Abstract

This dissertation proceeds from the premise that the art museum has a singularly important responsibility to carry out in a democratic society. I argue that the museum’s task is “to make art public,” that is, to move art—and the interpretive apparatus that support and maintain it—from the relatively private spheres of the artist’s studio and the academy into the public realm. In a post modern milieu, where art consists just as much of its interpretability as it does in the physicality of the object, the museum is faced with the even more difficult task of making the art object as the range, depth, and breadth of its interpretive repertoires available to the public. I suggest that the museum can take up this public responsibility by creating self-consciously critical spaces of interpretation for the public. In order to create these spaces, the museum must embark upon a critique of the discursive coordinates that have privileged a pedagogy of display and that have installed schooling as the primary interface between art and the public. In so doing the museum can begin to articulate the spaces between its own interpretive authority and the equally undeniable autonomy of the public to make whatever meaning they will in the face of a pedagogy of display. I propose that it is from the spaces in between notions of authorial truth and excessive relativism that the museum can begin to pay heed to the kinds of interpretive repertoires that are currently embedded in its practices and from there begin to develop critically engaged sites of interpretation for the public. I put forward the concepts of “being-singular-plural” and “co-appearance” as productive ways to re-imagine how critically engaged forms of interpretation in the art museum can work intentionally and productively from the spaces between the poles of authority and autonomy.
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Introduction

Objects are not precisely transparent but neither are they hopelessly opaque. (Conn, 1998, p. 4)

That which, for itself, depends on nothing, is an *absolute*. That which nothing completes in itself is a *fragment*. Being or existence is an absolute fragment. (Nancy, 1997, p.125)

The museum could be said to stand between the school and the library in the spectrum of authority and autonomy of public institutions that presume to know what is best for the public. The museum has a very specific mandate that distinguishes it from these other institutions, and that mandate has everything to do with the particular kind of cultural artifacts for which it is responsible. But it shares with these institutions a common concern with constituting important aspects of the public sphere where, in the Habermassian sense of the word, both the meaning and the meaning-making apparatus of cultural productions are shaped, discussed, and debated. The art museum, like all museums, takes up this public responsibility in ways that are directly related to the collections it holds in public trust. The art museum is therefore responsible for one critically important segment of public culture. How the museum constitutes that sense of the public simultaneously as a diverse and free body and as a body in need of discipline and training, how it constitutes its educative role as both colonizer and decolonizer of the interpretive space of the museum—these are the concerns of this text. Rather than staking a claim in one of the polarities of schooling-the-public-about-art or letting-the-display-of-art-speak-for-itself; I will argue that the art museum needs a theoretical
framework set between the poles of authority and autonomy for determining how it can best participate in the public sphere. This thesis will argue that the museum can find a footing, in these post-colonial, post-structural times, by housing and sheltering a necessarily self-consciously critical space of interpretation that addresses this dynamic between authority and autonomy as the very site of interpretation. It is this public space, as both public right and as quality of public life, that the art museum is in a position to define and defend.

The way in which one can speak about or speak to notions of authority or autonomy in the art museum differs depending on the understanding of the role of art in a democratic state. There are two traditions of thought on this. The classic republican view of democracy holds that the unity and stability of government is upheld through the civic virtue of its people. The primary goal of the republic, therefore, is to foster virtue through education. In this view, art and the art museum are seen as vehicles for moral education, partly because art is still seen to be concerned with beauty, moral goodness, and truth, and partly because art appeals to percepts beyond the rationality of truth; that is, to the emotions and the imagination. Consequently, art can be seen to be a complete guide to moral behaviour and, as such, a model of civic virtue. Through exposure to the arts, one could become civilized, cultivated, and inculcated into culture (Duncan, 1995; Weil, 1998; Bennett, 1998a). Democratic republics therefore have a great need for mass schooling of the public in the name of aesthetic education, and they support an authoritative museal apparatus that can create and deliver these citizens inculcated with civic virtue and a stable national identity. This tradition, needless to say, upholds a traditionalist aesthetic canon of art, abides by the master narratives of art history based on
the dominant western white male values, and has been complicit in colonizing both the
spaces of production and the spaces of the interpretation of art.

On the other side of the spectrum, the liberal democratic tradition has tended to
deny art an "official" political role in culture; more often it has taken up art as a
countercultural agent—one of the few sites in civil society where the "dangers" and
"failures" of democracy might be articulated, contested, and changed. But how and
toward what end these critiques of democracy were understood to operate differed
tremendously. The Frankfurt school Marxists such as Adonoro and Hokhiemer looked to
"high art" as a counter-hegemonic force, as a way to lift the masses out of the conformity
and mediocrity dictated by mass culture, and subsequently as a tool to bring the masses
toward a more autonomous participation in a critical democracy (Habermas, 1989).
Others, particularly thinkers from the multicultural left, emphasized the tyranny of the
elite culture of art and turned to art as an agent of subversion and social change, and as a
way to shock the ruling majority and to promote genuine equality for minority cultures
(Calhoun, 1992). Liberal democratic traditions therefore have a great need for art and
support a museal apparatus that fosters an autonomous subject—one that can either resist
or offer a critique of authorities, power, and hegemony (Melzer, Weinberger & Zinman,
1999).

This way of configuring the forces of authority and autonomy as they bear upon
the museum provides a very useful tool for analysis, and I will certainly be using it as
such in this text. However, I will also be arguing that if the museum aspires to foster
self-consciously critical spaces of interpretation, it needs to take a rigorous look at the
complex and often doubled spaces between these positions. For acts of interpretation are
not completely autonomous acts: we think with others, with the ghosts of all of our mothers and all of our teachers—be they flesh and blood, the stones of our great cathedrals and town halls, or the art and artifacts bequeathed to us. As Deleuze and Guattari (1985) said: “there are no individual statements, only statements producing assemblages” (p. 36). But neither are acts of interpretation completely confined and determined by the ruling bodies of the day. The ideological state apparatus, as effective as it has been at times, could not contain the artists, writers, radicals, and philosophers; it could not contain their desire to think without the weight of tradition that authorized certain interpretations and prescribed certain methods of proceeding. Although as Agamben (1992a) reminds us, “something remains present in the form of its retreat” (p. 193). However, it is in the thick traffic between these spaces, between these two ferociously competing narratives of the role of art in a democratic state, that the museum currently operates. On the one hand the museum constitutes its public as independent agents supposedly free from the authoritative powers of the museum. But at the same time, and often with the same gesture, the museum subjugates the public by offering them only a narrow band of interpretive repertoires, and by means of this narrowness, reinscribes its own interpretive authority—even as it espouses a rhetoric of autonomy.

The museum can work toward creating a self-consciously critical space of interpretation by undertaking a rigorous critique of the ways in which interpretive authority operates within and around the interpretive repertoires it provides for the public, and by simultaneously searching for new ways to open its own deeply informed meaning-making practices to the public so that they too might engage with the profound and insistent interpretability of art. Each artwork is an opening toward the interpretability of
art, an opening to what Nancy (2000) calls a “scattering” of the very boundaries of art. Art is therefore a site in culture—perhaps one of the very few sites in culture—where the authoritative reins of meaning-making can be loosened, where a persistent reworking and “unworking” of interpretive narratives and routines can take place, a site where interpretive muscle can be produced, and where an informed critical agency can be fostered.

However, the art museum, as it is currently configured, produces these sites of an autonomous critical praxis only for a small sector of the public, for those who are already deeply conversant with and often directly engaged in producing the critical apparatus that is available for the unworking and untying of art’s boundaries. The “rest of the public” are offered interpretive strategies that are contained and restrained by the museum’s tenacious belief in a transparent pedagogy of display. This pedagogy of display refers to how art objects are organized and presented in a way that is intended both to communicate certain messages to the public and to instruct them on the importance of those messages. This pedagogy is bolstered by the equally tenacious belief that “art speaks for itself” and therefore is not in need of any interpretive apparatus other than the museum’s pedagogy.
of display—even though there are whole libraries filled with a myriad of interpretations of art. Although this pedagogy is thought to foster an autonomous viewer, one who is not subjected to the influence or weight of the museum’s authoritative interpretive prowess, what I will argue here is that this pedagogy doubles back onto itself and categorically restricts the interpretive possibilities offered to the public and therefore curtails the critically engaged spaces of interpretation that it proposes to open.

The art museum has been called upon many times over the past decades to examine the practices that have created and maintained its exclusionary and authorial position and to become more accessible to the public, both physically and intellectually. This call for public accessibility has arrived in the form of new metaphors: museum as forum instead of temple (Weil, 1995; Mclellan, 1994; Harris, 1999); museum as community centre rather than university (Pittman, 1999); museum as the site for the production of narrative rather than the dissemination of sanctioned knowledge (Roberts, 1997); museum as semiotics (Balm 1992, 1996); and museum as the site that structures sight (Alpers, 1991). All of these, as Weil (1999) suggests, have manifest in a general shift in the understanding of the museum’s role in culture from an inward-looking model primarily focused on the growth, care, and study of its collections, to an outward-looking audience-centred model focused on providing services to the public. Accordingly, new discourses of accessibility, relevance, and community service have begun to fill the professional journals and have manifest in increased attendance—via the spectacle of the blockbuster exhibition—at the museums of the western world (ICOM Report, 2000). However, this increase in attendance, which is often touted as an example of the museum’s accessibility, does not necessarily imply an increased accessibility to the
interpretive apparatus that defines and sustains art. As Baker in *Contemporary Cultures of Display* (1999) suggests:

The fundamental problem of the spectacle...lies in the way that it subordinates art and its institutions to commercial and managerial priorities, producing a democratizing effect at the expense of serious engagement with or even close attention to works of art. (p.19)

I will be arguing that not only has the art museum been operating on a range of presuppositions that equate attendance figures with accessibility to art (that is, prioritize the physical access to art in the name of democracy), but that there is a clear reluctance on behalf of the museum to both take up its interpretive mission and to assume responsibility for the kinds of interpretive repertoires that it provides to the public. Even Hooper Greenhill (2000), one of museum education’s most renowned advocates and scholars, is oddly resigned to the fact that the museum does not have to take responsibility for the kinds of interpretive repertoires that it provides to the public precisely because that responsibility is completely fulfilled in a pedagogy of display as it is manifest in the installation of the exhibitions:

Exhibitions are produced to communicate meaningful visual and textual statements, but there is no guarantee that the intended meaning will be achieved. Visitors to museum exhibitions respond in diverse ways. They may or may not perceive the intended meanings, and, perceiving that, they may or may not agree with them, or find them interesting, or pay attention to them. (p. 4)

Even though this position undoubtedly posits an autonomous viewer by validating his or her experiential knowledge and personal narratives, this laissez-faire attitude toward the
meanings produced by the very narrow set of interpretive repertoires embedded in a pedagogy of display is a deeply problematic model for the museum. There are two interrelated fronts on which I will attempt to make this case.

The first is that in taking up this kind of laissez-faire stance, the museum abdicates one of its most fundamental responsibilities, which is “to make art public.” The art museum is the primary venue through which the very interpretability that produces and sustains art is brought into the public sphere, there to be taken up as part of a public discourse on art and its value in culture. There are four traditional academic disciplines (studio arts, art history, aesthetics, art education), a number of hybrid fields of study (visual culture, cultural studies), and a substantial academic and professional press that are all devoted to the production and interpretation of art. It is their collective task quite literally “to make art”—physically, metaphorically, and intellectually—and it is their collective task to make, contest, and remake the interpretive apparatuses that produce and sustain art. Whereas it is the museum’s task “to make art public.” It is the museum’s task to take all that is produced under the name of art by these disciplines and practices, as well as all that the museum itself produces, and to bring that into the public sphere for discussion, debate and circulation. The museum does not do this alone, but in conjunction with a complex art eco-system consisting of private galleries, collectors, publishers and a range of civic art projects.¹ The museum is undoubtedly, though, a very powerful force in this network and one whose primary role is, unlike the for-profit sector, to make art public. This is a huge and daunting task, and one that cannot be accomplished

¹ Even Nairne, in a essay that charts the growth of ‘culture of exhibitions’ from the museum to big biennials such as Venice, Sydney, and the international exhibitions such as documenta, concedes that “[t]he large exhibitions and the museums have the greatest effect in forming new critical audiences for the future [for this is] where most people will find a use value in contemporary art” (1999, p. 125).
solely within a pedagogy of display or with the kinds of meager addendums to that pedagogy that the museum has provided to the public.

Further, if we argue, following Tamen’s (2001) succinct appraisal of the postmodern shift, that the “artness” of art is not buried solely in the art object itself, but resides in a complex nexus of social, cultural, economic, and intellectual forces that come to name and treat certain objects as “interpretable objects,” then it becomes even more pressing that the museum pay heed to both the statements it issues and, even more importantly, to the kinds of interpretive repertoires that it provides for the public so that they can access and critically engage with those statements. For if art consists of its interpretability, and the museum’s task is to make art public, then the museum needs to make not just the physical art objects available to the public, but the range, depth, and breadth of the interpretive repertoires that create and sustain art. I will be arguing here that if the museum is to create critically engaged spaces of interpretation for the public, it can no longer posit a thin notion of a constructivist learning as an excuse for maintaining a pedagogy of display as the sole or even the primary interface between art and the public.

The second front on which I will argue that the museum is abdicating its responsibility to the public by adopting a laissez-faire attitude toward interpretation has to do with both the kinds of supplements that the museum has provided for a pedagogy of display and the way in which it has conceptualized the need for and place of these enhancements. Shortly after the formation of the public museum, a pedagogy of display was augmented first by very brief text labels that accompanied the artworks, and then, slowly, by educational programs (tours and “hands-on” activities) designed to assist
specific sectors of the public in accessing the content embedded in the exhibitions. However, I will be suggesting that there has been a persistent reluctance on the part of the museum to whole-heartedly invest in the interpretive programs that provide access to the content of the exhibitions even though it was recognized from the outset that a pedagogy of display is not a transparent mode of communication. Some of the reasons for this reluctance can be explained by way of what Derrida (1976; 1994) called the double logic of the supplement. The supplement either adds to itself, where it “is a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the fullest measure of presence;” or it covers over a lack: “the supplement supplements … adds only to replace … represents and makes an image … its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness” (Derrida, 1994, p. 144). The enhancements to a pedagogy of display, via this logic, were seen either as a wasteful extravagance and unnecessary addition to the already fully present opening to interpretive possibilities (based in the notion that art speaks for itself and everything else is noise), or as an unwanted reminder of the need to cover over the lack and deficiency of art/pedagogy of display. Curiously, though, this lack was deposited as the public’s lack (a public who was in need of schooling) and not as lack in the pedagogy of display. This notion of the public’s “lack” was further exacerbated by a certain infantilization of the public, which took place when the discursive frames and pedagogical strategies of schooling practices for children were transferred over and used to configure educational programs for adults. Consequently, the addendums to a pedagogy of display that were developed for the public (versus those like lectures and symposia, which have been developed for specialized art audiences) were seen either as frivolous add-ons to the
fecundity of art, or as the separate and, as I will propose here, marginalized territory that came to be colonized by specific discourses of schooling.

These forces have colluded around a pedagogy of display to produce and reproduce the enduring divide between those few members of the public who have the ability to engage critically in the opening to art’s interpretability and those members of the public who do not. This has bifurcated the museum’s publics roughly along the lines of the autonomous public who come to the museum already equipped with a sophisticated set of art discourses and critical practices, and the public who, although free to make whatever meaning they chose, are not offered access to, openings toward, or even small fragments of the theoretical discourses that both knit together and unravel the narratives of art, exposing the very thresholds of interpretability where art makes its nomadic home. How can the art museum begin to offer this kind of access to the public at large in a way that does not simply reinscribe the dichotomous subject positions that its current strategies have produced? This is the challenge that the museum must take up if it is to move toward creating spaces of autonomous critical praxis for and with the public. The histories, structures, discourses, and above all the possibilities of the museum’s interpretive power need to be re-examined and re-imagined if the museum is to rise to this, perhaps its most complex task. How can the art museum begin “to make art public” in these postmodern times, when such activity also and perhaps most importantly involves making available the dramatic interpretive struggles and scattering borders between the discourses that shape, produce, and contest art?

In this dissertation, I put forward a tripartite schema that can help the museum begin to generate spaces of critical interpretation for the public that attend to the tensions
and demands that are evoked between the poles of authority and autonomy. This schema operates on three levels: the discursive, the practical, and the physical spaces of interpretation in the art museum.

The first part of this proposal entails a radical critique of the discursive coordinates that have framed the museum’s understanding of its interpretive responsibilities to the public. This critique unravels the hold that a pure pedagogy of display has had on museum interpretation and questions the ongoing use of schooling and educational theory as the primary rubric through which interpretation is conceived and constructed. In lieu of these discourses, I argue that the museum must turn to contemporary thinkers and specifically to interpretive theory in order to create new discursive frames through which sites of critical praxis might be created. In so doing the museum begins to align the discourses that anchor its interpretive practices; firstly, with the contemporary art practices that it seeks to interpret, secondly, with its task to make art—and the interpretive discourses that make it art—available to the public, and thirdly, with a range of theoretical insights that has already worked through many of very conundrums that art museum interpretation, as it now stands, is struggling with.

The second part of this proposal argues that if the museum is committed to creating spaces of critical interpretation, it needs to significantly rethink the key component of its interpretive practices: the staff who create and operate the conceptual and physical interpretive spaces of the museum. I will advance two key suggestions in this text. One is that the character of a critically engaged space is profoundly discursive and as such needs to be staffed by people who possess pedagogical skills, knowledge about art, and ease with the complex new discursive coordinates outlined above. These
kinds of people, unfortunately, are not readily available for hire. There are a number of reasons for this, not the least of which is that there has been very little demand in the museum for people with this particular configuration of skills and knowledge. Consequently, and this is the second piece of my argument, the museum needs to begin to make real and sustainable investments in its interpretive staff. It can no longer entrust one of its primary roles—to make art public—to volunteer labour or to underpaid contract staff and claim that it is rising to its responsibility to make art public.

The third part of this proposal requires that the physical spaces of the museum be reconfigured in order to accommodate this level of discursivity. From the design of appropriate greeting spaces to the integration of comfortable and functional discussion spaces both in and near the galleries, the physical spaces of the museum need to acknowledge the presence of the public and of people there to talk about art. In addition, the acoustics of gallery spaces need to be reconsidered, again to accommodate a range of discussions with the public. These calls for change will make significant demands on the museum as it currently operates, for they require substantial and ongoing commitment to processes that go far beyond a silent pedagogy of display, whether that pedagogy be direct and static, or illusive and interactive. These changes, though, will go a long way toward producing the kind of spaces where the very fecundity of art and its interpretive possibilities might be made public—physically, intellectually, and in an embodied and critically engaged manner.

There are two coordinates for this project. One is my twenty years of experience working as the head of public programs and education in a number of major Canadian art museums. The other is a set of theories of the between, which deal with concepts of
mobility and relationality. I have called upon a group of thinkers who have identified an array of operations that take place between things, in the midst of them, in the nearly imperceptible movements, moments, and spaces where interpretive authority appears and escapes from itself and slips into autonomy, and where the relationships between what is shown and what is hidden become blurred. For all their differences, thinkers like Deleuze, Guattari, Ricoeur, Derrida, and Nancy have struggled to make language speak of a place that is in-between and on the way toward stability or away from stability. They have struggled to make language attend to its differences and to its deferrals, and in so doing have taught it new ways to say "interpretation" and new ways to say "public."

From the collaborative work of Deleuze & Guattari (1985; 1994) and from Deleuze (2000), I have garnered hope in the form of a set of metaphors about becoming, about forces, vectors, and trajectories. The museum today is not what it was twenty or fifty or one hundred years ago, nor what it can be in the future. It is a space of perpetual becoming where becoming is "not the transformation of one into another, but something passing from one to another" (Delueze & Guattari, 1994, p. 173). From this space of becoming there is no one ground, no sure place of origin, no original to which we must return; instead there are forces, intensities, and movements, or what they call "lines of flight," that either solidify and root themselves like trees, becoming arborescent and stable, or they move through time and space, spreading laterally and unexpectedly like the rhizomatic root structures of quack grass, producing new configurations and new growth at each node. So even though the forces that have created and are created by a pedagogy of display have become rooted and no longer serve the public (and perhaps
never did), these forces can become dislodged and dispersed, and in so doing produce new configurations for interpretation in the art museum.

From Derrida I have gathered the courage to face the ghosts that haunt my own practice. In his stunning evocation of the *spectre*, and in his conjuring of the "ghosts that haunt all inheritances" (1994, p. 21), he has offered us remarkable insight into “the art of seeing spirits” (p. 134). As both metaphor and method, Derrida’s work has proved to be useful as an example of how one might approach such huge and sprawling topics as “responsibility” and “public” and treat them as if they were only ciphers, the reappearance of something “else” in the form of a ghostly apparition. Above all, though, Derrida’s thought has helped me to frame one of the dominant tropes of this work: how ghosts of the past are haunting the museum.

From Nancy, whose work I will take up in some detail in Chapter Four, I have acquired a cluster of ideas and gathered them under the rubric of “co-appearance” as a way to describe how critical praxis needs to operate from the spaces between authority and autonomy. However, in order to do so, it needs to keep those poles in view, for it is this double vision, this steady and relentless co-appearance of authority and autonomy, that will guide the museum toward creating self-consciously critical spaces of interpretation for the public. Further, Nancy’s belief that we exist in relation to one another, that we are “beings” that are always a “being-singular-plural,” offers a powerful way to think about how the art museum might be one of the few places in culture where this kind of singular-plural being might be explicated—explicated, that is, because of the way art can only co-appear (Nancy, 1996, 1998). It takes all of art and its interpretive operations to make one artwork appear as art. In this dissertation I will argue that it is the
museum's responsibility to make those interpretive operations—the "co-appearance" of art as its interpretations—available to the public.

This dissertation, then, proceeds from the premise that the art museum has a singularly important and difficult role in civil society. Its role is to "make art public," that is, to provide access to the repertoires of interpretation that define, maintain, and contest the very boundaries on which and through which art exists. The production of this kind of self-consciously critical space of interpretation for the public requires that the museum undertake a radical critique of the discursive coordinates that have privileged a pedagogy of display and those that have installed schooling as the primary interface between art and the public. Further, it requires that the museum rethink how it might re-deploy both its physical spaces and its human resources toward creating sites of critical praxis. In order to rise to its public responsibilities, the museum needs to find new ways to operate in the spaces between the authorial power that it cannot deny and the equally undeniable autonomy of the public to make whatever meaning they will in the face of a pedagogy of display. I will make the case that it is indeed possible to create an art museum that takes responsibility for the kinds of interpretive repertoires and critical access to art that it offers to the public without a wholesale renovation of the entire museal project or a radical re-allocation of museum budgets. For although it will take ongoing commitments on behalf of the museum, it is both possible and desirable to begin moving in the direction of this new critically engaged art museum today.

In Chapter One, I situate the debates around a pedagogy of display by first looking at how the discursivity of display came to be supplemented with text, and that this textual supplement afforded the museum a way to constitute its interpretive authority
over the things therein. I then look at how this discursivity of display turned to a
pedagogy of display and was deployed in order to shape and determine two quite
different and often contradictory notions of who the public was and what the museum’s
responsibility to them might be. At this point, too, a pedagogy of display becomes linked
with schooling and manifests in the “object lessons” that continue to inform
contemporary museum practices.

Chapter Two looks at how museum education—as one of the primary addendums
to a pedagogy of display—was situated within the museum. I take a sustained look at one
of the influential documents of the field of art museum education, Eisner and Dobbs’ The
Uncertain Profession: Observations of the State of Museum Education in Twenty
American Art Museums (1986b), and discuss how it both formed and informed a set of
interpretive practices based on schooling and grounded in a premise of “lack.” I will use
Derrida’s notion of the supplement to analyze how this lack continues to manifest in
current practice as a doubled and deeply problematic configuration that has colonized
both the activity of thinking about the public and the space of interpretation for the
public.

In Chapter Three, I offer a critique of a 2002 exhibition called The Uncanny:
Experiments in Cyborg Culture. This exhibition won awards for excellence and is a
particularly good example of postmodern exhibition practice as it is defined by Hein
(1998), Hooper Greenhill (2000), and Silverman (1995). Here I attempt to demarcate the
difference between the interpretive strategies and programs that worked toward fostering
a space of a critical interpretation and those that simply aimed at engaging the public in
activities. I argue that the latter form of interpretive programming, even though it is
touted as good practices, pays very little attention to the kinds of interpretive repertoires or critical strategies those forms of engagement offered the public and therefore disavows the museum's fundamental responsibility of making art as its interpretive repertoires public.

In Chapter Four, I offer a new set of discursive coordinates that can be taken up by the museum as a way to create and shelter a space of critical interpretation. These operations are clustered around a number of different conceptual models for ways of attending to the tensions and spaces between things, between the authoritative interpretations of the museum and the autonomy of the individual, between what is seen and what is not seen in a pedagogy of display, between access and closure, between showing and hiding. I then propose "co-appearance" and "being-singular-plural" as a new theoretical framework through which critical interpretations might be made available and accessible to the public, and thereby offer the museum a new way to "make art public."

In Chapter Five, I give examples of how those discursive coordinates might be deployed in the museum and present new interpretive strategies for the museum based on the theoretical framework of "being-singular-plural" and "co-appearance." This chapter was written with my "head of public programs hat" nearby, remembering that it is one thing to call for change and quite another to manage the mammoth task of implementing change.
Chapter One

A Pedagogy of Display: Situating the Debates

The dialectic of word and image seems to be a constant in the fabric of signs that a culture weaves around itself. (Mitchell, 1986, p. 43)

The immense potential of display to produce knowledge and to offer up ways both to access and to critically engage with that knowledge is perhaps one of the most densely packed discursive operators in museum discourse. Some of this density can be unframed by attending to the major debates around the discursivity of display, and to ask: How does an exhibition speak? I will pick up this question at a key moment in the Renaissance when the display of art and objects was becoming a public activity, and from there I will track three phenomena. The first is how, in the shift from a discursivity of display to a pedagogy of display, a number of motifs were inaugurated that structure the relationships between the museum’s interpretive authorities and the way in which it constructed two divergent notions of the autonomous public: those who, through their own volition, could “read” the display, and those who needed to be “schooled” in reading. This shift is marked by the differences between a mode of display that conveyed generalized messages to comparably small and homogeneous groups of people with similar sets of interpretive repertoires and a mode of display designed to deliver more specific bodies of knowledge—those that come to be known as the grand narratives of Western culture—to increasingly larger and more diverse groups of people who did not necessarily share interpretive practices or strategies.
The second aspect of a pedagogy of display that I will track here is how, very early in its history, a pedagogy of display came to be supplemented with text labels and panels, which were subsequently established as the interface through which the authoritative knowledge of the museum could be delivered to the public. This public, though, was constituted as what Stallybrass and White (1986) called the “low other”—those who were in need of the kind of “lessons” that the museum could provide: lessons on science and nature, on civic virtue and the heroic might of the nation, or on the progress of culture (Duncan, 1995). This is a model of schooling based on the transference of the experts’ knowledge, consisting of “truth” and “facts,” into the minds of the uninformed. This model of schooling is characterized by McLaren (1995) as regulating the regimes of signification to such a degree that it is able to “produce the fully assimilated ‘western’ body/subject ... that conspires to contain socialist impulses” (p. 63). I will argue later in this text that even though contemporary museum practices do not theoretically abide by this authoritarian notion of schooling (Hein, 1998), it is nonetheless so intimately bound to a pedagogy of display that it appears and reappears in contemporary interpretive practices.

I pick up these questions of the discursivity of display in the Renaissance, bearing in mind that I am starting amidst a much longer history of the discursive power of objects that can be traced back to nomadic times. The discursivity of objects comes to one kind of enduring formation in Plato’s academy, Aristotle’s Lyceum, and Ptolemy’s Mouseion, which housed the great library of Alexandria as well as extensive botanical, zoological, and artifact collections from which and through which knowledge of the world was produced, reproduced, debated, and at times reformulated (Gilliam, 2001).
The moment I attend to here, though, begins in the Renaissance, when art collections amassed by the European social elite began to make their journey from the *studioli*—typically windowless rooms tucked away in secret locations in the recesses of a palace—to more public and accessible locations in the galleria. Findlen (1994) describes this shift from the containment of a private space to the openness and sociability of a more public space as a journey from silence into “garbled speech.” Here art and objects formed the luscious background for social spaces where “wandering eyes” cast “sideways glances” toward but not directly upon these treasures (p. 101). This “wandering eye,” free though it was to wander and wonder in and amongst the diversity of objects, cannot be understood as an autonomous “eye.” For this was an “eye” that was deeply implicated in and directed toward a subtle discourse of power uttered through a politics of display. As Turner (1985) explains, part of the exercise and maintenance of any leader’s power is “to ensure that his [the leader’s] image is constantly before the people who count” (p. 214). Where once the display of art and objects had been a thoroughly private affair savoured by the prince and the prince alone,² it now came to include the prince’s immediate supporters—the courtiers and nobility—and, most especially, his rivals (Turner, 1985, p. 214). At this moment, once a display has an audience of more than one, we can begin to talk about the discursivity of display, and at this juncture two things were established that still resonate throughout the museum today. One is that this “public” is configured as a very clear and distinct socio-economic group, quite literally the prince’s company. The other, more important in this context, is that this “public,” these

² There are earlier examples of this, but they are the exceptions. For instance, in 1584 the collection of Francesco I de Medici was transferred into the new and more public context of the Uffizi Gallery, in response to the need for public legitimization of the Medici dynasty (Olmi, 1985, p. 10).
“wandering eyes,” had a specific set of interpretive repertoires, a certain way of making meaning from the display of objects and of reading the power of the prince into and onto the display. This special power is what Pomian (1990) calls the ability to both see and see through objects on display.

Pomian suggests that what is seen on display is understood, valuable, and meaningful only because of the access it offers to a realm of significance that cannot itself be seen. The visible is therefore significant not for its own sake but because it affords a glimpse of something beyond the object itself. Display, then, can be considered both in the ways in which it refers to a realm of significance that is invisible and absent, and to the ways in which it mediates the public’s access to that realm of the invisible (Pomian, 1990). But these displays, which were meant to be seen only by the prince’s company, functioned in this symbolic manner only for those who possessed the appropriate socially coded ways of seeing—“seeing through.”

Consequently, even in these very first phases of the object’s move from the privacy of the studioli to the prince’s company, an important motif of the relationship between the discursivity of display and the kinds of interpretive repertoires that this particular kind of discursivity demands of its audiences was formulated. This motif works on the assumptions of classic communication theory as described by Bourdieu (1995), where the “message” (the prince’s might, power, and good taste) is sent along the “channel” (display of rare and precious objects) to a “receiver” who can decode the message only because that receiver is in possession of the codes in which the message has been encrypted. There are two levels on which this operates in relation to the discursivity of the prince’s collection. First, all of the prince’s subjects would certainly have
understood his palace and its massive collection of objects as a manifestation of his power and authority, even though many of those subjects would not actually have seen the collection. But only the prince’s company would have had the interpretive repertoires to engage critically with this display—on the grounds, of course, of what constituted criticality at that particular time in history, be it sheer abundance, rarity, or notions of “good taste” (Moriarty, 1988; Agamben, 1999b). The discursive nature of this kind of display was both general and wide enough that it offered a modicum of access to all of its “publics,” while at the same time affording critical access to those few who shared a set of interpretive repertoires that allowed them to decode its “garbled speech.” The key fact here is that even at this point in the history of display, there were two very different levels of engagement with the discursivity of display. One attended to the messages (the Prince is rich and powerful), whereas the other engaged critically with those messages and, to some degree, with their mode of delivery (how rich the prince is, and how he is showing me that wealth). The former was subjected to regimes of authorial signification while the latter, although also witness to these displays of power, did not necessarily yield to its power, because the public had ways of “seeing through” it.

The next part of the object’s journey toward the public took place as the cabinet of curiosities and princely collections of the eighteenth century were transferred into public museums that were therein charged with a mandate of public instruction.

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3 A methodological problem rears its head here. There is very little empirical evidence of exactly what meaning a specific member of the “Prince’s company” would have made of these displays. Pomian seems to be engaged in a kind of extrapolation of Bourdieu’s (1984) logic—a logic that seeks and finds the structures of perception and meaning-making in social class and links that to a hegemony that is produced and reproduced in the habitus. Frow (1987), though, argues that Bourdieu’s logic is deeply flawed, first on the grounds of an impossible critical exteriority and second for his inability to theorize relations of domination as relations of contested hegemony (p. 71). The first critique is by now a rather tired postmodernist critique of a modernist text (although in 1987 it was less tired). Both critiques, though, are reminders of the perils of interpreting historical interpretations.
(McClellan, 1994). At this moment, the parameters that constructed the discursivity of display change and discursivity begins moving toward a pedagogy of display. It is in the context of this move into the public domain that the 'wandering gaze' of the curious courtier was replaced by the objective and directed gaze of the scientist.

Aided by practitioners of the new scientific method, objects were tabulated, categorized, and cataloged via schemas similar to Linnaeus' hierarchical taxonomies (Bennett, 1995a). Collectors and scientists alike began to move objects from the curio cabinet to both a real and metaphorical examination table and began to arrange them as if the arrangement itself were a text that could be read. This is the moment when the modern notion of a pedagogy of display began to take shape. At this moment art and objects became place holders within a visual schema designed to recite an authoritative narratives of the world—be it as the progress of art or civilization or the structure of nature. At this moment, it is the arrangement of art and objects that became the vehicle through which the underlying narrative was made visible and intelligible. By
the mid eighteenth century, the content of a well-organized museum was meant to "be seen at a glance" (Findlen, p. 21).

But even at the moment when a pure pedagogy was taking shape, it was becoming equally clear that it was in need of a supplement of some sort—that the arrangements of objects alone could not communicate unambiguously. McClellan (1994) tells us how in 1745 Louis-Jean-Marie Daubenton, the newly appointed chief curator of the cabinet d'histoire naturelle at the Jardin du Roi, developed a system of labelling in which each object was given its own label so that it would be clearly and distinctly recognizable, and then the relationships between labelled objects were arranged in a manner that would make the order underlying nature (since this was a natural history museum) intelligible to the "ordinary visitor." In such an ideal museum, he tells us:

Everything in effect will be instructive; at each glance not only will one gain knowledge of the objects themselves, one will also discover relationships between given objects and those that surround them. Resemblances will define the genus, differences will mark the species; those marks of similarity and difference, taken and compared together, will present to the mind and engrave in the memory the image of nature. (Daubenton in McClellan, 1994, p. 80)

With the advent of the text label, the museum could become a site of pure transmission where the "authoritative voice" of knowledge embodied in display could now be transmitted to the public via the textual supplement. These rationally ordered, textually enhanced collections could instruct the "ordinary visitor" in how to "see and see through" objects by placing a filter of words between the objects and the public. Bourdieu and Darbel, in their 1969 text *The Love of Art*, frame this textual interface between art and the
public in a gentle, almost maternal way: text becomes the way of "giving 'the eye' to those who do not see" (p. 53).

Sheldon (1990) posits this supplemented pedagogy of display as a dangerously authoritative tool, stating that "museums come to procure for themselves a monopoly over the knowledge exhibited in their halls, and from this emerges a pedagogic authority that establishes an impeccable and unquestionable expertise which exercises a solitary reign over their empire of signs" (p. 99). Bennett (1998) deploys Findlin's language of the "eye" to analyze the effect of this textual mediation. He argues that the untutored eye was not allowed to roam freely, as was the wandering eye of the curious courtiers, but through the textual interface became the "directed" eye, "disciplined and allowed access to things only via the mediation of a rationally ordered language—the text label" (p. 354). Bennett describes this as a triumph of the word over the image, saying that it is a "carefully coordinated ocularity in which the thing is subordinated to the word, and thereby sight to the direction of a controlling intellect [the curator's]" (p. 355). I will return to this "battle" between image and word later in this chapter, for there are larger issues around the denigration of vision at play in Bennett’s analysis—issues that are useful for the museum if it is to move toward creating self-consciously critical sites of interpretation.
For now, though, the key point is the way in which the text label was seen from the outset to be the handmaiden of a mass schooling project, and offered interpretive repertoire that as Bennett suggests, did not open to sites of more autonomous critical engagement with the content but rather instructed the public in how to read the museum’s interpretation.

This mode of pedagogical display, though, needs to be situated amongst a whole range of late eighteenth-century exhibitionary complexes, including the fairground, the department store, and, of course, the great international exhibitions, all of which were new kinds of public spaces. Bennett (1995a) suggests that the museum carves out a space for itself within a set of discursive coordinates that locates the “logic” of museum display versus the “chaos” of the fairground, the “civilizing forces” of the museum versus the “riotous behavior” of the tavern. He argues that the museum, as one in a set of cultural organizations, came to be thought of by the emergent bourgeoisie’s liberal government as useful for governing, and consequently as a vehicle for the exercise of new forms of power (p. 19). As such, the museum came to be one of the mechanisms by which the bourgeoisie could distinguish and represent themselves. They could normalize their values by using the museum as a reformatory tool through which a wide range of regulated social routines and performances could take place and thereby transfer the cultural, political and economic power of the nobility to themselves. I will consider each of the “results” of the formation of the museum and point to how this moment established the museum’s interpretive authority in direct relations to quite different notions of autonomy and of “who counts” and how that counting might be accounted for.

In order to both distinguish and represent itself, the bourgeoisie undertook a double action of, on the one hand, usurping “high” culture forms of courtly display and
redeploying them for their own social and political purposes, and on the other, deploying strategies that created a “low other” that could be clearly distinguished from themselves. In France in 1793, when the revolutionary government seized the opportunity to dramatize the creation of a new republican state, they did so by appropriating the King’s collection and declaring the Louvre the “museum of the Republic.” This transformation “radically and explicitly redefined the privilege and restricted space of the princely gallery to something belonging to the French people, the ‘nation’” (Bennett, 1995a, p. 39). As Nochlin (1972) explains, though, the transition brought with it a number of contradictions:

However momentary, the first “advent of democratic principles” during the Revolution of the eighteenth century had indeed led to large-scale destruction of both religious and secular monuments and works of art, and the National Assembly, once it had decreed the nationalization of the property of the clergy, almost at once had to make provisions for the preservation and protection of the works of art which fell under this heading. It was precisely in these emergency circumstances that the Commission des Monuments came into being. Rescued from the fury of the people by revolutionary art lovers and scholars, the visual objectifications of tyranny, superstition and oppression were, through alchemy of the museum, transformed into the National Heritage, the most precious possession of the people. (p. 15)

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4 The historical determinism that drips from this account of the museum is primarily a rhetorical device, one that perhaps far too subtly (or perhaps naively) calls upon well-respected histories of the museum without engaging in a debate about their respective truth claims. I use these texts because they hint at the kind of interpretive repertoires that I am most interested in articulating here.
The appropriation of the King's collection in the name of the new republic was perhaps one of the more brazen moves that served to usurp the power of courtly display and redeploy it as a mass schooling project supported by a pedagogy of display. But an even bolder move was the way in which, in the hands of the new republic, a completely new meaning was bestowed upon these objects. Whereas once the objects in the Louvre represented the power of the monarchy—and, as Nochlin points out, during the height of the revolution were in danger precisely because of that—shortly thereafter they came to represent the new republic: from "the visual objectifications of tyranny, superstition and oppression ... to the most precious possession of the people" (Nochlin, 1972, p. 17). At this moment, then, at the violent and tumultuous birth of one public museum, a hitherto unacknowledged power of the possessor was bared: the power to unleash the inherent polyvocality of objects and, in so doing, point with stinging and decisive clarity to the sheer contingency of interpretation.

That this particular form of polyvocality should erupt, be magnified, and, in the time and place that ownership of objects changed hands, become public, is no coincidence. For it is this time and space of the transfer, a limbo of sorts, that opens to the possibility of meaning—opens, as Nancy (1997) says, "to the possibility of an opening that is meaning" (p. 17). This opening, in the case of the formation of the Louvre, was a massive opening—noisy and messy, and one that produced a new and formidable institution. But it is this same process of opening that occurs, often hushed and sequestered, in each interpretive act. This space of opening is enacted each time an artwork makes the journey toward display, each time it leaves the artist's studio, each time it leaves the safety of a collector's home, each time—but each time differently—that
it moves from private to public, from one configuration of ownership to another. Each
time this brazen polyvocality, the gaping chasm of the in-between, screams out at the
museum and each time the museum’s pedagogy of display is caught between containing
and authorizing its own interpretations or offering it as an opening toward autonomous
interpretations of the public. There is more to come on this, perhaps the most pressing of
the enigmas of interpretation, but for now it must be noted that with the birth of the
Louvre, a shivering polyvocality took up residence at the very heart of a pedagogy of
display. For if the objects of the king and clergy could be made to speak on behalf of the
republic rather than the monarchy, then that same kind of polyvocality inherent in the
display of objects could also afford the bourgeoisie a powerful tool with which to
represent themselves and to create an “other.”

But this amazing alchemical operation of the museum was only one of the ways in
which the new bourgeoisie used a pedagogy of display to both represent and distinguish
themselves. Another important site in which these activities took place was the advent of
what Habermas (1989) called the public sphere. European society of the late eighteenth
and early nineteenth centuries, according to Habermas, was characterized by a division
between the state and the court on the one hand, and between civil society and the sphere
of private familial intimacy on the other. Mediating between these two poles were the
new bourgeois institutions that made up this “public sphere”—artistic and cultural
institutions, including the academies, art galleries and salons, and eventually the museum,
as well as literary clubs and debating societies. These new institutions allowed the
formative bourgeois public to meet and, in rendering itself visually present to itself, to
acquire a degree of self-consciousness.
One of the crucial events accompanying the advent of the public sphere was the formation of art and literary criticism, for if the burgeoning public sphere allowed cultural products to become generally available, it did so only by simultaneously detaching those products from their anchors in the traditions that had previously secured their meaning for those "who counted." The process of arriving at meaning and assigning a value to cultural productions—particularly for those works of art and literature that were currently being produced—became a task that bourgeois consumers now had to undertake by themselves and for themselves. The emphasis here, as Bennett (1995) tells us, fell not on the consumption and dissemination of received and authorized knowledge but on the formation of opinions, forged, I would add, in the context of critical engagements of the kind fostered by and through the new institutions of the public sphere. As the traditional "authorities" that had once determined meaning—god, king, church, truth—began to withdraw, they were replaced by a rugged and tenacious individualism; and this self-producing "I" was installed right next to a subtle and shifty polyvocality—so close, in fact, that the two were often indistinguishable. The link between the polyvocality of objects and autonomous personal opinion was forged here, and the discursive dance between personal opinion and critically informed interpretation was set to a rhythm that to this day drives the interpretive rubrics of the museum. The differences between the two were blurred in the early years of the museum and continue to be indistinct. The argument that I forward here is that there are significant differences between a museum that works toward creating spaces where personal opinions are reinforced and one that works toward creating sites of critical engagement. The latter is not a form of opinion, but it is what Lachapelle, Murry, and Neim (2003) call a kind of
knowledge that grows from “informed experience” rather than simply “experiential knowledge.” I will take up this distinction in greater detail in Chapter Five. The key point here is that at this moment in time, the bourgeoisie was establishing itself as the primary political force of a newly democratic state, and along with that came the power of autonomous interpretations of the cultural productions of the time.

At the same time as this self-constituting “I” of the bourgeois liberal state claimed the right to determine and produce its own meanings, the bourgeoisies also constituted themselves as its recipient—as the “public.” As such their task became one of representing themselves to themselves. Their work was to produce and reproduce bourgeoisie culture. A number of very important processes were initiated at this juncture, processes that I will return to a number of times in this text. One of these is that in naming themselves as their own public, the bourgeoisie began a process of closure around the museum, situating the self-determined and self-determining individual at the centre of an institution whose primary job then became to produce its own subjects. In so doing, they established a pole of immanence and self-replication that manifests today in the charges of elitism that are leveled against the museum (Harris, 1999). This is one of the aspects of the museum that most need to be “unworked” if it is to begin providing self-consciously critical spaces of interpretation for the public. For by claiming and producing their own immanence, by positing themselves as the self-contained, self-fulfilling, self-replicating standard, they could claim any object whatsoever into their service, thereby erasing and annihilating other interpretations and other interpretive repertoires by the omnivorous desire to produce oneself as a self, one that consumes all representable forms of being into bourgeois life.
If the bourgeoisie were to complete this operation of both distinguishing and representing itself, if not raising itself to more noble heights, it also needed to attend to the other end of the social hierarchy, and here the strategies were quite different. Stallybrass & White (1986) suggest that this new public sphere could not be characterized only by its subscription to certain rules of discourse (freedom of speech and the rule of reason) but also and perhaps more importantly by its prescription of certain codes of behaviour. These behaviours were to be disassociated with places of popular assembly such as fairs, taverns, and inns:

The no spitting or swearing, no eating and drinking rules formed part of an overall strategy of expulsion which clears a space for polite, cosmopolitan discourse by constructing popular culture as the “low-Other” the dirty crude outside to the emergent public sphere. (p. 87)

This “low other” is in fact the first designation of a non-public (which one needs to understand as not the ‘right’ public or those who could see and see through displays), and therefore, by the logic of negation, was indeed the moment when the ambiguities of the “museum public” were constituted. This “low other” was seen to be in desperate need of schooling in the civic rituals of the new rule of the bourgeoisie, made the “right” public (the bourgeoisie) appear.

Although this “low-Other” was excluded from the generative discourses (opinion formation) of the emergent public sphere, they were the very field upon which the distinctions between the bourgeoisie self and the other were enacted and played out. Not only were they set apart by their mode of dress and “crude” manners, but the “low-Others” were set apart most obviously and with the greatest degree of disdain by their
grievous lack of social and intellectual capital—the very intellectual and social capital that the bourgeoises had borrowed from court culture and made their own. The new order of this social hierarchy was manifest most particularly in the “low-Other” not being able to read the pedagogy of display. The authority of interpretation is invested and reinvested precisely in the hiddenness of what is shown, in the ability of special few to be able to “see” and to “see through” what is on display. This is what Bourdieu (1993) calls “the rules of the game,” rules that one can only learn in the embrace of the habitus. This construction of value, and reinscription of social hierarchy by ensuring a certain measure of inaccessibility, was well under way in the nineteenth century. Emile Zola’s *L’Asommoir*, for example, describes a visit to the Louvre by a lower-class wedding party:

The little group, an amusing spectacle for the artists and regular museum-goers, trailing all the hand-me-downs of poor people’s fashions, trouped dutifully through the endless halls of the great palace of art. They were somewhat taken aback by the Assyrian Gallery and thought the statues very ugly: nowadays a good stone carver could do a lot better job than that. The bareness and severity of the great staircase awed them, as did the magnificent doorkeeper… Then, without pausing, their eyes dazzled by the gold of the frames, they plowed onward through the string of rooms, impressed mainly by the sheer numbers of works and their valuableness. In the Gallery of Apollo, they were amazed at the sheen of the floor, as shiny as a mirror; in the Salon Carre M. Madinier murmured under his breath, as if he were in church, while some of the less-mannerly wedding guests tittered at the naked women, especially impressed by the thighs of Antipe. More
and more pictures and Centuries of art passed before their bewildered ignorance, the fine rigidity of the early Italians, the splendor of the Venetians, the sleek and sunny life of the Dutchman. But what interested them most were the copyists, with their easels set up in the midst of the people, painting away undisturbed...

Little by little, the new visitors began to lose their enthusiasm... Finally, losing their way completely in quest of the collection of ancient jewels, they blundered in among the drawings: room after room with nothing amusing, only bits of paper covered with scribbles, under glass cases and against walls... Once in the courtyard... they breathed again... very much pleased to have seen it all. (Zola, cited in Nochlin, pp. 30–31)

A cluster of issues flow from this biting notion of “lack” directly into today’s museum. All one needs to do is to change the attire of Zola’s characters and this very same scene could be found today, playing and replaying in art museums around the world. But it is not just one line that constitutes a relationship between today’s bewildered museum visitors and their nineteenth-century counterparts, but rather a series of branching connectors.

The first of these is how the “low other” came to be included in the notion of the museum’s public. In part, this expansion of who could be counted as the public coincides with the reformatory impulses of the late nineteenth century. There was a recognition that the museum was a potent pedagogic force that could to be deployed to “educate” and to “civilize” the poor, the “low other,” where to become civilized meant to assimilate the behaviours and values of the bourgeoisie (Duncan, 1995). The problem, though, as Daumier and Zola had pointed out, was that a pedagogy of display was not sufficient in
and of itself, for the messages were now more complex and subtle than in the days of
reading the power of the prince unto his glorious palace: now the “public” had to be able
both to “see” and to “see through” the objects and the pedagogy of display in order to
assimilate their good effects. At issue here is how reformatory impulses installed a
politics of accessibility at the heart of the museum, positing that public museums should
be accessible to all sections of the population and thereby take their place among other
central institutions of a democratic society. According to Bennett (1995a), this
requirement

[c]an be asserted in the form of an expectation that the museum’s benevolent and
improving influence ought, in the interests of the state or society as a whole, to
reach all sections of the population. Or it can be asserted as an inviolable cultural
right which all citizens in a democracy are entitled to claim. (p. 8)

Either way one posits it, this shift toward counting “all of the public” amongst its
audiences began to intensify the museum’s need to ensure that its messages were being
communicated to a wider and more diverse public and therefore maintaining of
pedagogy of display and its textual supplement.

For all of its supposed power and might, for all of its imagined directorial skill,
though, a textually supplemented pedagogy display was not always able to give “the eye”
to “ordinary people.” A number of critiques pointing to the ineffectiveness of this
supplemented pedagogy of display began to take shape in the nineteenth century and
continue to occupy contemporary thought. The first of these is manifest in the realm of
nineteenth-century artists and writers who satirized what they saw as a spurious
pedagogy of display. The second is found in two aspects of late nineteenth- and early
twentieth-century educational thought. The first is a trend that begins to supplement the pedagogy of display with the specificity of "object lessons" and as such establishes a way of teaching through objects that still bears upon the museum today. The second is a major shift in the museum’s understanding of its epistemological role, one that begins to install an ideology of schooling-for-children at the heart of its educational mission, leaving the public to the vagaries of the pedagogy of display.

For nineteenth-century artists and writers, the museum—along with a whole range of new public and exhibition spaces from the great international exhibitions to the circuses and fairs—was a rich source of material for their stinging critiques against the kind of autonomy and more often alienation of the new democratic state. Public gathering places such as parks, cafés, theatres and circuses are the subject of many of the most renowned Impressionist and Post-Impressionist artworks, as well as the enduring novels of the time. The excerpt from Zola’s *L’Asommoir* quoted above is a good example of how the artists and intellectuals of the time were keen to point out the poverty in a pedagogy of display. In a similar vein, the French painter and caricaturist Honoré Daumier, produced a set of lithographs that, typical of his biting grace, depict the rather ironic outcome of "ordinary people" visiting this new and mighty pedagogic machine of art—the Louvre. One of the prints portrays an “ordinary” couple looking absolutely bewildered in front of an image of Egyptian animal-headed figures. The caption reads: “The Egyptians certainly weren’t very good looking” (Nochlin, 1972, p. 29).

Late nineteenth-century educators, in contradiction to the sardonic mode of the artists and writers, began to address the profound epistemological possibilities of teaching from objects. As Conn (1998) tells us, art objects—in fact, objects of almost any kind—
were of great interest to the Victorians: they stuffed their homes with them, and their incessant purchasing of objects helped to maintain and expand the industrial economy that in turn produced objects. As in the Enlightenment years, people operated from the assumption that objects could tell a myriad of stories to the untrained observer (p. 4). But whereas the museum had massive collections through which to construct its authoritative narratives of the world, the teacher had only select objects. The focus in teaching practice, then, settled more on what the specific object itself could tell, rather than the stories that could be told through the juxtaposition and display of objects. A tension began to appear between the discursivity of display as central to the museum’s discourse and the discursivity of the object as central to the educator’s language. This tension continued to polarize throughout the twentieth century as more specific notions of schooling became the rubric under which the interface between the art and public took place.

The nineteenth-century object lessons arose in the context of progressive child-centred theories of Rousseau and Froebel, and was designed to “develop all of the child’s faculties in the acquisition of knowledge rather than to impart facts and information per se” (Hooper Greenhill, 1994, p. 232). This approach to development of sense perception looks back to much older theories of the senses, and at the same time anticipates the child-centred experiential learning theories of John Dewey. The pedagogy of object lessons was designed to “address all of the child’s faculties” within the classroom, and eventually that notion of experimental learning became fodder for moving lessons from the classroom into the community at large—particularly to the museum. In the nineteenth century, though, a very important shift was taking place in museum culture
regarding its notions of an object-based epistemology as a whole; this shift is intimately
connected to what I have described as the museum's rather odd reluctance to provide
self-consciously critical spaces of interpretation for the public.

Conn (1998) tells us that in the nineteenth century, the role of the museum began
to shift from an epistemological tool that created new knowledge about the world to one
that disseminated already extant knowledge. In order to do so, it simplified that
knowledge, embedding it, as I have been describing it, in what was imagined to be a self-
evident pedagogy of display where knowledge was to be taken in at a glance. But by the
first quarter of the twentieth century, continues Conn, the business of producing new
knowledge about the natural world—about anthropology, about commerce and business,
about history—was now taking place at the universities and colleges and not at the
museums. He suggests that the art museum was the only exception to this shift, because
art—particularly contemporary art—continues to function successfully as a site that
produces new knowledge about the world (Conn, 1998, p. 29). I agree that art's
relentless erosion of its own borders, and its way of positing its own interpretability,
certainly put it in the category of a knowledge producer; however, I am reluctant to side
with Conn in his belief that the art museum is the only museum that is engaged in this
kind of knowledge production.

Still, what follows from Conn's argument, and what I do agree with, is that the
universities have assumed primary responsibility for producing knowledge and making it
available to a small, exclusive student/scholar community, and that it is the museum's
role to make that knowledge, in all of its complexity and profundity, available to a wider
public. One result of this division of labour, Conn states, was that museums turned
increasingly to educating schoolchildren, and the intellectual implications of the assumption that the primary educational role of the museum is to work with eight-year-olds are enormous. This assumption underscores the perception that the knowledge available at museums is outdated and suitable only for children. It also suggests that we are content to offer our children knowledge that, as adults, we no longer trust. Further, as we will see in the next chapter, this focus on schools and children has colonized the spaces of interpretation with models of schooling and effectively marginalized educational programming for an adult public, even though the museum claims to be both a public and an educative institution. Most significantly, though, this shift toward imagining the museum’s public as children and the “low other” has, for all the reasons listed above and more that I will outline in the following chapters, worked against creating the museum as a self-consciously critical space of interpretation for the public.

A pedagogy of display, then, makes its way into the twentieth century heavy with burdens and with multiply inscribed histories that continue to bear upon it today. It can be seen to be—and indeed, I would maintain, is—a part of public culture that continues to speak in a generalized way about its own power. These generalized discourses of power continue to operate as described by Willinky (1998) as educating the eye to divide the world (p. 56-57). This is assisted by the growth and “increasingly conspicuousness” of museum design (both the architectural sites and the exhibition design) which, as Barker (1999) points out, has become increasingly complex since the 1970s (p.23). I write this sentence, for example, from the office of a museum scholar at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles, California, where the glistening white marble perched atop the hills overlooking Hollywood speak an unmistakable language of power and
wealth. The pedagogies of display that are intact here and in other Western art museums are the sites upon which battles around a politics of representation continue to be waged, where art institutions continue to wield their interpretive authority over the objects they house and exhibit, where they constitute both a public that can “see” and “see through” their displays and one that cannot, where they reify a specific notion of an autonomous, critically engaged public who already have the interpretive repertoires to access the silent pedagogies of display, and where simultaneously they inscribe the infantilized public in need of schooling through that very same pedagogy of display. Many of the issues surrounding a pedagogy of display as they are stacked out in the late nineteenth century are not taken up again until the post-war reconstruction years, and there they become intertwined with the discourses of education. It is to those entanglements and their manifestations in the latter part of the twentieth century that I now turn.
Chapter Two

The Ghosts of Lack and the Spectres of Schooling

If one wishes to go back from the supplement to the source: one must recognize that there is a supplement at the source. (Derrida, 1976, p. 34)

In this chapter I will attempt to establish two things. The first is how, during its formative years, the field of art museum education—which was imagined to be the human aid to a pedagogy of display—was configured within an ideology of lack, and that this lack operated and continues to operate within what Derrida calls the logic of the supplement. The second, and intimately related to the first, is how—again in the formative years—the educative mandate of the art museum became linked with specific notions of schooling and how, together, these notions have colonized the space of interpretation, infantilized the public, drained art of its interpretive power in the public sphere, and continue to haunt the museum to this day. I propose that these two interconnected streams have, in the end, fed into and supported the museum's reluctance to work toward creating self-consciously critical sites of engagement for and with the public, and further, that these two streams have situated museum education as a relentless discursive operator onto which were loaded a whole series of conflicting and often contradictory notions about the museum's role in culture. I will identify the ways in which museum education has been situated on one end (but ironically not always the same end) of a binary construction that pits the museum's interpretive authority against an insubstantial notion of what constitutes the autonomy of the public, and argue that
these are impoverished places from which to work, places that only replicate the very kinds of interpretive authority that they propose to undo.

This chapter begins with a brief description of the logic of the supplement. Following that, I take a sustained look at two key texts. The first is Eisner and Dobbs’ influential 1986 report, *The Uncertain Profession: Observations of the state of museum education in twenty American art museums*, which articulated and emphasized an ideology of lack, instituted schooling-for-children as the dominant model of museum education, and supported the notion of schooling in general as the interpretive interface between art and the public. The second text is a conversation between two influential museum educators that took place in 2003 and demonstrates how lack, schooling and the ghostly effects of authority disguised as autonomy continue to haunt contemporary practice.

Logic of the supplement

The supplement, as Derrida (1976) describes it in *Of Grammatology*, is always double: it is at once that which is added to something *and* that which makes up for something that is missing. It is therefore both a mark of presence and a mark of absence. Derrida explores this logic of the supplement as a strange but necessary cohabitation, one that *forms* a part without *being* a part, one that belongs without belonging. The supplement “haunts” us in the sense that it leaves a trace without itself being either present or absent: it is ghostly, and it keeps on appearing in this state of neither presence nor absence.
Derrida’s work is occupied with the presence of these notions, in particular how they manifest in texts and in writings. For Derrida, Western intellectual traditions have privileged the role of speech, valorized it as a more “pure” conduit for the presence of meaning. This was thought to be so because the spoken word was seen to be a symbol of a mental experience, whereas the written word was seen to be a symbol of an already existing symbol. Derrida, though, reverses that hierarchy and suggests that the structure of writing is more important and even “older” than the supposedly pure structure of presence-to-self that is characteristic of speech. He works toward undoing this and other hierarchies of presence with his method of deconstruction, which is committed to finding within texts inconsistencies that point toward alternative meanings. He thereby evokes and manifests an “undecidability” that betrays the possibility of any one stable meaning that an author or critic might seek to impose upon the text. The process of writing, according to Derrida, always reveals that which has been suppressed, covers over that which has been disclosed, and more generally breaches the very oppositions that are thought to sustain it—oppositions such as presence and absence. It is the task of the deconstructivist reading to attend to these crevices, to reveal the indeterminacy of its meanings and its reliance on a logic of the supplement. But the logic of the supplement is itself equally covered over. The supplement, though, cannot be thought of in terms of “pure” presence. In the Specters of Marx (1994), Derrida uses the figure of the ghost and of haunting to continue to unwork the hierarchies of presence over absence. The function of the ghost is to blur the binary distinctions between the living and the dead, the there and the not-there, the body and the spirit, the real and the imagined, being and non-being, presence and absence. The supplement haunts. It is ghostly, present only in its traces.
It is this cluster of ideas from Derrida’s work that I employ here to try to attend to the ghostly presence of lack and to trace how schooling, as the interface between art and the public is problematic but not without redemption. This redemption, however, begins when the interpretive practices of the museum come under critical scrutiny in an attempt to identify those moments when a ghostly double is at work, disguising itself as liberatory practice but instead re-inscribing its own interpretive authority. For, as I will argue, there are moments when the museum might want deliberately to deploy cultural habits that are inscribed by schooling, but in a self-consciously critical way rather than in a way that is mired in the shadowy presence of authoritarian inscriptions parading as autonomy.

Further, the logic of the supplement offers a way to describe the practices of art museum education as a supplement in both senses of the word, and to track all of the traffic, the doubling and flip-flopping that happens if we begin with the idea that art is a supplement, perhaps a supplement to the very notion of interpretability—as Derrida and much of the postmodern project would have it, or perhaps a supplement to the very notion of being—as Nancy and the philosophers of an “aesthetics of being” (Seele, 2003) would have it.

Similarly, the supplement offers a way to track another set of movements that take place if we begin with the idea that art is in need of a supplement, and that that supplement takes the form of a pedagogy of display, of textual supplements to that pedagogy, and in the form of the whole project of art education. Finally, the figure of the ghost, because it is neither living nor dead, offers a compelling metaphor for the kind of interpretive spaces between the authorities and autonomies that have contained and restrained the interpretive practices of the art museum.
Lack

A profound sense of "lack" has been one of the most consistent features of art museum education. This lack was most clearly documented in a very influential report commissioned in 1986 by the J. Paul Getty Center for Education and carried out by Elliot Eisner, professor of education and Stephen Dobbs, professor of creative art. It was published under the title *The Uncertain Profession: Observations of the state of museum education in twenty American art museums*. Its goal was to "understand what museum directors and museum educators have to say about the role of education in the art museum and the contribution of museum educators in fulfilling that role" (1986a, p. 42).

Before moving into a critique of the recommendations, though, I will comment briefly on how Eisner and Dobbs framed the role of art museum education, for although I will argue that this report installed some deeply problematic models around the notion of lack at the core of a fledgling practice of museum education, I do not disagree as strongly with what they imagined the fundamental role of interpretive programs to be. They said:

Works of art live and endure by virtue of their ability to shape the experience of the competent viewer. The acquisition of this competence depends upon a form of learning for which museum educators have a special responsibility. Because museums possess the works that make such experiences possible, museums and museum educators come together in a common enterprise—to provide the condition that make art-works live as aesthetic objects in the experience of the museum visitor. (p. 42)

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5 Here and in what follows I use the version of this report that was published in *Museum News* because it was the one that circulated to the larger community of museum educators.
I would “update” a number of points here: I would use the postmodern language of art’s interpretability and all that that entails, rather than the modernist language of aesthetics experience and all that that encompasses; following that, I would use the language of critical engagement rather than competent viewers (which I will have more to say about later). Nonetheless, I agree with the fundamental gesture toward opening that Eisner and Dobbs posit as the role of the museum: that it is the museum’s job to make artworks “live,” that it is the museum’s job to make art public, and that that “publicness” is manifest most poignantly in the kinds of interfaces, and above all the kinds of interpretive repertoires, that the museum offers to its publics. But I forward here that the Eisner and Dobbs report established precedents that in the end did not provide venues that “increased visual literacy,” to use their language, but instead provided a model that replicated a set of internal hierarchies that the report was commissioned to redress.

From their interviews, Eisner and Dobbs concluded that museum educators lack consensus regarding their role, they lack adequate professional preparation within their domain, they lack the recognition and credibility of other museum professions, and they lack the communication networks, resources, and even the vision necessary for the exchange of ideas and the advancement of the profession. In sum, they wrote, “museum educators perceive themselves as lacking in political power and as being near the bottom of the museum’s professional hierarchy” (p. 44). Eisner and Dobbs cite several factors, such as the lack of a theoretical foundation for education in the museum, poor research and evaluation measures, and the need for educators to be considered professionals, as barriers to the advancement of education and the promotion of a visually literate public. They go on to suggest a number of ways to remedy this perceived “lack,” thus reinforcing
it, and reengaging it as the driving force of the profession already buttressed by its lack of autonomy.

All of Eisner and Dobbs' recommendations have been implemented in various ways over the past quarter century, but what I argue here is that these “implementations” operated via the logic of the supplement, and therefore this lack still lingers in the museum, haunting the corridors, the practices, and above all the kinds of interpretive repertoires and critical strategies they provide for the public. I forward here that the Eisner and Dobbs report led the fledgling field of art museum education away from an engagement with the adult public, away from efforts to create spaces that supported diverse and critical public engagements with art, and away from the larger epistemological issues of interpretation, and toward regimes of authority that closed down interpretive possibilities.

This cumulative position of lack as found in The Uncertain Profession, as well as the strategies recommended to combat the lack, were taken up by the fledgling practice and reinstated in a number of very influential publications (Rice, 1987; Hooper Greenhill, 1991, 1992; Silverman, 1995; Roberts, 1997), and although each of these authors suggests a slight variation on the “solutions,” the same set of themes are played and replayed until lack becomes an extremely effective, and an ironically fecund, colonizing gesture. This lack was never faced directly, but sublimated and turned into something else—a “something,” though, that continues to be haunted by the ghosts of lack. What I am proposing in this dissertation is that the art museum needs to be relentless in facing its lack, it needs to “unwork” the processes that obscure this lack and turn it into something
else, and that it needs to take up this task in earnest in all of its relationships with the public.

For “lack,” as it was articulated in the Eisner and Dobbs report, became a way to turn a lack of theoretical engagement into a championing of practice over theory, where educational practices in the form of looking strategies that led to certain interpretations were linked with the “good” goals of public accessibility and theorizing as a form of inquiry that led to other kinds of interpretations was demonized as the indulgent practice of the academic elite. Lack became a way that a lack of art content knowledge was turned into the promotion of strategies and formulas for simply “looking” at art and the demotion of any singular knowledge about art, where “strategy” mysteriously became a great democratizing and universalizing tool, good for all people and all times. Lack became a way of turning what has become “the art museum educator’s birthright”—their lack of status—into an empathetic tool by which they can identify with all of those lacking power and privilege, and thereby ride the wave of audience development initiatives designed to increase audience numbers. Each of these transformations of lack operates via the logic of the supplement, where the lack hides inadequacy and shows itself as a champion of its nemesis other. However desperate, sad, necessary, and even brilliant some of these moves have been, they have nonetheless reinforced the deep binary oppositions that many of the great thinkers of exactly this same period were trying to undo: theory vs. practice, elite vs. popular, and strategy vs. content. What follows here is an analysis of the recommendations made in that report.

The first recommendation in The Uncertain Profession was to hold “a summer institute on museum education that would bring together museum educators, curators,
and directors in order to examine ways in which they might work jointly to enhance the experience of museum visitors” (p. 47). Although this recommendation certainly addressed the lack of clarity regarding the role of the educator and spoke clearly of the internal discord and unequal power relations within the various disciplines of the museum, it was most pointedly directed at the relationships between curators and educators. I will come back to this troubled relationship, and all that it embodies, a number of times, for the strains within it speak to much larger issues. For now, though, I want to focus on how this recommendation set into motion a number of problematic models. The first of these was that under the rubric of education, a certain kind of institutional healing could take place for “such a conference,” they tell us, “would make a significant contribution to morale” (p. 48). No doubt this is/was the case, but this kind of role for art museum education as institutional healer simply diverts attention from the task of museum education, which as they describe it is “to foster visual literacy of museum visitors” (p. 44). Further, they pointedly argue that museum educators should not try to supplement their “lack” with more knowledge of art history, for “it is doubtful that museum educators ... will acquire the depth of specialized art historical knowledge required to be a curator ... Museum educators who try to compete in this area are likely to come in second every time” (p. 45). It is curious that Eisner and Dobbs are so clear about not taking up the role of the art curator, yet they so liberally attribute the role of staff counselor as a way to supplement their lack. These kinds of diversions, these subtle but insidious distractions are still very much a part of the lives of museum educators, where the museum educator is asked to take one role that clearly resides outside of his or her primary task of focusing on the interpretive repertoires offered to the public.
A similar sort of supplementary operation manifests most poignantly in how educators began to carve out certain notions of who "their public" was and thereby begin to constitute them as such. The educators' public included children, youth at risk, recent immigrants, ethnic minority groups, people with disabilities—in other words, all of those who were deemed to be in need of "care," all of those who needed to be either welcomed or lured back into the hearth of belonging (CAGE Case Studies, 1987–94). This identification of and with an audience of perceived "lack" did three things. First, it established that the educator had a plentitude, a fecundity that could be shared. This was very important, particularly in the face of a report filled with evidence of their lack, for now they could be the supplement for "their" audiences' lack: with them the educator held and wielded an interpretive authority that they did not have in the company of the more autonomous art communities who possessed a plentitude of interpretive autonomy.

Second, the choice to work with audiences of perceived lack consolidated a process of segmenting the "general public" into "specific audience groups"—a process that had been taking place for some time in a number of domains. This splitting of the public into special interest groups only deepened the divides about exactly who constituted the public and how they should be counted and accounted for. Third, by and through the programs the educators created for "their public," the space of interpretation in the museum came to be inhabited by programs for very specific audience groups. These programs were mounted in the name of the public, when in fact they reached only certain sectors of an increasingly bifurcated public—those who had the autonomy to "see and see through" and those who needed to be schooled in seeing.
The role of educator as healer/nurturer becomes increasingly complicated in the context of the changes in art production and exhibition practices that took place through the late 1980s and early 1990s. Until that time, mainstream contemporary art museums had been able to show the work of the avant-garde (from abstraction to conceptualism) by positioning it as practices on the edge of art, so that Barnett Newman's *Voice of Fire*, for instance, could cause heated discussion about expenditures on art, and a flurry of critiques disguised as clever “appropriations” of the famous three stripes could circulate in popular culture, but for the most part, it remained a discussion about art as a separate and autonomous sphere yet one funded by public money. The educator could continue their nurturing role by schooling the public in why *Voice of Fire* was both important and good art. Increasingly, though, mainstream art museums began to exhibit more and more difficult art—difficult not because it pushed the boundaries of art, but because it pushed—or, perhaps more accurately, hacked away at—the boundaries of conservative straight white male values. Slowly at first, the face of “the other” made its way into the museums: Nancy Spero’s delicate images of women dancing with dildos, culminating in Robert Mapplethorpe’s pristine photographs of gay sex and Olfie’s shit paintings of the Madonna and child in the *Sensation* exhibition. All of these opened the debates of art into a much larger public realm and eventually into the hands of the law, and there struck at the very core of the tensions in democracy—tensions between censorship and freedom of speech, between the authority of the state and the autonomy of the individual.

For the museum educator, these shifts brought troubling new dilemmas that further polarized positions within the museum. In order to sustain this nurturing role, the museum needed to be constructed as a “safe” place for children and those who were
thought to be in need of some kind of "protection." That the museum was never an ideologically safe place for many people, that it indeed silently screamed its messages of inequity, empire, sexism, and homophobia, was precisely what much of this art was attempting to address in its brash and complex ways that firmly position it within the liberal democratic understanding of the role of art in culture. However, for educators this destabilizing tenor of contemporary art was incompatible with their role as nurturers of children and subsequently the conduit through which culture is reproduced. It is in this context that the tensions between nurturing and colonizing begin to manifest. Bennett, in *Culture: A Reformer's Science* (1998a), makes the case that in the late nineteenth century, museums quickly learned their lessons of cultural inculcation and that their primary target audiences for this activity were women, children, and the "childlike," including uneducated and immigrant populations (p. 77). They were the ones who most needed to be inculcated with bourgeois cultural values. Sometime in the 1980s and early 1990s, the museum's mission became fragmented: the educator took up the role of "reproducing" the status quo and acting both with and on behalf of its authority, and the curators began to carve out a different space for art in the museum, one that attempted to decolonize the hold of authorities and to produce instead critically engaged critiques of power and authority. At issue here was the conflict between two fundamentally different notions of "what" not "who" the art museum was for. Yet these kinds of dilemmas only served to exacerbate and crystallize the now doubled divides between the curator's role as guardian of art that speaks for itself (and all of the subsequent colonizing and decolonizing gestures that go along with that) to a public who can "see and see through" art and the educator's role as guardian of the public—where "public" meant audiences of
lack. This bifurcation of the public resulted in divides between art (particularly contemporary art) and the public, between the curator’s public (those small groups of people who could see and see through) and the educator’s public (those small groups of “target audiences”) and the “rest of the public” (somewhere in the vicinity of eighty percent of the people who come to the museum!). This latter group is left in the hands of a pedagogy of display that, as we have seen, provides interpretive repertoires only for those who already possess them. These are the very divides that the museum can begin to undo by thinking in the direction of creating spaces of critically engaged interpretation for the “rest” of the public, spaces of engagement that purposely stand in the midst of these false divisions so that their arbitrariness is always visible.

Eisner and Dobbs’ second recommendation was that educators should begin to compile the existing scholarship from several fields. Again, this recommendation clearly recognized the dearth of what might be called the key or founding texts of a field of practice. What is perplexing, though, is that the first anthologies and bibliographies that began to circulate widely (Berry & Mayer, 1989) clearly excluded the very authors who were rethinking interpretation and meaning-making in its most profound sense—even though the late 1980s were bursting with these texts as structuralism, semiotics, post-structuralism, feminism, and postcolonial literary theory began to reframe questions of interpretation. Instead, the texts that circulated tended to include work grounded in ideas of the generation prior to the linguistic turn. What resulted was an intellectual frame and a set of discursive practices for the fledgling field of art museum education that were in the rear guard, both defending and disseminating older knowledge rather than participating in the production of new knowledge in the way in which contemporary art
practices, for instance, were engaged in shaping postmodern theory (Rogoff, 1998). This gap between the intellectual terrain of the art and the intellectual terrain of art museum education is one that urgently needs to be addressed. For as long as it is sustained, the educators are indeed distributing old knowledge and promoting and circulating interpretive repertoires that are not in keeping with, and sometimes in direct conflict with, the art works they are meant to interpret. The museum cannot work toward creating self-consciously critical spaces of interpretation for the public unless they first do so for themselves and their staff.

Eisner and Dobbs' third recommendation was that educators should hold an annual conference on museum education in order to galvanize the field. As with the second recommendation, this was no doubt intended to build an infrastructure for the field of study or perhaps even form the groundwork for a new discipline. Certainly both the individual networking and the visibility of well-publicized conferences contributed enormously to the shaping of a practice, as did the publication of selected papers from the museum educators' round-table discussions held at these conferences (Nichols, 1992; Hirsch & Silverman, 1999). But the desire to “galvanize” the field resulted in a perilous hegemony that appears in the authority of “best practices.” In order to galvanize, a certain neglect or dismissal of radical difference or theoretical critique in favour of reports on practice and the creation of standards for the practice had taken place (American Association of Museums, 1992). The power of galvanization is most clear when even at international museum education conferences, an uncanny sameness drips from museum practices in radically different parts of the world (Taipei international art education proceedings, conference proceedings, 1999).
The fourth recommendation was that educators should run more research studies as opposed to visitor studies. As another strategy to expand the repertoire of material that could constitute the knowledge base of a practice, this was indeed an imperative move. However, both the nature of research conducted in the field by educators who were not trained as researchers, and the lack of consistent dissemination tools, were problematic. In the end, such activity proved to be an expenditure of valuable resources to reinvent the wheel (Falk, 1995). Further, by far the greatest majority of this research that was carried out focused on schools and children’s learning in the museum (http://museumlearning.com). This kind of disproportionate focus on teaching children in the museum has greatly contributed to the colonizing of the interpretive space with an ideology of practice and of schooling.

As their culminating statement, Eisner and Dobbs recommended that the museum begin to implement joint project ventures between museums and schools. An important slippage takes place in the context of this recommendation. Even though the report begins with sweeping claims that it is the museum educator’s role to improve the visual literacy of the “public” (p. 44), in the end it functionalizes this public role by directing it specifically toward schools. Schools are the only audience group expressly named by Eisner and Dobbs and the only group toward which a specific list of resources were to be channeled:

Specially prepared materials would help teachers use the museum...with the help of museum professionals and the contribution of art consultants and interested teachers, school visits to the museum could be planned, preparatory materials designed, and assessment procedures developed. (p.49)
School programs had been part of the museum’s operations since the mid nineteenth century (Roberts, 1997). By the 1980s, school programs were deeply entrenched as the heart of the museum’s educational mission and are a continued focus of museum educator’s time and energy (CAGE reports). However, it is precisely their entrenched and fecund nature that makes them deeply problematic. This call to work with schools, spoken loudly and often, has overshadowed the museum’s interpretive responsibilities to the “rest of the public” — or perhaps “remainder of the public” better describes the tenor of the situation. This recommendation by Eisner and Dobbs, then, aided the colonization of the financial and human resources of museum education by embedding schooling as the ideological rubric under which interpretation for the public took place.

Perhaps the most telling example of how the rubric of schooling has colonized the spaces of interpretation is found in the way that the dominant models for structuring interpretive programs for adults has been borrowed from work with children. This is most poignantly the case with Project Zero’s “entry points” which are based on Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences in children (Davis, 1996; Garnder 1993), and the “visual thinking strategies” based on the work of cognitive psychologist Housen’s (1983) early research into the aesthetic development in children (which I will have more to say about later). Both of these models, although providing a certain kind of utility in terms of strategy, tend to marginalize the role of both art content knowledge and theoretical knowledge. These kinds of methods work from a position that imagines itself to be positing an autonomous viewer by providing a method of looking that will create what Eisner and Dobbs called “competency,” but instead they infantilize—or at the very best
“studentize” the public—and ensure that the educator has and continues to hold onto interpretive authority over the artwork.

One of a series of distinctions that I am trying to make appear here is the difference between authoritative notions of schooling that prescribe one method of looking at art that leads toward pre-established interpretations as compared to offering interpretive repertoires that open toward the meanings of art. To offer different interpretations of an artwork is very different than offering access to different interpretive repertoires. For example, to take a rather extreme but very clear historical case, if I offer the public only a formalist repertoire of Rueben’s Rape of Europa, I could nonetheless offer them a number of different interpretations of that work. I could direct their attention to the tumultuous composition which might lead the viewer to read it as a violent image, or I could talk about the voluptuous form and shape of all of the things depicted in the image which could lead the viewer to understand it as a deeply sensuous image. I might even go so far as to talk about the methodical yet slightly frenzied application of paint strokes as a metaphor for sexual arousal. These are all different interpretations of the artwork. If, however, I shift repertoires and begin to speak to this image from a feminist point of view, and begin to question the aestheticization of rape and the museum politics that offers it without comment, then I am beginning to give the public a different interpretive repertoire. If I provide both of these interpretive repertories to the public (formalism and feminism), then I am beginning to construct a site of critical engagement where a measure of critical autonomy exists. Part of the point here is that in order to do this, I need to be aware of feminism as just one of a number of postmodern critiques and offer it to the public as such, as one of many ways to interpret artworks. It is from this
kind of space that self-consciously critically engaged practices grow. In order to foster this kind of critical engagement though, the museum needs to both accept and embrace its own authorities in a self-consciously and critically responsible way. The education and interpretive staff should indeed be in possession of a staggering array of interpretive repertoires, and should be willing and able to share these with the public as part of what makes art art. They cannot do this if they are contained and inscribed from within a position of lack.

But to return to schooling, and in perhaps a more ghostly light, schooling is not only a purely “evil” source of determined meaning and restricted repertoires that are of no use to the museum except as a model to work against. There are aspects of the ubiquitous and powerful presence of schooling in Western culture that can be deployed in a self-aware way to create critically engaged spaces where the public can begin to encounter all that is available in art. For example, one of the premises of schooling is that it is based on very strict notions of sequentiality. From kindergarten to grade twelve, from Piaget’s stages of development to Feldman’s stages of assessment, there are tenacious bonds between sequencing and knowledge. The pedagogical premise is that only over time do we begin to grasp concepts that are increasingly more complex, learn how to attend to a multiplicity of narratives simultaneously, and to embrace notions such as dispersion, ambiguity, and contingency in lieu of demanding unity, certainty, or assurance. However, this otherwise seamless bond between sequence and the development of more sophisticated interpretations is quietly problematized by the museum. In order to understand the nature of this undoing, and how it might be used as a productive force, a very important distinction must be made between the kind of
pedagogical sequencing that I have just described and the ordering of artworks in an exhibition as a pedagogy of display.

The physical arrangement of an exhibition can have a whole array of ordering devices. The one used most frequently is a simple chronology, and those exhibitions that use chronology as an ordering device are often reciting narrative of the great marches of progress through history with themes such “Expression from Goya to Van Gogh.” Other exhibitions, such as *The Uncanny: Experiments in Cyborg Culture*, use a juxtaposition of two objects to set up the discursive coordinates of the exhibition, and then move into the more standard chronological installation. Other exhibitions order the display in a completely atemporal fashion, clustering works by artist, by theme, by recurring motifs, or simply groups artworks under such functional headings as “recent acquisitions.” There are many other ordering devices, but the point here is that this museal sense of juxtapositioning does not proceed like the pedagogical sequencing of information; that is, from grade one to grade twelve. There are no overtly scaled prerequisites embedded in exhibitions that need to be collected in order to move from one work to another, from one exhibition to another, or from one museum to another, or from a unitary to a more dispersed understandings of the artworks. There is, instead, one general but momentous supposition, and that is that the public can both “see” and “see through” the myriad of ordering devices embedded in a pedagogy of display.

The sequencing of knowledge is a powerful structuring force in our culture and one that educators in particular are accustomed to thinking with. Consequently there are ongoing attempts on behalf of educators to insert the sequentiality of schooling into a pedagogy of display. These have lead to a range of didactic interludes in the exhibitions,
such as “interactive text panels” and “hands-on activities,” which are often designed with children or “novice viewers” in mind but not explicitly labelled as such. Such interludes provoke complaints about the “dumbing down” of the exhibitions. The question that still remains though is: How can we begin to think about the unique temporalities of the museum in a wide enough way so that the sequentiality of schooling is structured in such a way that it is in conflict with the pedagogy of display? How can the museum learn to “use” the sequencing of schooling in a more productive way to propose alternatives interpretive repertoires rather than surreptitiously authorizing one kind of interpretation? Here, in both a hopeful and an ironic mode, schooling offers the museum a model. Part of the “success” of the school programs in the museums and part of the reason that they have been able to so thoroughly colonize the spaces of interpretation is that these programs are mediated by people who can both adapt the content to the individual groups’ needs and builds in a certain kind of pedagogical sequencing into the time they spend with each school group. Consequently, the young visitors are not reliant on the rather extreme prerequisites of a pedagogy of display and its often cryptic textual interfaces. I will be arguing in chapter five that a human interface with the public is one of the key aspects in creating critically engaged spaces of interpretation for the public, and that in the hands of skilled interpretive staff some of the dissonance between pedagogical sequentality and the museum’s pedagogy of display can be turned into a productive tool.

On another front, this distinction between pedagogical sequencing and museum’s ordering devices bears upon how the museum envisions the kind of interpretive power it wields over those who count as compared to those who need to be accounted for.
Currently the museum envisions its public in terms related to pedagogical sequence, where audiences are categorized into specific groups. But this segmented public is a problematic model for a number of reasons. First, on a functional front, it produces a spiral into unsustainable specificity. For if we play out this notion of specificity to its logical pedagogical end, the result would be a gallery for grade one students and another gallery for grade twos; or text panels for first-year general arts students, first-year fine arts students, programs for art school graduates from the 1960s, and so on. This is not a viable option. Second, this way of envisioning the public—as aggregates of individuals categorized and catalogued by demographic and other classification systems—is problematic in that it is not a “truth” of the public, but only a representation, only pictures of an imagined public. As such, as Ang (1991) explains in her study of public broadcasting systems, this way of counting and accounting for the public is simply a device to make the public “visible” to the institution in some way—naming them in terms of age, ability, race, and class—and, once named, these audiences can be called upon, interpolated. She calls this model “audience as market,” explaining that an “audience is produced by the institution, for the institution and in the name of the institution” (p.2). Third, this way of configuring the public produces, reproduces, and allows for only certain modes of individuation (age, race, class, gender) that bear on the individual as just one more ambiguous but powerful authority. Peter Hallward (2001) calls this the “specific” mode of individuation and proposes that in its place we might think about a “singular” mode of individuation. The specific frames the individual in terms of the “set”

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6 Audience segmentation and a host of related concepts are one of the dominant paradigms for articulating the public who have come to the museum through its marketing activities. There is important work to be done on how these notions have contributed to the colonization of the interpretive space of the museum as well.
or "class" or "grade" to which they belong, and therefore acts as a tyrannical force upon an individual. The singular, however, can provide a different kind of interface between the art and the public, one that does not surreptitiously interject the categorical structures of "school time" into the interpretive space of the museum. The singular casts autonomy as the agency of the individual in a wholly new light. This is particularly the case in the work of Nancy (which I will take up at greater length in Chapter Four) who conceives of a place where neither authority (with its risk of totalitarianism) nor autonomy (with its socially disconnected solitude) dominates conceptions of the individual and by extension the meanings that they make in the face of art. It is this kind of space of the singular individual that the museum needs to find ways to embrace in each and every one of its interactions with the public.

Spatially, too, there are fundamental problems when schooling is used as the interpretive interface between art and the public. Here the logic of the supplement is a powerful tool with which to unearth some ways in which schooling manifests and becomes ubiquitous in its influence. Extreme spatial disjunctures are embedded in exhibitions where the "art" is separated from "interpretation," or more precisely between the spaces where the exhibition's silent pedagogy of display is meant to "speak for itself" and those in which that pedagogy of display is meant to be "interpreted" or supplemented. This separation is most evident in the way that "activity rooms" have been installed outside or in peripheral space alongside many exhibitions. Increasingly, these educational spaces are moving closer to the exhibition spaces and, at times, right into them. At their worst, educational spaces "student-ize" if not infantilize the public by offering children's activities as if they were for everyone. At their best, educational
spaces move well beyond the rubric of schooling, but they are still haunted by schooling. I will present one such example in the context of my discussion of *The Uncanny: Experiments in Cyborg Culture* exhibition in the next chapter.

**Hauntings**

Although an ideology of lack and its companion schooling certainly inhabits the space of interpretation with all of the force of the colonizer, there are nonetheless many sites of resistance and difference within the field. I want to pay homage to them here, for they have opened up possibilities of practice, even though these possibilities are still haunted by schooling. As Derrida (1994) says, one can never exorcise the ghost—"it keeps returning, and in that return is the haunting" (p. 21).

Two major trends within art museum education can be identified in the wake of the Eisner and Dobbs report. One is a move toward developing standards for the field, toward establishing the authority—or at least authoritative documents—that would professionalize the field (as cited in Hooper Greenhill, 1995, p. 234). Frequently these initiatives were undertaken under the auspices of the national museums' associations that were already engaged in developing refining standards for all of the professions within the museum. One of the most influential of these was the American Association of Museums' (1992) *Excellence and Equity*, prepared by a special task force on education in museums. It placed education squarely at the "heart of the museum" and provided ten recommendations for its implementation. This report has certainly brought education to the attention of the museum as a whole and raised the professional status, respect, and salaries of many educators, and as such has brought to fruition the desires embedded in
the Eisner and Dobbs report. But there was clearly another agenda behind this report and that had just as much to do with corporate image building as it did with interpretation of the museum’s collections. As such, it falls prey to the kinds of diversions that direct intellectual and financial resources away from the museum’s interpretive responsibilities. For example, the three key concepts that frame the report are:

First, the educational role of museum is at the core of their service to the public. This assertion must be clearly stated in every museum’s mission and central to every museum’s activity.

Second, museums have the potential to be enriched and enlivened by the nation’s diversity. As public institutions in a democratic society, museums must achieve greater inclusiveness. Trustees, staff, and volunteers must acknowledge and respect our nation’s diversity in race, ethnic origin, age, gender, economic status, and education, and they should attempt to reflect that pluralism in every aspect of museums’ operations and programs.

Third, dynamic, forceful leadership is needed within and outside the museum community. Strong leadership on the part of individuals, institutions and organizations will provide vision, inspire broad-based commitment, and generate resources; it is the key to meeting the challenges and fulfilling the promise of this report. (p. 4)

It is clear that this new museum of “excellence and equity” is about the museum’s autonomy and, despite the rhetoric, not about the agency of the public. Even though the commitment to multiculturalism may have been self-serving (for example, they say that “museums have the potential to be enriched and enlivened by the nation’s diversity”
rather than the other way around), multiculturalism was nonetheless reinforced throughout the report and provided a venue for and validation of the kind of work that educators had been doing with “their audiences.” In the wake of Excellence and Equity, the number of “special projects” that museum educators constructed for small numbers of people belonging to minority community groups becomes more and more visible in art museum educational practices (Hirsch & Silverman, 2000). Often these programs were workshop based or built on a model like Los Angles Museum of Contemporary Art’s “First Visit and Beyond” program where members of the newly arrived Hispanic community were recruited, and given tours, light snacks, and free tickets to return to the museum—rarely though, to return (1995 AAM conference presentation). These kinds of programs pose a problematic model, for they unknowingly replicate a dynamic of authority.

I am certainly not arguing that community groups are not part of the public, or that efforts toward a more socially inclusive museum are not well intentioned and very necessary. Quite the opposite: what I am attempting to establish here is that when the interface between art and the public takes the form of these kinds of “projects” with specific community groups (be they based on age, race, religion or class), it replicates from the very outset Hallward’s “specific” mode of individuation and all of the forms of authorial constraints that go with that, and subsequently crowds out the possibility of producing practices where the singular form of individuation and the kind of autonomy it offers might be the rule. Second, by demarcating these specific groups as those that are “in need” of some help in order to negotiate the museum’s pedagogies of display and often lavishing substantial resources on them, while neglecting to take up the larger
interpretive mandate of the museum, the museum educator takes a position that is increasingly hard to justify. Further, a number of other prickly questions go along with this. By what process are "partners" chosen for this privileged access to museum staff and other resources? How directly or indirectly are these partnerships related to funding? How directly or indirectly are they related to marketing initiatives? These are not new questions, nor are they easy questions to deal with. What I hope to offer here is a way to think about the interfaces between art and the public that do not fall as readily into this trap.

The other trend that can be identified in the wake of the Eisner and Dobbs report is a whole series of attempts to open new possibilities for learning in the museum that move it away from the authorities of schooling and instruction. This was bolstered by an expansion of research that revealed a whole range of visitor experiences that did not necessarily come under the rubric of schooling or even within a larger frame of education. This research conceptualized and reported on museum visits as forms of leisure activity (Hood, 1989), social experience (Falk & Dierking, 1995, Falk, 1992, 2000), and private reverie (Kaplan, 1993). Together these ideas about ways of thinking about the nature of the museum visit constitute a dramatic shift. Rather than thinking about the museum's responsibility to the public in terms of education, schooling and the transfer of specific bodies of knowledge, this group of researchers began to think about museums as sites of autonomous interpretation and of individual meaning-making (Korn, 1993; Silverman, 1995). I will return to how this notion of "individual meaning-making" also poses a problematic model, but for now I want to point out that there is a small group
of museum scholars who are trying to move beyond a model of thinking about the interface between the museum and the public in terms of traditional models of schooling.

This shift is in keeping with a more general trend throughout the 1980s to rethink the audience as active participants and as producers of their own meaning, rather than passive recipients of authoritative knowledge. Roberts (1997) suggests that this notion of the active audience takes three different forms within the museum. One, which can be described with the controversial term *edutainment*, is a strategy that attempts to “reach visitors in linguistic and cultural forms that are more comfortable to them” (p. 132). The second is empowerment, a strategy that attempts to authorize alternative modes of knowing. The third is a model of experience that refers to ways of thinking about the basis for knowledge (pp. 131–32). Roberts characterizes this cumulative shift as a movement from knowledge to narrative, one in which the museum takes into account the context and character of the visitor’s experience. Even though Roberts is clear that these other paradigms call for a change in practice, she herself still cannot leave education behind: education, she says, “at least as it is practiced in museums, evolved into a rather different form from what it has been in years past.... [It is now] essentially a narrative endeavor which has implications for learning and teaching in the museum. The essence of the education enterprise is thus the making of meaning” (p. 133). What is problematic about this kind of stance is that in trying to move the museum beyond a model of transferring information, it has taken up the position at the other extreme—a veritable model of “whatever” meaning. Of course people make meaning in the face of art and objects, this is experiential knowledge. What I am arguing for here is that the museum needs to take up a position between these two poles of authority and autonomy, and
therein it can begin to take responsibility for the kinds of meanings that it offers and circulates to the public.

Hooper Greenhill, in a very influential series of publications throughout the 1990s, has charted the field of museum education through a number of successive changes. She sees the museum as essentially a communication tool and says that education must be seen in this context. There is a clear trajectory in her work from the specificities of education as a set of programs (1991), to education as a key in the shaping of knowledge (1992), to education as a communication tool (1995), to the role of education in honouring cultural diversity (1997), and, most recently, to the role of education in the interpretation of visual culture (2000). In the latter work she suggests that there has been a shift from the modernist museum and its pedagogy of transmission to what she calls the “post museum” and pedagogy as culture. These new approaches focus on the meaning-making activities of individuals and groups and seek to understand pedagogy, following Giroux, “as a form of cultural production rather than the production of a knowledge or set of values” (Hooper Greenhill, 2000, pp. 139–140). Although it is filled with a seductive rhetoric of inclusion, community building, and multiple voice, and while it is conceived of in terms of a “cultural borderland where museum workers can bring together the concepts of narrative difference, identity, and interpretive strategies” (p. 140), in many respects the “post museum” is only an updated version of Clifford’s (1988) notion of museum as a “contact zone” where different cultures (again based on the kind of authority of identity inscription that Hallward and Nancy are trying to find a way around) come into contact with one over and through their art and artifacts. However, it is in the nature of that contact that Hooper Greenhill finds hope, for her “post museum” will
be a much livelier place: it will include more voices in its pedagogy of display and will add an array of activities around those displays. Hooper Greenhill’s post museum is spoken of in the future tense:

In the post museum, the exhibition will become only one among many forms of communication. The exhibition will form part of a nucleus of events which will take place before and after the display is mounted ... events, discussions, workshops, performance, dance, songs, and meals will be produced and enacted.

(2000, p. 152)

What Roberts, Silverman, and Hooper Greenhill are advocating is a pendulum swing, one that replaces the authorial voices of modernist master narratives, legacies of colonialism and the tyrannies of schooling with the autonomous voice of post modern petite narratives, specific subject positions, and a multiplicity of voices. However, what I am about to demonstrate is that by trying to abdicate its own authorial position, these strategies only mask the museum’s interpretive powers, turning them into a ghostly presence. I advocate here that the museum needs to work from a place in between these positions, and to find ways to face in both of those directions at once. The museum cannot deny that it has interpretive authority, nor can it deny its responsibility to make art public. It is a complicated space from which to work, though, for it is one that is haunted by the ghosts of its own past.

Just how haunted contemporary practices are by the spectres of schooling, the ghosts of lack, and the school of “whatever interpretation” is apparent through a close reading of just a few passages from a public conversation between two of America’s most renowned art museum educators, Rice & Yenawine, published in the foremost
professional museum journal *Curator* (2002). I start here with a look at how the précis positions an unproblematic model of schooling, and then move into the main text. The précis reads:

Danielle Rice and Philip Yenawine are veteran art museum educators who have wrestled for decades with the thorny issues involved in teaching about and learning from art objects in the museum setting. While there is general agreement within art museums today that the object should be the focus of educational practice, debate continues as to the most effective processes for facilitating learning. Gallery teaching is one of the most contested arenas, with much of the disagreement centering on the place of information in teaching beginning viewers. In art museums, the issue of what and how to teach is complicated by the fact that many people, including artists, museum professionals, psychologists and educators consider art primarily as something to be enjoyed, and they posit this enjoyment in direct opposition to learning about art. Partly because of this, the function of art museum education and gallery-based instruction is still evolving. (p.289)

First, even though there has been at least a decade of work on the multitude of other experiences and other ways that people come to make meaning in the presence of art, the first reference here to such an event reinscribes it in “teaching” as the matrix in which all else can be inscribed. *Teaching*—the word itself is a hungry ghost lurking with all of its shadowy friends, all of the lack it hopes to supplement: schooling, deficit, and novice. *Teaching* hovers slowly, ready to devour the rest of the text. Second, it is problematic in the way in which it dismisses so much of both the post modern project and
of contemporary educational theory that positions the individual at the heart of the educational project by proposing "general agreement that the object should be the focus of educational practice." I suggest that the question may not be whether the object should be the focus of educational practice, but rather whether educational practice should be focused upon the object. Can other interpretive practices ranging from hermeneutics to deconstruction be brought to bear on the art object and would that always and necessarily be educational? Third, to suggest that the question is one of "the most effective processes for facilitating learning" is to keep a huge and sprawling debate on interpretation confined within the authorized parameters of "effective processes for facilitating." Once language like "effectiveness" is deployed, the question then becomes: who judges that? Further, does this propose a practice that leads museums down the road of national standards? Last, can the whole debate about interpretation in the museum be reduced to a question of how much information to give beginning viewers? I suggest that to frame a discussion in this manner calls up a whole cluster of ghostly authorities, but does not name them as such.

I want to take up one thread of conversation from this text, by first quoting the passage in its entirety, then discussing specific sections of it. The excerpt begins as Yenawine is describing his method of teaching using Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) based on Abigail Housen's stages of aesthetic development. (As a dominant teaching strategy in museums, it circulates in the museum world generally the way Yenawine describes it here). It should be noted that although Yenawine deals primarily with school groups in his work, he and Housen have been very active in promoting VTS as a method to be used with, by, and for adults.
PY: I start off the process by asking, "What is going on in this image?" This question is open ended enough to allow for any kind of comment, but it also encourages the natural behavior of storytelling. When I hear an interpretive comment in response, I ask, "What do you see that makes you say that?" This question asks the viewer to ground opinions in evidence in the image, so while the logic is their own, the grounding is in the picture. The behavior sought here is one that leads toward a Stage II framework that appears in Housen's research: that of looking for what the artist might be trying to make us think. I frequently ask "What more can you find?" in order to encourage more finding of detail and more probing. And so it goes.

DR: What role does information about objects play in all this?

PY: ...What the process I teach omits is what I call the "information surround": facts and opinions about the picture that are not apparent in the image, such as information about the artist's life. Or how the object was made, which is often only visible if you are acquainted with artistic practices...

DR: Do you correct misunderstandings?

PY: No, or at least very rarely. If groups consistently misunderstand a work, I change the work. For example, if they draw inappropriate conclusions from looking at an African ancestor figure, I will substitute it with a mother and child—something that they have tools for "getting right" without additional information. Open ended, facilitated discussion of art by beginning viewers works only when you select the art as sensitively as you choose books or movies for young people. You look for things that they can comprehend and enjoy without explication. I
am not against information, by the way. I know how wonderful it is to find out certain things about intention or original context. But I think that connecting with art begins with looking at it, and my concern with beginning viewers is that when we explain it to them, we teach passive reception, not active looking. I also think for beginners to get the impression that they need to know a lot of stuff before they can connect with art actually stops them from looking and thinking on their own. But perhaps the point in this discussion should not focus exclusively on the way I teach. What might be taken from what I think is that any interpretive program in museums should take into account the viewer, and what is most helpful to her or him. I don't believe in asking beginners what they want or need, because they don't know what the options are, for one thing. And we have trained people to expect certain things—such as lots of information. This is why I turned to Abigail Housen. She has taken the time to study what goes on in the heads of people of all stages when looking at art, and I think we can all use her data to design programs, even exhibitions. I have focused on beginning viewers mostly because, again using her research as well as the impressions of most of us, people who want help in museums want it because they are beginners. Those in Housen's Stages III and beyond have what they need in the art itself, in basic labels, in catalogues and books. Those who feel they lack their own resources turn to educational devices. (2002, pp. 290-301)

First, and in a very general way, I agree with the part of the VTS method that begins by ensuring that there is some kind of visual engagement with the artwork. Our vision has been so colonized by the speed and density of the post-industrial world that to
look closely at one still image, attending to its detail and subtlety, is often a selfconscious act. Further, I agree that it is important to ground interpretive production in the evidence of the art. But once we move past that, VTS becomes increasingly problematic. It offers only one interpretive repertoire: that of “looking closely,” and it is built on the work of one developmental psychologist. It reinforces already extant thinking patterns and interpretive repertoires of the museum visitors: “while the logic is their own, the grounding is in the image.” It is resistant to providing context or “information surround.” Together these three aspects of VTS point to a philosophy of art grounded in the notion that “art speaks for itself” and that all one has to do is “look closely,” or perhaps more to the point, be schooled in this one method of looking closely in order to unlock secrets that are embedded in the work. VTS is built on the premise that art is its own plentitude, that it is its own supplement, yet at the same time it offers VTS and the educator as the supplement, as the one who will supplement the lack in art, the lack in the viewer. It also has a curious relationship of lack with its ability to provide the very thing that it offers—access to “the meaning” of a work of art. Yenawine says: “If groups consistently misinterpret a work, I change the work.” This is a very complex statement. First, it assumes that there are “correct” authoritative interpretations. It also assumes that the educator has the “correct” interpretation, but that he or she is not going to “tell” the visitor what that “correct” interpretation is. Instead, VTS offers a way to lead viewers to these “correct” interpretations, via a method that, supposedly will make them independent viewers in the future. But if the method doesn’t work with one particular artwork, the solution is to “change the work.” How can such a strategy create autonomous viewers when it does not even “work” in the hands of an experienced educator who is already in
possession of both the strategy and all of the “information surround” that allows the educator to direct the questions?

Further, the decision not to correct a blatant misunderstanding is a tricky position for a teacher to defend—especially for a teacher that is operating from the position that there are correct answers. It is clear that this method is not addressing the issue of how one approaches a misunderstanding (in which case some would recommend not “correcting” the viewer but using gentler methods to help them see the misunderstanding), but rather that this is a conscious choice not to correct misunderstandings. This kind of blatant circulation of misinformation could not be defended if it was issued in the form of a text panel or an exhibition catalogue. Why, then is it justifiable in this context? Here live the insidious ghosts of lack.

In that same light, VTS operates via a process of “open ended facilitation” where the goal of the encounter with art is “getting it right.” The question here becomes: what part of “getting it right” is not dependent on information of some kind, on complex repertoires of meaning-making embedded in what Eco (1979) called social dictionaries and cultural encyclopedias? What “additional information”—about art, about the museum, and about what constitutes interpretation, does VTS end up giving the public by not giving them information? Here it becomes clear that the very strategy that is thought to open the art museum to “beginning viewers” actually functions as a tool that closes down interpretive possibilities for it relies on only one interpretive repertoire and, in offering no other, posits itself as the interpretive authority. Further, this strategy—designed to help create autonomous viewers—becomes the instrument whereby the museum sends the message that it does indeed have “the answers” but is withholding
them from the public, and thereby it becomes a way for the museum to maintain its position of interpretive authority precisely by ensuring such inaccessibility. This is no different from the way in which the nineteenth century museums replicated the social hierarchy by ensuring that the work was available to "seen" but not "seen through" by the "low other." It is precisely this kind of appearance of the ghosts of schooling and the way in which they sustain the museum's own interpretive reign over the public that the museum needs to identify and begin to replace with practices that offer critically engaged interpretation.

Two more important points must be made about the kind of unacceptable role models that VTS provides to the museum. The first is the artificial distinction that it makes between passive reception and active looking. Yenawine says "my concern with beginning viewers is that when we explain it to them, we teach passive reception, not active looking." A whole series of binaries lurking around this statement: information vs. connecting with art, passive vs. active looking, and explanation vs. looking that construct a one-dimensional system of good vs. bad. Here "passive reception" is the "bad" authoritative gesture whereas "active looking" is the "good" gesture toward interpretive freedom. The implication is that in order to do its job, all that the museum needs to do is to be on the side of autonomy, freedom from the oppression of information, explanation, and passive reception (which is an interesting oxymoron). I maintain that it is precisely this "choosing of sides" in the great epistemological battles of Western thought that the museum needs to leave behind; instead, it needs to look to the tensions between these positions as the spaces in which meaning comes to be, the space in which art exists, and the spaces toward which a critically engaged interpretive practice must look.
The last point to make about VTS has to do with the way in which it understands autonomy as complete self-reliance, rather than as a singular-plural configuration. Yenawine says: “I also think for beginners to get the impression that they need to know a lot of stuff before they can connect with art actually stops them from looking and thinking on their own.” The idea that one could ever think or look completely on one’s own is one of the stubborn ghosts that needs to be exorcized from the museum if it is to move toward creating sites of critical engagement. Looking and thinking are social products: we do these things with all of the legacies and ghosts that are bequeathed unto us, with the structures, people, and things that have taught us, have touched us. It is this plurality that nurtures us, that brings us into being, and that brings meaning into being, and it is always a singular-plural configuration. To ask, or perhaps to demand (demand because the museum offers only one alternative) that the public look and think “on their own” is to shroud all of the ways in which the museum has already structured what can be thought, to veil all of the ways in which art opens unto the relentless “scattering” of its own borders, and to offer back to the public an insubstantial notion of autonomy that allows the museum to retain its authority.

I have used VTS here as one specific example of how the practices of art museum education do not in fact work toward creating spaces of critically engaged interpretation. Any number of other “looking strategies” could have been used in its place, and although the particular arguments would be different, the critique would hold true—that they offer one or at most a very limited range of interpretive repertoires to the public and they do so in a way that re-installs the museum’s interpretive authority. This, along with the ideology of lack and the way that specters of schooling haunt these practices, collude in a
way that suggests a very real reluctance on behalf of the museum to take up its interpretive mandate in earnest and to work toward creating sites of critical engagement with the public. This reluctance also appears in the disproportionate allocation of financial resources devoted to interpretation and education. This lack circles around and in turn feeds into the production and maintenance of certain kinds of relationships of power manifest in what Bourdieu (1984) called symbolic and intellectual capital.

Financial and symbolic capital

The financial resources allocated to education and interpretation in major North American art museums is both small in proportion to the totality of the operating budget and very difficult to track across institutions for a number of reasons. First, the categories of exactly what constitutes interpretation and education are not consistent from museum to museum. Some museums include only those activities that take place in and through education departments. Generally, especially in the more traditional museums, these tend to be associated with either the more novice audiences (schools and children) or with programs for specialist audiences: lectures, symposia, and entertainment events such as concerts and social clubs. Other museums, those that are attempting to move toward a more inclusive and visitor-friendly environment, tend to include a much wider range of visitor services under the rubric of interpretation. Cashiers, coat checks, volunteer services, and occasionally security staff may be included. Still other museums, including those that champion their intellectual role in culture, tend to include all forms of publication under the heading of interpretation. All of these shifting parameters can make it difficult to track expenditures on interpretation and to compare figures across
institutions, but it does make one thing abundantly clear: that the museum community has no articulate or shared understanding of what constitutes interpretation, as they have of other cornerstones of the museum mandate such as collecting, preservation, and display.\footnote{What I am arguing here is simply that the “category” of collecting is more contained and stable than the “category” of interpretation. For although many would argue that the lines are blurred around what constitutes, for example, a good conservation policy, it would be rare to categorize building maintenance expenditures as conservation expenses.}

Even at this nominative level, then, it is clear how interpretation slips in and out of view and appears in many guises which, as we have seen, work toward maintaining the authoritative powers of the museum at the expense of opening spaces of critical engagement with art. The way in which museum education was already established as a powerful discursive operator into which a whole series of often contradictory expectations and desires could be loaded, is apparent just at the beginning of the professionalization of museum education in the 1970s. For instance, Burcaw (1975) stated, in his \textit{Introduction to Museum Work}:

\[\text{T}he \text{reader may well wonder why I have taken so long [over three-quarters of the way through the book] to get to specific mention of education, when that is the whole purpose of museum activity. \textit{The fact is that we have been discussing education all along} [italics added]. The word as used in this chapter has a special meaning. Museum people speak of their “education staff”…what they refer to is their work with visiting school classes, loan exhibits to schools, and related activities sometimes including guided tours. (p. 158)\]

What Burcaw had been discussing up to that point was the collecting, conservation and exhibiting aspects of the museum, so that all of those—with all of their conflicting desires for the museum—come under the larger rubric of education. This kind of
dispersal, as I discussed in the context of the Eisner and Dobbs report, speaks to reluctance on behalf of the museum to engage thoughtfully, critically and wholeheartedly with its interpretive mandate.

But this is only the beginning of the enigmas associated with the ideological and financial allocation of resources. There is a huge gap between the museum’s rhetorical claims that its mandate is to interpret collections for the public—and here all of the language of accessibility and relevance is marshaled in order to bolster the claim—and its actions. If interpretation is really that important, why do museums spend more money protecting art from the public rather than interpreting it for and with them? Why is significantly more money spent on seducing people into a show rather than on engaging them within the exhibition? Why are maintenance staff paid to clean the building and sales clerks hired to sell objects, yet far too frequently the interpretation of art is turned over to volunteer docents? Why does the physical care of the museum’s collection continue to consume a higher percentage of the budget than the intellectual care of artworks? Each of these decisions to spend precious funds on one kind of activity rather than another embodies a clear set of priorities, which consistently slip around and away from the museum’s interpretive responsibilities—Internet pictures are paraded as public access and interpretation is conflated with audience development projects such as Friday night jazz concerts.

The kind of discursive operations that take place around education, then, are one of the ways that museums foster their own interpretive malaise. This malaise is fed by the way in which museums have allowed schooling and an ideology of lack to colonize their spaces of interpretation, and by the way in which it harbours certain practices—
knowingly or not—precisely because these practices maintain their own interpretive reign over the public. At the same time, there is a way to use this persistent waiving of interpretive responsibility as an opportunity, or perhaps even a call for both a radical reappraisal of the interpretive and educative apparatus of the museum, and the emergence of, if not a new field of practice, at least a radical shift in current practices. To a very large extent this dissertation embarks upon just such a reappraisal, trying to articulate the particular approaches that prevail, filled as they are with missed and often overtly constrained opportunities to create critically engaged interpretive spaces for the public. It is an attempt to sketch out space and territory in which to take up the pressing issues of what it means to make art public, and therein foster critically engaged practices in this, our time and our world. There are indeed many doubly inscribed acts that reactivate the deep sense of lack that permeated the early years of art museum education, that call up those spectres of schooling and that cover over authoritative inscriptions with gestures toward autonomy. If the museum is to move to a more critically engaged space it needs to attend to these moments of evasion, to its acts of disguising and turning away; it needs to find ways to face up to these, and to act while keeping in view both its own authority and the different notions of autonomy that it embodies. It is to that kind of facing of one's own practice that I now turn.
Chapter Three

*The Uncanny: Experiments in Cyborg Culture*: A case in point

In this chapter I will look at one particular exhibition and begin to pry open where and how it worked toward creating self-consciously critical spaces of interpretation for the public and where and how it reinstated its own silent authorities. *The Uncanny* makes a useful case in point here for a number of reasons. First, in most respects it answered to many of the calls to examine its own practices and to look for ways it could be more open to the public: it engaged with contemporary ideas about art and popular culture and thereby provided a model for both looking at the borders that separate art and popular culture and thereby attended to the scattering of art’s borders; it had multicultural content and perspective; it had many layers of community participation and connections; it had a Web presence; it had a wide range of programs that attracted a number of audiences who did not regularly attend the museum. The exhibition represented the vanguard of museum productions and was honoured as such by the Canadian Museum Association with an award for outstanding achievement. Second, it is an example of how self-conscious criticality can be “installed” into an exhibition and echoed in its textual supplements; as such, it offers a model for how the museum can begin to critically engage with its own authorities and offer those up as one in an array of interpretive repertoires. Third, it is an example of how changed working processes supported a new kind of attention to the pedagogy of display. However, once we move into an analysis of the interpretive programs designed specifically for the public, many of the now familiar spectres of
schooling and ghosts of lack can again be found lurking there, reinscribing the authorial 
voice of the museum in the programs designed around the idea of a no longer viable 
notion of autonomy that I am deconstructing here. Further, I have both insider 
knowledge about the exhibition and a corresponding lack of distance, for I was head of 
Public Programs at the time that this exhibition took place and, as such, approved all of 
the public programs. This space “between” objectivity and experience, though, is one 
that I willingly embrace and promote as a site of self-consciously critical engagement 
with both ends of the spectrum that frame it and in whatever form they take. In this case, 
working from this place in between allows me to speak about how the exhibition was 
planned, what differences it articulated and what problems it reproduced in a way that I 
could not have done without this auto-ethnographic knowledge.

I will be focusing on two aspects of the interpretive work of this exhibition. First, 
I will look at how the project was developed from the early planning stages to the 
installation of the exhibition. From there I will track where and how the project struggled 
to engage critically with its own interpretive repertoires and how those might be made 
public, and where the project simply fell back into replicating past practices. Following 
that, I will look at one of the elaborate interpretive programs designed for the public, a 
hands-on space called The Open Studio, and consider how, in its attempt to posit an 
autonomous public and to create a self-directed learning space, it missed the opportunity 
to create a self-conscious critical engagement with the public. I focus on these aspects of 
the exhibition project because these are the sites that offer the most potential to rethink 
the discursive coordinates of interpretation by unravelling even further how the rubric of 
schooling is problematic, and how spaces such as these might be rethought in terms of
critical agency. However, it is important to note that extensive interpretive programs accompanied *The Uncanny* and that many of these programs engaged small groups of the public in critical discussions about the exhibition. These included a pre-exhibition lecture series; a one-day symposium with critics, historians, artists, writers, and performers; daily public tours; and six Philosophers' Café evenings (salon style conversations open to the public). The museum also offered monthly family days with hands-on activities throughout the gallery, school programs consisting of tours and workshops, a teacher orientation evening, and an English as a Second Language self-guided tour package. Yet for all of their richness and diversity, these programs served only twenty percent of the total number of adult visitors to the museum. Consequently the interpretive repertories offered to eighty percent of the adults were embedded in the pedagogy of display.

Further, only half of the visitors went into the Open Studio, and only another half actually "made things" there. It is therefore crucial to focus on these, the most "publicly accessible" aspects of an exhibition, in order to think through how the museum might better come to its work of making art public in a more critically engaged manner.

**Props for a pedagogy of display: exhibition development**

Exhibitions begin to move toward the public domain in increments. The way in which *The Uncanny* moved through the stages of exhibition development, though, was quite different from more traditional processes. In the past, exhibition development was generally a hierarchical affair. As true heir to the nineteenth-century pedagogy of display, exhibitions tended to be the "private" domain of the curator, hidden from the staff until the finished product, in the form of a list of works, was ready to be handed over.

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8 For further description of these programs see my works from 200, 1999, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c.
to the staff for implementation. At that point the museum machine—loans, shipping, advertising, installation, education, and interpretation—took over and produced a display for the public. The text for the exhibition catalogue, too, tended to be a carefully guarded document, the content unknown to the staff until its arrival in published form on or just before the opening day of the exhibition. Because so little information about the exhibition circulated to the staff prior to the opening, this form of exhibition production sustained the authorial power accorded the curators and their reign over a pedagogy of display.

For education and interpretation, this form of exhibition production both created and exacerbated their lack and unknowingly maintained the logic of the supplement. This loop was created in the following manner. The educator supplemented a pedagogy of display with “object lessons.” Object lessons were supplemented by “looking strategies”—strategies grounded in three interrelated areas of “lack.” The first was intellectual access: there was a lack of in-depth art knowledge among education staff and volunteers that was partially structural (the educator worked with breadth—developing programs for all of the exhibitions, while the curators did in-depth work on one exhibition) and partially disciplinary (the pedagogical and process knowledge of educators tends to be devalued because it does not engage in contemporary thought as readily as do the very art practices it is attempting to animate). The second was physical access: the educators rarely had access to lists of work or installation plans—which are the key to a pedagogy of display—far enough in advance to adequately engage with the content and subsequently to thoroughly prepare and train staff. The third was a lack of professional staff to deliver the programs. It was, and in many museums still is, standard
practice to have volunteers deliver many of the public as well as school tours. During the 1960s, the museums began to professionalize all of their other activities, yet they have continued to deploy volunteers to interpret art for the public. This alone speaks volumes about the entrenchment of a pedagogy of display and, for all of the rhetoric about the public, the museum’s profound lack of interest in creating a public space of critical interpretation. Further, the fact that the volunteers were primarily older white middle- to upper-class women reinforced the divisive and colonizing dynamic of construing the public as “low other” who are not able to appreciate the cultural patrimony of the white middle class. The ghosts of lack were alive and well in this form of exhibition planning.

This well-oiled machine of hierarchical exhibition planning and its support of a pedagogy of display also fostered the disciplinary divides within the museum. Collaborations between the curator and educator on the content or process of interpretation were rare. The curator saw the exhibition itself along with its textual interfaces—the fecund exhibition catalogue (for a small audience) and the meager text panels (for the public)—as the pedagogical tools, and all other interpretive endeavours were seen as the domain of the educators and “their audiences.” Ghosts!

In contradistinction to this, the planning processes for The Uncanny were based on the tenets of team-based project management which looked for ways to circulate more information about the exhibitions throughout the museum and to do so in a timely way. Here is how that process worked. Eighteen months prior to the opening date of the exhibition, the team gathered for a preliminary discussion of the exhibition. The curator presented the content as it stood at that moment, along with a tentative list of works; the team leader presented budget parameters; this was followed by a general conversation
with staff about the implementation of the project, including a discussion on interpretive programs and strategies. From then until the opening of the exhibition, the team met regularly and, through a series of predetermined steps, began to finalize the key messages, list of works, layout of the exhibitions, content of the press material, list of speakers for symposia, and focus of the tours and hands-on spaces in the gallery.

This way of planning a project is the result of and continues to support a number of important shifts in the way the museum is attempting to face the ghosts of lack. First, in a general sense, this shift in focus from “exhibition planning” to “project planning” acknowledges that the museum’s interpretive authorities operate in and through the totalities of all of the ways that it communicates, and therefore goes far beyond its pedagogy of display. As such there is a recognition that a pedagogy of display is only one in a range of interpretive strategies that the museum has at its disposal in order to do its job of “making art public.” It also hints at the ways in which the museum is already turning its attention (however tentatively) toward its interpretive responsibilities and attending to the exclusionary practices that may be embedded in the limited kinds of interpretive repertoires that it offers to the public.

Second, this kind of planning provided a way for the interpretive staff to undertake a longer-term engagement with the content of the exhibition and gave them freer access to the research materials. Above all, though, it provided number of occasions for the educators and curator to think together about how this project might settle and circulate in the public realm. These conversations took place in the context of refining the plans for the project. This kind of longer-term engagement with content that is in a Deleuzian state of becoming offers the potential of producing projects of a
“singular” nature (in Hallward’s sense of the word) rather than those that are simply the product of a template. Although this kind of planning model provides a step toward a self-conscious criticality, one of the problems with this way of working is that it is still a hierarchical model in a number of important respects. For example, the staff who actually delivered the public programs—those who work most directly with the public—did not attend team meetings; their supervisors did. This is a testimony to the fierce conviction that a pedagogy of display is self-sufficient. It also demonstrates the museum’s persistent reluctance to take up its interpretive responsibilities in earnest, for the staff who work most closely with the public are those who are given the least support in terms of time, money, and access to the intellectual wealth of the team, to engage with the content of the exhibitions, or, even further, with more profound and complex questions of opening to the interpretability of art in general. This is a significant measure by which to judge the museum’s ambivalence toward creating a rich and critically engaged space of interpretation for the public.

Third, this way of planning allows the museum to think differently about its public. The older hierarchical models of exhibition planning advanced—in fact, almost demanded—that the public be thought of in Hallward’s sense of the “specific,” that is, as aggregates of their demographic markers who, once identified as such, could be administered to in the proper way. Therefore, the pedagogy of display was there for those who could “see and see through,” and the educator administered to “schools” to “children” and “community groups,” and, with any leftover time and money, produced something (often very little) for the “public.” This way of working, as I have attempted to delineate—even with all of its good intent to create an audience with agency—only
reproduced the museum’s interpretive authorities. This model of team planning, though, has begun to produce little fissures, and to open tiny cracks for beginning to think about the public in terms of the “singular.” For example, at the initial team meeting, staff identified both the “specific groups” the museum might want to work with as a form of audience development and a kind of politics of equal representation (along the lines of Hooper Greenhill’s 2000 “post museum,” with its multiple communities contributing to the project). More important, and as a site of great potential for beginning to “unwork” the current discursive coordinates of museum interpretation, the team also identified individuals who might have a “singular” contribution to this project as such and not because they represented a specific “community.” I will embark on a further analysis of this distinction between community and representation later; for now I want to point out that this process of team planning has inserted a little wedge in the way that the museum has traditionally conceived of and subsequently administered to its publics.

Fourth, this kind of planning process begins to undo some of the disciplinary boundaries that have so contained the different practices within the museum, and begins to work toward a de-disciplining of the disciplines and an unworking of old habits. Rather than educators and curators getting together once in the summer to “share ideas,” as Eisner and Dobbs recommended, here they engage in sustained teamwork, working together and working through all of the challenges of a particular project in its totality. This requires continuing collaboration. It is a relationship that moves toward mutual respect and toward the singular–plural being of a team. It is a process that still lacks many things, but is not a process sustained solely by the educator’s lack. Most important, though, it is a process that the museum must continue to nurture and to grow as the very
site from which the new discursive frames for a critically engaged practice can be brought into the public domain.

Becoming Public: Grants and Press Releases

As The Uncanny project moved through team-planning on its way to becoming public, it also began to make its first public appearances outside the gallery, in the form of grant applications to government, corporate, and private funding sources. Even at this stage, and in the face of a select group, old ghosts of lack already haunted the project, for the grant applications clearly prioritizes a pedagogy of display as the primary mode through which art is made public. The Uncanny was described like this:

The purpose of the exhibition is to provide the gallery visitors with an introduction to the rich and complex history of the cyborg figure in the visual arts and popular culture of the modern age. The exhibition and publication will provide a rare opportunity to show the cross influence between artists, writers, moviemakers, scientists and cultural theorists ... It is expected that the exhibition will provide a dynamic context within which to access the cultural significance of the cyborg image. (Uncanny exhibition files)

This was followed by one paragraph describing the research that has already taken place and one more paragraph on how this research fits into funding criteria of the foundation. The last—and shortest—paragraph describes the educational material:

A wide range of education materials, activities and programs will be developed for this exhibition; they include text panels, wall displays, public lectures, artists'
talks, guided tours, hands-on interpretive material, documentary and interpretive video tapes, and a web site.

Three one-page addenda were also included. The first contained more information on the exhibition and publication; the second was a preliminary list of works categorized as historical art, contemporary art, historical film, contemporary film, anime, manga and illustrations, and science; the third, entitled “gallery activities and public programs,” further described the program.

The first ghost of lack appears in this way. The exhibition section describes the research that has already been undertaken for the exhibition in Hallward’s sense of the “singular”:

The exhibition emerged from long-term research on the evolving image of the cyborg in the modern age, more recent research has focused on the historical and cultural differences that distinguish contemporary western representations of the cyborg body from the modern Japanese representations of the cyborg.

The educational material, on the other hand, is described in generic terms: “text panels, wall displays, public lectures...” One could argue that the temporal difference between work that has been done on the exhibition and work that will be done is simply a function of the sequence of work that takes place in order to produce a project. However, that argument simply reproduces the “lack” associated with any interpretive spaces beyond or outside a pedagogy of display and undermines the importance of attending to the development of critically engaged interpretive spaces. I suggest that this temporal differentiation is one instance of how the lack of education has been naturalized, so that it does not seem odd that the people who will be constructing many of the interfaces
between this carefully constructed exhibition and the public have not begun to research either the content or how they are going to undertake that task. I suggest that the museum needs to confront this lack—that it needs to call up this ghost and to stare it down.

The second ghost of this grant application makes a shadowy appearance in the term “gallery activities and public programs.” In the past decade or so, many “education departments” in Canadian galleries have been renamed “public programs” or “interpretation,” as a conscious gesture to move this work away from a direct association with schooling and formal education. However, as a strategy to think past “education” as a title for the interpretive spaces for the public, this phrase doubles back on itself, for the term “gallery activities” also suffers from an association with schooling. The word “activity,” relates, in this case, to parts of a school curriculum devoted to projects carried out by the pupils and to a system or method of teaching that involves such projects. In the curricular sense, these are concrete and practical activities directed toward some end. Consequently, even though there may have been a desire to use the word “activity” instead of “education” in order to avoid slipping into schooling, the word nevertheless rewrites “schooling” all over the “gallery activities.” It does so perhaps even more insidiously than does the word “education,” for the “hidden directedness” implied in the word “activities” (even though it may have been “tamed” by renaming it “discovery learning”) speaks of how ideology, hegemony, and colonization function. Stafford’s (1994) “disciplined eye”—and all of the authorities of schooling associated with it—are re-inscribed into the very “activities” that were meant to de-discipline the silent pedagogy of display. Shortly, I will give an example of how this operated in the context of the Open Studio for The Uncanny.
Further, the choice of the word "activity" as a label under which all of the "other activities" take place, functions via the doubling logic of the supplement. It positions "activities" as substitutes: not the "real activity," but the "other activities." However, at the same time it is the supplement to the "real activity," for if the "real activity" were not lacking, there would be no need for "other activities." Finally, the logic of the supplement dances its dance of exchange between two supposed binaries, the one supplementing the other, and it needs those binaries in order to do its dance. The oppositions between a pedagogy of display and a pedagogy of activity—often framed as "passive looking" and "active learning" (Rice & Yenawine, 2002)—are the very binaries that need to be unworked and dislodged in some way if the museum is to develop interpretive spaces between art and the public that do not replicate hierarchical power relations or provide cover for an evasion of its interpretive responsibilities. The Open Studio will provide a concrete example of the problematics of activity-based pedagogies as a supplement to a pedagogy of display. The point I make here is that even in the very first stages of "becoming public"—that is, in how an exhibition idea circulates to the funding bodies—a whole series of problematic trajectories is already in place.

After the grant applications are complete, the next move on the road to becoming public is to prepare press releases and advertising copy. Just how important these are in terms of framing the interpretive spaces of art is made clear by comparing how two different galleries dealt with The Uncanny. Here again there are hauntings aplenty.

The Mendel Art Gallery's release reads:

Today we see the cyborg everywhere around us—Arnold Schwarzenegger's Terminator, Star Trek's Borg, William Gibson's cyberpunks, and Nintendo's
GameBoy. The Uncanny is a wide-ranging exhibition that explores historical and contemporary representation of the cybernetic body, "the combination of human and machine," in the visual arts and popular culture.

The exhibition proceeds from the premise that the image of the cyborg is a visual metaphor for the anxiety that accompanied the growing presence of the machine in western culture. Modern culture's representation of the cyborg shuttles between a celebratory fascination with the machine and an intense anxiety around masculinity and mechanical equipment. (Uncanny exhibition files)

This release is written in a particular kind of "institutional voice," that hovering voice of objective authority that dares to speak on behalf of all of the "we's" of the world: "today we see the cyborg everywhere around us." The purpose of this kind of "we-ing," according to marketing wisdom, is to "engage" the reader: it catches their attention because they are being addressed directly. If "we" grant that this is the case, as a structural device, and leave aside how it might be seen as a device that co-opts experience, the question still remains: in what are we engaging the reader?

I suggest that it is a subtle yet critically aware "lesson" in how to use the museum: a veritable "user's manual" in the art of "seeing" and "seeing through." For even if we do not see the cyborg everywhere (in fact, we see the cyborg in some films, a few novels and in a select number of video games, many of which are based on the films and novels), we will see cyborgs in this exhibition. But the museum's primary role, following Pomian (1990), is not simply to offer objects to be seen, but rather to orchestrate a "seeing through" of some kind. The press release gets to that in the next paragraph: "This exhibition proceeds from the premise that the image of the cyborg is a
visual metaphor.” The final sentence offers two poles of interpretation from which to proceed: “the shuffle between a celebratory fascination with the machine and an intense anxiety around masculinity and mechanical equipment.” As such, this press release offers a shining example of how the museum can indeed begin to negotiate the terrain between its own interpretive authorities and providing access to a range of interpretive repertoires. It is therefore a good example how the museum can work toward creating spaces of critically engaged interpretation for the public precisely at that moment when it begins to acknowledge its own interpretive repertoires and at the same time to acknowledge that it is offering them to the public as interpretive repertoires. This is, in part, what Nancy calls “co-appearance.”

The Edmonton Art Gallery’s press release was much more emphatic about what the public should do at The Uncanny exhibit.

Not only does Bruce Grenville see a clear connection between Charlie Chaplin’s Modern Times, Sigmund Freud’s writings, The Terminator and Pablo Picasso, he thinks you should too. (EAG website)

This press release clearly takes a much more authoritative and directorial tone, one that is much less frequent in press releases. It, too, sets up certain lessons on how to use the art gallery. First, it tells us that this is one person’s view—what Bruce Grenville sees—not the disembodied truth of the matter. Second, it tells us what to attend to: clear connections between very different things. Third and last, it tells us what to do: find those connections! As such, though, it leans more toward “an activity”—find those “clear” connections, the “right” answers—than it does toward offering a range of interpretive repertories that shuffle between two poles. The ghosts of schooling haunt this place.
The exhibition: a pedagogy of display

By the time The Uncanny made its physical debut, it had already begun to open little cracks through which self-consciously critical spaces of interpretation were beginning to appear. Or perhaps more accurately, it was a self-conscious criticality on behalf of the museum that created these fissures through which new public practices could begin to manifest. This opening toward new discursive frames continued with the installation, but as in the planning processes, it by no means overcame the legacies of its own authorities or of positing a specious sense of public autonomy.

The version of the exhibition that I will be addressing here was installed on the ground floor of the Vancouver Art Gallery. The public entered the exhibition space via a rectangular room just off the main lobby. From this room, visitors were afforded three vistas designed to establish the three discursive coordinates of the exhibition. To the
right was an over-life-sized hand-painted reproduction of Fernand Léger’s *le mécanicien* (*The Mechanic*), 1920. The image is one of a “heroic,” stylized muscular man who is painted in the same geometrical and rhythmic patterns as the machines in the background, and is perhaps meant to be seen as analogous to the machines in some way.

Straight ahead, and installed in the middle of a four-storey rotunda flooded with natural light, stood Kenji Yanobe’s *Yellow Suite*, 1991, a massive metal “space suite” of sorts, made for man and dog to survive in a post-nuclear age. The suit/person hovered—or perhaps more accurately hung—from an awkward apparatus that functioned as a counterweight, keeping him suspended there in the midst of the rotunda. To the left was a small astroboy toy of the kind you can purchase at specialty toy stores. These three pieces offered the three discursive coordinates of the exhibition: the cyborg body as it was represented in art, technology, and popular culture and as they oscillate between fear and fascination.
Upon walking into the exhibition space, the visitor saw Henri Maillardet’s Automaton, 1810. This extraordinarily realistic figure, approximately two feet high, rested on a pedestal in the middle of the room. Its movements were produced by a set of rods, levers, and gears, and it was dressed in the fashionable clothes of the day. When “wound up,” it wrote poetry and drew pictures! To the left was a large reproduction of Eadweard Muybridge’s Animal Locomotion. To the right was a large-scale framed text panel entitled “The Human Machine.” This strategy of using very large-scale text panels and framing them so that they were treated like the rest of the art/artifacts in the exhibition was a clear statement that the text was meant to be an integral part of the interpretive efforts of the project, rather than a small add-on relegated to a corner of the room. Large and often highly designed text material such as this has entered the lexicon of science and technology museums, and may have been an acceptable strategy here since The Uncanny was looking at the intersections of art, science, and technology. Generally, though, a pedagogy of display in the art museum allows for small, “discreet” text panels that are as unobtrusive as possible so as to not distract from the artworks.

As well as their predominance in the exhibition, the text panels broke with traditional formulas in a number of other ways. There are three kinds of textual supplements for an exhibition: the object labels that name, date, and describe the material from which the work is made; the text panels that have a plethora of contested roles, authors, and design issues (Serrell 1996), and the exhibition catalogue. Although great care is taken to research, write, and prepare the exhibition catalogue and to ensure the object labels are accurate, traditionally far less care and attention are given to writing and preparing the text panels. This can largely be attributed to the tenacity of the pure
pedagogy of display that still haunts the art museum. But in addition to abiding by a philosophy that “art speaks for itself”—through a pedagogy of display—this lack of care in preparing text panels also has to do with the bifurcation of the audiences I spoke of earlier. For example, an exhibition catalogue is produced in proportionally small numbers compared to the number of visitors to an exhibition: in some sense it is produced for the “public that counts”—the people who can already “see through” the exhibition, and who purchase the catalogue not to assist with the actual museum experience but for many other reasons. The text panels, on the other hand, are produced for the “rest of the public” as a way of re-inscribing the “low other,” and reconstituting the “educator’s public.” The more public the interpretive texts become, the less care and effort that is extended upon them. This split between the public and the “public that counts” reinscribes the interpretive authority that the museum wields over the contents housed therein and ensures that the binary stays in place.

The text panels for The Uncanny, on the other hand, attempted to create a space between these two positions, between the “public that counts” and the “public in general,” by offering text panels that were adapted from the catalogue. In so doing it presented text panels that embodied some of the richness and care that characterize the catalogue. The exhibition catalogue for The Uncanny (which was co-published as a book with Arsenal Pulp Press) contained the catalogue essay by the curator as well as essays that examined the representation of the cyborg from a number of contemporary and cross-cultural perspectives, in addition to reprints of key historical texts, including a facsimile of the first English translation of Freud’s essay on The Uncanny, and excerpts
This way of translating the thoughtfulness of a catalogue essay into a text panel is another—and, I might add here, considerable—step toward creating spaces for critical interpretation. Inch for inch, there is perhaps more discussion, debate, and anxiety about text panels than there is about any other space in the museum. I suggest that part of the reason for such stress is that there is simply too much interpretive pressure put on the panels: they are supposed to serve diverse purposes for too many diverse audiences, and because of that they often end up serving none. Part of what I forward here is that we need to add highly trained staff to the interpretive complements of a pedagogy of display as a way to more adequately take the complexity and nuance of art into the public domain. This does not mean, though, that there would be no interpretive panels in the
museum; the pressures upon them would simply be reduced. The texts for *The Uncanny* serve as a good role model for opening up the discursive space for the public.

The first lines of the introductory panel to the exhibition read: “This exhibition is offered as a proposition on one of the most persistent cultural images over the past century [italics added],” and as such is emphatic about ensuring the propositional rather than declarative nature of the exhibition. Similarly, the introductory panel set up the discursive coordinates for the exhibition but did not limit interpretation to those coordinates:

Fear and anxiety are not the only response to the appearance of the cyborg. For some, the cyborg body offers a line of flight from the oppression of the patriarchy and its narrative of the norm and natural body. For others it is adopted as a shield against a world that is too emotionally or sensorially intense. For others still, it offers a means to novel and unimagined erotic possibilities.

Finally, the introductory panel invites thoughtful and directed inquiry: “How are we to understand the persistence of this image in the visual arts and popular culture, in science and literature, medicine and cultural theory? What do we imagine are its meanings and significance?” As such, these text panels offer the public a number of different interpretive repertoires and at the same time open a space for the critical agency of the viewer, both establishing the discursive field of the exhibition and inviting the public to enter that field in a number of different ways. Compared to the traditional text panel that offers only a biography, or a description of the work, or a justification for the exhibition, these texts indeed provide a self-consciously critical space of interpretation for the public.
The *Uncanny* also fulfilled a number of other kinds of calls from museum theorists that begin to hint at the kinds of critically engaged spaces I am proposing. Greenblat (1991), for instance, called for a model of exhibition making built around concepts of “resonance” and “wonder,” where resonance is “the power of the displayed object to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which it may be taken by a viewer to stand.” Wonder is “the power of the displayed object to stop the viewer in his or her tracks, and to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness” (pp. 42–43).

This oscillation between resonance and wonder, and the shuttling between the two, was designed into the exhibition with “arresting” moments such as larger-than-life video projections of Stellark swallowing his stomach sculpture, and the surprise of turning a corner in the exhibition to see Takashi Murakami’s stunning life-size female [hyper-mechanized/eroticized] transformers about to take flight: *Second Mission Project ko2 (ga-walk-type)*, 1999; *Second Mission Project ko2 (human type)*, 1999; *Second Mission Project ko2 (jet airplane type)*, 1999.
Further, *The Uncanny* affords a glimpse of what Clifford’s notion of the museum as "contact zone" might look like. For Clifford, objects become the props or occasions for forms of cross-cultural talk. The works from Japan accompanied by another thoughtful and provocative text panel on Techno-Orientalism provided a space in which to consider cultural difference:

Japanese artists Takashi Murakami, Moriko Mori and Kenji Yanobe share a desire to resist the simple consumption of their art by Western audiences while maintaining a critical dialogue with contemporary Japanese culture .... They are part of a diverse group of contemporary Japanese artists who have begun to reconceptualize the notion of the Techno-Orient, not simply in opposition to Western stereotypes, but rather as a product of a history, very different from that which can be represented within the Western notion of the Techno-Orient.

*The Uncanny*, then, is a role model for a pedagogy of display that creates spaces for critical interpretations, and as such can be held up as an example of how the museum might more meaningfully take up its public mandate by providing thoughtful and critically rich interpretive possibilities that engage with issues that circulate in the public sphere. However, when we move into the gallery activities and public programs, many of the old ghosts of lack begin to appear again.

The Gallery Activities and Public Programs

The Gallery activities and public programs, as they were described in the grant application referred to above, fall into two categories. The first is in-gallery interpretation, including text panels; guided tours; hands-on experiences for adults,
children and families; and video presentation. The second is "other" programs, including lectures, artists' talks, web site production, community advisory groups, and collaborations. This range of programs offered to the public was loosely based on Gardner's multiple intelligences and different modalities of learning—there were opportunities to look, listen, read, watch, talk, and make things. Further, these offerings lean toward a model of working with community partners. Structurally, then, this program matrix fits Hooper Greenhill's (2000) call for a post museum and Roberts' (1997) call for multiple narratives. However, what I will attempt to demarcate here is the difference between creating a space of engagement as such and creating a space that guides the public toward critical interpretations of art. I will consider only the gallery talks and hands-on activities as supplements to a pedagogy of display.

Guided tours of the gallery's exhibitions were offered four times a day, two of them for The Uncanny exhibition. The tours were delivered by paid staff who, as mentioned above, were not privy to all of the subtle details and nuances of the exhibition as it had unfolded in team meetings. The tour guides—called Animateurs to distinguish them from the volunteer staff who deliver tours to schoolchildren—had been giving tours for a number of years. They possess a large repertoire of strategies for addressing the public, they are skilled at assimilating large amounts of diverse content quickly and efficiently, and they have a deep tacit knowledge of the diversity of people who visit the museum. The content of the tours was based primarily on the narratives of the exhibition catalogue—narratives which, as we have seen, were also mirrored in the text panels for the exhibition. It is in the content preparation, though, that the ghosts of lack began to appear and trouble the otherwise seamless supplement that the tours might have provided
for the public. The Animateurs were part-time staff. They were paid for eight hours of
research time, in which they were to read the catalogue and research the individual artists.
In addition, they attended two “brainstorm” sessions with their supervisors in which they
began to chart their routes through the exhibition and to choose their “stops”—those
places where they would engage in a version of object lessons. During the last few days
of the installation, the curator toured them through the exhibition, providing as much
contextual and specific information as could be crammed into two hours. With this in
hand, the Animateurs constructed their tours, tried them out with their supervisors as
“mock audience,” and, the next day, began giving tours to the public. Compared to the
years of research and discussion that had gone into producing the exhibition, the amount
of research and preparation time that these workers could devote to translating the “rich”
content to the public, let alone fostering critical debates, is disproportionate to an extreme
and attests to the ghosts of lack and to the museum’s persistent reluctance to invest in
those sites where the critical interpretation could take on a public presence. In Chapter
Five, I will discuss the importance of the both a longer-term commitment to the kind of
research I speak of and the importance of shifting the strategies deployed by the
Animateurs.

The second of the “gallery activities and public programs” that I look at here is a
“hands-on” area called the Open Studio. This is how I described the Open Studio in 1999
(Meszaros, 1999):

The Open Studio is a visitor-centred, interactive space designed as a hands-on
learning centre directly related to one or more exhibitions. It is nestled among the
gallery spaces, open during all gallery hours, and staffed by full-time Animateurs,
who welcome visitors, explain the activities, and generally use all of the tools available to them to facilitate whatever learning the visitors may be engaged in or about to embark upon. In its various incarnations over the past two years, the Open Studio has housed live bee colonies, plastic cadavers, a walk-in pinhole camera, a top-of-the line color photocopier, a quilt-making project, videotapes of Chinese television, computer stations, and, of course, an abundance of object-making projects from acrylic painting to paper making and body art.

On a physical level, the Open Studio creates a people-centred space within the object-centredness of the museum by including simple luxuries such as sufficient seating and natural lighting. On a referential or metaphorical level, the Open Studio is coded (i.e., decorated) with references to familiar sites such as the kitchen, living room, patio, the great outdoors, or the quintessential artist’s studio. In every respect the Open Studio creates a social space alongside the private and sometimes alienating space of the modernist gallery.9

Methodologically, the Open Studio is multi-model and multi-sensory. It is composed of non-threatening activities such as paper making that do not require what visitors often call talent or skill, as well as more sophisticated “Art” activities like drawing, painting, and collage. It is tactile, interactive, and diverse, containing music, videos, quiet reading corners, playful fun moments, and serious “teaching” moments. Embedded in this diversity is respect for difference,

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9 For further discussion of the coding devices of the Open Studio, see my article “Dialectics of Innovation” in Muse (1997).
including different kinds of prior knowledge; for example, sewing, threading needles, and using tools such as glue guns.

The Open Studio is densely packed with different ways of accessing information, content and meaning. In some respects, the Open Studio is like an UNZIP program on a computer: it is the tool that allows visitors to expand greatly compressed tracts of information, ways of knowing and understanding, tracts that they simply could not access through any other node in the matrix, but once accessed reveal immense possibility and profound connectivity.

The Open Studio for *The Uncanny* exhibition was built on those same principles assimilated from Gardner (1993), Hooper-Greenhill (1991) and Hein (1998), and embodied notions of self-directed learning. Its décor was based on the sci-fi cyber-bar, wall displays charted advances toward the cyborg body from eyeglasses to pacemakers, and there were three sets of "activities" designed for adults, but open to children. One of these invited visitors to make their own "cyborg" from dolls and a range of mechanical parts, another was a collaborative drawing activity, and the third invited visitors to make collages from photocopies of images of the cyborg.
This studio was staffed, but the staff—because they believed they were fostering open-ended learning experiences—spent most of their time managing the materials rather than engaging the public in dialogue about the kinds of things they were making in response to the exhibition. As a case in point the Open Studio for *The Uncanny* was all that Hein (1998) had described as the best of the constructivist museum, for it accommodated freedom of movement, comfort, competence (none of the activities required any particular “art skills”), control of the environment, and conceptual access, which Hein describes as the ability to associate the content of the museum with prior knowledge (pp. 158–61). The use of the Open Studio was high: 35 to 40 percent of all museum visitors were visiting it and half of those making things. The comment cards were glowing. Visitors seemed to be having fun, sponsorship money has been received, and colleagues from all over the world expressed great interest in this exciting version of “hands-on” learning for adults in the museum.
As a supplement to the pedagogy of display, though, the Open Studio was haunted by nearly every ghost of the past that I have mentioned so far. The Open Studio Animateurs acted as mothers, simply distributing materials and cleaning up; the ghosts of schooling and of its infantilized audience hovered around the “activities”—a veritable playing with dolls. The activities spoke of “lack” on almost every front. In their desire to be accessible to all, they lacked intellectual challenge and were reduced to cut-and-paste activities that surely attest to the “dumbing down” of content that education is often accused of. In their desire to offer comfort, they lacked the very spark of discomfort, the dissonance and disequilibrium, that educators since Festinger (1964) have held as necessary for learning. In their desire to create familiarity, they lacked the “wonder” of the unfamiliar and subsequently the “resonance” with the theme of The Uncanny. In their desire to create a Vygotskian social space of learning, they neglected to offer the Vygotskian more competent other. The activities therefore did not negotiate the space between the museum imposing its authority and fostering a self-consciously critical space of interpretation. Instead it simply abandoned the public to drift—but to drift pleasantly—among a sea of fun and cool activities.

Undoubtedly learning of various kinds did take place in the Open Studio, and the objects made there attested to ways in which the public had assimilated certain aspects of the “aesthetics” of the exhibition. Similarly, reports on conversations that took place there confirmed that Open Studio visitors did indeed talk about the exhibition while engaging in their activities, but the nature of these conversations was not recorded, and the Animateurs did not participate in these conversations in their role as educators. I suggest that the Open Studio, as both a case in point and an example of a larger trend toward installing these kinds of activity-based learning sites for adults, is the kind of supplementary programming that
needs to be heavily mediated by profoundly informed and experienced staff if activity is to open toward critically engaged interpretation of the artworks on display in the museum. The museum is primarily a site of consumption of art, in all of the best senses of that word, not the production of art. If the museum is interested, as many are, in running an art school, then that is where studio work—in all of its intensity with the materiality of art—should take place. If it is serious in taking up its interpretive responsibilities within activity based interpretive activites, then it needs to take up the challenges of pedagogical content similar to those described by Grauer (1999).

_The Uncanny_ project as a whole, then, provides a glimpse into the complexity and contradiction of a house that is haunted by many ghosts. It offers examples of how the museum both has and has not negotiated the complex spaces between its own authority—an authority that I suggest it can neither deny nor abdicate—and fostering the critical agency of the public.

I have used _The Uncanny_ project here as an example to establish that a pedagogy of display has arrived at a more critically engaged space of interpretation than have many of the interpretive programs for the public. I have suggested that the figure of the ghosts of lack and of schooling might be a rubric under which to gather a number of forces that have produced this situation. I have spent this time “facing” the ghosts of the supplement to a pedagogy of display because they organize the dominant discourses of the museum. However, I have also suggested that the discursive coordinates of museum education literature do not provide viable possibilities: The Open Studio embodied Hein’s suggested principles for the constructivist museum, and yet it offered a space that did not
house self-aware critical interpretation. It is time, then, to look elsewhere for possibilities.
Chapter 4

“Being-singular-plural” and “Co-appearance”

What else are they [the arts] but the exposition of an access concealed in its own opening. (Nancy, 2000, p. 14)

I have been addressing the ways that, through a pedagogy of display and the educational programs that are meant to supplement it, the art museum has constructed interpretive practices that oscillate between two poles: one that reinstates the museum’s own interpretive authorities, the other that abdicates interpretive responsibilities by fostering an uncritical consumption of art in the name of the no-longer viable notion of autonomy. I have attempted to demonstrate that although there is a whole range of complex histories and disciplinary practices that stake claims in either the museum’s own authority or in this kind of autonomy of the public, in fact neither of these positions works toward creating and sustaining a critical space of interpretation for the public. As such the ground upon which the art museum enacts its public responsibilities is fragmented and often contradictory. I have also been making the case that the way in which the museum imagines, constitutes, and administers to its public is symbiotically linked to these poles of authority or autonomy, and that these relationships are enacted differently from different sites within the museum. Lastly, I have suggested that the art museum is poised to make changes that might lead it toward embracing its public responsibility to make art public in a new and more profound way. It has begun to heed calls for public accessibility and for openness, but it has been struggling with ways to open the critical spaces of interpretation to the public. Current museum literature and the
museum’s interpretive practices that address the issue of intellectual access often posit solutions that only reinscribe and replicate the problems of authority versus autonomy.

What I propose here are new discursive coordinates for interpretation. These coordinates arise from theories that address the between. I will look at two different ways in which the spaces of the between have been theorized: Ricouer’s notion of “traders in time,” and Nancy’s ideas on “being-singular-plural” and “co-appearance.” I will look at how these have affected the new formations of community and the subject, and then suggest how these may be useful for the museum as a way of constructing spaces of critically engaged interpretation for the public. The museum already stumbles back and forth between these in the context of their practices; the question remains how to make sense and then begin to make use of that shuffle.

The whole of the postmodern project might be framed in terms of how to theorize, create, and begin to occupy the spaces between the mighty binaries of Western thinking. By the middle decades of the twentieth century, the long and enduring debates about interpretation had coalesced into two discernible positions: hermeneutics and structuralism. The hermeneutic position grew up around the premise that meaning is made in relation to the individual subject. There are two competing paths in hermeneutics: one follows Dilthey and sees interpretation as verstehen (understanding), as a method to be deployed in the historical and human sciences. The other path follows Heidegger (1962, 1971) and sees interpretation as an interaction between interpreter and text. That interaction is part of what we call understanding. Heidegger and Gadamer (1975) anchor mid-twentieth-century hermeneutics firmly within the notion that interpretation is part of the finite and situated character of all human knowing. This
hermeneutics is linked to and manifest in the grand philosophical traditions of the West, and is inhabited by notions of "being," "horizon," "intent," "desire," and "agency," and is metaphorically propelled by forces of various kinds, by circular movements, by movements toward, by pushes and pulls, and by becoming (Seldon, 1995).

The structuralist position, on the other hand, proceeds from the basis that only in and through the structures of signifying systems—social, semiotic, linguistic—can any kind of meaning be created. A number of streams lead toward/constitute structuralism, but all of them lead back to Ferdinand de Saussure and his *Course in General Linguistics*, published in 1915. In it, Saussure set out a number of principles that came to dominate the study of language; eventually, as more and more cultural productions began to be studied as if they were languages, these principles became a set of practices called structuralism. As Culler put it, structuralism "seeks to identify the conventions by which signifying practices produce its observable effects of meaning" (Culler, 1981, p. 48). As the great "other" to the hermeneutic position, structuralism was inhabited by notions of systems, codes, charts, and grids, and is metaphorically classified, enclosed, and charted within self-contained systems.

This binary framework that sets structuralism against hermeneutics is not as neat and clean as I have described it, but in fact underwent a number of critiques at the same time as each of the positions was being worked out. One of those critiques was manifest in the late 1960s in the work of Paul Ricoeur, a hermeneutic philosopher. Ricoeur posits that the problem of existence is given in language and therefore must be worked out in language, even though he anchors subjectivity in the body and material world (unlike Foucault and Derrida, who see subjectivity as an effect of language). Consequently, he
turns to the structuralists' work on language to see how it might help him think through what are inherently hermeneutical questions of understanding. From Saussure's time forward, language—and, eventually, culture in general—was studied as a synchronic system, as a snapshot existing outside of time. Although structuralism certainly acknowledged that change occurs, how that change occurred was of little interest or importance. Ricoeur was very interested in how change takes place and subsequently began an inquiry into the untheorized space between the successive synchronic pictures of structuralism.

On Ricoeur

Ricoeur's question concerned the conflicts of interpretation as they manifest in concepts of tradition and change. This inquiry is useful in relation to the spaces between authority and autonomy of interpretation that I have been charting here. He tells us that there are two kinds of temporalities associated with the notion of tradition. The first pulls meaning toward stabilization, canonizing it into mythology; this is a time of authority, of pure transmission, a synchronic time, exhausted and still (Ricoeur, 1974, pp. 27–61). The other temporality pulls tradition toward change, opening it to renewal, rejuvenation, and innovation, and exposing what he calls a “hidden time.” But according to Ricoeur, there is also a third time, one that provides a spark or a “temporal charge” that acts as a go-between, splitting time’s arrow, one path leading toward stability of meaning, the other toward possibility. This is his “time of interpretation.” In positing this notion of a time of interpretation, though, Ricoeur enmeshes it in two other cornerstones of structuralist thought: the “problem” of multiple meanings of signs, and the prioritization
of the study of the system of langue (langue) over the actual speech act or event (parole).

I will deal with multivocality first.

The problem of the inherent polyvocality of language and, also, as we have seen, of images has been with structuralism from the beginning. Simply put, the dilemma is this: if you build a system of meaning-making based on binary differences within a closed system, something rather mysterious happens on the way up the scale from phonemes to fashion. For example, take the words bat and cat. On the phonetic scale, the difference between bat and cat is described by the differences between the letters b and c: in this there can be no ambiguity. But on a semantic level, things get more complicated. How, for instance, can we know which bat this word is referring to? Is it the one that goes with baseball, or the winged creature that sucks blood and screeches in caves? On the level of discourse, how can we decide which of all of the hundreds of connotations of the word bat are being called upon, from an extraordinary achievement to vampire? The structuralist section of the library is lined with books that try to account for this fundamental ambiguity—and the argument is generally answered on all three levels by some reference to context (Bryson & Bal, 1991).

For Ricoeur (1974), though, polyvocality—what he calls “symbolism”—is not a “problem” that needs to be accounted for, but rather:

Symbolism... marks the breakthrough of language towards something other than itself—what I call its opening. This breakthrough is saying; and saying is showing. Rival hermeneutics conflict not over the structure of double meaning but over the mode of its opening, over the finality of its showing. This is the strength and the weakness of hermeneutics; its weakness because, taking language
at the moment when it escapes from its enclosure, it takes it at the moment when it also escapes a scientific treatment, which can begin only by postulating the closed system of the signifying universe. All other weaknesses flow from this one, and first and foremost the conspicuous weakness of delivering hermeneutics over to the warfare of rival philosophical projects. But this weakness is also its strength, because the place where language escapes from itself is also the place where language comes to itself, the place where language is saying... The relation of showing-hiding ... is a force which discovers, which manifests, which brings to light, a force which language utilizes and becomes itself. Then language becomes silent before what it says. (p. 67)

There are such ripe similarities here between a pedagogy of display and Ricoeur's description of the relation of showing-hiding as a force. A pedagogy of display is a powerful site of this showing-hiding where the structure of display becomes silent in order to communicate. Many of the problematic educative endeavours such as VTS or the Open Studio—even though they are meant to assist the pedagogy of display—might be described as delivering the pedagogy of display (and the art that it presumes to speak on behalf of) over to "rival philosophical projects" that do not and cannot attend to this opening toward meaning and instead "begin by postulating the closed system of the signifying universe." We have seen many examples of this, from an ideology of schooling to Yenawine's "not telling." But the question still remains: how can the museum be more attentive to this relation of showing-hiding, and in so doing create a space where the public might attend to opening of interpretive possibilities offered up by art? Ricoeur gives us a few hints.
For Ricoeur, as for Derrida and many others, words/texts/images have an inherent excess, an innate multivocality. But whereas Derrida sees this excess as play, as the perpetual deferral of meaning, Ricoeur suggests that over time, excess becomes confined, contained, and cramped into stable mythologies that move unceasingly toward stasis. However, this movement toward an authoritative telling, toward the stabilization of meaning, can be arrested and turned into potential. The temporal spark is ignited when the "word," the "trader between structure and event," is given new meaning in a sentence, and since the word survives the transitory instance of utterance, it holds itself available for new use. Thus, Ricoeur says, "heavy with a new use-value—as minute as this may be— it [the word] returns to the system. And in returning to the system, gives it a history" (Ricoeur, 1974, p. 93).

This is Ricoeur's "time of interpretation." It is a bifurcation, a passage between history and subjectivity, between *langue* and *parole*. It is Ricoeur's way of accounting for diachronic change within a synchronic system, of putting *parole* alongside *langue* in the act of interpretation, and of grafting structuralism onto hermeneutics. It is this graft, this making of a hybrid, that begins to topple the heady hegemony of the structuralist moment, and it is a similar graft that the museum has been struggling with.

For if we replace Ricoeur's "word" with "work of art," we have a fine picture of a critically engaged museum, in which the stability and authority of interpretation that is produced by the pedagogy of display, textual interfaces, and educative projects can be opened by and with the public through critical engagement, and there begin to circulate through this hermeneutic circle of interpretation. Using Ricoeur's picture, then, the space between authority and a critical agency of the public is opened and is occupied by
“traders between structure and event,” and I want to imagine that the sites of critical interpretation for the public are staffed by these traders between structure and event, trafficking interpretations, dealing in exchanges. I want to imagine trade routes, exchanges, switching, swapping between the pull toward authority and the pull toward autonomy. These are productive pictures for a site of critical interpretation for the public, and certainly some of the current programs might be seen in that manner, the way, for instance, the text panels for *The Uncanny* both directed and opened at the same time. However, this picture, as fruitful as it may be in terms of generating metaphors, is nonetheless one that conceives of the binaries of authority and autonomy as “givens” and does not work toward rethinking them.

On Nancy

Nancy, who studied with Ricoeur for a number of years, provides us with yet another and radically different picture of how the spaces of the *between* might be configured. He does this by re-addressing one of the enduring debates of Western philosophy—one that has conceptualized the individual’s autonomy as being in opposition to the authorities of community/society. Nancy is one of a group of contemporary thinkers, including Agamben (1993a, 1998), Badiou (2000), and Lacoue-Labarthe (1989), and Blanchot (1988), who have been attempting to theorize a political space of community that could exist between the poles of extreme individualism and failed attempts at communism. Like many thinkers in the postmodern project, they are trying to undo the hold that the autonomous “I” has had on thought. The philosophers in this particular group are rethinking the individual in terms of a commonality that does not
always and necessarily run the risk of heading into communism. This way of re-
imagining the space in between authority and autonomy can be of direct use in rethinking
the discursive coordinates of art museum interpretation and in re-imaging what the
museum might look like in the future. Here I will first outline Nancy’s “unworking” of
the individual/community opposition and his proposition of “being singular-plural.”
Following that, I will move into how this can be of use in the museum.

Nancy’s (1991) question, then, is not: what is it to be in a community? or: what is
a community? but rather: how is it that we are in-common? His thesis is that at the core
of Western political thinking there is a longing for an “original community,” for the
restoration of a transparent, small-scale community that might liberate us from the
alienation of modern society. He tells us that this schema of the return to the original
community has been used by many philosophers and social thinkers:

The lost or broken community can be exemplified in all kinds of ways and by all
kinds of paradigms: the natural family, the Athenian city, the Roman Republic,
the first Christian community, corporations, communes, or brotherhoods—always
it is a matter of a lost age in which community was woven of tight, harmonious,
and infrangible bonds and in which above all it played back to itself, through its
institutions, its rituals, and its symbols, the representation, indeed the living
offering, of its own immanent unity, intimacy and autonomy. (1991, p. 9)

Nancy suggests that we should be suspicious of this thinking about an “original
community” and an individual’s “authentic belonging” to that community, because these
ideas do not refer to any real time in history; they are rather a form of mythical thought,
an imaginary picture of our past. He argues that we need to do away with these ideas for
two reasons. One reason is that they are intertwined with the problematic of an autonomous and immanent selfhood—a no longer viable construct of a self-sufficient and self-governing individual who pre-exists all communal formations and decides independently whether or not she or he enters sociality. The other reason is that the logic of "original and authentic community," be it based on race, religion, or ideology, is founded on a fusional belonging that erases the individual as part of its work, as part of the process of community formation. The process of fusional belonging installs the autonomy of a community, which then produces and reproduces itself—this is what Nancy calls the "work" of the community, and in its most extreme case, this "work" results in the vicious totalitarianism of, for instance, Nazi Germany. Nancy's philosophical project is to "unwork" this persistent immanence of community by rethinking one of the oldest philosophical questions—that of "Being"—as a question of "being-in-common."

In order to come to his task of "unworking" this immanence of community as it is now configured, Nancy fashions the idea of "being-singular-plural" in which "singularity" is the inverse figure of Cartesian subjectivity (1991, p. 31). Whereas the Cartesian subject only discovers itself when it succeeds in isolating itself completely from other subjects and from the rest of the world, singularities always discover themselves vis-à-vis another person.

[Regardless of the theme of the individual, but beyond it, lurks the question of singularity. What is a body, a face, a voice, a death, a writing—not indivisible, but singular? (1991, p. 27)
"Singularity' would designate precisely that which, each time, forms a point of exposure (exposition), that which traces the limits on which there is exposure" (1991, p. 7). The key to Nancy's reformulation of the subject is the face-to-face encounter to which he links the "event of exposition." One immediate consequence of this encounter is a revision of the "case" of subjectivity. The face-to-face encounter does not reaffirm the fundamental, nominative priority of the "I," nor does it draw the self into the fusion of the first person plural, a larger "we." It posits a "singular-plural" being, where the encounter brings both singularity and therefore "being" into existence.

Nancy argues that the singularity of the subject does not, strictly speaking, "appear," as if it were a totally independent and isolated being, but rather that it can be said to "co-appear." This co-appearance is both what constitutes "being" and that which reinstates the singularity of the individual. There is, in Nancy's thought, no "being" without a "being with." Being is "being-singular-plural." Similarly, for Nancy "there is no meaning if meaning is not shared, that is shared-out" (pp. 2, 194). Meaning begins where presence (the immanent presence of the community or the individual as described above) "comes apart"; that is, when it is shared, where it is ex-posed.

Part of what I have been tracing here in the context of interpretation in the art museum is a very old tension between belief systems that emphasize and affirm either the agency of the individual over the society/culture/institution or vice versa. This concept of the singular-plural-being of co-appearance breaches the gap between the one and the many without reducing one to the other. For the museum, this is a very useful concept precisely because of the way co-appearance resists incorporation into either the authority of the museum's interpretation or, conversely, into the authority delivered over to the no
longer viable notion of autonomous individuals who make meaning completely on their own. Here I will address two ways in which singular-plural co-appearance can be of use to the museum in creating a critical space of interpretation. The first is how it can help the museum think about the public in a new way, how it can “unwork” the divisive or devouring notion of community. Two, how it can help the museum think about the “individual” in a way other than the sum of its statistical markers or demographic metres. Together these offer new ways of thinking about the possibilities for creating a space of critical interpretation in the museums.

Community: from work to “unwork”

Over the past decade or so, museums have begun to think about the public in terms of communities, and the way in which they have done this is central to their commitment to social responsibility. This movement toward thinking in terms of community has begun to distribute the authoritative voice of the museum in ways that were unimaginable even twenty years ago. However, what I will attempt to show here is that the museum’s current understanding of community as an “originary community” and “authentic belonging” need to be “unworked,” for in the end, this approach works against producing a space of critical interpretation.

10 The exhibition *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada’s First Peoples* opened at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta, on January 14, 1988. An exhibition of more than 650 Canadian Native objects drawn largely from foreign collections, it was part of the Arts Festival of the 1988 Winter Olympics. In its conception, *The Spirit Sings*, organized by the Ethnology Department of the Glenbow, was designed as an important vehicle to educate the Canadian people about the Native heritage of their country and to bring to light the wealth of Canadian Native materials held in foreign museums. The exhibition proved to be popular with the general public, but was boycotted by some Native organizations, some foreign institutions, and the Executive of the Canadian Ethnology Society.
The museum has taken up the word “community” in many ways. Definitions of it appear in the museum literature that describe it in relation to national and cultural identities (Anderson, 1983; Karp & Levine, 1991; Karp, 1992; Duncan, 1995). A different interpretation of “community” is embedded in the museum’s desire to engender “a place of belonging” (Kaplan, 1994; Hooper Greenhill, 1995) where individuals might be brought into a sort of communion with aspects of themselves. Yet another concept of “community”—one of an original and authentic community—is the ground upon which reconciliation in Australia and repatriation in Canada are taking place (Ames, 1990). Community, as a sum of its specific members, has become a handy way to summarize the diverse range of the museum’s public, so that they are unified under the rubric of the museum community. Community, as an operative concept, has become a tool through which new working processes and collaborative exhibition development are taking place, and subsequently a sharing of the museum’s authorial and interpretive power (Phillips, 2003). Community is a ubiquitous word in museum culture, but it is also a very complicated discursive operator.

The museum’s deployment of the word “community” is dispersed over a wide range of categories and practices, many of which blur the boundaries between, on one end of the spectrum, niche marketing strategies that define “community” as a cluster of addresses and lifestyles that are then bundled together as a “community” of people to whom goods and services can be sold; and, on the other end of the spectrum, “community” as a set of strategies of “social inclusion” that are often likened, particularly in England, to economic rejuvenation. Further, the concept of community has been a polite way to describe many of the forces of colonization that have been enacted through
the museum (Clifford, 1988); at the same time, it is used to describe the forces of
decolonization of the museum space and the politics of representation (Karp, 1992).

In the last decade or so, the notion of community has become a way to begin to
particularize the public, to think more specifically and locally about what is shown and
what is seen, and to think again about who counts and who is to be counted. Some of the
most shining examples of how rethinking the audience can change museum practices
have taken place in anthropology museums. Philips (2003), for instance, describes how
different models of collaborative exhibition design have begun to articulate an ethics of
the postcolonial museum in which the emphasis shifts from product to process (p. 158).
There is no doubt that these new models of collaboration in the production of exhibitions
and programs have contributed greatly to a sharing of decision-making power, and the
forging of new relationships between individuals and organizations. Above all, the idea
of community has provided ways for the museum to begin to disperse its interpretive
authority, to make interpretations other than its own available to the public and, in so
doing, has been a powerful force in opening the museum toward a self-consciously
critical space of interpretation.

There is an important aspect of the reinscription of authority that needs to be
accounted for when the idea of community is set to work in the museum. This
reinscription of authority is more complex than the transference of curatorial authority
into the hands of a particular community. As we have already seen, a myriad of often
contradictory gestures are at work in a pedagogy of display and in educational programs
where the museum tends to hold tighter and tighter to its silent and often shrouded
interpretive authorities the closer it gets to the public. Nancy offers us a way of
reconfiguring the relationships between community and subject so that this reinscription of authority does not always and necessarily take place.

Part of the “work” of the art museum has been to produce an art community, a community with common reference and common ability to both see and see through a pure pedagogy of display. This “authentic” art community, though, only becomes visible because there is an “other” community: the “public,” the “low other,” or “the educator’s public.” This “other” and the “art community” are in a symbiotic relationship. In this configuration of community, the work of the art museum is precisely to make these distinctions, to partition off “authentic belonging,” and to erect closures; and, as we have seen, these closures are exceedingly effective so that the museum’s gestures of openness in the end work to sustain closure for all but the art community. The “work” of the art museum, configured in this way, is the antithesis of working toward creating a critical space of interpretation for the public.

In conjunction with this, though, the “work” of the museum is also to produce a “museum community,” one that somehow and necessarily includes the “other” at the same time as it separates them from the “authentic art community.” Nancy describes this aspect of the “work” of community as “the laborious negotiation of a reasonable and disinterested image of community devoted to its own maintenance, which constantly reveals itself as nothing but the maintenance of the spectacular-market machine” (2000, p. 63). This, I think, describes the trajectory of the museum’s blockbuster exhibition and goes a long way to explain why so many forces have colluded to produce a persistent reluctance to provide an array of interpretive repertoires for the public, thereby ensuring that this community—the public—is differentiated from the “art community.” The work
of producing a public becomes a supplement to the "real activity" of producing an art community, and far too many of the museum's practices have worked toward producing and maintaining those divides.

Nancy's "unworking" of the immanence of community is helpful first as a critical frame, as a way to describe these operations to make them visible in a new way. But in conjunction with that, it also offers us a guide to practice, a way at the very least to begin to act in a direction of "unworking." How, then, can we move toward "unworking" a community that reproduces itself? How can we "unwork" the disciplinary boundaries within the museum that have divided the public into the art community and the others, the curator's public and the educator's public? How can we begin to "unwork" the pedagogy of display that always already works toward dividing the public into those who can "see" and those who can "see through"? How can we "unwork" the logic of the supplement so that it is not reproducing its own lack?

The "unworking" of the museum's definition of community can be aided by Nancy's concept of the "ex-position." The idea of community that Nancy offers rests on a fundamental event that he calls the event of "exposition." This ex-posing unlocks the individual from a collapse into immanent individualism that puts an "I" before the "we" of culture; at the same time, it unlocks the individual from a collapse into the fusional "we" of community. Nancy (1991) says:

[W]hat community reveals to me ... is my existence outside myself. Which does not mean my existence reinvested in or by community, as if community were another subject that would sublate me in a dialectical or communal mode. Community does not sublate the finitude it exposes. Community itself, in sum, is
nothing but this exposition. It is the community of finite beings, and as such it is itself a finite community. In other words, not a limited community as opposed to an infinite or absolute community, but a community of finitude. (p. 17)

Community, as Nancy wants to envision it, is neither an amalgamation of subjects (the demographic of the museum community) nor a promise of immanence (I find myself in the museum), nor a communion of individuals in some higher state (God, nation, state, and people), nor the product of any "work" to produce itself. In other words, community is very few of the things implied by the museum's current use of the word. But at the same time, I would argue that the art museum is the very site in which Nancy's sense of community as "unworking" can take place—and, at some ineffable level, already does take place. For art is one of the great "unworking" sites in culture—its epistemological and ontological status are a fundamental part of its content. Each artwork is the exposition of the opening toward the interpretability of art. Each act of interpretation is the co-appearance of a singular-plural being facing this opening toward interpretation. This takes place each time and each time differently. We may visit the museum repeatedly, we may revisit a particular exhibition or artwork, but we do so each time as a singularity, here with all of the pluralities that constitute an "eye" at this time and at this place in the face of this interpretable object called art. Art ex-poses singularity in all of its singular-plural splendour. The art museum is the site in culture where we can attend to the unworking of community, where interpretive reins are loosened, where interpretive muscle is produced, where we work out and work through the very singularity that Nancy speaks to. This would be a space where critical interpretation could be.
The art museum can move toward this kind of "ex-position" on an array of fronts. Administrative practices that create membership, special privileges, and special sites within the museum for those who fit the category of "authentic belonging" can give way to shared public space that honours singularity. Exhibition practices, particularly in contemporary art museums, have already moved beyond those practices that overtly re-essentialize race and gender, but they can certainly continue to haunt the more subtle levels of practices. Programmatically, the art museum can take co-appearance quite literally and construct discursive sites in the space of the museum where face-to-face conversation can take place.

Subjectivity: From the specific to the singular

The museum constitutes the individual as either subjected to the museum’s interpretive authority (in that they were either schooled in art or already able to both see and see through the pedagogy of display) or as a subject of a problematic notion of immanent selfhood (autonomous in its own authority, constructing meaning from an independent position—the wellsprings of an essential "I"). The tensions between these have been played out with admirable clarity on the terrain of visitor studies. From the moment that the museum was constituted as a public institution, there were clearly articulated and often repeated demands that the museum be accessible to all. This call for accessibility is connected to the development of tools that could measure and make visible the collection of subjects that comprised the museum’s public. The way in which visitor studies constituted and then subsequently administered to the "individual" produced another trajectory of practices that more often than not have diminished the possibility of producing critical interpretive spaces for the individual in the museum.
Here I will pick up the trajectory of visitor studies as it became a frequent practice in the museum, aware again that I am picking it up along the way of a much longer history in order to show how the museum again replicates its interpretive authorities.

The first phases of visitor studies were framed within a strictly behaviourist approach—observing the individual’s patterns of movement through the museum and documenting how long they stayed (Loomis, 1987, p. 14). By the 1960s, unobtrusive observation was combined with new interview techniques, and front-end analysis of exhibition design mockups. By the late 1970s, the pattern was set and more and more museums had begun to conduct visitor studies—collecting, as Loomis (1987) puts it, the “objective information about visitors’ identity, expectations, interests and motivation” that would help the museum make informed decisions (p. 2). This kind of work established a notion of what Ang (1991) called “the public as market,” arguing that “audiences only exist as an imaginary entity, an abstraction constructed from the vantage point of the institutions, they must be produced and invented, made and made-up … they are created by institutions and in the interest of the institutions” (pp. 2, 32).

Loomis (1987) also tells us that in the 1970s it become clear that educational objectives for exhibits could be defined in ways that permitted measurement, and with this measurement came the possibility of developing exhibits that would enhance visitor learning and participation (p. 27). This established a rubric of “the public in need of schooling” and shifted the work of visitor studies to the educational value of the museum visit, which, as we have seen, assisted in the already widespread colonization of the interpretive space of the museum by an ideology of schooling.
The work of the next generation of visitor studies evaluators (Hood 1989; Falk & Dierking, 1992; Weltzl-Fairchild, 1995b, 1999), though, began to dislodge the perception of the public as a demographic to be delivered to the institution (although some aspects of that still ring true of visitor studies today) or the faceless, easily duped masses in need of schooling. Instead they started to “individualize” the visitor, to characterize visitors’ experience in a number of ways that are qualitatively different from those employed by commercial and mass media apparatus. Attempts to install a specific individual at the heart of the museum experience have subsequently come in many forms: the individual as both recipient and producer of the museum experience (Falk & Dierking, 1992), the individual as the one who interprets work through narrative (Rumley, 1997), the individual who makes meaning through imagination and through conversation (Leinhardt, Crowley & Knutson, 2000) and through aesthetic experiences (Weltzl-Fairchild, 1995b).

These characterizations of the individual, though, as “one in a sample” that might be used to prove a theory of narrative, of imagination, of conversation, are individuated though a set of relations that Hallward describes as “specific” rather than “singular.” He makes this distinction in the context of postcolonial literature and sees the “specific” and the “singular” as two fundamentally different approaches to conceptions of agency and context, self and other, politics and particularity (Hallward, 2001, pp. xii–xiii). He tells us that until the advent of postmodernism, theoretical insight was usually defended in terms of its universal inclusiveness or its powers of generalization, and that this validated the use of one sample to stand in for the whole. This power of generalization was indeed the methodological ground upon which the work of visitor studies was founded and the
way in which a particular sample of visitors could be turned into the “public.” However, postmodernism has radically overturned this universalizing impulse. For the story of postmodern theory is, as Hallward declares, “a narrative driven by pursuit of the particular and contingent as opposed to the universal and the necessary. Postmodernism is precisely a theory of pure particularity or radical fragmentation ... a ‘plurality without norms’” (2000 p. 27).

Postmodernism, though, leaves us with an awkward choice between fully particularized, more or less essentialist accounts of culture and identity, and what Fanon called “people without an anchor, without a horizon, colourless, stateless, rootless—angels” (Fanon, cited in Hallward, 2000, fn 13). Ahmad observes:

[T]he tendency in cultural criticism is to waver constantly between the opposing polarities of cultural differentialism and cultural hybridity. We have, on the one hand, so extreme a rhetoric against Reason and Universality, and such finalist ideas of cultural difference that each culture is said to be so discrete and self-referential, so autonomous in its own authority, as to be unavailable for cognition or criticism from a space outside itself.... At the other end of the spectrum, we have so vacuous a notion of cultural hybridity as to replace all historicity with mere contingency; to lose all sense of specificity in favour of the hyper-reality of an eternal and globalized present. (Cited in Hallward, fn 14)

In Ahmad’s comment, we can hear echoes of Nancy’s critique of a community as immanent to itself “working” to reproduce its own immanence by producing its subjects. Like Nancy and Ahmad, Hallward sets out to reconfigure this map, and he finds the tools for that task in the emergent concept of the singular as opposed to the specific.
Hallward's use of the term "singular" is most useful here as a device to make the "specific" appear with more clarity and it is that notion of the specific that I want to bring forward as a relationship between the museum and its public that is in need of "unworking."

The specific mode of individuation, as described by Hallward (2001), belongs to an essentialist camp where identity is described in terms of belonging to a set and constituted by external relations: "Specific mode of individuation yields elements whose individuality can only be discerned through the relations they maintain with their environment and with others" (p. 4). This would be demonstrated, for example, in an "I" who was female not male, Canadian not American. This "I" is always relational: I am this as compared to that. The constraints that name and define me are external to me, or constituted as I speak to myself. The bourgeoisie’s self-constituting self that I described earlier would be a specific configuration, because they are formed by and in relation to the "low other" and to each other, and by the institutions that shape them. The specific mode of individuation dominates visitor studies and, as we have seen, is one of the dominant modes of individuation in many of the museum's interpretive programs. This specific individual is part of a statistical set, either a tourist or a local, either alone or with a group, either a novice or an advanced viewer, and so on. It is this notion of the specific that continues to deliver the public to the museum as a market to be schooled or "worked" into a community. As such it leaves little room for thinking about a space of critical interpretation.

For Hallward, the singular mode of individuation is a much more creative and constitutive site: "the singular mode of individuation proceeds internally, roughly through
a process that creates its own medium of existence or expansion” (Hallward, 2001, p. 4). Now, what is so telling about this characterization of the singular is that it demonstrates just how difficult it is to think about individuation without resorting to the self-constituting “I” that is either immanent to itself or being acted upon or co-opted by the forces of authoritative relations. Again, Hallward’s use of the singular is most effective as a way to bring the “specific” into sight, but does not offer much in the way of opening unto how the singular might operate. He suggests that the market economy is an example of a singular institution in the sense that it is neither specific to any particular “outside” place nor constrained by any logic outside the immanent criteria of its own operation (p. 3). Nancy, on the other hand, regards singularity as that being which is always a being-singular-plural, and as such unties the oppositional relationship between individual and community. From this place we can only think “with.” He says that what is at stake is no longer thinking:

beginning from one, or from the other, beginning from their togetherness,
understood now as the One, now as the Other, but thinking, absolutely and
without reserve, beginning from the “with.” (2000, p. 34)

Nancy, Hallward, and Ricoeur each offer different ways both to conceptualize and to inhabit the spaces in between constitutive power and agency, between the poles of authority and autonomy. Ricoeur imagines this space as a highway of sorts where traffic moves between two poles that are constituted by forces or pulls. We reside there as “traders in meaning,” moving once in one direction and once in another. This, I think, serves as a valuable way to think about interpretation in the museum but also as a way to think about the whole museal project. For in many respects the museum is the shuttle
between, on the one hand, the artists and the disciplines of art that make art and produce
the interpretive repertoires that make it art, and, on the other hand, the public who make
art “live” in the public sphere. The museum is a “trader” in meaning, carrying interpretive
repertoires from one domain to another. In small and hopeful increments, this space
between is becoming a two-way street where the wisdom of the academy is no longer
simply channelled into the public via the museum as a transmission model would have it.
This is the kind of museum that I am lobbying for and *The Uncanny* offers us a glimpse
of how the two-way street might operate. For it looked at the way in which the image of
the cyborg circulated in both popular culture and the world of high art, and then offered
that image of the shuffle between them as a discursive frame—and only one frame—
through which the public could enter into this commerce of meaning that surrounds and
sustains art.

Nancy gives us a place of co-appearance, a place more intimate than *between*, a
place of the “with” that is neither fusional nor additive. He offers us a picture that begins
to erode the very poles that anchor Ricoeur’s model. Nancy’s concepts of co-appearance
and being-singular-plural—where all of plurality brings each singular being into
existence—provides both difficult and, I believe, very important apertures through which
to view the museum. It is difficult because Western thought and the languages in
which/through which it lives are so tenaciously structured on the binaries that keep the
singular and plural in opposition to one another, that there are indeed no single words,
nor even traders that could speak to the concept. Instead, Nancy gives us a rather cranky
“being-singular-plural” to remind us just how hard it is to think this thought of “with” in
all of its subtlety and profundity.
Nancy’s work can be useful to the museum because it offers a way out of the binaries and slippery doublings that happen when the museum posits the stalwart self-constituting “I” at the centre of their interpretive practices. This “I” either works to produce closure around the art community because they can both “see” and “see through” and because it is their “work” to produce closure, or it posits the “I” who is only speciously free to “make their own meaning” but who consistently falls prey to the museum’s authoritative reign over them by ensuring either that access to interpretive repertoires is either denied or that “one” (as in VTS) is offered as the only “one.” I want to imagine what art museum interpretation might look like if it started with co-appearance, with “with” instead of “for” the public, with “being-singular-plural” rather than the problematic figuration of autonomy.

Art is the quintessential case of being-singular-plural. Part of what designates it as art is its very uniqueness, its “oneness,” and part of what designates it as art is its purposeful openness to interpretation so that even once it has been made, it continues to manifest its singular-plurality in the face of its own interpretability. As I have mentioned, art is a singular-plural configuration because it takes all of art and all of its forms of interpretability to make it art. Interpretation, too, is a singular-plural act, each time and each time differently. It is this—the essential openness of art—that bolsters a tenacious belief that a pedagogy of display somehow honours that openness by not crowding it with something else, by not supplementing it with words, or with “information surround”—even though for centuries the museum has known that this pedagogy more frequently teaches people “their place in cultural hierarchies” rather than offering them interpretive repertoires that open toward or enter into art. I want to imagine that there are other ways
to open that most fecund and expansive interpretability of art. It is to that most
pleasurable space of imagination that I now turn, face to face with my experience, my
bibliography, and, above all, with the hope that the museum can and will rise to this call
to take up its interpretive responsibilities, to make art public in all of their singular-plural
configurations.
Chapter Five

A self-consciously critical space of interpretation

But meaning as an opening does not open unto the void, any more than it infinitely
tends toward its fulfillment. It opens directly onto us. It designates us as its
element and as the place of its event or advent. (Nancy, 1998, p. 65)

I am proposing that in order to create self-consciously critically engaged spaces of
interpretation for and with the public, the museum needs to take up a tripartite schema
where “being-singular-plural” and “co-appearance” comes to guide the museum’s
actions. The first part of this schema entails a shift in the discursive coordinates of
museum interpretation, one that works toward making the polemics of interpretation as
such, and a number of different interpretive repertoires more visible and available to the
public. The second asks that this process be facilitated by professionally trained and
highly qualified museum staff who would spend their time in conversation with the
public in the gallery spaces. The third suggests that the physical spaces of galleries need
to be rethought so as to accommodate this level of discursivity with the public. These
calls for change will make significant demands on the current museum, for they require
substantial and ongoing commitment to processes that go far beyond a pedagogy of
display. These changes will go a long way toward producing sites where the very
fecundity of art might be made public—physically and intellectually.

The art museum produces and sustains highly critical and intellectually rigorous
debates with and among the art communities, and this is a very important part of its job. I
am not suggesting here that the museum abandon the art community in favour of the
public—that would simply reinstate all of the hierarchies and binaries that I have been
trying to unwork here. On the contrary, it is in the context of the debates and exchanges
by and with the art community that the making of art and its interpretations takes place. The art museum is, as Conn (1998) suggested, an institution that continues to produce new knowledge. What I suggest here is that there is a way to both honour that and to “unwork” it at the same time. That unworking commences when the museum begins to identify the interpretive repertoires that have been silent and embedded, and therefore accessible to only a few, and make them available to a much wider spectrum of the public. Then that would be the site of critical engagement with the interpretive repertoires that frame and position a particular encounter between art and a visitor to the museum. I am calling upon the museum to re-create itself as a site of critical interpretation for and with the public. Change of this magnitude can be called for in text but can only be enacted through and with the museum’s staff. Change, therefore, must begin there.

One of the first areas that needs to be addressed is the hold that a pedagogy of display has had on the way the museum thinks about interpretation for the public. The first chapters of this text begin to map the complex operations that are buried in a pedagogy of display, to demonstrate how the museum’s current strategies for opening that display only reinstate its closed authorial powers, and to suggest that they do so because they operate from a no longer viable notion of the autonomous individual. Here, though, I want to move toward an imagined space of the future, where the singular-plural form of individuation might offer new possibilities.

Currently the work of the museum’s interpretive staff is dispersed amongst the content of many different exhibitions per year—a system almost guaranteed to ensure a lack of depth. If, however, the staff were to focus on a particular interpretive repertoire
over the course of a year or so, this kind of surface knowledge about a plethora of specific exhibitions could be changed into a much more in-depth knowledge, along with a range of strategies more along the lines of a singular-plural configuration. By interpretive repertoires, I mean bodies of ideas and groups of concepts such as "thresholds," "alterity," "singularity," "sovereignty," or "mimesis." This interpretive repertoire, which is larger than a theme, although it certainly thematizes in a certain way—would address the way one cluster of thinkers have conceptualized interpretation and meaning-making. It would reverberate with a number of exhibitions throughout the year and, whenever possible, with at least two concurrent exhibitions, but certainly would not have to address all of the museum's projects. Further, one of the key thinkers in this cluster would need to be an educational theorist, for above all there needs to be congruence between what kind of interpretive repertoires are offered and how they are offered to the public. This, then, could be "one" repertoire, but one that is already singular-plural because of the way it gathers a group of thinkers, exhibitions, and processes together and therefore, from the outset, sidesteps the dangers inherent in relying on one specific strategy such as VTS that is based on one person's work.

The concept of "thresholds" would have been an appropriate interpretive rubric for The Uncanny, for it relates to the cyborg as a figure that is at the threshold of human and machine. It also resonates with a number of other exhibitions that took place that year: Stan Douglas' work as operating on the threshold of photography and film; and This Place, an exhibition that looked at Vancouver as a city on the threshold between the West and the East. "Thresholds" is interpretively rich and deeply implicated in the art world, but a concept that moves well beyond that community as well. Thresholds—from the
Deleuzian plane of immanence, Merleau-Ponty’s chiasm, to the transgendered or cyborg body—is a theme that already circulates in both academic and popular culture and, in that sense, is already available to the public in some way, yet it is one that culture is not yet done with and that is therefore open to ongoing critical engagement. Further, the threshold has been taken up by educational theory in terms of Pratt’s (1998) perspectives on teaching; Giroux’s (1994) border pedagogies, McLaren’s (1995) critical pedagogy, and Gadotti’s (1996) pedagogy of praxis, and as such offers important and viable strategies for practice. Giroux (1994), for instance, reminds us that in the context of identity politics the struggles over a pedagogy of representation that we will have to: 

[r]e-work the relationship between identity and difference as part of a broader struggle over institutions and ideologies designed to extend and deepen greater forms of political, economic, and cultural democracy. Such a struggle demands a profoundly more sophisticated understanding of how cultural workers can address the productive dynamics of pedagogy....(italic added). Finally, any attempt to connect the issues agency, ethical responsibility, and representational pedagogy must work self-consciously within the often overlooked tension between being politically committed and pedagogically wrong. (1994, p. 52)

The kinds of pedagogical strategies proposed by the critical pedagogues, and the courage to say that one can have good intent and be pedagogically wrong, offer the museum a way to articulate the spaces between its rhetoric of accessibility and the practices that sustain inaccessibility, and more importantly here, a way think through the singular pedagogic strategies that can be manifest in the context of a theme such as thresholds. This way of thinking about the kinds of interpretive repertoires that might open toward a
more critically engaged encounter with each one of the exhibitions is, again, a singular-plural configuration. For it "unworks" the immanence and self-contained nature of each specific exhibition project or a "universal looking strategy" such as VTS, while at the same time providing the plurality that makes the singularity of each of those exhibitions, each pedagogical strategy, and each artwork appear.

This focus on one interpretive repertoire for a year would also provide a critically engaged anchor of sorts around which the interpretive staff could begin to both focus and intensify the research and the kind of preparation they undertake, and, more important, a way to begin to take up that research along with the public. Here is how that could happen. The first phase of preparation, beginning about two years in advance, would be to commission a literature review (this is rarely part of standard interpretive practice, even though the museum hires consultants for many other specialized tasks). This would provide the museum with key issues, texts, and possible lecturers and guest speakers. Next, possible partners would be identified: universities, colleges, other galleries, and many different cultural organizations that might find resonance in the theme of "thresholds." The purpose of these partnerships would be to gather together intellectual resources but also to begin sharing and dispersing the resources across and through different kinds of social formations. Then, about eighteen months in advance, the interpretive, curatorial, and marketing staff would begin their preparation. This could take the form of monthly "seminars" on key issues/texts, some of which would be led by gallery staff but more frequently by others who are intimately familiar with the field. Lectures associated with the theme would be open to the public. Each of the staff seminars would have a "with the public" section that discussed how these ideas might be
made available to the public in the pedagogy of display, in conversation with the public, as part of a program matrix, and in relation to publicity and promotion. In addition, the programs that are designed for specific audience groups—lectures, symposia, teacher training—could also take up the theme, building both a critical mass and more sustained engagements amongst these groups. By the time the year of the “threshold” begins, then, the staff and key audience constituents are already poised in a way they never have been to both provide and foster critically engaged interpretive spaces for the public. What is key here is that in many respects the staff is coming to these ideas along with the public—albeit at this point still small groups of the public—but the goal is nonetheless that this leaning happens together, that the staff is not the informed expert. This is, of course, a radically different model compared to the traditional exhibition model I described earlier, in which the content and certainly any interpretations of the exhibition were kept “secret,” sequestered in the curator’s office until they were ready for the “show.”

This kind of preparation of the interpretive staff answers to three key areas of lack that I discussed earlier. The first is the lack of intellectual capital that has been associated with the educative enterprise of the museum, for instead of dwelling on the method, this kind of approach would work with the contested issues that prop up and sustain certain methods—methods, such as VTS, that allow for only certain kinds of interpretations to be produced and to circulate. This process would bring the staff group into direct dialogue with key contemporary thinkers/texts of our time, rather than encountering “great thinkers” through second- and third-hand texts that are redeploying them to other ends. This is a key component of creating critically engaged spaces of interpretation for the
public, and one which the museum can no longer ignore by circulating outdated modes of interpretation.

This process also addresses how the spectre of schooling might be tackled. I am aware that the language I have used to describe those processes (literature reviews, seminar) is borrowed from the university, and that the academy has a similarly doubled relationship to schooling. It is both a site that reproduces the dominant discourses of its own power structures and at the same time the site that "unworks" those discourses (consider, for instance, the disputes that erupted in the academy at the time when feminism and women's studies were struggling to be validated there: they erupted "in" the academy). I offer this doubled process, though, not as a way to eradicate the spectres of schooling or somehow to bypass the logic of the supplement—which, as Derrida has shown, is not possible, for the supplementary process simply continues, folding into the logic of difference—but rather as a way to keep careful watch on all of the sites and processes that harbour the ghosts of schooling (and undoubtedly there will be many ghosts born of "thematizing" that I put forward here). To be critically engaged with contemporary theory and to be well versed in the history and range of interpretive repertoires that work toward the "scattering" of art's boundaries, means also to be well versed in the current epistemological and educational debates. All the while this preparation is taking place, the interpretive staff would already be "on the floor," working with the public and with these ideas, slowly and incrementally changing, revising, reworking, and rethinking the "work" that they do. Equipped with this kind of theoretical and experiential knowledge, the interpretive staff would no doubt be able to track down
and face the ghosts of schooling even as they reappear (as ghosts do) in these new critically engaged practices.

The third issue that this process would begin to address is the way in which many of the current interpretation practices have infantilized or “schoolified” the public by frequently offering them “activities,” by reminding them that they are in need of discipline (the overwhelming presence of the security guard as compared to the interpreter), or that they are in need of instruction (“Bruce Grenville sees a connection … and thinks you should too”). The latter point is perhaps the one point on which this call for a self-consciously critically engaged site of interpretation for the public will turn. For the museum that I am imagining does indeed have a range of interpretive strategies that the public most likely does not possess, and the public does not possess them yet because it is the museum’s job to make them public. What I have been suggesting here is that the museum needs to face up to that responsibility, and face up to it by sharing it, by offering it visibly and tangibly to the public for what it is—a number of different ways to interpret art. A staff that does this thoughtfully, generously, and in light of a singular-plural configuration will produce sites of critical agency for and with the public.

Lastly, and perhaps foremost from a ruthlessly practical point of view, the preparation processes that I have put forward here are functionally possible—and possible starting today. It asks only eight to ten hours a month from each of the staff involved—time that can be garnered by doing away with many other “activity”-based projects for adults. Over time, the intellectual capital and cumulative knowledge of this group will ensure that the art museum no longer falls prey to the critique that Conn
levelled at “other” museums: that they disseminate old knowledge rather than creating new knowledge.

But now that we have a group of well-prepared, critically engaged staff, the question is: what do they actually do in the gallery space? I hold that human, face-to-face interaction should be the dominant form of interpretive interface. These interactions would need to take place both in the exhibitions proper, in the form of tours and talks, and in specially designated conversation spaces. I will address the physical spaces first, for this focus on discussion demands a different kind of attention to the layout of the exhibition spaces. Many galleries have notoriously bad acoustics, and if the museum is to become a more conversational site, this needs to be addressed and can be done so with sensitivity to placement of false walls, and the use of baffling materials and appropriate public address systems. Further, the integration of a discursive format into a pedagogy of display would demand that much greater attention be paid to public conversation points in the installation plans. The “theme of the year” could act as one of the structuring devices for the spaces, so that the gathering spots for the tours would take place at the thresholds of the exhibition—at the entrance, at the transitions, and at the exit; and philosophically the tours would point to those moments in artworks that are pushing at its limits: the thresholds, the borders of art, of culture and of understanding. Further, the space in which the discursive coordinates of the exhibition are framed by the juxtaposition of artworks needs to be installed in such a way that even in a fairly large group of people, the pieces would still be visible. Further, there are moments in each exhibition when the pedagogy of display is either very forceful or sometimes very subtle, but absolutely key to the message of the exhibition. These spaces themselves need to
accommodate larger conversation groups so that such poignant moments can be opened in different ways.

Lastly, there is a need for designated conversation spaces—spaces that are physically similar to the Open Studio but not filled with "hands-on activities." I imagine a place where one can have a cup of coffee and talk with the museum staff about the art and its interpretations, operating the way that "going for coffee after a class" provides a space in which to continue a conversation, work out ideas, or just review what happened. I suggest, too, that this kind of space could be deployed as a overt site of schooling, again facing the fact that the museum does possess interpretive repertoires that it wants to share with the public. Here, then, mini-lectures can take up the "information surround" in a critically engaged manner. Think, for instance, how fruitful it could be to have regular "mini-lectures" on biography in the context of a Frida Kahlo or Andy Warhol exhibit. This lecture could provide the very information in which the public is interested but which the museum is reluctant to offer through its precious few text labels, and at the same time it could contextualize this information, problematizing it as a dominant interpretive framework, but then offering other frames under the rubric of the "thresholds" between public and private, between persona and identity. By the time visitors arrive in this space, they may have encountered the notion of thresholds elsewhere in the museum, either on the tours and mini-talks in the gallery that have woven the notion of thresholds into those discussions with the public, or in advertisements, newsletters, or newspapers—and the chances of that encounter increase as the year goes on. With this, then, the museum begins to build a cumulative understanding that until now has been very difficult to build into the temporal spaces of
the museum. It is this kind of accumulation and access to a number of different interpretive repertoires that opens a space of critical engagement and can lead to the very kind of agency that the museum has been attempting to posit but which is haunted by silent authorities.

This kind of human interface would need to be thoughtfully intertwined in and around exhibition spaces so as to ensure that there are always three different routes the public can take through the exhibitions: one "with" museum staff, one without museum staff and one that allows for flexibility. In the desire to provide human interface, it is important not to hurl the pendulum in the opposite direction, and in the desire to create a critically engaged space, not to forget that it is a space of the experience. Lachapelle, Murry, and Neim (2003) put forward a pedagogical model of "informed experience" developed in the context of a number of studies they conducted with the public that that can be of use. In what follows here, I give a brief overview of the "informed experience," and then suggest how it might form part of a configuration that opens toward spaces of critically engaged conversations with the public.

Lachapelle, Murry, and Neim's (2003) model is based on the interaction between two very different kinds of learning: experiential and theoretical. They argue that when these two types of learning are deployed in tandem, they have tremendous potential to foster a new understanding of art (p. 84). Even though they can be deployed in tandem, they are most often experienced in a sequential or spiralling fashion. Works of art, they argue, "must be experienced" first. This experiential learning consists of three kinds of knowledge. The first, "mediating knowledge," includes all of the forces of acculturation, experiences, and memories that act upon us and provide initial access and response to the
work of art. The second is “objectified knowledge,” information located in the object and the things that make it concrete and perceptible. The authors make the case that “objectified knowledge consists of the ideas and feelings that are communicated by the artist through the process of creation” (p. 86). I suggest that these, too, are socially mediated, but I agree with the conclusion that they draw: that art embodies ideas. The interactions between “mediated” and “objectified” knowledge produce constructed knowledge. Constructed knowledge is the outcome of the first phase of experiential learning, and it results in an interpretation of the work of art. This is the kind of learning that a pure pedagogy of display both relies on and fosters.

The next phase is “theoretical learning,” in which viewers take advantage of the insight and knowledge of others in order to further their understanding of the work of art. Although I thoroughly support the idea of “theoretical learning,” I disagree with their definition of what constitutes theoretical knowledge:

Theoretical knowledge is organized according to traditional disciplinary boundaries relating to the scholarly study of artistic production, art history, art criticism, and aesthetics. Theoretical knowledge must be logical, unified and well articulated. It must provide the concepts that will assist the viewer to separate fact from fiction, to eliminate any stereotyped ideas from his or her thinking, and to go beyond premature conclusions and initial, tentative inferences about the meaning of work of art. In sum, theoretical knowledge must provide the means by which the viewer achieves a new and more satisfying understanding of the work of art based on a synthesis with the evidence observed in the work of art. Theoretical knowledge helps the viewer to stand back from his or her initial
viewing experience in order to see the work of art more clearly. It provides "the bigger picture": a panoramic view of the work of art, and situates it within the context from which it originated. (pp. 89-90)

This description of knowledge does not resonate with postmodernity's relentless erosion of the boundaries that organize disciplinary knowledge, or with the repeated affirmations that knowledge is partial, fragmented, and contingent. Postmodernity would bridle at providing "the bigger picture"; it is rather just "a picture." Further, this way of positioning "theoretical knowledge" as the master narratives of the Western world that give us uncontested "truths" simply reinstalls them in the very position of authoritative knowledge that the museum needs to leave behind if it is to create sites of critical agency in the museum. However, even though I have a fundamental disagreement with Lachapelle, Murry, and Neim about what constitutes theoretical knowledge, I nonetheless call upon their model precisely because it acknowledges the importance of theoretical knowledge in the context of art museum experiences. This is in contradistinction to the dominant educational strategies that argue against the importance of theoretical knowledge in art experiences. Examples of that are evident in VTS, as well as in Roberts' (1996) personal narratives and McKay and Monteverde's (2003) dialogic looking.

The last stage of Lachapelle, Murry, and Neim's model is what they call "reconstructed knowledge," where the learner integrates "constructed" knowledge and "theoretical knowledge":

Through the reconstruction of knowledge, the viewer's personal meaning for the work of art (embodied in constructed knowledge) enters into a dialogue with the
public meaning of the work of art conveyed by disciplinary (theoretical) knowledge. The result is a new meaning for the work of art: one that, at least in part, is socially shared by the viewer and all other contributors. (p.91)

The pressing need to integrate theoretical knowledge into the museum was articulated by Bennett nearly a decade ago when he described the relation between art theory and the museum’s interpretive practices this way:

Those interventions into the space of the art museum which seek to take issue with the exclusions and marginalizations which that space constructs, will need, in constructing another invisible in the place of “art”, to give careful consideration to the discursive forms and pedagogic props and devices that might be used to mediate these invisibles in such a way, to recall Bourdieu and Darbel, as to be able to give “the eye” to those who cannot “see”.... The question of the role of theory in art museums is thus not one that can be posed as abstract; it is inevitably tied to questions of museum didactics and hence to the different publics which different didactics imply and produce. (Bennett, 1995a pp. 172, 173)

Bennett, however, did not provide any direct suggestions, but did I think, offer a hint when he chastised the interpretive interventions into the art museum as “another invisible.” Further, it demonstrates just how entrenched the pedagogy of display, with its allowed few square feet of text panels (what he calls museum didactics) was, and I suggest still is, as the primary mode of interface between art and the public. For text was, even for Bennett who is perhaps one of the most thoughtful and rigorous museum critics, the only form of interface he forwards. So, although my proposal—which is to ensure that professionally trained and highly skilled people might be better placed, willing and
able to make theory/interpretive repertoires “visible” to the public, and that in so doing the museum might create self-consciously critical spaces of interpretation for and with the public—might not seem so radical, if it did not push against an extraordinary array of the museum’s habits (a pedagogy of display is what the museum does to make art public); so many entrenched practices (experiential knowledge is the way the museum ensures interpretive autonomy of its visitors); so many of its theoretical frames (the curator is plentitude, the educator is lack); so many of its discursive frames (universal four-step looking strategies over theoretical diversity); so many of its financial priorities (pay the party planners but not the interpreters).

Even in the face of this, or more accurately because I have faced this array of ghostly forces and enfolded pressures that bear upon the art museum, I can imagine a museum that begins each day anew to “unwork” those forces. I can imagine a museum that willingly and critically embraces its interpretive responsibilities toward the public. I can imagine a museum that acknowledges the interpretive authority that it already possesses and in owning it begins to share it with and in the public sphere. I can imagine a museum where “being-singular-plural” is no longer a cranky collection of words but goes by many familiar names. I can imagine a museum of critical agency where the public enters and scatters art’s interpretive threshold each time and each time differently.

This museum begins with the cost of less than one day a month.
Conclusion

This dissertation has proceeded from the premise that the art museum has a particularly important responsibility to carry out in a democratic society. Its task is “to make art public,” that is to move art—and the interpretive apparatus that support and maintain it—from the relatively private spheres of the artist’s studio and the academy into the public realm so that it may live and circulate there as part of a larger art ecosystem. In the post-modern milieu and in line with Bryson (1983), Greenberg, Ferguson & Nairne (1996) and Holly & Moxy (2002) where the “artness” of art resides just as much in its interpretability as it does in the physicality of the object, the museum is faced with the even more difficult task of making the art object—as a cluster of the interpretive repertoires that have created and sustained it as art—available to the public. I have argued that the museum can do this by creating self-consciously critical spaces of interpretation for the public. These sites begin to emerge when the museum undertakes a critique of its own interpretive positions, considers both the kinds of interpretive repertoires that it offers to the public and the manner in which these are presented, and when it begins to attend to the spaces between its conceptions of interpretive authority and autonomy, between its claims and its actions.

As the art museum currently operates, though, it supports autonomous critical praxis only for a small sector of the public, for those who are already deeply conversant with and often directly engaged in producing the critical apparatus that is available for the unworking and untying of art’s boundaries. The “rest of the public” are offered interpretive strategies that are contained and restrained by the museum’s tenacious belief
in a transparent pedagogy of display. Although this pedagogy is thought to foster an autonomous viewer, one who is not subjected to the influence or weight of the museum’s authoritative prowess, what I have sought to establish here is that this pedagogy doubles back onto itself, categorically restricting the interpretive possibilities offered to the public and therefore curtails the critically engaged spaces of interpretation that it proposes to open.

I have also suggested that there is a persistent reluctance on behalf of the museum to develop critically engaged sites for the public, and I have tracked how this reluctance manifests historically in both the discourses and practices of museum interpretation and educational activities. For example, I have tried to demonstrate that when the museum justifies promoting only one interpretive frame, or when it bolsters a laissez-faire position toward interpretation by championing predominantly experimental knowledge and personal narratives, that it is indeed working against the creation of critical engagement, and therefore abdicating one of its most fundamental responsibilities, which is “to make art public.” The museum that I call for here can no longer posit a thin notion of constructivist learning such as the kind manifest in the Open Studio as an excuse for maintaining a pedagogy of display as the sole or even as the primary interface between art and the public—for it is a pedagogy that repeatedly inscribes a binary and doubled relationship between its own authority and the autonomy of the public.

In light of this critique, and in relation to the important role of the museum in culture, I have presented three strategies that can help the museum begin to generate spaces of critical interpretation for the public. These strategies have to do with the discursive, the practical and the physical sites of interpretation in the art museum. The
first of these is an assessment of the discursive coordinates that have framed the museum’s understanding of its interpretive responsibilities to the public. With this appraisal, I have begun to unravel the hold that a pure pedagogy of display has had on museum interpretation and question if schooling is the appropriate rubric through which to conceive and construct the interpretive role of the museum. I have presented an example of how, in turning to contemporary thinkers, the museum might find discursive frames more conducive to critical praxis. In so doing, I have offered the museum a way to align the discourses that anchor its interpretive practices with the contemporary art productions that it seeks to interpret, and a way to align its discourses and its task which is to make art—and the interpretive discourse that make it art—available to the public.

Nancy’s work was used as one example of how new discursive frames can be useful to the museum. His work affords a way out of the binaries and slippery doublings that occur when the museum posits the stalwart self-constituting “I” at the center of its interpretive practices. For this “I” is either part of an art community that produces closure around itself by ensuring a pedagogy of display can be seen and seen through only by its own members or this “I” is the one who is only speciously free to “make their own meaning” but one who consistently falls prey to the museum’s authoritative reign. The museum maintains its power over the latter by ensuring that access to critically engaged interpretive repertoires are either denied or offered as the one and only way to establish meaning (as was the case with VTS of Yenawine and Housen). Nancy has re-worked the persistent philosophical problem of the individual versus society, and proposed instead a “singular-plural” configuration between them, one that acknowledges both without
erasing either. This configuration has been a generative one for me, helping me to re-think the spaces between authority and autonomy in a more productive and fruitful way.

The second proposal that I have forwarded here is that the spaces of critical engagement in the art museum are profoundly discursive and as such the exhibition spaces need to be staffed by people who possess exceptional pedagogical skills, deep knowledge about art, and who are at ease with the complex new discursive coordinates outlined above. These kinds of people, unfortunately, are not readily available for hire and therefore I have offered a practical and sustainable plan for how the museum can foster the development of just such a staff group. This is a key point in light of the critique of a pedagogy of display that I have outlined here, for the museum can no longer substantiate the claim that it is rising to its public responsibilities while it turns over one of its primary roles—to make art public—to volunteer labour or to underpaid and underqualified contract staff. Further, I have suggested that a long-term commitment and sustained engagement with one particular interpretive repertoire/theme is one way to address a number of problematic areas in museum interpretation. This kind of thematizing increases the critical strengths of the museum’s interpretive staff, offers the public coherent links between different exhibitions over time, and it provides one way for the museum to begin to use the deep culturally-inscribed links between learning and sequentality in a productive way.

The third part of this proposal argues that there are physical changes that need to be made to the exhibition spaces in order to accommodate the levels of discursivity that I call for here. I have provided examples of the kinds of physical alterations—many of which are subtle and relatively inexpensive—through which the museum could affirm its
commitment to critically engaged discussions about art and its indefatigable interpretability.

These calls for change will no doubt make demands on the museum, for they require substantial and ongoing commitments to processes that go far beyond a silent pedagogy of display. But the changes I am recommending here are not the kind that demand either extravagant re-building of the museum or that require others to change—the university, schools, or internally, the curator or even the public—before the museum can begin to re-direct its interpretive practices. Instead I have offered changes that can begin to be implemented today and that can begin moving toward producing the kind of spaces where the very fecundity of art and its interpretive possibilities are made public—physically, intellectually and critically.

I have argued that it is both necessary and possible to create an art museum that takes responsibility for the kinds of interpretive repertoires and the critical access to art that it offers to the public. It does this when it acknowledges that interpretation is always a “singular-plural” configuration and when it concedes that critical praxis “co-appears” between authorial truth and excessive relativism. It is here, then, where art becomes public, and where the museum takes up its important and singular role in public culture.

I am aware, though, of how each of the strategies that I have forwarded in this dissertation opens laterally, like the Deleuzian rhizome, to another set of discourses, another array of possible ways to think about interpretation in the public art museum. As I move toward closure of this text, I shudder at what has been left out, left behind, or left for another occasion, and at the same time I tremble with excitement at the stunning array of openings that each of those closures has provided. It is in the shuffling co-existence of
those two, between opening toward possibility and closure as summary that the contributions of this text, its shortcomings and its potential reside.

The central claim of this thesis is that the art museum has a responsibility to make art as its interpretability accessible at the public, and that self-consciously criticality as it is constructed from the spaces between interpretive authority and autonomy is key to accomplishing this task. There is a line of inquiry that flows into and flows from this thesis that has to with the public responsibility and it is here where the contributions, limitations and possibilities of this text register simultaneously. On the one hand I attribute a certain kind of self-evident transparency to the notion of public responsibility, and this is one of the text’s frailties, for here I am guilty of reducing a very complex set of discourses to something like “common understanding.” On the other hand, though, I purposely contained the notion of public responsibility and aligned it with Derrida’s notions of ghosts and the spectre in such a way that the idea of public responsibility became the tool through which the interpretive malaise of the museum was made visible. That co-appearance and the ability to hold two such sprawling ideas as public responsibility and interpretation in speaking proximity with one another so that the inadequacy of the museum’s practices might be seen, named and identified in the doubled discourses of authority/autonomy is one of the strengths of this text. At the same time though, the concept of public responsibility has a fecund almost excruciating potential to extend and amplify the arguments that I have begun to make here. I have used the work of Nancy here, but there are a great number of contemporary theorists who are redressing the concept of public responsibility in ways that can help the museum to articulate their role in the increasingly complex social spaces of the twenty-first century. With this
enriched understanding of public responsibility, the art museum could position itself as a leader in making democracy visible to the public both in and as art. As I re-shelf Nancy’s texts, then, I begin opening Arendt, Levinas, Dwokin and Agamben, and I dwell for just a moment in that breathless space as closure and opening touch one another.

If political philosophy forms one of the coordinates around which the museum’s public responsibility can be articulated further, then critical pedagogy and the role of the public intellectual forms a coordinate around which another of the central notions of this text can continue to be worked through—and that is the idea of criticality. Many of the things that I have just said about public responsibility hold equally well for the idea of critical engagement. For one of the judgments that could be leveled upon this text could be that it has not itself engaged more critically with the work of the critical pedagogues from Freire to McLaren, Giroux, and Aronowitz, even though their presence is inscribed in-between many of the lines written here. I am keenly aware of how the idea of “criticality” as a rubric through which the museum can take up its interpretive responsibilities teeters on a dangerous threshold poised between the Cartesian binary of mind/body. This binary would prioritize the intellectual/critical over forms of embodied knowledge while its opposite would argue that not all experience can or should be channeled through a screen of words. In reply to this, I have tried to hold to the idea that critical engagement does not prioritize one form of engagement with art over another, but rather and most precisely that it fosters an awareness of the different kinds of interpretive repertoires that we bring to art. One of the contributions this text could be said to make, then, is the way in which it has positioned the idea of critical engagement—precisely as the co-appearance of a number of different interpretive repertoires—at the very core of
the museum’s interpretive practices. Part of the work of this text has been to position critical engagement as a site of the tensions between and co-appearance of different notions of authority and autonomy. Now part of the ongoing work will be to think through the ways in which the strategies of critical pedagogy can be attuned to the reconfiguration of the relationships between identity and community that Nancy and others are bringing forth. Further, exactly how the strategies of critical pedagogy might both be aligned with the idea of a “theme of the year” and used as a kind of critical wedge to ensure the spaces between the doubling forces of interpretive authority and evolving notions of autonomy are kept in sight, is a fertile opening that the closure of this text offers.

The suggestions for practice that I have forwarded here as well as the concrete plans for how those might be implemented hover in the space where theory and practice co-appear, where hope and optimism line up against habit and functionality. Again, like in the discursive realm, the strengths, weakness and possibilities all reside together in the proposals that I have made. If there is a certain vigor in these plans, it is because they are do-able. As I write the last paragraphs of this text, I am in the process of working with a group of paid tour guides at a large art museum. We have identified the idea of “the horizon” as a thematic, and are reading Gadamer trying to think through how hermeneutics might be of use in the context of their particular collections. Even though I will be working with them for only a short period of time, there is already talk of noticeable changes in their practices and pleas for a reading list for the rest of the year. This welcome embrace by one group of paid interpreters is an indicator that there is both readiness and desire to take up this call for critical engagement. The next phase of this
work, then, will be to create a collaboration between the museum and the research community so that the full extent of this plan can be implemented. Following this an evaluation needs to be developed to measure if or to what extent these strategies of critically engaged interpretation based on the co-appearance of authority and autonomy are making art as its interpretive repertoires available to the public.

However, it is the rather immediate ‘doability’ of these plans that is also the site of their vulnerability. One of the criticisms that I have leveled against current interpretive practices such as VTS is that they are too reliant on one method at the expense of critical engagement. My fear for this work is that, for example, a “teachable” version of hermeneutics would simply become installed as “the” method and the notion of a new thematic being introduced each year would get buried under the crushing deadlines and sheer weight of the day-to-day work of interpretation in the museum. On this front, though, I remain hopeful that the trajectories set in place by critical engagement with the persistent interpretability of art will prevail and that the interpretive repertoires offered to us by the greatest minds of all time will be contagious in their singular-plural configurations.

The singular-plural nature of art and the way that it calls up all of art in order to bring one artwork into existence is an extraordinary rich way to think about interpretation. For art is a site in culture—perhaps one of the very few sites in culture—where the authoritative reins of meaning-making can be loosened, where a persistent reworking and “unworking” of interpretive narratives and routines can take place, a site where new interpretive acumen can be formed, where an informed critical agency can be
fostered, and it is above all a site where art is made public. The art museum that works
toward that is the art museum that is taking up its public responsibility.
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