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Performing the Museum

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This article characterizes the relationship between the museum and its visitors as a dialogic process that enables a play between the public narratives of the museum and the private narratives of the viewers. The museum is presented as a performative site where its dominant socially and historically constructed pedagogy engages in a critical dialogue with the viewer's memories and cultural histories. Five pedagogical strategies are provided to comprise a critical performative pedagogy in museums: performing perception, autobiography, museum culture, interdisciplinarity, and performing the institution. These strategies represent a comprehensive museum pedagogy that enables visitors to experience and understand the museum's collections and exhibitions from their respective cultural perspectives.

Einstein's brain is a mythological object... he is commonly signified by his brain, which is like an object for anthologies, a true museum exhibit. (Barthes, 1957, p. 68)

Introduction

I begin with this quote from *Mythologies* (1957) to invoke Roland Barthes's metaphoric association between the human brain and the institution of the museum. Barthes's conjunction of Einstein's brain and the museum enables a double reading: the brain as an essentialized object to be collected, preserved, and exhibited; and the brain as a repository that collects, preserves, and exhibits essentialized objects. Through his museum/brain conjunction, Barthes exposes a noteworthy parallel between the brain's *private* memory and cultural history and the *public* memory and cultural history of the museum. This parallel notwithstanding, his metaphor parodies Cartesian disembodiment by exposing the absurdity of disconnecting the brain's and museum's intellectual operations from the larger contexts of the human body and the body politic. It is within the liminal, contingent, and ephemeral spaces that separate these multiple readings of Barthes' metaphor that I will conceptualize a theory of performativity, an embodied pedagogy whereby new museum myths can be imagined, created, and acted out.

Barthes's museum/brain metaphor finds among its historical antecedents the ancient "art of memory" and the 16th century "cabinets of the world." According to museologist Eileen Hooper-Greenhill (1992), "the art of memory was a mnemotechnic skill used to train and extend memory" (p. 91). During the Renaissance, memory served as a tool to store and recall knowledge, to imagine about the world, and to bring order to its chaotic nature. Cabinets of the world served to facilitate memory in two ways. First, they assembled disparate objects of curiosity within

a given site in order to facilitate a discourse about the meaning of their individual character and to imagine their hidden relationships to one another. Second, using the art of memory, meaning was constructed from this encyclopedic collection in order to, “recall and orally present a picture of the world” (p. 84). Thus, cabinets of the world provided a context within which to perform the art of memory and to articulate the rational worldview of the Renaissance based on interpretation and similitude.

This performative relationship between the two functions of the cabinet of the world was formalized in the 16th century with Giulio Camillo’s *Memory Theatre*. Whereas the interpretations and similitudes of the art of memory were imagined, *Memory Theatre* took on a concrete and didactic character. A tool for cognition, its principal function was to present empirical knowledge. “The complexities with which the cognitive structure of the ‘Theatre’ was constructed meant that the ideas had to be ‘explained’ or ‘demonstrated’ by the constructor, who was regarded as a very powerful, not to say dangerous, philosopher” (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 100). It is this privileged status of *Memory Theatre*, the didactic, monologic performance of its discourse of knowledge inherited by the modern museum, which is being challenged in this article.

The Museum As Performative Site

Performing the museum is tantamount to performing memory and cultural history. This pronouncement which assumes the use of museums as performative cultural instruments raises a number of questions. What is the relationship between museums, their cultural artifacts, and performance? Who performs the museum? Whose memory and cultural history is being performed? Considering the recent critique of exclusionary museum practices, in this essay I will tackle these and other questions by identifying the performance of subjectivity as a strategy through which viewers can engage museums and their artifacts critically. Similar to the “interactive museum experience model” espoused by Falk and Dierking (1992, p. 5), I will argue that broadening the museums institutional pedagogy to include viewers’ personal and social knowledge and experiences introduces critical content to museum experiences. In doing so, my objective will be to argue for a performative museum pedagogy that re-positions viewers as critical participants and enables their creative and political agency within museum culture (Garoian, 1999). Viewers’ agency enables their use of museum culture as a source through which to imagine, create, and perform new cultural myths that are relevant to their personal identities. In doing so, a critical dialogue is created between viewers and the museum.

If museums shape knowledge as Hooper-Greenhill (1992) suggests, then their power to influence our identities must be challenged. Using critical theorist Michel Foucault’s (1974) concept of “effective history,” Hooper-Greenhill calls for, “an opposition to the pursuit of the founding

origin of things, and a rejection of the approach that seeks to impose a chronology, an ordering structure, and a developmental flow from the past to the present. History must abandon its absolutes, and instead of attempting to find generalizations and unities, should look for differences, for change, and rupture” (1992, p. 10). Performing the museum is predicated upon rupturing the assumption that works of art are beyond reproach. While they are conserved, preserved, and secured for posterity, works of art represent the potential to dialogue with history; for us to expose, examine, and critique cultural codes. They also provide the possibility to imagine and create new cultural myths, new ways of exhibiting and interpreting works of art that take into consideration content introduced by museum viewers.

Performing such irreverence toward the museum and challenging its relevance in contemporary culture finds its parallel in Antonin Artaud’s (1958) “Theatre of Cruelty” second manifesto: “We shall renounce the theatrical superstition of the text and the dictatorship of the author” (p. 124). By challenging the mythic assumptions of the proscenium, which distinguishes and divides performers’ representation of reality on stage from the reality of the spectators’ lives in the real world, Artaud sought reciprocity between theatrical performance and the performance of everyday life. As in Artaud’s manifesto, viewers’ use of personal memory and cultural history to interpret works of art enables the performance of their subjectivities, the acting out of private content that challenges the public historical assumptions of museum culture. His concept of “cruelty,” when considered as viewers’ critical disruption of the museum’s historical assumptions and practices, produces a crisis of knowledge that is essential to the learning process (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 53).

Political theorist Cleo H. Cherryholmes (1988) argues that the critical disruption of reified culture represents, “critical pragmatism [when] a sense of crisis is brought to our choices, when it is accepted that our [cultural] standards, beliefs, values, guiding texts, and discourses-practices themselves require evaluation and reappraisal” (p. 151). The disjunctive relationship between the museum’s art historical content and the autobiographical content introduced by viewers enables critical pragmatism to take place. Science philosopher Robert Crease (1993) refers to disjunctive pedagogy as “argumentative analogies” that enable a “play” of ideas and images which expose knowledge that is otherwise unknown or hidden (p. 76). By performing the museum, viewers bring their personal identities into play with the institution’s dominant ideologies. In doing so, they are able to imagine and create new possibilities for museums and their artifacts within their contemporary cultural lives.

Museums write and perform historical scripts through their collections and exhibitions. Performance theorist Vivian Patraka (1996) claims they function as “a performative site in the sense that the architect, the designers,

and the management of the museum produce representations through objects and so produce a space and a subjectivity for the spectator” (p. 99). Key to Patraha’s critique is the idea that museums construct and exhibit an historical pedagogy that represses viewers’ cultural perspectives. As in Artaud’s conception of reified theater, the museum serves as the stage for which the script of history is written and upon which it is performed for the viewer. Assuming sole authorship, its performance of history precludes the memories and cultural histories of viewers. Architectural theorist Robert Harbison (1977) refers to this practice as the “museumifying” of cultural history (p. 145). Similarly, critical theorist W.J.T. Mitchell (1994) argues such historicism, “confirms a dominant sequence of historical periods, a canonical master-narrative leading to the present moment, and which seems incapable of registering alternate histories, counter-memories, or resistance practices” (p. 87). From the artists who author the artifacts, to the collectors who acquire them, to the historians who document their historical significance to the curators who assure their posterity, museum culture represents an exclusionary practice determined by an elite corp of professionals.

Whose Narrative Is Being Performed In The Museum?

To enter into a dialogue with museum artifacts challenges the monologic pedagogy of museums, an epistemological model established during the Enlightenment whereby the museum’s art historical knowledge is privileged and the private cultural histories of viewers denied. Performing the museum is a radical pedagogical strategy that critiques the exclusivity of the Enlightenment mindset in order to create an open discourse between museum culture and viewers. Predicated on linguistic theorist Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981) dialogical imagination, such critical discourse assumes that all language and knowledge within and without the museum are interconnected and interdependent thus exemplifying “speech diversity” (p. 272). Thus, by performing the museum, viewers challenge the museum’s monologic practices through the discourse of their memories and cultural histories thereby introducing narrative content that would otherwise remain ignored.

Museum educator Lisa C. Roberts (1997) advocates the dialogic process in spite of the “unpredictability of visitor [viewer] responses and narratives.” A narrative model of education, she argues, “requires that museums do what they have always done, which is present messages; but they must do it in a way that is respectful of the narratives constructed by viewers and that is conscious of and explicit about the constructive process engaged by museums themselves” (p. 146). Roberts’s point is that the research, development, and exhibition of historical content by the museum must continue if a dialogue is to be constructed with the public. This dialogue, however, is not possible without viewers’ narratives. The dynamic tension between the two is what makes the critical performance

of knowledge possible in museums. Additionally, by interconnecting its narrative with that of viewers, the museum becomes an integral part of community life.

The performance of museum narratives can be characterized by the speech act theories of J. L. Austin (1962) who distinguished between “constative” and “performative” speech. Constatives like “The museum represents cultural history” or “Picasso was a cubist” are predicated solely on true or false statements. When knowledge about museum artifacts is represented in constative form, viewers’ understanding and appreciation is limited to the curators’ academic assumptions of museum culture. Austin distinguishes the factual knowledge of constatives with performative speech, the derivation of which is, “from ‘perform’, the usual verb with the noun ‘action’: it indicates that the issuing of the utterance [saying] is the performing of an action” (p. 6). Thus, viewers’ *saying* things about works of art (their museum discourse) represents the act of *doing* (their museum practice).

Austin (1962) further identifies three characteristics of performatives that are significant to the way in which speech functions: locution, illocution, and perlocution. Locutionary speech is the “act ‘of saying something’” (p. 95). For example, the locution, “Look at the paintings in the gallery” is performative in that it says something that suggests action. What differentiates *locution* (what is said) from *illocutionary* speech (the “force” of how it is being said) can be determined by: asking or answering a question; giving some information or an assurance or a warning; announcing a verdict or an intention; pronouncing sentence; making an appointment or an appeal or a criticism; making an identification or giving a description; and the numerous like. (Austin, 1962, pp. 98-99). Thus, illocutionary force, when applied to the locutionary statement made above, results in the performative, “He urged me to look at the paintings in the gallery.”

Austin’s third example of a performative, perlocution, resides in the consequences of illocutionary force. “Saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons: and it may be done with the design, intention, or purpose of producing them” (Austin, 1962, p. 101). The statement, “He forced me to look at the paintings in the gallery,” is an example of the consequential effects of perlocutionary speech. Thus, Austin’s three characteristics of performatives can be distinguished as “what is said in museums” from “how it is said” from “how we are affected” (p. 102). By exposing the performative character of speech in this way, Austin provides the possibility to critique and re-consider the museum’s authoritative speech. A critical pedagogy that enables viewers to challenge the dominant speech codes of museum culture makes it possible for them to re-present museum narratives through their respective subjectivities.

Performing the museum is a dialogic process, a play between the public narratives of the museum and the private narratives of viewers. To achieve this dynamic relationship requires an open, risk-taking pedagogy on the part of the museum, one that enables viewers to turn history onto itself and to interrogate its ideological terrain. The Maryland Historical Society gave such permission to artist Fred Wilson who searched through its 19th-century collection and mounted *Mining the Museum*, a provocative exhibition wherein he juxtaposed artifacts like ornate silver serving utensils with slave shackles. In doing so, Wilson's intervention and interrogation of the collection "raised issues of colonialism and racism underling museum practice" (Dubin, 1999, p. 13). In similar ways to Wilson's, viewers perform the museum as they re-embody, re-signify, and re-present its "discursive field" and as they begin to embody, signify, and present new museum narratives from their diverse cultural perspectives (Diamond, 1996, p. 2). In what follows, I will characterize five performative strategies for museum education that will enable viewers' cultural perspectives to enter the discourse of museum culture: the perceptual, autobiographical, cultural, interdisciplinary, and institutional.

My purpose for proposing these strategies is to argue for a comprehensive critical inquiry, a performative pedagogy that introduces content in the museum from a complex of cultural perspectives that heretofore have played marginal roles. Art educator George Geahigan (1998) claims that the critical inquiry of art serves as a "recursive process" (p. 302) that is contingent on contextual considerations, one that turns history onto itself. Its contingent character enables viewers to problematize the propositional aspects of a work of art and to bring their own cultural perspectives to bear on its inquiry. Predicated on heuristic principles, critical inquiry engages viewers in an empirical investigation that is incapable of proof leaving them to determine meaning in a work of art from their respective cultural perspectives. A multicentric process, critical inquiry occurs at the conjunction of perceptual, autobiographical, cultural, interdisciplinary, and institutional content, a complex and contradictory assemblage whereby a comprehensive understanding of museums and their artifacts in contemporary cultural life is made possible.

Performing Perception

How does perception constitute performance? How does *seeing* a work of art function as perception? How do we differentiate between *looking* at a work of art and *seeing* it? The perceptual engagement that exposes the phenomenological characteristics of museum artifacts represents an experience that is performative. Contrary to its inert appearance when viewing a work of art, the viewer's body is discreetly acting out. According to educational philosopher John Dewey (1934), "this act of seeing involves the cooperation of motor elements even though they remain implicit and do

not become overt.... Perception is an act of the going-out of energy in order to receive, not a withholding of energy" (p. 53).

Performing perception is to see what one is looking at, to be absorbed in its aesthetic qualities through empathic projection. Viewers absorb the aesthetic characteristics of art works and, in doing so, discover qualities of experience that metaphorically link with their own memories and cultural histories. For Dewey, perceptual experience consummates the relationship between the viewer and the work of art. "To perceive, a beholder must *create* his own experience. And his[her] creation must include relations comparable to those which the original producer underwent.... Without the act of re[-]creation the object is not perceived as a work of art.... There is work done on the part of the percipient as there is on the part of the artist" (Dewey, 1934, p. 54). Thus, by amending J. L. Austin's notion of the performative to include perception as a speech act, what one *sees* in a work of art is tantamount to what one *says* about it and *does* with it. Moreover, this perceptual dialogue with the work of art represents the viewer's performance of subjectivity within the context of the museum.

Perception, according to phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964), is the primary means through which we experience and interact with the world. Our bodies, like cultural artifacts, are things that are "caught in the fabric of the world" (p. 163). Accordingly, the performance of perception is an ontological process that occurs at the "intertwining, the chiasm" of the body and the world, a condition which he refers to as "enfleshment." Flesh, in this instance, is not the material substance of the body or the world, but, "an element... the concrete emblem of a general manner of being" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 147). The ontology of enfleshment occurs in the chiasm, the intersection where the viewer's subjective knowledge and experience intertwines with the objectified artifacts in the museum.

Drawing upon philosopher Martin Heidegger's concept of *ecstasis*, philosopher Drew Leder (1990) characterizes the perceptual performance between the body and the world as an "ecstatic" phenomenon in which the body is "forgotten" as it experiences the world. Leder claims that the body "conceals itself precisely in the act of revealing what is Other" (p. 22). Within museum culture, the body [viewer] is foregrounded by the work of art [Other] during perception. This play between the body's presence and absence corresponds to Merleau-Ponty's notion of intertwining and enfleshment whereby the, "lived body, as ecstatic in nature, is that which is away from itself" (Leder, 1990, p. 22). Flesh is where the ecstatic body reflexively engages with the world. We can only experience artworks as flesh because our bodies are flesh, and we can only know artworks in the flesh of our bodies, as the thing perceived and not the "thing-in-itself." In doing so, the body sees itself in the things of the world similar to the way in which Barthes's metaphor of Einstein's brain functions both as museum

[world] and artifact [body]. We could not experience a world whose essential properties are radically discontinuous with ours (p. 63). Leder further distinguishes an aspect of ecstasis as, “aesthetic absorption,” an intertwining process whereby the work of art penetrates the viewer which in turn penetrates the work of art. This “bidirectional incorporation” between the viewer and the object of perception represents a “one-body” relationship wherein “the boundaries between inner [body] and outer [body] thus become porous” (p. 165).

The chiasm wherein enmeshment and aesthetic absorption takes place can be characterized as a performative museum metaphor in three ways. First, chiasm is a *liminal* site where the viewer’s subjectivity and the object of its experience, the museum artifact, intertwine in a reflexive loop. In doing so, we arrive at Barthes’s consanguineous museum/brain metaphor in that the body is the museum is the body. Second, this museum/body intertwining is not a fixed experience, but *contingent* upon the existential circumstances of their encounter. The conjunction of museum artifacts and the memories and cultural histories of viewers yields experiences that are open and unpredictable. And third, the continual flux of their intertwining represents an *ephemeral* relationship between the museum and the viewer. Just as works of art accrue meaning over time, so does the viewer’s identity. Performing subjectivity in the museum assumes that the relationship between viewers and artifacts will change over time.

Within the museum, enmeshment suggests the experience of artifacts as an ontological investigation; one in which the body is intertwined with the architecture of the museum, the artifacts on exhibit, and other individuals who are encountered in the galleries. Viewers engage these museum phenomena in their bodies as flesh. In doing so, they fulfill an essential feature of performance whereby the subjective experience of the viewer intertwines with the object of the museum. Thus, by seeing, saying, and doing in the museum, viewers perform their subjectivities through the perception of art objects.

Performing Autobiography

The performance of autobiography, the central topic of this essay, represents the memories and cultural histories which viewers bring to museum culture, the personal, anecdotal knowledge by which they create narratives to represent their experiences of art. To respond to art in this way is to introduce content that usually remains hidden in museum experiences and that is contrary to the dominant academic assumptions of museum pedagogy. Viewers’ personal narratives represent speaking in the first person, acting out one’s subjective knowledge, which is contrary to the third person narratives that are constructed by the museum that *speak for* the viewer.

In the dialogical process both the museum and viewer “give ear” and “give voice” to each other; performing both listening and speaking are essential to their pedagogical objectives. This intertwining dialogue between the two corresponds to Shoshanna Felman’s (1987) concept of “psychoanalytic pedagogy” (p. 83), which consists of performing *testimony* by giving it and *witnessing* by receiving it. In a continual process of reciprocity, both learn and teach the other. Based on Freudian and Lacanian theories, Felman makes a compelling argument for personal narrative in the pedagogical process between the museum and the viewer. It is in the conjunction between their two narratives that a crisis of learning occurs and brings about meaningful knowledge.

Remembering one’s subjective experiences, according to cultural theorist Michel de Certeau (1984), introduces content that is disruptive in the performance of everyday life. “Its foreignness makes possible a transgression of the law of the place [cultural assumptions of the museum]. Coming out of its bottomless and mobile secrets, a ‘*coup*’ modifies the local order” (p. 85). Viewers’ performances of memory and cultural history in response to works of art represent a disruption of the museum’s dominant historical pedagogy. Rupturing the museum’s academic representation of history makes possible the inclusion of the viewers’ diverse histories that would otherwise remain ignored. Thus, the dynamics of personal memory work are such that they enable viewers to transform themselves within museum culture, to create an identity that is based on their respective cultural perspectives.

The performance of memory in the museum consists of viewers’ conjoining their stories with the stories represented in artworks. In doing so, they create verbal analogies, metaphors, and metonymies to represent their perceptual experiences. By putting visual images into words, they enable artworks to speak. The performance of verbal language evokes *ekphrasis*, the problem of articulating, “the verbal representation of visual representation” which Mitchell (1994, p. 152) characterizes in “three phases or moments of realization” (p. 152). The first phase, “ekphrastic indifference” (p. 152), is based on the realization that verbal representations of visual works are virtual impossibilities in that “words can ‘cite,’ but never ‘sight’ their objects” (p. 152). The cliché, “a picture is worth a thousand words,” is an understatement considering the fact that visual experiences have no verbal equivalents. The indifference of *ekphrasis* notwithstanding, Mitchell identifies “ekphrastic hope” as the second realization when the “impossibility of ekphrasis is overcome in imagination and metaphor...[as words are used] to make us see” (p. 152). This period of hope, in which indifference is “stilled” (p. 154) enabling a flourishing of verbal representations, is immediately followed by the third realization, “ekphrastic fear...[,] the moment of resistance or counterdesire that occurs when we sense that the difference between the verbal and visual

representation might collapse” (p. 154) and we wish that the image had remained “invisible.”

These ekphrastic realizations are significant to performing the museum in that the continual struggle to articulate the perceptual experience of artworks in words corresponds to the problematizing aspect of Geahigan’s (1998) critical inquiry process mentioned above. The ekphrastic articulation of the problem posed by the work of art casts its visual experience in verbal language. Geahigan’s invocation of John Dewey’s five stages of inquiry illustrates the similarities between ekphrasis and critical inquiry:

1. *A problematic situation.* Dewey argued that inquiry always begins with an existential situation of indeterminateness or internal conflict in which the inquirer experiences a felt difficulty just because customary ways of thinking or acting are blocked. This is the antecedent condition of inquiry.
2. *Articulation of the problem.* Having been confronted with the problematic situation, Dewey held that an inquirer will first attempt to articulate the felt difficulty into a problem to be solved. (Geahigan, 1998, p. 295)

The problem of “situation” and “articulation,” which Geahigan identifies in Dewey’s first two stages, is similar to Mitchell’s first phase of ekphrastic indifference in which the viewer struggles to put visual images into words. Dewey’s next two stages correspond to Mitchell’s second phase of ekphrastic hope in that the struggle to articulate the problem of the artwork is brought to a position of “stillness” (Mitchell, 1994, p.154):

3. *Hypothesis suggestion.* After the problem has been articulated, there is a further stage of suggestion or hypothesis formulation in which a person imaginatively formulates various solutions to the problem.
4. *Deduction of consequences.* Having formulated an [sic] hypothesis, there is a stage in which the inquirer deduces the consequences of that hypothesis. (Geahigan, 1998, p. 295)

Through “hypothesis suggestion,” the viewer imagines and creates verbal representations of visual art and, in “deduction of consequences,” she/he consummates the struggle between the visual experience and its verbal representation. Dewey’s final stage then corresponds to Mitchell’s third phase of ekphrastic fear in that viewers begin to doubt their verbal deductions of the visual representation in works of art as they “test” and confirm their verbal hypotheses:

5. *Testing of hypothesis.* Inquiry concludes with testing of the hypothesis through observation, data gathering, or imagination to see whether it is confirmed or disconfirmed. (Geahigan, 1998, p. 295)

Thus, in performing autobiographical content as critical inquiry, viewers learn to intervene in the historical content of museum culture with their memories and cultural histories and, in doing so, find they are able to interconnect with a complex and diverse historical matrix. Rather than

acquiescing to the dominant history that museum culture inscribes their identities, they are able to “write” on the body of history, to contribute history that would otherwise remain silent.

Performing Museum Culture

In contrast with the performance of autobiography, performing museum culture represents learning the academic and aesthetic codes of art historical research and writing. In addition to the diverse historical content of the museum, there exist contemporary considerations that change over time as the cultural role of museums is brought into question. As a counterpart to the knowledge that viewers bring to the museum through autobiography, this strategy of performing the museum depends on the knowledge that the museum brings to the viewer. The established character of this knowledge notwithstanding, it functions as performative as viewers assume its dominant cultural codes authored by art historians and curators.

Significant to the study of the museum’s cultural codes, the art critic Thomas McEvilley (1991) characterizes the diverse content found in artworks as “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird.” Compared with the exclusive modernist focus on essential form, McEvilley provides a more open, postmodern conception of the various ways in which works of art affect our experiences and understanding of culture. When performing the museum, it is imperative that its pedagogy be understood in all of its complexities and contradictions including those of the formal characteristics of its artworks. McEvilley not only provides such an understanding, but he also places considerations about form within the context of his 13 content designations:

1. *Content that arises from the aspect of the artwork that is understood as representational.*
2. *Content arising from verbal supplements supplied by the artist.*
3. *Content arising from the genre or medium of the artwork.*
4. *Content arising from the material of which the artwork is made.*
5. *Content arising from the scale of the artwork.*
6. *Content arising from the temporal duration of the artwork.*
7. *Content arising from the context of the work.*
8. *Content arising from the work’s relationship with art history.*
9. *Content that accrues to the work of art as it progressively reveals its destiny through persisting in time.*
10. *Content arising from participation in a specific iconographic tradition.*
11. *Content arising directly from the formal properties of the work.*
12. *Content arising from attitudinal gestures (wit, irony, parody, and so on) that may appear as qualifiers of any of the categories already mentioned.*
13. *Content rooted in biological or physiological responses, or cognitive awareness of them. (McEvilley, 1991)*

McEvelley's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" represent 13 performative strategies by which museums can identify and provide content to viewers. When the diverse content of museum knowledge is conjoined with that of viewers, a dialogue is made possible whereby the museum's essentialized history is expanded to include the diverse memories and cultural histories of its viewers.

Performing Interdisciplinarity

How does the work of art relate to subjects of study outside the visual arts? Performing interdisciplinarity assumes that all knowledge of the world is negotiated through a reified academic structure, a classification of disparate disciplines whose boundaries must be continually contested and expanded in order to create new meanings relevant to contemporary cultural life. The socially and historically determined codes of discipline-based culture privilege and protect their academic positions, and they resist the cross-pollination of ideas that can elicit new ways of knowing. Performing interdisciplinarity in the museum exposes, examines, and critiques the boundaries that exist between the disciplines and works of art in order to interconnect academic knowledge with museum knowledge with experiences in the world.

As in McEvelley's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" mentioned above, the disparate disciplines of academia could be identified as potential sources of content to interpret works of art. Mathematics, biology, physics, chemistry, engineering, psychology, sociology, anthropology, music, theater, architecture, the visual arts, the foreign languages, literature, and others represent content that, when interconnected with works of art, can elicit diverse interpretations. The abstract language of mathematics, for example, can be related to concepts of abstraction in works of art. The use of proportion in mathematics can be related to harmonic scale in music to proportion in a sculpture. The grain in a marble sculpture functions in similar ways as structural motifs in architecture and engineering.

This interconnectedness between the museum, its artifacts, and academic culture corresponds with the Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1987) concept of the *rhizome*, a system of inquiry that represents the heterogeneous field of academic knowledge as a map, and *nomadology*, the performative strategy by which that field is traversed. Unlike ethnocentric fields of interest whose systems operation the authors assign an "aborescent" taproot metaphor, the rhizomatic consists of a "radicle-system, or fascicular root metaphor" (p. 5). The rhizomatic breaks the subject/object relationship in a binary, and it prevents a unity of opposites from taking place. In the place of binaries, the rhizomatic submits a system consisting of six principles. Deleuze and Guattari identify the first two principles as "connection" and "heterogeneity," "any point of the *rhizome* can be connected to anything other, and must be" (p. 7). The inter-connecting of

disparate disciplines, cultural institutions, artifacts, and personal knowledge is strongly encouraged. The authors' third "principle of multiplicity" circumvents the trappings of the Cartesian subject/object binary by providing unlimited possibilities for interpretation. Functioning like an assemblage, rhizomatic knowledge, "increase[s] in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections" (p. 8). The fourth principle of "assignifying rupture" claims the possibility that any of the multiple connections within a rhizomatic system, "may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines" (p. 9).

Because multiple lines of flight interconnecting multiple contexts of knowledge continue to expand, any breakdown would not stall the system's ability to regenerate itself and "tie [these contexts] back to one another" (p. 9). If, for example, a connection between Jackson Pollock's *Blue Poles* (1953) and entropy theory is unclear or broken down, its position within the rhizome can be re-established through its links with other contexts of knowledge. The "fall from grace" represented in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* (1534-1541), the aleatory music of John Cage, and the temporal character of Navajo sand paintings represent a few of the multiple possibilities that construct conceptual links between Pollock's painting and entropy. Deleuze and Guattari's final principles (5 and 6) of "cartography and decalomania," suggests a mapping impulse in rhizomatic systems that is, "open and connectable in all of its dimensions: it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification" (p. 12). A map that contains the academic disciplines, the artifacts of museum culture, and viewers' memories and cultural histories as geographical sites, provides multiple points of access to multiple sites of visitation. Thus, according to the six principles of the *rhizome*, the performance of interdisciplinarity enables museum viewers' agency within contemporary cultural life as they learn to interconnect and traverse these various contexts of knowledge.

Performing the Institution

What does the institutional setting of the museum signify? How do its environmental conditions, the workings of its staff, and their decisions of collecting, preserving, and exhibiting artifacts in a museum effect the experiences of viewers? In what ways does the museum's performance of subjectivity effect those of viewers? To ignore the signifying power of the museum's institutional context is to eliminate the ways in which its various professional practices shape knowledge. As compared to the visible display of artifacts, these behind-the-scenes operations constitute the museum's hidden curriculum.

Like medieval religious art, ritual, and architecture, the museum serves as a performative space, a "choreographed environment" that is designed to heighten viewers' experiences of symbolic artifacts. Similar to the

performative strategies of the Church, those of the museum sanctify cultural artifacts through a variety of environmental conditions that evoke bodily responses in viewers. As viewers embody these conditions, they experience the “etiquette” of the museum’s secular myths. For example, the architect’s configuration of the galleries choreographs viewers in reverential movements through the museum. The museum’s HVAC system, which regulates and maintains relative temperature and humidity to safeguard the artifacts in its collections and exhibitions, produces a sublime atmosphere for the body. The maintenance of low level lighting to protect artifacts from harmful illumination subdues the body to a meditative state. The standard height for mounting artifacts submits the gaze and stance of viewers’ bodies to a servile normative position.

In addition to the aforementioned environmental factors, viewers’ knowledge of museum workers’ professional responsibilities exposes the museum’s system of labor and the ideological underpinnings of its decisions. The professional staff of museums, namely directors, curators, educators, exhibition designers, preparators, registrars, security guards, office staff, and volunteer docents, carry out the mission of the museum to collect, preserve, exhibit, and educate. Knowledge of these separate and distinct responsibilities provides viewers with insight into the business and politics of museums and the ways in which they construct history through their collections and exhibitions. Performing the institution in this way enables viewers to gain agency within museum culture. By exposing, examining, and critiquing the institutional context of the museum, viewers learn to participate in the cultural work of museums. In doing so, they bring the diverse professional and cultural perspectives of their respective families, neighborhoods, and communities to bear on the culture of the museum.

Summary

The five strategies for performing the museum outlined in this essay represent an embodied pedagogy by which viewers enter into a dialogic relationship with the museum and its artifacts through perceptual, autobiographic, cultural, interdisciplinary, and institutional content. The purpose of this pedagogy is to create an inclusive discourse and practice in the museum, a dialogical play between the museum’s academic subjectivity and the private subjectivities of viewers. In doing so, viewers learn to expose, examine, and critique the public dominant codes inscribed on their bodies by museum culture as they perform their private memories and cultural histories. Such pedagogy does not represent history as an essentialized construct similar to the myth of Einstein’s brain, but one that in its complex and contradictory character interconnects the museum’s history to those of viewers.

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