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See table of contents

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The Decline of the Modernist Museum

THOUGH IT HAS YET TO FALL, the modernist museum is declining. Supported by upper- and middle-class patrons, the modernist museum emerged during the 19th century. It advanced what Steven Conn calls an epistemology of objects, insisting that objects could "speak for themselves" when properly arranged by curators.[1] Working people who otherwise lacked educational opportunities were among the intended audience of this address. With its spectacular displays, the modernist museum purported to offer the public direct experiences of material culture. Ideally, these experiences transmitted both universal and humanist values, resulting in an increased knowledge of industrial design, natural history and the creative accomplishments of great artists. The modernist museum was an institution yielding immeasurable social benefit. At least, that was the claim of its defenders.

By the mid-20th century, however, the value of the modernist museum was no longer obvious. Critics argued that, instead of serving the public, it catered to the elite classes and legitimated their ideologies. In the 1960s sociologist Pierre Bourdieu undertook the first extensive visitor surveys at European institutions, discovering that blue-collar workers and rural dwellers felt intimidated by the solemn surroundings and esoteric demands of the museum.[2] Bourdieu concluded that far from upholding a democratic ideal, museums were in fact exclusionary. They had a distinctive social function, but it was not the liberal education of a diverse populace. Museums both produced and reinforced class distinctions.

During the 1970s and 1980s, art historians Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach continued to unmask the myth of the museum's neutrality.[3] In their analyses of the Louvre in Paris and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Duncan and Wallach argued that these institutions should be understood as ritual spaces, not unlike churches, that shape visitors into civilized members of society. Modernist museums usually have dominating classical facades in order to mark the passage of the visitor from the exterior world into the discrete realm of the museum. These symbolic thresholds fortify the myth of the museum as a space of universal values detached from mundane political, economic and social concerns.

Even the earliest modernist museums were hardly philanthropic endeavours. Questioning the benevolent goals of 19th-century reformers, cultural critic Tony Bennett found that museums were sites for reforming the habits, morals and beliefs of the subordinate classes.[4] Supporters of the modernist museum hoped that by

1 Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago and London, 1998), pp. 4-9.

2 Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, *L'Amour de l'art: Les musées européens et leur public* (Paris, 1969). For the English translation, see *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and their Public*, trans. Caroline Beattie and Nick Merriman (Stanford, CA, 1990).

3 Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Museum of Modern Art as Late Capitalist Ritual", *Marxist Perspectives* (Winter 1978), pp. 28-51 and "The Universal Survey Museum", *Art History,* 3 (December 1980), pp. 447-69. See also Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London, 1995).

4 Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (New York, 1995), p. 19.

Lianne McTavish, "The Decline of the Modernist Museum", *Acadiensis,* XXXIII, 1 (Fall 2003), pp. 97-107.

undertaking educational pursuits, the working classes would spend less time in ale houses. Extending Michel Foucault's arguments about the development of the prison, Bennett claimed that the modernist museum was another disciplinary technology designed to encourage self-surveillance and the incorporation of the values of the state. By analyzing human behaviour in American museums in 1976, sociologist Norman Trondsen established that visitors did indeed conform to the norms of the institution; they modulated their voices, restricted their bodily movements and observed a certain "civil inattention" to fellow museum goers.[5]

The most damning critiques of the modernist museum focused on anthropological displays. Formed during the height of colonial expansion, museums of anthropology both stemmed from and encouraged the fascination with exotically foreign cultures. Critics charged that these institutions ripped ethnographic objects from their original contexts, resignifying them in the interests of Western patrons and viewers.[6] Museums also re-presented indigenous peoples – sometimes in live performances but often in the form of human remains. According to cultural critic Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, such displays resulted in an objectification of people, turning them into "signs of themselves".[7] In 1822, for example, thirteen Kaffirs were exhibited in Hyde Park, eating meals, hunting and performing ceremonial dances, all before painted backdrops. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argued that the viewers of such theatrical displays continued to gaze at "others" as objects of their touristic pleasure beyond the walls of the museum.[8]

In North America, the acquisition and display of Native objects was justified by the myth of the inevitable decline of the "noble savage" in the face of modernity. Anthropologist Ruth Phillips contended that souvenir trade goods, such as beaded purses and miniature canoes, were ignored by curators of the modernist museum because the objects demonstrated the ability of Native peoples to adapt to the popular demands of the market without assimilating to Western culture.[9] An exclusive interest in "pre-modern" Native culture allowed the anthropology museum both to deny and

5 Norman Trondsen, "Social Control in the Art Museum", *Urban Life*, 5 (1976), pp. 104-19

6 For some critical discussions of anthropological museums, see Michael Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums* (Vancouver, 1991); Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (New York, 1996); Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn, eds., *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum* (London, 1998); Annie Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture, and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven, CT, 1994); Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley, CA, 1998); Jeremy MacClancy, ed., *Contesting Art: Art, Politics and Identity in the Modern World* (Oxford, 1997); Moira T. McCaffrey, "Rononshonni–The Builder: David Ross McCord's Ethnographic Collection", in Shephard Krech III and Barbara A. Hail, eds., *Collecting Native America 1870-1960* (Washington, DC, 1999), pp. 43-73; Moira McLoughlin, *Museums and the Representation of Native Canadians: Negotiating the Borders of Culture* (New York, 1999); Moira Simpson, *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era* (New York, 1996).

7 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography", in Ivan Karp and Stephen D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, DC, 1991), p. 415.

8 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography", pp. 410-1.

9 Ruth Phillips, *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900* (Seattle, WA, 1998), p. 69.

compensate for colonialism. At the same time, in contrast to these romantic constructions of "savage" peoples, the Western culture displayed in art and history museums appeared civilized, up-to-date and naturally dominant.

Artists produced some of the most striking critiques of anthropological practices. In 1992, Fred Wilson undertook a museum intervention at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore, an established history museum.[10] "Mining" the Society's archives, Wilson rearranged its collections to emphasize the African-American presence in the region, a presence traditionally excluded from the museum. Using a different strategy, performance artists Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Pena protested the celebration of the quincentenary of Columbus' landing.[11] They masqueraded as ethnographic specimens in various European and North American museums. As "The Couple in the Cage", Fusco and Gomez-Pena dressed as two members of the newly-discovered Guatinaui tribe (from a fictional island off the coast of Mexico) to foreground the historical display of indigenous peoples. Some visitors missed the subversive intent of their art, and instead marveled at the delayed discovery of such primitive peoples.

Though 19th-century habits continue to inform the modernist museum, critiques of its elitism, conservative politics and colonial legacy have had an impact. Museum administrators now face mounting pressure to take responsibility for the inescapably ideological representations they promote. They are called upon both to represent and address more diverse audiences, especially people of colour, women and the working classes. To this end, the mission of the modernist museum has begun to change. So too have its methods of display and pedagogical goals. Many museum workers now design exhibitions with a disparate public in mind, striving to accommodate different learning styles with interactive displays. Challenging traditional structures of authority within the museum, curators are sometimes considered facilitators of the public use of collections, not unquestioned experts who determine what objects mean.[12] Various curators, especially those working in anthropology museums, have begun both consulting and collaborating with the communities they represent, engaging seriously with such issues as Native self-determination and the repatriation of objects.[13]

Some scholars view these changes positively. In their opinion, the transformation of the modernist museum is based on an intensification of the paradoxes intrinsic to it. Even as Bennett argues that the 19th-century museum was meant to encourage self-surveillance, he demonstrates that it was riddled with contradictions. While the museum claimed to provide a universal representation of the world, its exhibitions offered necessarily partial views, politicizing issues of inclusion and exclusion still

10 Lisa Corrin, ed., *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson* (Baltimore, MD, 1994).

11 Coco Fusco and Paula Heredia, *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatinaui Odyssey* (Chicago, Video Data Bank, 1993). See also Coco Fusco, *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (New York, 1995).

12 Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 104, describes the new curator as a "possessor of a technical competence whose function is to assist groups outside the museum to use its resources and to make authored statements within it".

13 For a discussion of collaboration, see James Clifford, "Museums as Contact Zones", in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), pp. 188- 219.

relevant today. At the same time, a homogenizing ideal which stressed the accessibility of the museum in the hopes of teaching and thus "civilizing" the masses was belied by the ways in which the institution was designed to distinguish "elite" classes from "lower" ones.[14] According to Phillips, anthropological museums shaped knowledge about the Native "other" but they also "acted as arenas for complex negotiations of social constructions".[15] Historian Stephen Bann concurs that modernist museums have long been open to a plurality of experiences and interpretations; they are not monolithic institutions impervious to change.[16]

Other scholars resent the recent changes, regarding them as a travesty of the modernist museum. They argue that alterations in museum practice are driven by a business-oriented drive for profit, not heightened educational goals or inclinations toward political responsibility. Audience-oriented museums pander to the lowest common denominator, turning the museum into a site for entertainment where the consumer reigns supreme and the curator's specialized knowledge is devalued. Critics charge that in order to make museums more attractive to the viewing public, the institutions now resemble theme parks and shopping malls rather than places of learning. The designers of the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa, for example, looked to both open air museums and Disney World as models for a newly engaging and interactive museum.[17] An increasing number of museums, including the Trowbridge Museum in Wiltshire, England, and the New Brunswick Museum in Saint John, New Brunswick, are contained within shopping malls.[18] Even the Louvre Museum now hosts a commercial centre, complete with the first North American-style food court in France.[19] One of the negative results of this transformation of the museum into an entertainment complex is the blockbuster exhibition, a gala event marketed with splashy advertising campaigns and merchandising. Critics affirm that though these shows purport to increase cultural understanding, they do not. According to art historian Brian Wallis, massive exhibitions such as "Turkey: The Continuing Magnificence" (1987-88) and "Mexico: A Work of Art" (1990) toured the United States in order to sell both the image and the products of developing countries to American markets.[20]

A recent publication by historian Brian Young aligns him with those who regret the transformation of the museum. His discontent is directed at one institution in

14 Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, pp. 103, 28.

15 Phillips, *Trading Identities,* p. 69.

16 Stephen Bann, "Art History and Museums", in Mark A. Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey, eds., *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspective* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 241.

17 George F. MacDonald, "Change and Challenge: Museums in the Information Society", in Ivan Karp and Stephen D. Lavine, eds., *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington, DC, 1992), p. 170.

18 Clare Conybeare, "Mall, Mill or Museum? (The First Museum to be Incorporated into a Shopping Center)", *Museums Journal*, 91 (1991), pp. 20-1.

19 Lianne McTavish, "Shopping in the Museum? Consumer Spaces and the Redefinition of the Louvre", *Cultural Studies*, 12 (April 1998), pp. 168-92.

20 Brian Wallis, "Selling Nations: International Exhibitions and Cultural Diplomacy", in Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff, eds., *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (Minneapolis, MI, 1994), pp. 265-81.

particular, the McCord Museum in Montreal, which houses a collection of objects and documents related to the history of English Canada. In *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum: The McCord, 1921-1996* (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), Young outlines the history of the McCord, presenting a narrative of misunderstanding, loss and anti-intellectualism. His argument unfolds chronologically, documenting the McCord family in the 18th century, David Ross McCord's collecting philosophy, the opening of the McCord Museum at McGill University in 1921, its closing to the public in 1936 and its eventual reopening in 1971. The detailed institutional history culminates with the firing of longtime archivist Pamela Miller in 1996, an act Young views as epitomizing the decline of both professional museum work and scholarly research at the McCord Museum.

Young's book is important because most studies have concentrated on museums in Europe and the United States; scholarly attention is only starting to focus on Canadian institutions. Though it concerns one institution in Quebec, Young's account sheds light on the situation faced by most if not all Canadian museums. Dwindling budgets, inadequate staffing and a renewed emphasis on profit margins undermine the research and care of collections. At the New Brunswick Museum, for example, chronic underfunding by government and intensive cuts in professional staff have accompanied demands that the institution represent every cultural group in New Brunswick, undertake outreach programs and safeguard the province's heritage. Despite this challenging situation, curators remain committed to researching and publishing on the museum's diverse collections. It is not difficult to see these museum workers in Young's terms, as heroic figures contending with the diminished recognition of their professional training and skills.

Young's biographical approach to the history of the McCord Museum features its founder, as well as subsequent directors, curators, benefactors and volunteers. Many of these later figures were women. Young convincingly documents what he calls a "women's culture" in the museum, a topic receiving surprisingly little attention in previous historical studies (pp. 80-111). According to the author, a culture of women was able to flourish at the McCord because of McGill University's continuing ambivalence about the value of the museum. Connotations of amateurism and suspicions that material objects did not constitute the stuff of serious history opened the door for mostly white, middle-class, conservative women to manage the collections with some degree of freedom. Female workers replaced David Ross McCord's interest in war and imperialism with an emphasis on the history of childhood, daily life, the family and the lives of Native peoples (p. 83). Isabel Dobell was especially influential; hired in 1955, she became the McCord Museum's chief curator in 1968, and then its director from 1970 until her retirement in 1975. By fundraising, encouraging female benefactors and pressuring McGill University, Dobell raised the profile of the museum, overseeing its reopening in the renovated Student Union Building in 1971.

Despite revealing the struggles of curators and women, Young's book will likely be unsatisfying to scholars who specialize in critical museum theory. His study is based almost exclusively on written documents and personal interviews. It presents the McCord Museum as an archive, not a site where objects were presented to viewers. Though Young passionately defends the study of the objects in the McCord's collections, he writes little about them. In his discussion of the reopened museum, for

example, the author reports only that its well-designed exhibitions were "sparing in their use of artifacts and with intelligent labels" (p. 107). There is no consideration of how curators selected objects and positioned them in relation to other objects as well as written texts. By failing to investigate how the meanings of objects were created within the McCord Museum, Young potentially reinforces modernist assumptions about the ability of objects to "speak for themselves".

Young's study is uncritical when it reaffirms the tenets of the modernist museum without questioning them.[21] He insists on the value of learning from the material objects in the McCord's collections, but does not define key terms such as "object" and "learning". This neglect is at odds with the substantial scholarly literature that both historicizes and analyzes museum classifications formerly considered obvious, including object, artifact and souvenir.[22] Though there are a few citations to museum theory in his notes, Young seems to lump all critiques of the museum into a single category he calls the "new museology". He argues that "much of the recent literature on museums and the 'new museology' totally subordinates collections and their past to an obsession with audience and the visitor as consumer" (p. 3). According to Young, this new museology features the "subordination of the object in favour of the educational and social values it represented" (p. 123). Such claims scarcely do justice to the complex historical and critical studies of the museum published since the 1960s.[23]

For the most part, museum studies are no longer exclusively focused on curatorship, issues of conservation and collections management. Yet when art historian Peter Vergo called in 1989 for a "new museology" that would entail a "radical re-examination of the role of museums", he did not advocate abandoning the study of objects in museum collections.[24] Many critical studies pay attention to how the meanings and value of objects are shaped within museums. Scholars explore how objects shift between categories – moving from "artifact" to "art work" – and how they are understood differently by disparate groups over time.[25] It is true that much

21 Though Young convincingly links David Ross McCord's character with anti-modernism (pp. 46-7), the author describes the goals of the McCord Museum in ways that conform to those of the modernist museum outlined above.

22 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore, MD, 1984). See also Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London, 2000), pp. 104-8, reviewed below.

23 For sophisticated studies of the museum, see Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clio: A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France* (Cambridge, 1984); Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley, CA, 1994); Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, eds., *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe (*Oxford, 1985); Joy Kenseth, "'A World of Wonders in One Closet Shut'", in Joy Kenseth, ed., *The Age of the Marvelous* (Hanover, NH, 1991), pp. 81-101; Didier Maleuvre, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art* (Stanford, CA, 1999); Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge, 1994); Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500-1800* (Oxford, 1990); Anthony Alan Shelton, "Cabinets of Transgression: Renaissance Collections and the Incorporation of the New World", in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, eds., *The Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), pp. 177-203.

24 Peter Vergo, ed., *The New Museology* (London, 1989), p. 3.

25 James Clifford, "On Collecting Art and Culture", in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, MA, 1988), pp. 215-51.

critical museum theory considers how viewers interact with objects, instead of approaching them as legible forms with fixed meanings. Nevertheless, interest in the museum-going public does not necessarily contribute to the replacement of objects with visitor centres as Young implies (p. 123).

A recent publication by Miriam Clavir, *Preserving What is Valued: Museums, Conservation, and First Nations* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2002) interrogates one of the traditional functions of the modernist museum that Young simply defends. In addition to displaying collections of objects, the modernist museum was meant to safeguard them, protecting cultural heritage and knowledge for the future. This emphasis on preservation necessitated the development of methods of conservation – interventions required to maintain the physical integrity of objects. The importance of conserving objects in museums may seem obvious. Clavir, however, challenges the axiomatic status of conservation practice in order "to elaborate its values and to explore them as historically and culturally grounded" (p. xix).

The author began to consider this topic during her 20-year career as conservator at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia. She was forced to rethink aspects of her professional training when members of First Nations communities in British Columbia asked to borrow some of the objects in her care. They wished to use objects originating from their own cultures in dance and ceremonial events. For Clavir, such use of objects was inextricably linked with their physical degradation. Lending them was at odds with her primary commitment to preserve and protect objects – real things with a unique link to the past. In short, Clavir was faced with what she calls the "preservation-versus-access dilemma" (p. 146).

According to western museum standards, the appearance and materiality of historically significant, irreplaceable objects should be maintained at any cost, even by removing them from both the use and view of the public. Many of the First Nations people that Clavir interviewed, however, had different understandings of preservation. They did not consider objects inert forms meant to be safely stored away. Material preservation was less important than cultural preservation, especially the "maintenance of continuity with indigenous values and beliefs that are part of a community's identity" (p. 73). The goal of First Nations communities was to sustain culture in a broader sense, with an emphasis on songs, language, oral history, traditions and genealogy.

Objects certainly had a role to play in the preservation of First Nations cultures on the Northwest Coast of Canada. They confirmed stories told by elders, participating in the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another. If separated from this process, objects could lose their significance. According to Gloria Cranmer Webster, 'Namgis (Kwakwaka'wakw), founder and former director of the U'mista Cultural Centre: "those objects really, oh, really don't mean much by themselves, sitting on shelves. They only come to life when they are really used" (p. 161). The use of important material objects in ceremonies and rituals was not linked with their degradation. On the contrary, use was precisely what enabled objects to continue to transmit beliefs and values.

Many of the First Nations interviewees stressed that Native objects were not frozen in the past, but rather part of living cultures (p. 76). The modification of objects could therefore be viewed positively, and not necessarily linked with a loss of integrity or authenticity. Dena Klashinsky (Kwakwaka'wakw and Salish), a Musqueam Band

member, argues: "if it's all within one family, like the grandson has made alterations to his grandfather's mask, then I think that's pretty wonderful" (p. 170). If the changes respected the appropriate use of ceremonial objects within families, they could signify both the continuance and renewal of traditions. For the same reason, replacing old objects with updated ones demonstrated the rearticulation of traditional forms, not their loss.[26] Even the deterioration of objects was an acceptable part of their natural life (p. 151). According to Don Bain of the Lheit-lit'en (Carrier) Nation, if a totem pole collapses it "doesn't lose its cultural significance. In time that pole starts returning back to the earth. . . . It's a cycle" (p. 153).

By drawing on the expertise within various First Nations, Clavir demonstrates that the conservation of sacred objects in western museums is not necessarily the best way to preserve them. The author is careful, however, to avoid presenting a unified Native view. Numerous and often lengthy quotations from her interviewees indicate that First Nations groups have diverse traditions; opinions about the proper care of objects can also differ within the same band. Some of the authorities Clavir spoke with had worked in museums and thus had ideas about preservation informed by both Native and western traditions. By including their voices, Clavir avoids portraying western museum practices as absolutely and immutably opposed to First Nations interests.

Preserving What is Valued encourages the re-examination of anthropological museums, but goes beyond the usual discussions of representation and repatriation. Clavir outlines the appropriate role for museums from a First Nations point-of-view (p. 216). While some First Nations interviewees mistrusted the institutions which had acquired objects seized from outlawed potlatches, others were more hopeful about what museums could do. According to them, museum workers should respect the knowledge of First Nations peoples, while striving to handle, store and display objects in an appropriate manner. They also ought to follow the protocols of object use; only those who had the rights to ceremonial gear should be allowed to borrow it (p. 145). In this way, museums could help First Nations peoples maintain knowledge of their ancestors, while encouraging others to learn about Native cultures. The reshaped anthropological museum begins to act "as a steward of these collections, providing a safe environment and facilitating easy access" (p. 145).

This vision of the museum recalls arguments made by cultural critic James Clifford. He uses the term "contact zone" to describe museums as a form of "ongoing historical, political, moral *relationship*", rather than simply a collection of objects.[27] His emphasis on dialogue among and between various communities does not facilitate the subordination of objects to the interests of "clients", as Young might expect. In fact, Clavir shows that dislodging an exclusive focus on the materiality of objects in anthropological museums can be beneficial. It leads to a richer comprehension of those objects as well as the cultures from which they originated.

The only weakness in Clavir's study is the way in which she conveys her important arguments. The book is verbose, including much repetition and constant sign-posting both to remind readers of what has already been covered and inform them of what is

26 For another discussion of this practice, see Judith Ostrowitz, *Privileging the Past: Reconstructing History in Northwest Coast Art* (Seattle, WA, 1999).

27 Clifford, *Routes*, p. 192 [emphasis in original].

yet to come. Bearing traces of its existence as a dissertation, Clavir's publication contains references and details that are not always essential. With more attentive editing, the book would have been significantly shorter.

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill's most recent book, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London, Routledge, 2000), examines how people understand objects in museums. Unlike Young and Clavir, the Professor of Museum Studies does not focus on one institution or issue. Instead, she asks: "how is meaning produced in museums?" (p. 1). Her responses to this complex question address how museums acquire and arrange artifacts, their pedagogical role and the active looking of museum visitors. At the same time, by undertaking close, historical readings of specific material objects, Hooper-Greenhill demonstrates that their meaning is never singular or unified.

After analyzing the collecting practices of the National Portrait Gallery in London during the 1850s, the author turns her attention to the vicissitudes of a 19th-century Maori meeting house, the collections of a Maori woman, Maggie [Makereti] Papakura and the repatriation of the Lakota Ghost Dance Shirt formerly displayed in Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow. Each case study shows that "the meaning of an object is dependent on the framework of ideas and objects within which it is placed" (p. 50). Hinemihi, the Maori meeting house, for example, was built in Te Wairoa, near Rotorua, New Zealand in 1880, buried in a volcanic eruption in 1886, purchased by Lord Onslow, the retiring Governor of New Zealand, in 1892, and taken to his family home in England, before becoming a British National Trust property. Hooper-Greenhill traces the shifting perception of Hinemihi as its function changed; beginning as a religious and community centre as well as tourist site in New Zealand, Hinemihi was subsequently a boathouse, military hospital, child's playhouse, work of art and spiritual mediator for the Maori people who visit it in Surrey. In addition to written documents, Hooper-Greenhill pays close attention to Hinemihi itself, discussing the modification of its materials, proportions and carved ornaments. She argues that this approach is necessary because the earlier meanings of objects are not entirely erased by later changes; they may be marked on the object itself, and thus recoverable (p. 50).

These case studies are interspersed with more strictly theoretical chapters, including one on pedagogy. The way in which visitors learn in museums is a topic already considered by the author in a collection she edited, *The Educational Role of Museums* (London, Routledge, 1999). In her more recent 2000 publication, Hooper-Greenhill continues to call for the development of a critical museum pedagogy that would take into account how individuals construct meaning according to their own diverse social experiences, interpretive skills and previous encounters with museums. Her attempts to facilitate visitors' active use of the spaces of museums are informed by theories of critical pedagogy, including those developed by Paolo Freire, Henry Giroux and bell hooks.[28] These scholars recognize teaching as a form of cultural

28 Paolo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, 1970); Henry Giroux, "Living Dangerously: Identity Politics and the New Cultural Racism", in Henry A. Giroux and Peter McLaren, eds., *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Practice of Cultural Studies* (New York, 1994), pp. 29-55; bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York, 1994). See also George Hein, *Learning in the Museum* (London, 1998).

production and not merely as the delivery of skills or knowledge. According to Giroux educators should contribute to the formation of schools as democratic public spheres by making learning meaningful, as well as critical and emancipatory.[29] Hooper-Greenhill's ideal museum would perform a similar role. She contends that instead of positing visitors as a unified and largely passive group, museum curators and educators should provide experiences that both engage and extend visitors' interpretive strategies, while taking account of their prior knowledge and potentially diverse learning styles (pp. 139-40).

This pedagogical approach should also consider how visitors interact with museum displays, especially how they look at objects and other materials. According to Hooper-Greenhill, museums are "predominantly scopic sites" (p. xi). Her understanding of vision is, however, at odds with that of the modernist museum. Instead of the passive perception of data, she aligns looking with interpretation. The author's historical-analytical approach to vision is influenced by changes in the practice of both art history and cultural studies. Since the late 1980s, the study of what is called "visual culture" has emerged in ways that challenge the traditional discipline of art history. An interest in visual culture instead of only "art" means that popular images such as street signs and shop displays are worthy of careful analysis. But visual culture studies does far more than simply accommodate a wider array of objects.[30] Scholars of visual culture also consider how objects are both framed and looked at, while undertaking historical analyses of visuality. Hooper-Greenhill argues that studying visuality in museums means examining the possibility of performing acts of seeing, analyzing who sees what, what is made visible, what remains invisible and how seeing, knowing and power are interrelated (p. 14). The author considers how the museum both produces and embodies forms of visuality, while encouraging a dialogue between viewer and object.

Hooper-Greenhill contends that a new kind of museum is emerging – the "post-museum". Though heir to the modernist museum, it is still unclear exactly what form the post-museum will take. General transformations are nevertheless discernible. According to Hooper-Greenhill, the shift "from the modernist museum as a site of authority to the post-museum as a site of mutuality" (p. xi) will mean that museums move closer to their audiences, embracing many voices and perspectives (pp. 142-4). No longer equated with a building, the post-museum will become an experience that includes exhibitions as well as a wider array of community events, the presence of artists or scientists in residence and even satellite displays in pubs, shops and on the World Wide Web (pp. 152, 148). Though the post-museum will continue to care for objects, the collecting phase of museums has passed (p. 152). Museums will therefore centre more on the use of objects rather than further accumulation. At the same time, intangible heritage will no longer be overlooked in favour of material objects. Songs,

29 Henry Giroux, *Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope: Theory, Culture and Schooling* (Boulder, CO, 1997), pp. 102, 71. For a critique of this pedagogical model, see Elizabeth Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy", *Harvard Educational Review*, 59, 3 (August 1989), pp. 297-324, and her *Teaching Positions: Difference, Pedagogy, and the Power of Address* (New York, 1997).

30 Mieke Bal, "Visual Essentialism and the Object of Visual Culture", *Journal of Visual Culture*, 2, 1 (2003), pp. 5-32.

memories and cultural traditions will enter the post-museum, revealing histories that were formerly obscured (p. 152).

Hooper-Greenhill's book provides a thorough and sophisticated critique of the modernist museum, without losing sight of material objects. The post-museum she describes is open and inclusive as well as attentive to looking and learning. It accommodates the relations of respect and reciprocity envisioned by the First Nations people interviewed by Clavir. Yet Hooper-Greenhill's post-museum might seem to be Young's worst nightmare. While objects still have an important role to play, they are not the primary concern. The authority of the institution is dispersed, with exhibitions occurring in pubs and other commercial areas. Such conditions may encourage business managers to enter the museum field in greater numbers, placing even more emphasis on profit, superficial blockbuster exhibitions and the reduction of visitors to paying customers.

Museum workers and supporters should be wary of this by no means inevitable possibility; indeed, many of them already are. Practitioners of critical museum studies concerned about the increasing commercialization of the museum can analyze how and why the critique and commodification of museums occurred at approximately the same time. Though it cannot be viewed in terms of cause and effect, this imbrication requires further examination. At the same time, the critical theories and skills applied to the modernist museum should be tested and recreated in relation to the post-museum. The altered museum is equally worthy of critique. Its more interactive exhibitions and increasing use of the World Wide Web are ripe for analysis.[31] The publications reviewed here suggest that an interdisciplinary approach drawing from history, art history, anthropology, museum studies, sociology, cultural studies and the study of visual culture will have a role to play in both the evaluation and construction of the future museum.

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31 Critical discussions of virtual museum exhibitions are just starting to be published. See Lianne McTavish, "Visiting Virtual Museums: Art and Experience Online", in Janet Marstine, ed., *New Museum Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford, forthcoming).