



www.ichim.org

Les institutions culturelles et le numérique
Cultural institutions and digital technology

École du Louvre
8 - 12 septembre 2003

**THE MUSEUM EFFECT: GAZING FROM OBJECT
TO PERFORMANCE IN THE CONTEMPORARY
CULTURAL-HISTORY MUSEUM**

Valerie Casey, Yale University, USA

« Acte publié avec le soutien de la Mission Recherche et Technologies
du Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication »

Abstract

Analysis of the evolution of museum practices in terms of Lacan's concept of the Gaze demonstrates how processes of display in the cultural-history museum produce cultural knowledge. This paper offers a theoretical model of the visitor-object relationship as a means to establish the museum visitor and museal object in dynamic interconnected roles. Their respective positions are evaluated in terms of the changing modes of museum practice, which comprise three typologies: the legislating museum, the interpreting museum, and the performing museum. While these categories overlap, they also appear in historical chronology, where the modern art museum of the early 19th century is the "legislating" type, the pedagogically focused museum of post-WWII represents the "interpretive" mode, and the contemporary living-history museum is classified as "performing." Analysis of the social issues around these museum practices informs the development of relevant and meaningful interactive technologies for visitors in the contemporary museum.

This research has focused on Western cultural-history museums, often specifically American museums. The applicability of this theory of the viewer to museums outside the U.S. is the subject of current research.

Keywords: Cultural-history museum, the Gaze, Lacan, exhibition design, narrative, cultural memory, interactive technologies

Museum authority and the ways of seeing

The museum acquires social authority by controlling ways of seeing, and the objects around which museal vision is directed gather meaning from their context within the museum. In *Museum Without Walls*, Malraux (1967) describes the museum effect where the very placement of the object within the museum creates its importance and validity. Anthropologist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) echoes this assertion: "[in the museum] objects are not found, they are made." Museums do not just gather valuable objects but make objects valuable by gathering them. The museum is able to produce

cultural knowledge by organizing how the materials it authorizes are seen – by controlling the Gaze.

The Gaze as analytic framework

For this analysis, the Gaze is used as the conceptual framework with which to examine the evolution of museum practices. In Lacanian terms, the Gaze is the act of involuntary participation in a culturally constructed, visual discourse where there is no unmediated, pure relationship between a Subject and the Object of its view. Every visual exchange carries the weight of environmental, cultural, and physical conditions. Art historian Norman Bryson (1988: 91) describes the Gaze as requiring a collective submission of the “retinal experience to the socially agreed description(s) of an intelligible world.” At the core of the Gaze is the presupposition that the visual world is a cultural construction in which all social beings participate. The Subject–Object relationship is always mediated by a “screen,” a collection of signs and signifiers given by social custom that represent the Object. Because the screen is merely an image of the Object, not the Object itself, the object of the Gaze can never be known directly. In psychoanalytic terms, the Object of desire always lies just beyond the reach of the viewer and is always intermediated by the screen. The Subject is perpetually propelled toward it, seeking but never sated.

This notion of the screen applies to museum practice in two ways. On one level, the screen quite literally is the curatorial information provided in label text, the design of the exhibition, the narrative on an audio guide. Each of these devices and techniques of exhibition design aims to provide context for the visitor, yet each also distances the viewer from the art or artifact by predetermining its cultural value. In even the most informed or egalitarian environment, the prescribed curatorial meaning manages the visitor’s understanding. The second manifestation of the screen concerns desire. In abstract terms, the desire that is linked to the unattainable Object motivates the aesthetic and intellectual pursuit. Why look over and over again if not propelled by a deep unsatisfied curiosity? The way the Subject craves apprehension is encapsulated in the now familiar story of the throngs of visitors who visited the Louvre to view the space left after

the theft of the Mona Lisa (Leader, 2003). Their curiosity was compounded by the novelty of a major art theft, but visitors also went to the naked space as if through it they might be able to comprehend the Mona Lisa, painting present or not. This example demonstrates that the cultural screen remains vivid even when the Object itself disappears.

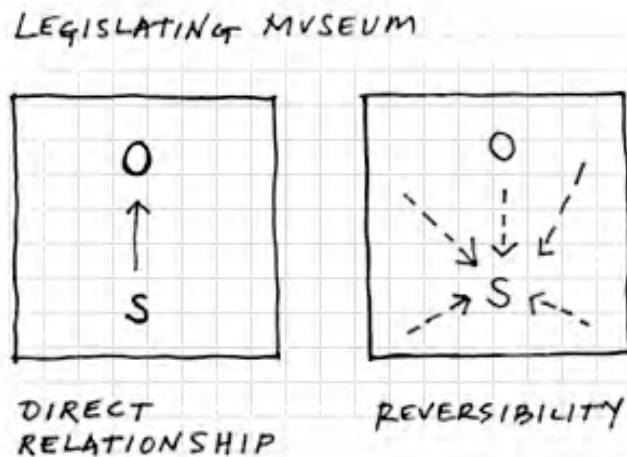
Another characteristic of the Gaze is its reversibility. Lacan (1998: 106) writes, “in the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture.” The Gaze has the effect of alienating the Subject through this reversibility. The viewer’s centrality is dislodged when another enters his field, in this case the object of art or artifact. Now the watcher is being watched. The spectator is transformed into the spectacle. Reversibility elicits self-consciousness in the viewer. This awareness of the self motivates the Subject to maintain appropriate social behavior. As with Foucault’s critique of power structures outlined in the metaphorical “Panopticon” (1979), social conduct is a self-regulating process. In Foucaultian terms, the museum is an institute of discipline which indoctrinates appropriate behavior in the viewer. Foucault’s critique reinforces the notion of the museum as a place in which cultural values are authorized and specific behaviors encouraged as a means to produce socially acquired knowledge.

The codes observed in the Subject-Object relationship are made more clear by mapping the Gaze to three major trends in the history of museum practice. Specifically, the evolution of museum processes of display illustrates how the primacy of the museum experience has shifted from object to performance.

Evolving typologies: Legislating and Interpreting

Museum practice can be distilled into three major typologies. Prior to the 19th century, the museum was considered a container for collections of objects. The museum researched and preserved curios, exotica, rare, and sanctified objects (Weil, 1995). The aim of the legislating museum was to present the paragons of the aesthetic and intellectual pursuit, to create a venue for display not debate. The authority of the museum was enacted through selection and presentation of its objects. Without contextual information that

explained why an object appeared in the museum, or its relationship to the objects around it, the legislating museum created a distinct and distant relationship between object and viewer. This visual system can be articulated with a simple sketch.



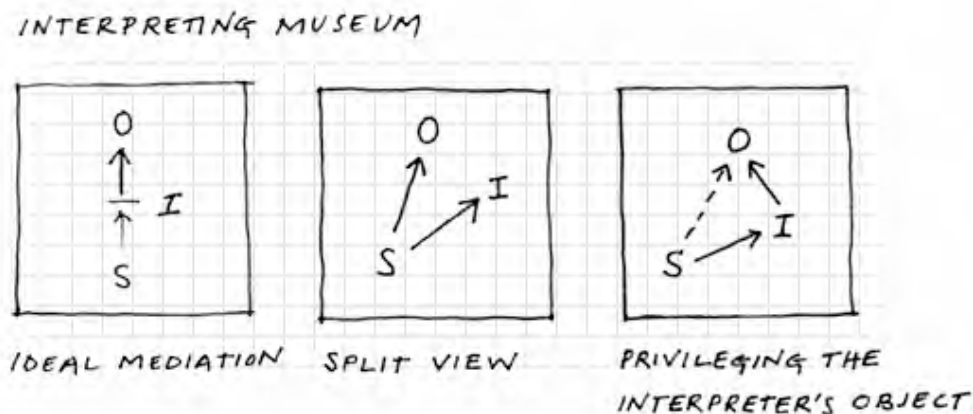
[Figure 1: Legislating museum diagram]

In this diagram of the “legislating” museum, the first frame represents a supposedly unmediated and direct experience between subject S and object O. However, the link between subject and object is not uninterrupted. The layers of social and institutional intervention, and the viewer’s specific cultural baggage, all bear on the relationship. This is indicated in this diagram by the grid-ed field on which the museum space is described. The second panel expresses the always-present reversibility of the Gaze where the power of visibility is in flux. The viewer is both watching, and being watched.

Because the legislating museum deployed authority through objects, not information, it created a specific experience of the object which attempted to fulfill its institutional goals. However this relationship was complicated by the viewer’s own cultural context and self-awareness inspired by the sacred museum space. This scenario is demonstrated by the socialized behavior of the museum visitor. When a museum patron enters the Louvre to see the Mona Lisa, the visitor’s passage is ennobled by the grand institution, as if he were walking onto a stage. The viewer is acutely aware of his place in the museum and acts appropriately. He positions himself in front of the painting in a certain way, seeing

himself see the object, mindful of how he is viewed by others, even how he is viewed by the painting itself.

In contemporary times, the role of the museum in “legislating” meaning through its objects has changed to “interpreting” that meaning. Museologist Duncan Cameron (1972) writes of this change in the museum as a metaphorical shift from the authoritative “temple” to the contextualized “forum” that contains multiple voices and perspectives. Through label text, docent tours, and multimedia tools, the museum provides a framework for how objects should be viewed and understood. Media archeologist Wolfgang Ernst (2000) describes the transformation of the object from subject of scholarly work to means of communication as the seminal shift in the museum mission. Rather than having objects speak for themselves, museum professionals interpret cultural significance for visitors by structuring art and artifacts around easily identifiable chronologies, geographies, formal themes, and narratives.



[Figure 2: Interpreting museum diagram]

In the “interpreting” museum diagram, the first panel illustrates the ideal position, where the Subject-Object relationship remains intact, but the interpretation mediates. In this case the notion of the object is strengthened by the interpretation. I propose that what is actually happening in the interpretive museum is described in the second and third panel, where the Subject splits his attention or view between the Interpreter and the Object. This in fact has the unintentional effect of magnifying what Lacan describes as the “screen” between Object and Viewer. (Though, of course, a screen must also lay between viewer and these supplementary interpretive devices.) The result of the split is described in the

third panel, where the Subject privileges the Interpreter's object, and the direct connection between the Subject and Object is made tenuous.

Exhibition design as a cultural medium

The shift from legislating to interpreting demonstrates how the techniques used in museum practice transform objects in the museum environment. Objects are stripped of their cultural context only to be reassembled later in a way that advances museum pedagogy. Cultural historian Spencer Crew and Smithsonian director James Sims (1991) characterize objects as “dumb:” only through display and conservation are objects stabilized and their meanings fixed to adhere to the museum environment.

The political and intellectual factors that influence object collection expose the museum as a place that constructs cultural meaning. Art historian Svetlana Alpers (1991) suggests that the objects in museums are collected primarily for their visual interest. By removing the object from its ritual, cultural, and economic associations, “museums turn cultural materials into art objects.” For Alpers, museums elicit a viewer's attention through the visual appeal of the object, then ascribe meaning to that object. Art and artifacts providing evidence of esthetics, techniques, and ideologies are not necessarily selected for their specificity, but instead are chosen for their display value. The rising importance of the visual is a precursor to the performing museum, which privileges display techniques to harness visitors' interest.

Rise in cultural heritage

The way the museum directs the viewer's gaze through display of selectively authorized materials has been complicated by the recent rise in interest in cultural heritage, and a proliferation of museums that display the past. Of the estimated 16,000 museums in the United States, the majority address history (AAM website). Similarly in the UK, heritage sites constitute the most rapidly increasing proportion of museums (Urry 2002). Historian

Pierre Nora (2002) writes of society's changed relationship with the past as a result of a society-wide memorializing obsession. This upsurge in memory is "everywhere establishing close ties between respect for the past – whether real or imaginary – and the sense of belonging, collective consciousness and individual self-awareness, memory and identity." Nora traces the beginnings of this phenomena to two forces. First, the "acceleration of history" results from a lack of permanence in the present, and the inability to plan for the future. The future is uncertain, but the tools for remembering are finite and known. Therefore in the uncertainty, society is compelled – has a "duty" – to remember, and as a result an exaggerated importance is placed on documenting the past. Because contemporary society is in doubt of what will be needed in the future, it "stockpiles" memories, artifacts, and documents.

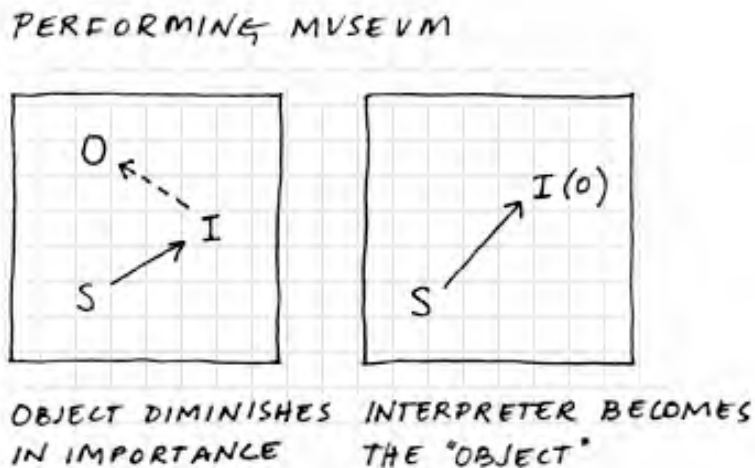
This energized collecting of cultural materials coincides with a shift in the way history is represented in the contemporary cultural-history museum. The new museum favors portraying the lives of everyday people. Sociologist John Urry (2002: 118) observes, "No longer are people only interested in seeing either great works of art or artifacts from very distant historical periods. People increasingly seem attracted by representations of the 'ordinary.'" Urry interprets this as a rejection of traditional (and monolithic) events and figures to describe the past. Cultural critic Andreas Huyssen (1995) writes that this yearning for "diversity" among multicultural audiences is an attempt to recover the less frequently recognized narratives that reaffirm ethnic identities. Nora (2002) echoes this assertion by suggesting that the threat of totalitarian regimes – like that faced by the Jewish people in WWII – has prompted an articulation of ethnic diversity and "particularism" through structured remembrance. Museums provide a formal space not only for the display of national icons, but the description of the issues faced by "ordinary" members of social groups.

The newly democratized subject matter of the contemporary cultural-history museum has shifted focus from an historical consciousness to a social history that bases historical accounts on the lives and activities of everyday people, especially people ignored by traditional authoritarian ideology. However the post-colonial, postmodern museum faces challenges in developing appropriate collections. Crew and Sims (1991) note that there is a scarcity of authentic, "ordinary" objects that provide the same canonical impact as

traditionally used museum objects. The shortage of sanctioned artifacts to express the material culture of ordinary people has prompted exhibition design to focus more on themes, rather than objects. At Old Sturbridge, the reconstructed 18th century village in Massachusetts, a cook's iron griddle and a child's wooden toy are elevated to extraordinary levels of museal importance because the narrative is built around them, not because of their notable aesthetic, functional, or historic value. As a result, the attention to social history has signaled a departure from object-focused modes of museum display, and has encouraged museums to more creatively express their ideas. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2002: 3) refers to this as a shift from in-context displays, which "depend on the drama of the artifact," to in-situ displays which, in privileging the experience, rely more on human display rather than objects.

The new museum performs

As the museum moves away from using objects as the primary element to convey information, the importance of display increases. In addition, to compete with other tourist attractions, the museum has assimilated commercial strategies to entertain audiences. To appeal to its experience-oriented audience, the contemporary museum privileges the processes of display over the particularity of objects to convey information. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2002) describes this museum practice as "performing museology." This "performance" goes beyond employing interactive tools and multimedia technologies to engage visitors. Storying and sequencing combine with entertaining re-enactments and recreations to execute the museum's didactic mission. The contemporary museum's inclination to convey its ideologies through more visible modes of "in-situ" representation enables a more clear reading of the institutional processes of display at work. In addition to conveying knowledge, the visibility of these modes of display highlights the museum as a medium for the production of culture, where the museum itself is on display.



[Figure 3: Performing museum diagram]

This phenomena is illustrated with this figure where the already fragile relationship between Subject and Object actually dissolves completely. The Interpreter and the Object collapse into one entity, and the Object is subordinated by the Interpretation.

Modes of exhibition design focus the Gaze. The museum mise-en-scene – the organization of collections and the sequence of displays and objects – creates a specific view and associated understanding of museum art and artifacts. Over time, the modern museum has evolved in its role first as legislator, then interpreter, and now of performer. The diagrams illustrate how the processes of display that have formerly mediated the relationship between object and viewer have now subsumed the object and led to its gradual de-materialization. While the notion of museum interpretation was introduced to explain art and artifacts, the role of the interpreter has become so central in museums that the object that is being interpreted has been overshadowed by the performance. Where authentic cultural materials formerly conveyed museum themes, in the modern museum, the performance of the themes is privileged. Further analysis of the performing museum illustrates how the representation of history has helped transform the contemporary museum from object-based to experience-based.

The cultural-history museum as the vanguard of “performing” practice

While commercially oriented presentation techniques can be detected across many museum types, the contemporary cultural-history museum has embraced the performance strategies more comprehensively than other museum types (Urry, 2002). Through dramatic presentation, which is one of the most advanced of the experience-economy techniques, “living” museums provide a contextual departure from the present (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). By layering traditional interpretive museum practices with additional theatrical tropes including historical interpreters, reconstructed scenes, and character actors, an immersive environment is created that relays the past. Lifestyles are expressed; the social dimension of history is presented for its audiences through interactive narratives, visitor role-playing, and the physical markers of history presented with real or manufactured architectural cues.

As the specificity of the object decreases (because of a lack of appropriate collections or iconic artifacts), the burden of authenticity often falls on physical place. For instance, the United States’ oldest living museum, Colonial Williamsburg, is a recreated town that derives its credibility from its siting in the city of Williamsburg, Virginia, and from its detailed focus on architectural preservation and restoration. The architectonic importance of the past is elucidated in psychologist Francis Yates’ theory of mnemotechnics (1964), which describes the practice of mapping knowledge to images and sites to create a system of artificial memory. Yates traces the history of the power of place in anchoring history and remembrance. Further, Urry’s account of the increase in ethnographic museums built within vacated factories, farms, and homes testifies to the value placed on “authentic” space. Because visitors’ expectation of museum authenticity is satisfied by place, the real site provides the ideal stage for the fictionalized performance. The authentically sited cultural-history museum can regularly encourage visitors to suspend disbelief when considering unusual forms of material evidence.

The evolution of the performing museum results from a confluence of two phenomena: the proliferation of a legible and marketable system of display, and an upsurge in

memorialization. The first issue concerns the need for the contemporary museum to compete for its audience. While some critics describe this as a commercial collapse of the museum (see Eco 1986, Sorkin 1992, Baudrillard 1994), the scenario is far more complex and involves not a dumbing-down, but a integration of a marketplace syntax of representation. The power of display in the museum lies in the known resultant patterns that emerge from the use of specific, shared cultural cues. Object placement under a vitrine, the synchronized dimming and highlighting of objects to express hierarchy, and the theme-introducing audio-visual presentation are all part of a system of representation strategies employed by exhibition designers. In the new museum where display techniques have primacy, exhibition designers seek to orient and entertain viewers, the pedagogical goals are secondary.

Influence of cultural memory

The contemporary museum-goer is invested in preserving a collective memory of the past. Cultural memory promotes a shared sense of history, and this collective interpretation is fundamental in creating the values, ideals, and goals associated with social identity. However, this memory is selective. Historian Marita Sturkin describes the role of collective memory as not necessarily to reflect any “original experience,” but to provide “continuity to a culture ” (2002: 259). In an age of political, social, and personal unrest, a notion of the past, however fictionalized, provides cultural congruence. For Nora (1989), the fictionalization of the past is perpetuated on cultural level in order to maintain social stability. Building on this premise, I suggest that the tactics of the performing museum are particularly effective in the cultural-history museum because of the audience’s interest in a shared sense of cultural history. In the museum, the strength of this collective interest in maintaining a specific version of the past allows visitors to suspend disbelief as they explore historical re-creations, and do not miss the lack of traditional object-centric museum practice.

In the cultural-history museum, formal historical discourse meets exhibition design in non-traditional ways. The act of “performing” the past is the display of cultural memory.

This new history relies on particular selections, omissions, and emphases to promote a specific vision. The museal storying of history through re-creations, re-enactments, and restorations rely on the dramatic narrative. Frankfurt School theorist Walter Benjamin (1968) explores the strength of theatrical representation in conveying the past in a memorable way. In addition to following the dramatic formula that includes development of a progressive plot with a recognizable hero, Benjamin's describes the audience's rapt attention to "epic theater" as resulting from having their "collective interest" supported. The potency of the theatrical performance is intrinsically linked to socialized viewing, where the interest of the group prevails over that of the individual.

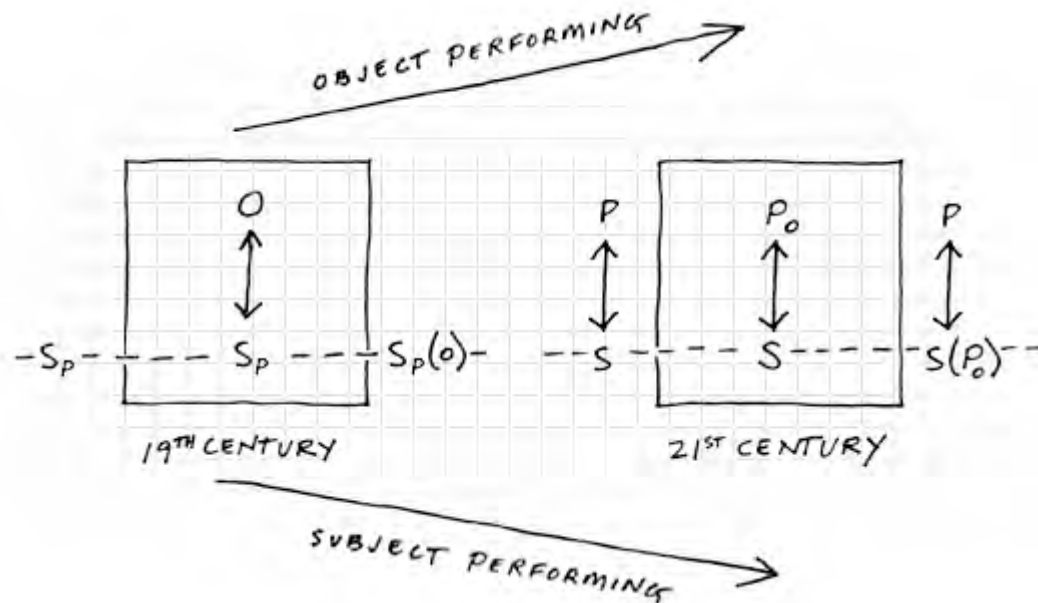
While history always carries the burdens of various agendas, in the performing museum there is a departure from empirical knowledge, and a movement toward the development of narratives that promotes a sense of belonging. Philosopher Alain Renaud (2002) theorizes that in the age of hyper-developed technologies, the past provides a respite – a safe haven – from the frenetic present. In regard to cultural memory, there is major shift from the authentic object to the narrativized place.

Role of the visitor: a shift in degree of performance

The evolution of museum practices (legislating, interpreting, performing), coupled with the cultural memory phenomena, suggests that the museum is becoming more performative over time. However it has always been a performative space. What has actually changed in the museum is the degree to which the Subject and Object have been performing – the relative proportions of the two directions of the Gaze.

I am suggesting that in the early museum, the object commanded the performance. The visitor was doing much of the performing – behaving in a certain manner, enacting the aesthetic or intellectual experience, playing a role in the drama of this special space. The legislating museum's role was didactic. It taught the viewer not only how to see, but how to behave. In contemporary times, the visitor's responsibility in creating the scene is reduced, the museum performs for the visitor. While the performing museum claims a

greater degree of audience participation, at living-history museums interactive activities are often scripted to inspire predictable responses. A key weekly event at Colonial Williamsburg is a discussion with Thomas Jefferson where the Jefferson character presents a seminal speech about independence and viewers respond during the appropriate pauses with the cheers and jeers in unison.



[Figure 4: Shift in the performance model]

This model describes the shift in the degree of performance. In the first panel where P is the performance, the Subject-sub-p (the performing Subject) occupies a specific position in respect to the inanimate object and performs with the correct posture of the viewer, with the self-aware positioning in the sacred museum space – always behaving with the appropriate mix of awe and restraint when experiencing the aesthetic moment. In this scenario, the reversibility of the Gaze compels the viewer to behave in a particular socially sanctioned way.

The dotted line represents the temporal component. The Subject – who according to Lacan’s concept of reversibility is always performing – moves through the space, engages in the museum performance, and leaves the museum with a notion of the Object. Here the object stays the same, but the viewer changes.

The panel on the right represents the viewer in the performing museum. P-sub-O represents the interpretive performance of the Object by the museum. Here the Subject is subordinated to the role of the spectator. The Subject observes the spectacle produced by the museum, and participates in it insofar as it preserves a sense of cultural memory. After the encounter in the museum space, the Subject leaves not with a notion of the Object as in the previous panel, but with an experience of the performance of the Object. Further, their relationship is seen as working in inverse proportion. As the Subject's level of performance decreases, the museum's performance increases.

These diagrams help to illustrate a trend in museum experience history where the Subject-Object relationship has radically shifted. The privileging of the visual spectacle through commercially oriented display practices and theatrical re-enactments has resulted in a dematerializing of the museum object as it perpetuates a selective semi-fictionalized account of the past that reflects cultural memory.

The technocratic museum and a new auratic experience

The performing museum is a contemporary cultural phenomena where the museum's representation of cultural occurs through interaction, not just objects. As exhibition design, which includes digital technologies, achieves ever increasing importance as a cultural medium that can create and shape history, practitioners of museum technologies must address social implications with greater attention and sophistication. The theoretical model of the Subject-Object relationship can inform technological design and development. Understanding how society acquires knowledge in the museum provides the opportunity to offer new narratives that can simultaneously appeal, educate, and inspire the market-oriented audience. From analysis above, several principles emerge to guide the development of user technologies in the new museum.

Extended Experience

Meaning is no longer intrinsically tied to the object, but instead created in the interaction between the viewer, the message, and the museum. Technology-facilitated museum practice should extend the museum narrative across multiple mediums, and assist the museologist in managing the audience experience, before and after the visit.

Where traditional museum visits are discrete – that is, they are usually contained within a single physical structure and time period – a better visitor experience could be created by linking interests outside the museum. In a physical space, the connection could be within another museum or a retail environment. In a virtual space, a Web site or kiosk could add value to the visitor experience by providing access to a online community or information related to the visitor's interests. In this way, the museum experience may be more personalized to the visitor's specific tastes and interests, as well as promoting spontaneous congregation and communication with other visitors. By realizing the museum outside its physical architecture, the production of cultural knowledge becomes a more integrated and collaborative event.

Is it really interactive?

The research of cognitive scientist George Lakoff (1990) finds that people categorize the world not on the inherent qualities of things, but on how they interact with those things. Despite this revelation, technologists continuously misrepresent interactivity to end-users. Like the Internet Service Provider's "walled gardens" of the mid-1990s, most museum guides, websites, and multimedia kiosks provide limited choices under the pretext of interactive freedom. Philosopher Slavoj Žižek uses the "Close" button in an elevator as an example of this guise of user control. Even if the button does not actually close the elevator door more quickly, its presence pacifies the button-pusher. Similarly, current interactive technologies in the museum are incredibly varied, but also limited because they exist in a closed system. They succeed in providing the visitor with a sense of control of what they experience. However, to provide true interactivity, adaptive information

architectures that reflect a user's natural patterns need to be developed. In addition, technologies can offer novel approaches to information which promote abstract connections. These do not need to overburden the visitor with choices or complex interfaces, but can provide different access to information and persuade the user to think differently. The QBIC web tools on the Hermitage Museum website achieve this free-form association by allowing visitors to use shapes and colors for search criteria, rather than just words or selection by artist or style.

Visitor as producer

Psychologist Darien Leader (2003: 121) explores the notion of the museum visitor as a producer rather than consumer, using Duchamp's deliberately unfinished *The Large Glass* as an example. Leader describes the "aesthetics of the nonfinito" when the viewer's job is "to complete the picture with their own act of creative imagination. ... bringing their own creative capacities to bear on it ... the work is unfinished because of the creative act of the viewer." As the creation and maintenance of cultural identity is at stake in museum, the active participation of the museum visitor is of great importance. A strength of the performing museum is the invitation for the visitor to interact and use personal agency in a situation. While the mock trials at the living museum in Salem, Massachusetts, where visitors decide the fate of an accused witch fail to offer much interactivity, they highlight the impact of the social role in creating history. These events also enable a participation that exceeds the passive encounter that marked early museum experiences.

Socialized viewing

As illustrated in the analysis of collective cultural memory, viewing in the performing museum is socialized. I refer to a basic psychological tenet to describe the impact of socialized viewing. Leader (2003: 26) writes, "Visual images on their own might trap us, but for our capture to become more than transitory, they need to take on a symbolic,

signifying value.” The symbolic value is socialized. Objects must be of importance to someone else to be of value to the viewer. This is also a primary building block of both Piaget’s theory of child development and Lacan’s exploration of the mirror stage, which state that to become a social being, the self must see through the eyes of the other. In society, the impressions of others are both invaluable and inescapable. Based on almost counterintuitive logic, technologists need to develop and maintain community interaction to strengthen the individual experience. Non-museal examples of the strong influence of community on individual behavior, awareness, and accountability include eBay’s seller’s ratings and Amazon’s collaborative filtering suggestion software. These technologies have the capacity to recover the individual as an entity with agency while retaining communal identity.

Consumption

In terms of the Gaze, desire is an ever-present force in the Subject-Object relationship. Desire is also strongly linked to consumer consumption (Pine & Gilmore 1999). Hendry (2000) describes one result of the rise of cultural heritage as the objectification and materialization of culture. This manifestation results in the need to consume objects, products, and experiences that represent cultural nostalgia. Historian Michael Kammen calls nostalgia the consumable memory that “fills [the consumer] with some new – or old – emotion, a sense of recollection of nostalgia” (1991: 620). Instead of the desire created by the unsated gaze of the Subject in the legislative and interpretative museums, the Subject’s appetite becomes for many different ways to experience memories in the living museum. Technologists can create new ways to consume. The bookmarking/saving feature on Antenna Audio’s (pilot program) museum guide at the Tate Modern and the Experience Music Project’s museum guide both allow novel ways for museum visitors to consume by acting as their own curators, collecting favorites to later review.

Conclusion

The museum acquires social authority through its ability to direct ways of seeing. Historically, the museum has prescribed cultural value through objects, but in contemporary times, meaning is communicated through modes of display. Some criticize display strategies in the new museum as eroding the cultural and intellectual legitimacy of the institution. Critics perceive the chronology of typologies as a negative progression that indicates the deterioration of the mandate of the museum as cultural institution. Huysen (1995: 14) writes that the museum is now a “mass medium, a site of spectacular mise-en-scene and operatic exuberance.” However, the dramatic affect of contemporary museum practice can also liberate the new museum. The degree of artifice in presentation – which the visitor has rarely registered in the traditional museum – becomes visible in the performing museum. As a result, the techniques of presentation have begun to stop concealing the processes of cultural production, and have started to expose them. As the performance reinforces the illusion of the museum, it undoes it at the same time – the contemporary subject is positioned within the scene as its active viewer and outside it as its passive witness. The detachment of the spectator has made the modes of representation used in the museum more visible.

The visibility of the museum’s ideological position changes the way visitors process what they see, and thus provides an opportunity to challenge cultural authority and redirect dominant cultural narratives. The dematerialization and increased theatricality in exhibition design will beget a more critical viewer in the museum. Digital technologies have the potential to create a new conceptual space in the performing museum which not only contains a multiplicity of voices, but facilitates their conversation. In this way, museum is worth exploring as a liberating experience from the typical invisible construction of cultural authority.

The goal of this paper has been to describe the stakes in contemporary museum design by theorizing three primary typologies of museum practice. Considering the museum as a legislator, interpreter, and performer illustrates a shift in museum authority and in the visual reception of the museum viewer. Analysis of these practices in terms of the Gaze

reveals the complex relationship between the viewer and object. The impact of socialized behavior and current cultural pressures can be traced to this evolving relationship. The contemporary performing museum diverges from traditional museum practice in three primary and interconnected ways:

- 1/ There is a significant rise of experience-oriented display techniques to gain audience attention.
- 2/ The traditional auratic museum object has steadily declined in importance (and sometimes availability) due to the preference of audiences for dramatic performances in immersive environments.
- 3/ The scientific rigor of historical study has been challenged by an interest in perpetuating collective, quasi-fictional cultural memory.

While the museum has always perpetuated certain narratives, the way the contemporary museum performs its ideologies exposes the museum's social power. Rather than diminishing the legitimacy of the museum, perhaps this new phase in museum practice which recognizes the museum as a medium through which cultural knowledge is produced, will create an opportunity to challenge ideologies and convey new narratives. New technologies can spearhead this movement if they are developed with an awareness of the evolution of contemporary museum practice and the psychological and social effects of cultural memory.

References

- Alpers, S. (1991). *The Museum as a Way of Seeing*. In I. Karp & S. Lavine (Eds.) *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 25 - 32.
- Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Benjamin, W. (1968). *What is Epic Theater? Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 147 – 154.
- Bryson, N. (1988). *The Gaze in the Expanded Field*. In H. Foster (Ed.) *Vision and Visuality*. Seattle: Bay Press, 87 - 108.
- Cameron, D. (1972). *The Museum: A Temple or the Forum*. *Journal of World History* 14, No. 1, 197 - 201.
- Crew, S. & Sims, J. (1991). *Locating Authenticity*. In I. Karp & S. Lavine (Eds.) *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 159 - 175.
- Eco, U. (1986). *Travels in Hyperreality*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Ernst, W. (2000). *Archi(ve)textures of Museology*. In S. Crane (Ed.) *Museums and Memory*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 17-34.
- Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline & Punish: The birth of the prison*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Hendry, J. (2000). *The Orient Strikes Back*. Oxford: Berg.
- Huyssen, A. (1995). *Twilight memories: marking time in a culture of amnesia*. New York: Routledge.
- Kammen, M. (1991). *Mystic chords of memory: the transformation of tradition in American culture*. New York: Knopf.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (1998). *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lacan, J. (1978). *What is a picture?* In J. Miller (Ed.) *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*. New York: W. W. Norton, sections 6 - 9.
- Lakoff, G. (1990). *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Leader, D. (2003). *Stealing the Mona Lisa: What Art Stops Us from Seeing*. New York: Counterpoint Press.
- Malraux, A. (1967). *Museum Without Walls*. Garden City: Doubleday.
- Nora, P. (1989). *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire*. *Representations* 26, 7 – 24.
- Nora, P. (2002). *The Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory*. *Tr@nsit-Virtuelles Forum* 22.
- Pine, B. J. & Gilmore, J. (1999). *The Experience Economy*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Renaud, A. (2002). *Memory and the Digital World*. *Museum Internations* 215, 7 – 18.
- Sorkin, M. (1992). *Variations on a Theme Park*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Sturkin, M. (1997). *Tangled Memories*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Urry, J. (2002). *The Tourist Gaze*, London: Sage Publications.
- Weil, S. (1995). *Cabinet of curiosities: inquiries into museums and their prospects*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.