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Helen Graham

Breaking out of the museum core:

Conservation as participatory ontology and systemic action inquiry

In Mark O'Neill and Glenn Hooper (2019) *Connecting Museums*. London: Routledge.

The call for museums to reform themselves is prevalent in contemporary policy and practice: for museums to be places for social justice, for human rights, for democracy, for wellbeing.[1] These demands have a particular character and are set in motion by the nature of the museum as a political form. Four interrelated 'museum claims' flow from this political form:

- Representation: for museums to represent humanity and the world
- Access: for museums to seek to know about audiences so they can be accessible to all
- Conservation*:* for museums to conserve collections and other resources for everyone now and for future generations
- Impact: for museums to seek to use their resources on behalf of the public for the public good

Claims of this type are visible in international and national policy from ICOM to UK Museums Association, as well as in statements from institutions such as the British Museum and the Smithsonian Institution[2] and in many civic museum mission statements.[3]

These propositions draw on representational logics in two senses; that of *epistemic representation*, that a concept, object or person can stand in for something or someone else; and of *political representation*, that the authority delegated to museums means they can make decisions *on behalf of* everyone now as well as in the future. Participation has emerged as one response to these claims: a desire for greater direct connection with people otherwise framed as 'audiences'. From pioneering early examples to the proliferation of schemes and projects today, it has been hoped that direct involvement of people in co-producing collections,

exhibitions and programmes will enable both greater representation and greater access.[4] Yet attempts by museums to be participative have often proved fraught and have opened up two tendencies offering critiques of participatory work: one based on *depth and extent of involvement* and one based on *scale of impact*. The first derives from a critique of participation on its own terms; that projects are not participatory enough, do not hand over power and remain marginal, only work with the usual suspects, can be frustrated by staff resistance if not approached holistically and with support from the organisation's leadership.[5] The second has been that participatory work is not strategic, does not address itself to the core of museum practice (to affect the collections or permanent displays) and fails to scale from intensive and expensive small group work to create sustainable change in the overall inequalities in the demographics of museum visitors.[6]

Both the critiques of participation have, in different ways, been a response to museums' representational logics in terms of a desire for greater diversity of representation in terms of collections, displays and audiences.[7] Yet a central impetus to my argument in this chapter is that participation derives from a different set of political precepts than representation, as becomes clear if we look at the lineage of both terms in the concept and practice of democracy. In a representational form of democracy an elected member represents a constituency. In contrast participation is in the tradition of direct democracy where people act and speak only for themselves.[8] Doing participatory work in museums has been challenging because it has been mobilised in response to the demands of a representational tradition which the very logics of participation call into question. Not recognising that different political logics and traditions are at work in this debate will continue to cause tensions and frustrations, and part of my argument in this chapter is to extend this point to also to epistemic traditions. However, if we do fully realize the potential of thinking

museums in a participatory way then productive alternatives to the ideal positions implied by the two established critiques of participation will also emerge.

In order to imagine a participatory museum practice that addresses and reframes both the critiques related to *depth and extent of involvement* and *scale of impact* I use a specific combination of approaches, drawing on distinct theoretical resources. I begin by seeking to better understand what is at stake in museum work by drawing on normative democratic theory in order to clarify the representational logics of museums. I then draw from theories associated with 'non-representation theory' to develop a participatory ontology for museum work, one which extends the resonance of 'participation' beyond community action and decision-making to a broader epistemic understanding of non-representation which treats every 'thing' and every person as singular and constituted through their connections.[9]

Finally, I indicate how everyday museum practice and everyday participatory practice can become the ground for addressing inequalities through using techniques associated with systemic action inquiry – known as 'a strategy for whole system change' – drawn from development studies.[10] A use of systemic action inquiry allows us to link everyday museum practice and participatory practice with building understandings of wider systemic conditions through parallel participatory action and an ongoing reflexive inquiry into the nature of the museum. More specifically I identify the potential for whole system change that lies in recasting museums' mission away from representation, access and reform and instead re-emphasising another of its traditional missions: conservation. I seek to understand conservation dynamically, as an action inquiry and specifically as a social-material practice of world-making, enabled by an ontology which is non-representational, enlivened by the interrelationships and connections between things, ideas and people, and unfolding transformation from, and at, the otherwise representational 'core' of the museum.

Museum claims I: Using democratic theory to understand representation logics

Cultural theorist Tony Bennett diagnosed the 'insatiability' of the museum's political demands in his 1992 book, *The Birth of the Museum*:

> Two distinctive political demands that have been generated in relationship to the modern museum: the demand that there should be parity of representation for all groups and cultures within collection, exhibition and conservation activities of museums, and the demand that the members of all social groups should have equal practical as well as theoretical rights of access to museums.[11]

While Bennett made this observation in the context of nineteenth-century museums, these demands are immediately recognisable to contemporary museum practice and, with tailored modifications, to many other types of large public or publicly-funded organisations such as theatre, classical music venues and local government. Crucially – which is again very relevant today – Bennett argues that these dynamics are 'insatiable' because of a 'mismatch' or 'dissonance' between public rights demands and the 'political rationality' of the museum:

> Public rights demands are produced and sustained by the dissonance between, on one hand, the democratic rhetoric governing the conception of public museums as vehicles for popular education and, on the other hand, their actual functioning as instruments for the reform of public manners.[12]

This dissonance remains very visible in policy today. To give one example, the UK Museum Associations 'Museum Change Lives' advocacy document draws attention to 'active public participation, engaging with diverse communities, and sharing collections and

knowledge' as a way of 'breaking down barriers to access and inclusion'. However, this is done in the name of reform and scale of impact and as instances of how the museums will 'impact' upon people's lives.[13]

The museum claims are normative in the sense that they are animated by 'what ought to be'[14] and when seen through the lens of normative democratic theory, however, the claims clearly propose a theory of legitimacy. That is, what makes museums legitimate is the extent to which they can:

- Represent and create Access – which raise the question of constituency and the question of decision-making
- Conserve material culture for future generations – which raises the question of governance of limited resources
- Create public impact in terms of mission and purpose – which raises the question of definition of the type and status of museum work

The central problem raised by the museum claims is the question of the implied 'who' – the spatially and temporally expansive constituency of 'all', 'everyone', 'the world' and 'future generations'[15] – what is known in democratic theory as 'the boundary problem'.[16] Democratic theory has proposed one main answer to this problem and that is 'The Principle of Affected Interests', which suggests that 'everyone who is affected by the decisions of a government should have the right to participate in that government'[17] or 'all those who will be bound by a rule should have a say in making the rule'.[18]

Yet if the museum claims to be *accessible* and for everyone now and everyone in the future then, as Robert E. Goodin puts it, 'this expansive conception of "all possibly affected interests" causes the franchise to balloon dramatically and the scope for legitimate exclusions to shrink accordingly'.[19] It is museums' expansive constituency – too big and unimaginable to 'make the rules' collectively – that has underpinned the idea of the need for the delegated

authority of professionals, working 'on behalf of' everyone/future generations, a version of what Steven Brint calls 'social trustee professionalism'.[20] In this model, constituencies can be defined by the museum itself, the claims can be professionally managed and present and future needs can be balanced out.

Yet – as the insatiability of the claims indicates – this representational approach to governance never settles the matter, precisely because of the epistemic representational duty to *represent* human life in some way or another. The legitimacy question behind this problem is clarified by Michael Saward's work where he describes two different types of political issue. The first is named 'non-contingent', which is fundamentally political, as it defines what living together means; the necessary stuff of democratic debate.[21] However, Saward then defines a second type of knowledge as 'contingent', and as professional or technical: 'the garage mechanic knows better than I how to fix my car; the nuclear engineer knows better than I how to build a nuclear reprocessing plant; the social worker knows better than I how to deal with runaway teenagers'.[22] Saward's overall argument is 'that politics is not a realm where contingent claims to specialized, superior knowledge are legitimate; rather, it is a realm in which only non-contingent claims are admissible in principle'.[23]

Like all professional work, museum work should be based in contingent knowledge. Yet the nature of the task, set in terms of the epistemic representation of humanity and the world, appears to be non-contingent. One way of thinking about this is that museum workers are given the scope and scale of non-contingent issues and yet they have, through the governmental framework of the museum, been delegated to do this *as if* it is a specialist technical form of work. On this view, there is a dissonance in forms of political legitimacy. And, as a result, the museums' claims to work *on behalf of* never quite holds. Finally, one could read the reform agenda of museums – to reduce inequality; to increase wellbeing, etc. – as a way of rendering contingent work which otherwise is non-contingent in scope. If we

were to adopt this view, we might see in such reforms an attempt at legitimising museum work by making of it a set of technical activities rather than the political act it arguably is.

To draw this together, the lens provided by normative democratic theory suggests that museums are always open to critique because of the definition of constituency (representation and access for everyone; for future generations) and the political status of the work (non-contingent). The political nature of museum work is rendered constantly problematic because it often seems to be dealing in non-contingent (democratic) matters as if they were contingent (specialised, technical). In this context, reform then offers a tactic of legitimation by putting the non-contingent aim of exploring what it means to be human and live in this world into a contingent framework of policy. Therefore the mismatch Tony Bennett notes is not simply about the difference between rights and reform, but even more fundamentally about the legitimacy of professional museum work itself. These are therefore good reasons why participation has proved so compelling for museums; participation is an acknowledgement of the non-contingent nature of museum knowledge and a search for a different form of legitimacy. In the last part of this chapter I will explore these dynamics through conservation, which is often seen as a specialist practice where technical decisions are legitimately made on behalf of everyone. Yet I will argue that if we were to think of conservation non-contingently it might well offer a key to a strategic whole system approach to participatory museum work.

Museum claims II: Tracing the critiques of participation to the 'core'

There are two main tendencies in critiques of participatory work, both promoted in different ways by the museum claims. As noted in the introduction, the first tends to emphasise the *depth and extent of involvement*. A second tends to emphasize the *scale of impact*. The tendencies differ – to evoke again democracy theory – in their imagination of what makes museums legitimate. Taking the 'scale of impact' tendency first, Mark O'Neill, former

Director of Policy and Research for Glasgow Life and Head of Glasgow Museums, has drawn attention to issues raised by the use of intensive small group projects, especially in relation to health benefits. O'Neill has argued that 'epidemiological research suggests that a strategy promoting less intensive attendance at cultural organizations among vulnerable communities may be able to achieve a health impact at a population level'.[24] More specifically, the implications of this are that small group work and the depth of the work itself is not necessary for large scale positive population-level benefit'.[25]

Secondly, the inequalities in mainstream museum visiting mean 'museums come to serve the most educated and best-off and the better educated they are, the better museums serve them'. O'Neill notes that museums often produce different 'Museum Access Zones' which he evokes concentrically, with the permanent collections at the centre, temporary exhibitions in the next layer and, on the outside of the circle, outreach activities. At worse, suggests O'Neill, outreach becomes 'a way of protecting the core from change […creates] ghettos of staff that can engage with these groups which have no role that is integral to the museum', while there is 'little evidence the museum learns from these groups', nor that the people feel any more welcome within its walls.[26] To counter this he advocates the idea of changing the collections and permanent displays so that museums can engage 'mixed audiences in the core'; to do this he argues that population-level targets are needed, with the aim of 'increasing the percentages of museum visitors in the communities in which we work'. O'Neill argues that 'this is the only context in which small groups make a difference' and 'if you don't have these strategic aims then small projects become ethically questionable'.

The other tendency, more represented in the academic literature, places much more emphasis on *depth and extent of involvement*. In the work linked to the Paul Hamlyn Our Museum project, a strong argument has been made against 'empowerment-lite', as Bernadette Lynch characterised it (following Andrea Cornwall), underpinned by a critique of

a beneficiaries model where the museum is 'of service' and 'helps' people.[27] Instead the argument is made that participation should be seen as everyone's job and that communities be seen as agents and active partners. For the Our Museum project 'core' always refers to community engagement being seen as central to the use of the resources of the museum (staff, money, time).[28] In terms of defining museums purpose, and in common with Nina Simon's work at the Museum of Art and History in Santa Cruz, there tends to be an emphasis on agency itself, citizenship or civic voice, rather than outcomes like health benefits.[29]

It is worth reflecting on the interest in the concept of the 'core' in both tendencies, and in the context of large and publicly-funded museums there is a very good reason for this related to the tension in the purpose of museums, in terms of the four claims and in the context of limited resources. In an article exploring an ethical approach to disposal of collections, Nick Merriman cites a report that up to 60% resources in museums are spent on conservation collections storage.[30] It is this particular commitment to conserving collections which creates tensions between present use and future generations and pulls in resources of time and money.[31] The issue of there being a 'core' is therefore a very real one for museums and is why both the *depth and extent of involvement* and *scale of impact* critiques of participation use the idea of core to indicate where power lies.[32] But does conceptually reinforcing the concept of the core help address either the challenges for museum practice posed by the critiques relating to *depth and extent of involvement* or *scale of impact*?

The use of the idea of 'core' poses a particular ontology for museums; a particular theory of what museums are. 'Core' suggests there is an inside and an outside; a centre and periphery; that there are museum staff and people who are the public/community and that there are things (objects, collections) and people. This ontology means that conservation is often seen as the key political challenge for museums. Not least because, to return to the representational logics of museums, when conservation is understood as a desire to protect

material culture – to keep it safe via restricting use and access – it produces the tension of constituency between everybody now and future generations.

Yet even conceiving of a 'core' draws participation into a particular spatial relationship, with participation being understood as being constantly, centripetally, in a contest-mode with a fixed centre. There clearly are some instances in which the narrowing of focus of the contest-the-centre model is absolutely necessary, not least in the calls for repatriation.[33] However, this is not always the case and in the repetition of the idea of a centre where the power is, power can also be reinforced and solidified. In many cases, alternative, more centrifugal approaches, which open out, widen the focus and treat power as distributed, can be taken. Rather than reinforce a particular ontology implied by the idea of 'core', a participatory museum practice benefits from a different ontology for objects and a different ontology for power and change. And I want to suggest that conservation, that aspect of museum work often seen as core, if rethought centrifugally, can be used to hold both together.

Conservation as thriving: A non-representational participatory ontology

When thought of traditionally conversation in museums is bound up with the imaginary of a fixed and non-renewable resource which needs to be protected from use. Yet this has come in for challenge in many ways. The idea that objects' meanings might be in their use, rather than in keeping them safe and giving access only via glass cases is now well-established with faith objects and objects of significance often being made available for use and conservators have been calling for honest conversations about 'uncertainty' over the implications of movement and use.[34] Similarly, the conceptualising of heritage as intangible has a long trajectory in a variety of ways; both in that sustaining intangible heritage requires sustaining the ecologies

and economies that allow communities to thrive[35] or in the argument that really when we talk about heritage or culture what we are taking about is meaning.[36]

What these more recent debates allow us to do is to see conservation as a social-material act, the dynamic enlivening and sustaining of materiality and meaning. It is worth noting that underpinning this shift is quite a different ontology, a shift between a representational ontology to a participatory, relational ontology. Using democratic theory we have drawn attention to the representational politics at work in museums but a representational epistemology is also at work; that one object can stand in for other objects, for other people, for other events and for other ideas. In her work on the emergence of the modern fact in the eighteenth century Mary Poovey has argued that modernity is characterised by the new ability to link 'individual claims about specific observations with generalizations about "larger" or "deeper" principles that presumably lie behind the observed phenomena'.[37] This both produces a certain approach to the world – that we can explain 'what-can-be-seen by reference to what cannot' – but also 'a standpoint of a nonparticipating, objectifying observer' which has made it 'possible to think about social structures, relationships, and processes as entities, as relatively autonomous, and as sufficiently systematic to warrant scientific descriptions—which are systematic as well'.[38] Yet museum objects already play a hinge role in this modern epistemology in that they are both often used representatively in some way – to allow for 'bigger issues' to be explored – and at the same time are conceived of as unique objects and valuable because they are unique (have a certain specific provenance, have been used in certain ways).

This interest in objects as singular – that even when mass produced they have particular histories of use – open the way for us to explicitly think *non*-representationally about their role. That is we can recognise that their role in museum displays can be thought of less as representation and more as offering, as John Law and Annemarie Mol have put it in their

theorization of complexities, 'phenomena in their own right, each differing slightly', whose role is not to 'stand in for' anything else but rather to 'sensitize the reader to events and situations elsewhere [or to act as an] irritant, destablizing expectations'.[39] When thought of non-representationally, each object explicitly requires the visitor to make all sort of connections to other things. The idea of the visitor as active in constructing meaning is of course well established in the museum literature,[40] but the shift this allows us to make is to no longer see this 'constructivism' as only *meaning*-making prompted by the representational capacities of the object but as part of the same relational phenomenon of object-person-ideas-connections and as the making of reality itself.

Annemarie Mol refers to this reframing of making meaning to making reality as an ontological politics which requires different ways of conceiving what is going on:

> Talking about reality as multiple depends on another set of metaphors. Not those of perspective and construction, but rather those of intervention and performance. These suggest a reality that is done and enacted rather than observed.[41]

When applied to museum practice, this allows us to move away from conceiving conservation as a core act separate from, but which enables, representation and visitor engagement. Rather we can understand conservation as a phenomena which includes the object and the people and the connections they make and that in this moment of enactment is *doing conservation*, bringing the future sustainability of that object, those social relationships and those ideas into being by producing reality itself. This draws on Karen Barad's description of a relational ontology, given impetus by quantum physics, which 'does not take the boundaries of any of the objects or subjects of these studies for granted but rather investigates the material-discursive boundary-making practices that produce "object" and "subjects" and other differences out of, and in, a changing relationality'.[42] To put it another way, the basic unit of

reality is not an object or a person nor is it a moment in time or a particular place, it is the 'phenomena' itself and is the mutual entanglement and mutual production of differentiation; not only of 'objects' and 'people' but also 'past' and 'future'.

This ontology offers a reorientation of conservation relationally and non-representatively. This ontology also allows us to connect differently and re-orientate the four museum demands we opened with, no longer as competing tensions pulling in different directions and requiring professional arbitration underpinned by a representational politics and epistemology. Rather it allows conservation to be conceived as the whole phenomenon where access, future-making and benefit is built from the now and *how to do it* is a necessarily participatory and open-ended inquiry.[43]

Museum Work as Systemic Action Research: Rethinking the 'depth and extent of involvement' and 'scale of impact' critiques of participation

The question then becomes how to operationalize a participatory ontology in museums, to reframe fundamentally their representational political form and to address the 'depth and extent of involvement' and 'scale of impact' critiques of participation. To indicate how this might be done I will draw on systems thinking and especially the systemic action research approaches developed by Danny Burns. Systems thinking – which has long flourished in organisation and management studies – nourishes this approach, as Yuha Jung and Ann Rowson Love have put it:

> Systems thinking sees the world as open and interconnected to and interdependent with all parts of the world; the parts are situated in context, shaping the whole, which is better understood by examining dynamic interrelationships among its parts […] it refers to a complex, interdependent, and open web of things, people, and relationships

> that reside within the larger social, cultural and natural world and are in a constant state of flux.[44]

Burns approach to systemic action inquiry elaborates how to operate in and make positive use of this connected web offering 'a process through which communities and organisations can adapt and respond purposefully to their constantly changing environments' in order to develop 'participatory solutions to entrenched problems' and 'the possibility of strategy development that can meaningfully engage with the complexities of the real world'.[45]

As explored above, the effects of the representation logics of the four claims are to create irreconcilable tensions (between protection of collections and future generations and access for people today) that require professionals to manage the claims on behalf of everyone else and – through the emphasis on public impact – to turn heritage and culture, which otherwise might be considered non-contingent political issues, into technical, contingent, and therefore professional, work. As argued above, taking a participatory ontology to museums allows us to see people, objects and ideas as part of the same phenomena of conservation, with the future sustainability emerging precisely from that relational social-material dynamic.

Enacting a participatory ontology via systemic action inquiry means we can conceive differently the challenges posed by the 'depth and extent of involvement' critique which is motivated by the idea that power can be located at the core in terms of museum decision making over resources and that power over the core needs to be shared. The key challenge posed by this critique is the need to move way from professionals taking full responsibility for balancing out the various museum claims. A systemic action inquiry approach turns issues and sicking points into questions and enables an exploration of the challenges and for ways forward to be identified and shared between staff and community members. For

example, it would allow a very open discussion about conservation practice in the sense of managing risk to material culture so that both the scientific aspects of materiality, temperature fluctuation, light levels and touch could be explored alongside the museum need to enable access and engagement. Not only would conservation itself (in the way described above) essentially be happening through the conversations but new ways of dealing with the practical-political dilemmas might be collectively identified. This approach would allow for joint action inquiries which involve staff and community members to be initiated, directly following their energy and passion.[46] This also offers a conceptual shift from 'everyone' to 'anyone'. If the concept of 'everyone now' and 'future generations' pushes power back onto a mediating professional, 'anyone' creates open possibilities for direct involvement of interested people.[47] In addition, a systemic action approach is not consensus orientated and opens up space for quite different strands of inquiry, what Burns calls 'parallel action'. It therefore allows for a pluralisation of what the museum is to include a collaborative creation of heritage and culture in ways which might allow for moving beyond the idea of the museum as a fixed and non-renewal resource.[48] In turn this shifts the idea of decision making as only and specifically a formal process towards also recognising the 'simultaneity of action and decision making' because in a museum participatory ontology, action is conservation.[49] At the same time 'a structure for connecting organic inquiry to formal decision making' can be created in order to speed up and actively facilitate that organisational shift and change.[50]

In terms of the *scale of impact* critique, systemic action inquiry allows for a shift from seeking to demonstrate impact *on* people to allow for positive benefit to be discussed and collaboratively articulated, evaluated and enacted.[51] In terms of addressing the crucial question of persistent inequalities in museum visiting, this recognises change is only possible through engaging with the complexities of that specific museum in its locality, as Burns puts it 'each situation is unique and its transformative potential lies in the relationships between

interconnected people and organisations'.[52] This fully contextual approach enables a non-generalising understanding of specific inequalities. It also allows the museum not to be the centre and focus of the question of inequality (Who comes? Who doesn't come?) but to work across and beyond organisational boundaries about inequity and to play a role in wider whole system, whole society change (which might in turn transform who is involved with the museum but that would be neither the starting point nor the end point). Burns argues that the key here is to move away from the ontological logics of formal decision making and planning approaches which are 'often out of date by the time [the plans] are finished and limit options' and instead, drawing on a participatory and relational ontology, to 'build emergence into organization decision-making'.[53] What this should then allow for is a collaborative focus on 'direction of travel' and 'core values', and an opportunity to create a 'process of strategic improvisation that enables strategic intervention in ways that can respond flexible to real world change'.[54]

An enactment of this type of thinking in the context of museums has arisen from the work of Mike Benson, Kathy Cremin and John Lawson as developed at the Ryedale Folk Museum and Bede's World which shows how heritage, conservation, action and organisational decision-making can be understood as fully congruent processes:

> Decision-making can be distributed across a museum. Instead of hierarchy, leadership can be passed between communities, volunteers and staff. This shifting, dynamic and shared approach to decision-making is enabled in Bede's World by thinking of heritage as abundant and constantly renewed. Sharing your own knowledge, memories and cultures enables all of us to have 'freedom of self' and be active agents in our own lives. The image of a living stream helps us see how heritage is a means of sustaining the places in which we live. […] both conceptualizations of heritage and organizational structures need to be re-engineered.[55]

In the metaphor of heritage as a living stream, the authors inspire both a shift away from epistemic concepts of representation – heritage is life, is abundant and is a future constantly unfolding – and a shift from representational logics of legitimacy towards participatory logics of legitimacy, where decision-making is action itself and is distributed. A participatory museum is one that uses a participatory ontology.

A participatory ontology: museums and heritage as systemic action research

In this chapter I have been exploring what might be gained for museum practice by making a shift from representational to participatory logics, both epistemically and politically. The shifts we've been exploring look like this:

- Representation – Living: for museums to move from representation as an end point to embracing their non-contingent mission and supporting living cultures and dynamic debates
- Access – Creation: to move beyond an access model where 'culture' pre-exists engagement to seeing culture and heritage as an ongoing collaborative creation
- Everyone – Anyone: to sift from the impossibly expansive ideas of everyone and future generations which force power into the 'on behalf of' of professional hands towards opening out to 'anyone'
- Conservation - Thriving: expand the idea of conservation as protection 'on behalf of future generations' to conservation as a thriving material-social practice from which the future is constantly being made
- Impact – Transformation: to see museums not as agents who reform others ('museums change lives'/ beneficiaries model) and instead for museums to see

themselves as collaborators in wider systemic transformation (of inequalities; of democratic culture)

Museums are themselves ongoing research inquiries, in that everyday museum work is always about enacting and reworking what museums are, their ontological conditions and their political legitimacies. But more than that, and to turn the focus centrifugally outwards, one way of seeing museums is as an open experiment and a great participatory and non-contingent inquiry into what it means to be alive. Therefore the scope for these shifts is there and is already emerging. As museums move away from conceiving themselves representationally and as defined by a centralised core and move towards a fully participatory approach to politics and knowledge, it is conservation itself that will thrive.

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[1]K. Message, *The Disobedient Museum* (London: Routledge, 2018); C. Mouffe, 'Institutions as Sites of Agonistic Intervention' in P. Gielen, ed., *Institutional Attitudes: Instituting Art in a Flat World* (Amsterdam: Antennae, 2013), 63-76 ; G. Noble and H. Chatterjee, *Museums, Health and Well-Being* (London: Ashgate, 2013); R. Sandell and E. Nightingale, *Museums, Equality and Social Justice* (London: Routledge, 2012); R. Sandell, *Museums, Moralities and Human Rights* (London: Routledge, 2017).

[2] ICOM are currently working on 'revising the museum definition', but it currently rests on the idea of being 'in the service of society'; the British Museum mission ticks all these boxes, and mention 'greater access', a 'laboratory of comparative cultural investigation', all of which it holds 'in trust'; the Smithsonian Institution emphasises 'engaging and inspiring more people', 'presenting diversity', and characterises its role as 'steward and ambassador'.

[3] Glasgow Life: 'Our mission is to inspire the city's citizens and visitors to lead richer and more active lives through culture, sport and learning. In doing so we aim to make a positive

impact on individuals, the communities in which they live and the city as a whole'. Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums: 'Our mission... is to help people determine their place in the world and define their identities, so enhancing their self-respect and their respect for others'.

[4] F. MacLeod*, Out There: The Open Museum: Pushing the Boundaries of museums' potential* (Glasgow: Glasgow Life, 2010); M. Ames, 'How to decorate a house: the renegotiation of cultural representation at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology', in L. Peers and A. Brown, eds., *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), 171-180.

[5] B. Lynch, *Whose Cake Is It Anyway?: A collaborative investigation into engagement and participation in 12 museums and galleries in the UK* (London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2011); B. Lynch, *Our Museum: A Five Year Perspective from a Critical Friend* (London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2014); P. Bienkowski, *No Longer Us and Them: How to change into a participatory museum and gallery. Learning from the Our Museum programme* (London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2016).

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