time, which determine the conditions and possibilities for the establishment of causal relationships, but every event structure is also made up of different, often competing, structurations of time. Georges Gurvitch, in *The Social Spectrum of Time* (1964), distinguishes between distinct social groups and 'sociabilities' to which he attributes specific historical orientations. Groups experience time differently and consequently structure it in different ways. Furthermore, before the collapse and reduction of the category of time to indices of mechanical movement, and the imposition of the clock to measure such movement, time was marked in different ways, each of which imparted it with a distinctive qualitative character. The fragmentary and unevenly articulated event structures that we describe as constituting history are therefore neither uniform nor unitary; they constitute a heterogeneity of structures that obscure the multiple ways time is experienced and articulated within them.

Universal history is a 'representation' of representations, though as Belting (2003: 66) has noted in the case of art history, one that has internal limitations in its efficacy to encode and transmit a collective memory and that after all is the product of a specific civilization and his-

tory. In exhibitions and textual works, Fernando Estévez González (2004, 2010) has resolutely argued that the past is irrecoverable and can only be grasped through its relationships to a socially constructed present, which is always mediated differentially through unequal power relations. Archives, including museums, never protect or ensure authentic pasts, but, as explored in his exhibition *El Pasado en el Presente* (Tenerife, 2001), reconstitute them within the terms of the present; this process of essentialization involves a series of 'operations' not unlike those employed to create normative landscapes formulated from the freezing of time that Bender identifies with the construction of heritage sites (1998: 26). Museums have been legitimated in operational museology as embodiments of a long genealogy of institutions—the heirs of the library of Alexandria, church treasuries, cabinets of curiosities, and Enlightenment collections (Bazin 1967; Pearce 1989)—that implicitly accept an empirical, cumulative, and noncritical attitude to history fundamentally opposed to the 'archaeological' view essential to critical scholarship. The foundation and operational narratives with which museums legitimate themselves must always be subjected to skeptical scrutiny. Every history is a constructed fiction and every fiction has its own history.

2. The figure of the collector has long been prioritized to give operational museology historical continuity and impart it an objective legitimacy. Collecting, it has been argued (Cabanne 1963; Pearce 1989), has characterized every society and every period in the history of human development and, as I have argued elsewhere, has been naturalized in the work of these authors to become a fundamental psychological predisposition common to the whole of humanity (Shelton 2006: 481–482). Even our species identity (materialist, acquisitive, and competitive) has been defined by our universal propensity to collect. The justification of such activity however, in operational museology, is not attributed to its origin in history but to a transcendental psychological drive (Baudrillard 1981; Muensterberger 1994; Belk 1995). The legitimation of human materialism, acquisitiveness, and competitiveness is, in operational museology, guaranteed by supposed transcendental laws that exist and govern behavior independent of society, but whose effects can be demonstrated and 'proven' by museums asserting a 'truth effect' disseminated through the underlying presuppositions upon which exhibitions and programs are based. Museums legitimate their own 'stories' and activities by reference to transcendental criteria.

Operational museology further accepts that collecting is conditioned by well-defined and explicit ideal modalities. Susan Stewart ([1984] 1993) and Susan Pearce (1989) distinguished three modalities of collecting: fetishistic, souvenir, and systematic. Fetishistic collections are those that have been amassed through a pathological fixation that substitutes a specific type or order of objects in place of the 'normative' sexual impulse. Souvenir collecting is likewise centered on the ego. Here, following Stewart, the individual condenses personal experience of a time and space within an object that then contains his or her subjective memories. Only the systematic collection escapes the confines of the ego, they argue, by subordinating itself to the fulfillment of the rules of a transcendental objectivist taxonomic science. Here, accumulation is regulated by its focus on specific, systematically defined classes of objects, which share a supposed common ('natural') affinity. Only this latter modality, because collecting is regulated by natural taxonomy, is considered 'scientific' and therefore deemed useful for museum-based research and exhibition. In her 1989 book, Pearce used this typology to distinguish between legitimate (systematic) and illegitimate (fetishistic and souvenir) collecting to delineate the division between ethically responsible and irresponsible acquisition. By focusing collecting on the acquisition of systematically constituted object classes, museums are confirmed as scientific institutions and their work relegitimated according to what Lyotard (1984) refers to as a Humboldtian metanarrative that values science for its emancipatory propensity.

Collecting, however, does not fall so neatly into typologies, as many collectors themselves have insisted when discussing their personal or group motivations (Blom 2002; Miller 2008; Shelton 2006, 2011), and in a later work Pearce (1991) herself revises her position to acknowledge that motivations probably draw and combine together all three criteria that she and Stewart had earlier defined. Nevertheless, by reducing the motivations behind collecting to a tripartite psychologically based typology, operational museology has been able to construct and objectify a history through which museum practice was effectively legitimated (Shelton 2001b, 2006). This reduction of history to the play of psychological processes obfuscates the heterogeneous and conflicted contexts in which many collections were made (Fabian 2000; Gosden and Knowles 2001), the political and social contexts of how they were used (Coombes 1994; Levell 2000; O'Hanlon and Welsch 2000; Henare 2005; Elliott and Shambaugh 2005), and their role in defining personal identity (Bann 1994; Miller 2008: 293). Moreover, in some societies where individualism is subordinated to collective identity, psychological explanations may be entirely invalid. Álvaro Armero (2009: 27) is one of few scholars who, while suspecting that biological drives might motivate the propensity to collect nevertheless acknowledges the heterogeneous and nonessentialized directions in which collecting can develop. More fruitful still is the phenomenological approach that sees objects as inseparable from the subject perceiving them. In this formulation, objects seduce and fascinate us without ever imparting us any of their intrinsic identity—the only meaning we can know is that which we ourselves invest in them. Objects are experienced as close and comforting, but nevertheless, existentially, are always distant and alien (Schwenger 2006).

Studies of collecting should not forget what is uncollected and the relation and interpenetration between different regimes of value to better understand how systems of desire are personally mediated (cf. Miller 2008). Such foci may reveal synergies between collectors and what Leah Dilworth has called "meta museums," museums that disrupt and lay bare established rhetoric and celebrate "epistemological dilemmas" (2003: 5), or what Jacques Hainard has called a museology of rupture. A critical museology would aim to rescue museology from both the dead hands of an objectivist history and from psychological reductionism or "cold passion" (Armero 2009), in order to restore a critical and reflexive historical approach to understanding the assemblage of collections and the development of collection-based institutions (Shelton 1997, 2006, 2007b).

3. It will by now be clear that operational museology has constructed the museum's institutional authority on an uncritical acceptance of empirical methodologies anchored in theories of objectivity. The institution of curatorship, based on the privilege it accords material or visual culture as its source of knowledge, is one of the essential guarantors of this self-same authority. Museums reproduce a teleological circle in which curatorship guarantees the knowledge-value of material culture, while the knowledge-value of material culture reciprocally guarantees the curatorial authority on which museums are based. Jacques Hainard has explored this operation extensively in a series of exhibitions at the Museum of Ethnography, Neuchâtel, that culminated in *Le musée cannaibale* (2002), In Hainard and Gonseth's view,

> to feed the visitors of their exhibitions, museologists take from their reserves pieces of the world's material cultures. To prepare these objects they use recipes meant to bring to light the contrasts and similarities existing between the worlds of here and there. To do this, they have more or less agreed on a rhetoric which remains poorly analyzed and put into practice without method or system, wherein they mix juxtaposition, aestheticization, sacralization, mimesis, changes of scale and hybridization, logical relations and poetic associations, exhibiting their items either simply in showcases or in complex three-dimensional ways. (2002: 15)

Díaz Balerdi (2008: 67) reiterates the unquenchable appetite of museums for increasing their collections and transforming objects into exhibitions, publications, and programs, while at the same time concealing them in stores and warehouses to ensure their public face at least appears slim, slender and cool. For him, following the digestive metaphor, museums show all the symptoms of bulimia.

Objects, in the context of museum displays, not only act as signifiers but signifieds too. Their presence is not only a condition of their existence, but also a guarantor therefore of their meaning. They are performed as if they contain within them both form (optical evidence) and meaning (authority), which the curator traditionally had responsibility to unfold and make explicit to the wider public (Padró 2002: 54). For this reason authenticity, and the knowledges, technologies, and certifications that guarantee the object's 'purity' or 'sanitization', assume overwhelming importance in much curatorial work, while the proliferation of replicas, imitations material, and virtual copies (Estévez González 2010: 36) and the mutual 'impingements' of the authentic and the restored (Eco 1986), issues that raise fundamental questions, are only at best reluctantly acknowledged by operational museology. What is 'authentic', it needs be asked, in an increasingly hybrid world in which technology has the capacity to intervene through diverse operations to preserve, conserve, restore, and repair and reverse the effect of historical decay to mediate cultural and natural extinction? Is such obfuscation an effect of the museum's intention to always create order where none necessarily exists, not dissimilar from the operations of scientific laboratories, where the social and technical are intermingled and alternative scientific hypotheses are limited and restrained by the imposition of frameworks (Latour and Woolgar 1986: 36–37)? The application of the sciences of preservation is likewise culturally mediated (Clavir 2002: 54). The idea that objects have significance independent of their mediation through consciousness is, given the arguments of Barthes (1972, 1994), Baudrillard (1981, 1983), Certeau (1988), Appadurai (1986), and Kopytoff (1986), difficult to uphold, as is evidenced by the sustained criticism positivist material culture studies have received both by processual archaeologists and exponents of "new material culture studies" (Tilley et al. 2006). If objects and meanings are not held together by any 'naturalized' binding relationship—except that arbitrarily attributed to them—not only can an object's meaning change and differ at specific stages in its 'life history', but the nature of the simulacra through which it becomes imminent might itself change. Kopytoff (1986) and Baudrillard (1981) introduced a paradigmatic shift in material culture studies whose implications for curatorial work and the status of museum authority continue to be poorly appreciated within the profession. The move from an objectivist to a subjectivist concept of knowledge, as Jacques Hainard, Fernando Estévez González, Mary Bouquet, Bruno Latour, and Nuno Porto, among others, have repeatedly demonstrated in their curatorial strategies, retain enormous potential to generate new heterologies and explode the limited range of existing exhibition genres.

4. Related to these critiques of objectivist interpretations of the object is the precept that signifiers themselves have no common 'valency' in their relation to signifieds. Baudrillard (1983: 83) returned repeatedly to distinguish four different reality effects or simulacra that are created as a result of the distinct and irreductive relations constructed between signifiers and signifieds and among different categories of signifiers themselves. Baudrillard first isolated three simulacra as a typology that appeared to succeed each other chronologically. Later a fourth, viral simulacra, was identified which appeared to be specific to the contemporary world. Nevertheless, no such tidy chronological order exists in a society that is now nearly totally globalized and in which specific groups and ethnicities operate within and between different simulacra that coexist and sometimes overlap at the same time. Such simulacra are no longer restricted to

particular ethnicities and geographical spaces but may be specific ways of thinking that stretch between distinct cultures and geographies, as in Eco's (1986) and Baudrillard's (1989) hyper-realities. Under these conditions, increasing complexities and ambiguities within and between cultures and societies are exacerbated to the extent that any simple correspondence between object and meaning in museum displays hides, at best, a crass disequivalence that obfuscates our wider experience of existence. Operational museology develops within a field whose reality is constantly manipulated and attested through its own operations where politics are inseparably embroiled in its 'truth' (cf. Latour and Woolgar 1986: 237). Museums, however, no matter how deeply obfuscated, are fundamentally more heterotopic than the societies in which they operate and are therefore potentially disruptive of them.

Methodological Interdictions

1. Agency, while a key area of anthropological research and radical pedagogy, was almost entirely ignored by operational museology. Not only the agency of the institutions themselves, but also the agency implicit in the construction and institutionalization of collections, exhibitions, and related pedagogic work, was effectively eluded in the institution's public presentation. Critical museology needs to uncover these occulted relations, and also examine the intersections and struggles between different types of agencies represented by distinct groups and cultures (Ames 1992: 78). The museum, no more than the expression of an official patrimony, does not expend agency in a vacuum. It elicits resistance, contestation, counterprojects, and even violent reactions that seek its destruction, such as the large-scale cultural looting performed by Napoleon, Hitler, and Stalin; the destruction of patrimony after the fall of the Soviet Union and its satellites; or, more recently, the looting and bombardment of Iraq and Syria and the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas. The agency of patrimony and museums can be redirected into projects of reconciliation and cultural healing, as in the case of Holocaust museums, the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh, commemorating those executed by the Khmer Rough, or the exhibition *Yuyanapaq: Para Recordar* (Museo de la Nacion, Lima, 2009), documenting the violence during the Peruvian state's struggle with Sendero Luminoso. Agencies and counter-agencies gain special visibility in the transfer of cultural property, such as in the repatriation of Ts'elxweyaqw from the Burke Museum in Seattle to the Sto:lo First Nation in British Columbia (2006), or the G'psgolox Pole from the National Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm to the Haisla First Nation (2006).

In 2010, the Reina Sofia hosted the exhibition *El Principio Potosi,* intended as a collaborative enterprise between German, Spanish and Bolivian museologists. The exhibition concept was intended to juxtapose seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Andean Catholic images with contemporary art works to draw parallel histories between the iconography and symbolic violence inherent to historical and current capitalist economic and ideological strategies. However, the project was severely critiqued by the Bolivian curators because of the lack of acknowledgment given to the historical and continuing role of indigenous agency in the appropriation and incorporation of these 'foreign' images into a uniquely Andean worldview.

Examples such as these emphasize the analytical importance of cross-cultural collaborative methodologies, which, even in a world characterized by increasing intercultural relations and hybrid cultures, better explicate the specificities and nuances of unique and irreducible cultural processes, epistemologies, and ontological understandings. Moreover, it is through such culturally diverse collaborations, of whose power operational museology is well aware, that critical museology can help perpetuate its own critical efficacy while ensuring that the so-called democ-

ratization and decolonization of museums, here taken as labels that denote continuous processes rather than completed conditions, remain an important goal.

2. Every theoretical intervention within museology occurs within an already constituted intellectual field made up of competing subject positions. Bourdieu defines a field as "a separate social universe having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy" (1993: 162). The field includes the social conditions that determine the possibilities of specific functions. It is both conditioned and conditioning and includes the mechanisms that regulate its attendant power relations and define the limits of struggle between the different subject positions within it. Museological practices should be understood in relation to the field in which they unfold. This reflexivity is a necessary precondition for establishing a theory of practice, from which a practice of theory can emerge. Only by theorizing museum practices do we become conscious of the presuppositions that we apply to our everyday work, and only through a rigorous deconstruction and reflexivity of that work can we develop fresh insights and innovations necessary to ensure the future development of museums, such as in the example that follows.

As a precondition for the major gallery projects undertaken at the Horniman Museum, London, and the Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museum, Brighton, it was thought necessary to understand the broader history of ethnographic curatorship in the United Kingdom (Shelton 1992, 2003). After comparing the chronology around the implementation and use of particular anthropological paradigms within museums and universities, it became apparent that for most of the twentieth century there had been a lag between the dismissal and adoption of each paradigm within the two institutions. This had resulted in some outdated and sometimes racist ethnographic exhibitions in the UK's provincial museums that had out lived perspectives already discredited within the university system. This preliminary study steered the adaptation, at Brighton, in two adjoining galleries, of radically different approaches, intended to capture the tensions and contradictions implicit to intercultural communication. The first gallery used categories including exchange, worship, work, association, secret societies, gender, etc., to present a comparative perspective on Western and non-Western aspects of culture; the second gallery examined the motivations behind various collectors who had donated substantial collections to the museum. The effects, conditions, and themes derived from the tensions generated between these two gallery approaches provided the subject for a series of small temporary exhibitions curated in a third space. Such an approach was generated in response to the theorization of some of the practices disclosed by the deconstruction of the history of ethnographic exhibitions in the United Kingdom.

3. The distinction between museology and museography, as discussed by Desvallées and Mairesse (2010: 52–54), is fundamentally incompatible with the methods of critical museology. To distinguish between museology as the study of museums and museography as a configuration of scientific, technical, and managerial knowledges (architecture, environmental controls, lighting, conservation, visitor studies, management) eludes the essential and dependent relations between the two systems of knowledges and obscures their points of articulation, relations of dependency, common epistemological origins, and political linkages and functions. By distinguishing between applied and intellectual knowledge we obscure the close relations between them and the way they are mediated through social relations. This only reinforces their appearances as closed, systematic, and coherent fields devoid of social and cultural operations (Latour and Woolgar 1986: 21). As Miriam Clavir demonstrates in *Preserving What Is Valued* (2002), science, in this case conservation, is always mediated and applied following social values and ethics fundamental to the very structure of museums and the various professional bodies that

buttress them. On a different level even the presentation of science in museums has itself repeatedly been argued to be socially and ethically mediated and to take place within specific social arenas, which are usually eluded from public view (Macdonald 1998; Vackimes 2008: 17).

More obviously, management, another core component of operational museology, is also based on cultural value and social-structural models governing the distribution of resources to achieve set functions. Functions, levels and application of resources, values attributed to such institutions, and the optimal organizational structure of power and authority are 'operations' all determined by political and socioeconomic considerations (Strathern 2000: 2). By comparing management models, which represent the ideal distribution of power and authority within an institution, to their practical implementation it is possible to locate the contradictions and areas of tensions and contestations that play a fundamental role in institutional change and transformation, and that form an essential part of critical museology.

The distinction between museology and museography, in the work of some of its expounders, divides the study of the publicly visible side of museums, exhibitions and programs, from that of its largely invisible organization and support structures, reproducing a division that easily occults the source of an important determinant of public policy. It is not, I believe, possible to distinguish between technical or applied knowledges on the one hand and interpretive methods on the other without privileging the site of museography as a theoretical 'no-go zone' and eluding the political determinants and epistemological presuppositions to which public programs respond. Like the laboratory described by Latour and Woogar, museum activity is deeply complicit in "the organization of persuasion through literary inscription" (1986: 88).

4. Museums, along with museology itself, are part of wider fields of social, political, and economic relations and cannot be understood when segregated from other museums and galleries, heritage sites, monuments, and formulations and counterformulations of 'patrimony' and national or regional identities. James Clifford's groundbreaking work "Four Northwest Coast Museums: Travel Reflections" ([1991] 1997) effectively shifted the study of museums away from individual institutions to the field of museological operations, in which individual museums and cultural centers are compared and interpreted. Not only did he distinguish similarities and differences in the institutional poetics of their displays, but he also related their innovations to a specific experience of indigenous/settler politics in British Columbia.

In a different context, Estévez González (2006: 151–152) draws attention to the growth of networks of museums, warning of their political tutelage and their involvement in new projects related to identity formation; the 'McDonald's-ization' of museums to become part of the tourist industry and the 'New Economy'; and the homogenization of museums under the direction of a hegemonic operational museology.

Operational museology itself is not a unified or coherent field, despite, as Estéves González (ibid.) observes, its claim to scientific status through which it aspires to claim universality. Its fractures and differences are evidenced in the two movements that Gómez Martínez (2006: 12–13) distinguishes as dividing the Anglo-Saxon and Mediterranean museum worlds. These differences, he argues, were determined by religious orientation and their associated sentiments and distinguished by their different foci on family, community, and society; the idea of service; and the love and celebration of beauty (ibid.: 19). Such a distinction is similar, in some regards, to Lyotard's (1984) description of what he refers to as the Humboldtian and classical paradigms, the dominant metanarratives underlying the legitimation of science and art and their respective museological institutionalizations.

It is no longer possible to distinguish between local, regional, and national museums (Shelton 2005, 2007a). Regardless of the nature of the state and its relation to the regional polities

within it, or its connections to neighboring states, there now exist multiple networks that link museums and other agencies more closely together than ever before. Critical museology must therefore distinguish between different fields that, depending on geographic proximity, political integrations, or shared subject positions, will be marked by variations in the intensity of their interactions and influences. Assuredly such fields cut across disciplines, sometimes creating repetitive but different scales of representational effects. Writing itself, as is clearly attested in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century travel narratives, contains strategies to fix and naturalize the materiality of the world in ethically charged spaces and times and to organize our visual and nonvisual experience of them. Such operations reaffirm the curatorial designs implicit within related media, including international exhibitions and museums.

5. Crucial to critical museology is the proposition that in defining any aspect of the society or regional civilization of which that society is part, we implicitly define or reproduce its opposite (cf. Preziosi 2003: 98–99; Said 2002: 202, 301–302). The institutionalization by museums of, for example, collections therefore needs to be critically assessed and the analysis of its effects examined for their political implications.

It is usual for museums to elide the presence and agency of Western institutions and individuals, including themselves, in the history of assembling collections and imputing them meaning. The circulation between different cultures of 'works' and the construction of their specific arenas or fields of political and cultural meaning are broken and obscured by the geographical separation of collections from one part of the world from those from another (Henare 2005). Trade, exchange, collecting, and looting are seldom elaborated upon in museum displays, partly because Euro-American material culture and art are institutionalized differently from their non-Euro-American counterparts, as if there had never been any historical contact between them.

Difference is created by the imposition of a limit, which draws a boundary around one category while at the same time delineating what becomes an absence. Limits are constructed by linguistic discrimination—the differentiation of signs that intervene between the undifferentiated experience of the world and its conceptualization through language. The separation between the condition of being and the act of experience constitutes a fundamental alienation between the world and consciousness, casting all signs, even within the same language, as 'foreign' to each other. Either way, there is no exterior to the everyday/exotic worlds imagined by the technologies that reproduce differential equations between them.

Language articulates and sometimes assists visualization of elaborate structures of otherness. The 'we' and the 'other' has been expressed in the past through the supposition of distinct mentalities, associated with specific cognitive mechanisms, operations, and ways of experiencing the world, as well as different ensuing histories (and nonhistories) and nonlinguistic cultural forms of expression. Further limits were and are constructed to equate these differences with geographical boundaries or psychological states and dispositions. Differences have been argued to have been created by species, race, gender, age, or form. These operations underlying the construction of difference produce the normative, familiar, and self-identifiable at the same time they lay out the space and raw material for the articulation of their opposites. Moreover, these phenomenological, linguistic, and philosophical operations, once concretely expressed, receive embodiment through their institutionalization, an institutionalization that is usually legitimated by historical objectification and essentialized to endow its authority transcendental value. The ongoing reorganization of the French museum system demonstrates well the changing political effects of institutionalization and reinstitutionalization on collections.

In 1996, the Chirac government announced it would move the ethnographic collections from the Musée de l'Homme and amalgamate them with those from the Musée National des Arts

d'Afrique et d'Océanie (MNAAO) to create the much discussed Musée du quai Branly (Clifford 2007; Price 2007; Shelton 2009). Not all the collections of the Musée de l'Homme were sent to the quai Branly. One hundred and fourteen 'masterpieces' were taken to be exhibited in the Pavilion des Sessions in the Louvre; works representing Asian civilizations were sent to the Musée Guimet; and just as significant, European ethnographic collections were set aside to be amalgamated with others from the Musée National des Arts et Traditions to form a reserve that is intended to provide the basis for the new Musée de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée, to be opened in Marseille in 2013.

By separating European from non-European collections, France reinforced an older and much criticized binary division between Europe and the 'other'. This difference, it is reported, has been smudged in the Marseille project by the unavoidable acknowledgment that the growth of Europe has always been intimately connected to the development of neighboring civilizations. It would be implausible to present European knowledge systems; science, cartography, medicine, and astrology; and Christianity, Judaism, and Islam independent of discussion of the wider region. Here, therefore, at least, the essentialization and purification of European material and intellectual culture might be mitigated. The quai Branly, however, in its permanent exhibitions, is unable to avoid the essentialization of the non-European cultures that it exhibits. Although there are soft transitions from one continental area to another, objects are abstracted and exposed as indices of specific cultural essences. Detached from history, collections have been purified and essentialized within a Western-generated grammar of difference that is mute to all and any process, transformation, or intercultural relationship that might have created links between Europe and elsewhere. Here, the West has effectively edited itself out of the process of the formation of these collections, and with it, even the mention of the circulation of ideas, technologies, and people between different worlds on which our own identity as well as that of those we 'other' has been constructed. The French museum system has proven itself an effective technology for distilling different grades of otherness and placing them in various historical, modern, and contemporary conjunctions with the 'we'.

The radical separation of European and non-European works institutionalized in the Musée du quai Branly is mirrored by that of people in the Cité National de l'Histoire de l'immigration. This is not a museum of immigration and emigration, which would have presented the mutual relationship between France and the world, but instead focuses only on the one-way movement of non-French people into France, a magnet with only one pole. It would appear therefore that whether intentionally or not, French museums have redoubled their efforts to maintain the separation between domestic and 'foreign' cultures and have thereby remained silent, in their permanent exhibition galleries at least, on the changing relations between Europe and the rest of the world. Ethnic cleansing, political and economic colonialism and dependency, Arab expansionism, colonialism and slavery, US counterhegemonic dependency and military projections, and, more recently, the effects of Asian economic development on Europe are all absent. We Euro-Americans have found it difficult to escape our own epistemologies and have articulated the 'other'—the reconstruction of archaeological sites or the historic centers of cities—through our own imagination of an 'other' using a Western gaze and framework. In short: The construction of the 'other' follows the same syntax as the construction of the 'we' (Preziosi 2003: 120).

6. Critical museology is never exhausted by the act of deconstruction. "Incredulity towards metanarratives," the skeptical attitude toward knowledge and the masquerading of information as knowledge (Lyotard 1984), is an essential attitude toward museum and gallery institutions, which must be sustained to ensure the continuity of self-critical and reflexive practices. It would be naïve not to expect that the insights derived from critical museology might be incorpo-

rated, undoubtedly for sincere reasons, into the operation, policy, or programming of museums and art galleries, rather like galleries have used artists associated with institutional critique to inform their own values, programming, and operations, though not, it needs to be acknowledged, without consequent dilution of their critical strategies (Crimp 1993: 155). The purpose of critical museology is not, however, to reform institutions or to claim a privileged position for its own practice, but to sustain an ongoing critical and dialectical dialogue that engenders a constant self-reflexive attitude toward museum practices and their wider constituencies. As theoretical knowledges move from intellectual to museum fields, they inevitably undergo a process of mediation, and reintegration within museum practices, objectives, vision, and values. Within this process, adopted perspectives become relationally and sometimes epistemologically transformed within new determinate fields. Oscar Navarro Rojas's exhortation that critical museology should aim to confront the museum visitor with "the dilemmas of contemporary society through the eyes of history and critical memory and ethics" (quoted in Lorente 2012: 81) should, like the provocative museological experiments of Hainard, equally never escape critical scrutiny. Neither should it be ignored that critical museology itself has grown in the shadow of the emergent master narrative of the 'New Economy', which predicates a major rearticulation of the arts, cultural and knowledge organizations, and their commodification within a knowledge and experience economy (Löfgren and Willim 2005: 2). Critical museology must, therefore, always maintain a sustained incredulity to itself as well as its field of application. It follows that critical museology could never be an operational tool or provide an alternative strategic mission for museums, though it needs to encourage institutions to adopt more experimental practices, champion openness and transparency, and support critical community engagement.

Such an unflinching attitude is not easy to sustain and can be expected to meet institutional as well as external resistance. Providing support for one party or another in situations of contestation over museum authority, and its ideological underpinnings, might merely result in the exchange of one static and hegemonic discourse for a counterhegemony that itself might do no more than nourish new hegemonies. Unlike operational museology, which implicitly is always politically situated, critical museology must remain politically skeptical if it is to ensure it remains reflexive, open, and critical. Failure to maintain distance between institutional and critical thought casts critical museology back into the mold of an operational subject position.

7. The epistemological critique of dominant models of museum operations, and the necessity to broaden the field of study to include adjacent institutions and national and international organizations suggests we should revise the lens through which we view museums. Since Clifford (1997) and Pratt (1992) formulated the concept of the contact zone, museums have moved beyond easily definable, geographically circumscribed arenas of interaction. Globalization, the formation of extraterritorial political and economic federations, and interterritorial organizations, together with the growth of the Internet and social networking sites, have contributed to phenomenal increases in connectivity between institutions. It is no longer adequate to define a museum solely by its physical plant and 'real' space exhibitions, programs, and projects. More now than at any time in their existence, museums perform as hubs within expansive international, national, and regional networks, and in so doing have lost more of their privileged singularity and uniqueness.

Such networks connect museums, the subject positions represented within them, professional organizations, and management structures. They also connect museums with diverse client communities, including those from where their collections originated. Geographical distance is no longer sufficient to ensure the separation of object and subject, as evidenced by the growing and rightful refusal of communities, artists, and individuals to remain silenced

on issues of institutional objectification and ownership rights. These networks, both virtual and physical, carry technical information, development campaigns, and managerial directives; they host research projects and lobbies; they project exhibitions and programs regionally and internationally; and they connect museums and communities, funding, and political sources, providing access to collections and archives and conduits for critical engagement. Networks are interactive and carry multidirectional flows of information. In short, they integrate institutions to the world, establishing a hypercomplexity that museum theory has been slow to appreciate (Cameron and Mengler 2009: 191).

It is individuals that create specific networks, even if institutional policy attempts to define their foci, a condition which results in a diffusion and broader spread of institutional authority and opens the prospect of its manipulation through network lobbying between groups within and external to museums. Critical museology needs to develop the analytical tools to enable museums to be better understood as hubs within hypercomplex, though not necessarily cohesive, networked fields. Hubs are both virtual and material, although their coexistence within or between fields does not necessarily imply similarity or correspondence between them. The epistemological foundations of the nodal institutions that make up a network can be radically separate, while at the same time intimately implicated in each other's operations. The virtual erases spatial difference—an exhibition or program on one side of the world can intervene in the subject or condition about which it is focused in places far removed from it; the instantaneousness of the moment of diffusion blinds temporal succession and denies the discreteness, even if it was only an appearance, of event structures; spatial and temporal boundaries, 'self' and 'other', being and nothingness which all dissolve under the operational world conjured by the virtual (Virilio 1991: 13). The paradox of contemporary existence is that while the virtual suffuses material institutions and threatens their discrete existence (solid walls, mission statements, institutional values, and political and ideological fields) at the same time it depends on them for its own existence and reproduction. Estévez González compares social and mechanical time, with "instantaneous time, the time of virtual reality", noting each conception has its own mode of regulating society and nature (2004: 17), which repeatedly brings nostalgia into collision with postmodernist pastiche (ibid.: 14). The museum and archive are perhaps frozen between this binary. "The past is everywhere," writes Estévez González; "[i]t is fashionable" (ibid.: 13); an impossible condition, that never the less envelopes our existence.

Instead of conceiving museums as the latest manifestation of a long line of collection-based institutions beginning with the Library of Alexandria, or Noah's Ark, we need to understand them as part of distinctive exhibitionary complexes (Bennett 1995), situated within particular historical periods and geographical principalities or fields. We need to exchange generalities about the historical development of collecting and exhibiting institutions (they are not always the same) for particularities of their function within set geographies and histories. Instead of reducing the subject of collecting to specific typologies, we need to examine the way collections have been used in self-fashioning social and personal identities (Bann 1994; Henare 2005; Elliott and Shambaugh 2005). Museums must recognize more generally that they no longer possess a monopoly over the meaning and significance of the material or visual cultures they institutionalize, and that objects have different meanings depending on their positionality in regard to distinct ethnic groups, classes, institutions, and exhibitionary strategies, which imply mutual rights and obligations (Hainard and Gonseth 2002; Shelton 2000). Following the already well-established application of the cannibalistic trope to museums, the question that needs to be asked is whether the coexistence of virtual and material realities leads to museum's autodigesting themselves. After severing the mechanical relationship between objects and meaning previously fixed by positivist sciences and developing a genre theory that might do for exhibitions

what literary theory has done for literary criticism, we can begin to develop new practices and new types of exhibitions that can be disseminated both materially and virtually. New challenges and expectations surrounding museums, and their implications for their traditional operations, have created major ruptures within operational museology that now demand a new disciplinary response to demystify them and assist in liberating and reharnessing their full creative and explosive potentialities. Rather than reduce possible museum futures to a simple choice between them being 'temples' or 'forums', let us reimagine them as laboratories redolent with possibilities. It is a worthy enough aspiration that a critical museology might strive to constantly help renew such quixotic and such essentially dialectical institutions as museums and galleries.

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