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Framing a Changing Museology in the Digital Age

Museology is experiencing a significant shift once again due to the institutional survival of museums in the digital age. But to understand this shift is not merely to study the new technologies used (by both museums and their visitors) or the new digital experiments conducted. The digital age has affected nearly every aspect of modern society, causing a cultural shift throughout the world. Therefore, it is necessary to frame a study of the shifting museology with four major constructs that are tightly interlinked in the digital age: place, community, culture, and technology. This chapter will describe these four notions as they have been described by other scholars, raising critical issues, debates, and questions about each that become more pronounced (and complicated) in the digital age, serving as the theoretical foundation upon which this book investigates situated technology praxis in the five case studies.

The American philosopher Edward S. Casey (1997) writes a remarkable philosophical history on the notion of *place* that references great theorists, historians, and philosophers throughout the ages starting with Aristotle and encompassing Newton, Kant, Heidegger, Lyotard, and Deleuze and Guattari. He traces how *place* was prominent in early Greek thought, but disappeared into the shadows of *space* throughout late Hellenistic times, medieval philosophy, and seventeenth-century physics, only to return again in modern culture. This book will not attempt to enter into the great debate over place and space—whether place is in space or space is in place, which came first or which is more relevant today—but acknowledges the presence and significance of both in the digital

age. Casey describes how the reappearance of place requires a distinctly different form: "To spread out in places is to leave (behind) the extensiveness of homogenous infinite space and to inhabit a new kind of space, one that is heterogeneous and open, genuinely spaced-out . . . it is open precisely *in places*" (1997, p. 341). One of these different forms is proposed by Eric Gordon and Adriana de Souza e Silva in their 2011 book *Net Locality*, who argue for the primacy of *locality* rather than physicality or place in the digital age (they call it the "networked world"). Locality, they suggest, is a new hybrid space "composed by a mix of digital information and physical localities." Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells (2001) prioritizes the "space of flows"—another form—over the "space of places" in his idea of the global network society. Henri Lefebvre (1974/1991) offers the idea of *rhythms* as one more form. Lefebvre believes that rhythms invest places but are not a thing, aggregation of things, or even a flow, and are derived from a relationship between space and time.

Today the central notions of place and space are integrally tied to the equally central notions of community and culture. Nevertheless, all of these isomorphic concepts (including the related terms public, public sphere, and society) have been points of discussion, debate, and writing since ancient times, with *culture* emerging later during the Industrial Revolution. What has changed in modern times, however, is the fluidity with which they are all correlated. Raymond Williams (1958/1983b) and the modern field of cultural studies declare that culture and society are separate in modernity, with the former being more a social idea that came to be associated with an elite part of society. Just as with place/space, this book will not enter into the debate over culture and society, but acknowledges the presence and significance of both in the digital age. One cannot discuss how culture is actively created and transformed without studying the social conditions within which that process takes place. When Glenn Lowry, the director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, claims that "museums across America have become the defining public institutions of their communities" (as cited in Cuno, 2004, p. 131), he is referring to a modern (or post-postmodern) institution that somehow encompasses place, space, culture, community, public, public sphere, and society. The road toward greater inclusion has not been a smooth one—and for some museums more bumpy than others—but we can certainly acknowledge the great efforts of art museums in responding to diverse, and often competing, voices. And digital technology is one very crucial tool that museums are using to aid them in their continuing efforts. As public institutions where physical visits are still more social than individual, museums are

ever more concerned with inclusiveness and plurality regarding their visitors and local communities, yet they also strive to place themselves within a global framework. Museums have subdivided their members into groups that, aside from adding to their hierarchical, dominant nature, provide a stable foundation of interest-based constituents and financial support. The social capital that museums supply presents an opportunity for the public to interact socially (especially certain privileged members), but more importantly, for the different classes, races, and ethnicities to interact within a legitimate public space that still reflects normative, societal values.

An ethnographic study of art museums in the digital age looks at how museums and their visitors are using technology across all the contextual constructs in order to discover the broader implications. Because museums and museological practices today are ever more engaged in their respective places/spaces, communities, and cultures/societies, any contemporaneous study of them must be as well, including their use of digital technology that ultimately displaces our familiar understanding of all these terms. Each of the four concepts will now be discussed in further detail. Despite their division as separate subchapters, they are considered interrelated and so each will be woven throughout this theoretical discussion, as well as in the five case studies.

PLACE/SPACE/EXPERIENCE

This book claims, like Casey, that place has regained its prominence in the digital age. This is not such a simple statement, however, as the notion of place has changed radically from ancient times to the Enlightenment to the Industrial Revolution to the Digital Age. What do we mean by place today? Does place imply physicality? Not if you consider the validity of places in Second Life, or even when considering common Internet terminology such as "landing on a Web *site*." Does place imply locality? James Clifford (1997) gives the example of the great world's fairs starting in the nineteenth century (London, Paris, and Chicago) where the local was always global. And even more so today with synchronous digital communications technologies such as Skype, chat, Web conferencing, and the latest, telepresence videoconferencing where *place* becomes that indeterminate point of intersection within a global network of users; what Casey refers to as the "omnilocality" of place. Finally, we can ask if place implies permanence? For this answer, we turn both to theory and technology. Feminist theorists such as bell hooks (2000) write about the marginality of women in democratic society, philosophers such as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write

about nomads inhabiting a "special kind of place," and cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall (1997a), Homi Bhabha (1994), Nestor García Canclini (2001), and Seyla Benhabib (2002) write about the causes and consequences of the migration of classes, races, and ethnicities from the periphery to the center, and the fluctuating nature of that new center. Similarly, developments in mobile and location-based technologies, including virtual and augmented reality, allow us to talk about the transference of place in the digital age. "We are where our devices are," claim Gordon and de Souza e Silva. To describe this portable nature of social connectedness due to online and mobile technologies, sociologist Mary Chayko uses the term *portable communities*, which are "groupings that use small, wireless, easily transportable technologies of communication (portable technologies) to facilitate interpersonal connectedness and to make and share a collective identity and culture" (2008, p. 8).

There are two main reasons why place has receded for the modern museum; one is due to technology and the other due to the primacy of experience. Both are related, however, as new digital technologies allow for new kinds of experiences, a rather continuous cycle of dependence. In her book on public art, philosophy professor Hilda Hein argues that the primacy of experiences in the mid-twentieth century served to displace the museum's collection, coining the term "experiential museum." As museums became about experiences—"process over stasis"—they became less connected to place; objects became "vehicles for the delivery of experience rather than as ends unto themselves" (2006, p. x). Nevertheless, Hein acknowledges that in our modern society saturated with opportunities for experience and entertainment, the museum is distinguished by the authenticity and materiality of its objects. Visitor experience can still be place-based as museums and other institutions offer experiences within their physical spaces, but ultimately experiences are defined by the *individual* that receives the experience in a unique manner, and less by institutional intentions. Experiences subjugate the place because they can be taken away by the visitor, stored in memory, and often recalled through various strategies (analog and digital) that may no longer relate to the original place-based experience.

Falk and Dierking concur with this idea that museum experiences detach visitors from the physical museum place.

> Since visitors do not make meaning from museums solely within the four walls of the institution, effective digital media experiences require situating the experience within the broader context of the lives, the community, and the society in which visitors live and interact. (2008, p. 27)

While museums certainly are not intentionally trying to drive visitors away from their physical buildings and collections, they have largely come to accept the constructivist notion of how learning and meaning are created by visitors within the context of their personal backgrounds, interests, and lives. Based upon this modern museology is a growing awareness that personal mobile technologies allow visitors to experience the museum wherever and whenever they choose. With mobile tours (such as Art on Call at the Walker Art Center), visitors can call a number to hear more about work they are standing in front of—inside museum galleries, outside in museum gardens or exteriors, or throughout the city—or visitors can call the number from their home at a later date and time, perhaps never intending a physical visit to the museum. Another feature called *bookmarking* creates a stronger connection between the physical museum experience and a pre- or post-museum experience at the visitor's home (or wherever they may have Internet access). For example, Getty Bookmarks at the J. Paul Getty Museum is a way for visitors to select their favorite works of art and then save them on the museum website in a personal gallery. There are many variations of bookmarks, with functions on audio and handheld tours where visitors are sent e-mails with links to their bookmarks; visitors can access their bookmarks or personal galleries at physical kiosks inside the museum, or through their own smartphones. A few more examples of such personal spaces on museum websites include My Collection at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, My Art Gallery at the Seattle Art Museum, My Scrapbooks at the Art Institute of Chicago, and Art Collector at the Walker Art Center and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

If *place* in the digital age no longer implies physicality, locality, or permanence, but rather a different form such as those suggested by the scholars mentioned above, then its reemergence in the digital age permits a symbiotic relationship with experience rather than a contradictory one. Furthermore, the proposal of *place/experience* allows for fluid movement through space and time as well as through society and community in general. In *Mobilities of Time and Space*, Marita Sturken refers to the term *nonplace* first discussed by Marc Augé in 1995. She writes,

> If modernity was characterized by a separation of space and place, in postmodernity, there is an emphasis on the proliferation of nonspaces—airports, freeways, bank machines. The postmodern concept of the nonplace thus bears a contiguous relationship to the modern sense of space as compressed, traveled through, removed from actual places. (2004b, p. 79)

This book does not negate or reduce place, as in the postmodern concepts of nonplace or nonspace, but proposes the additive concept of place/experience that acknowledges its new form. Casey (1996) similarly suggests, "A place is more an *event* than a *thing* to be assimilated to known categories," and James Clifford (1997) writes about location as "an itinerary rather than a bounded site—a series of encounters and translations."

Ethnographers and anthropologists have long been aware that places are socially and culturally constructed—*contact zones*—in turn influencing philosophers such as de Certeau, Lefebvre, and even Albert Camus, who stated in 1955, "Sense of place is not just something that people know and feel, it is something people do" (as cited in Basso, 1996, p. 88). This sociocultural process, however, does not serve to transform place into space, but rather remains an overriding and uninterrupted influence of space, place, and locality throughout their digital transmutations. Gordon and de Souza e Silva suggest that "now that our devices our [*sic*] location aware, we are much better positioned to be location aware ourselves" (2011, p. 54). As we pay more attention to place and location today, we must remain conscious of their sociocultural contextual framework. Referring to the idea of place-based education, David Gruenewald (2003) uses the term *place-conscious education* to demonstrate the need for the educational field to also pay more attention to places. Gruenewald believes that places are social constructions, calling this term "the new localism" that emerged in response to globalization. As the field of education extends outward toward places, it becomes more relevant to the lived experience of students and teachers that consequently become more accountable so that "places matter to educators, students, and citizens in tangible ways." A consciousness of place, Gruenewald argues, is accordingly a consciousness of ourselves as "place makers and participants in the sociopolitical process of place making" (p. 627). This call for active participation—for *place making*—is associated with recent calls for increased civic engagement (Putnam, 1995; Asen, 2004) and recognition of the participatory culture of the digital age.

When places are actively inhabited, created, and shared—like the *practiced place* of de Certeau or the *representational space* of Lefebvre—they become public spheres. Jürgen Habermas expounded on the bourgeois public sphere in his influential book from 1962. The public sphere of eighteenth-century Europe united strangers together, requiring only that one pay attention in order to become a member. The more active acts of deliberation, argumentation, and ultimately agreement were also necessary to form the ideal citizen that avoided

violence by engaging in reasoned discourse. Directly opposed to Habermas's bourgeois public sphere is the proletarian public sphere, first proposed by Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge (1972/1993). The most important distinctions are that there is not merely one public sphere but multiple public spheres, and that the concept of community should be replaced with that of *counterpublics* (Fraser, 1990; Warner, 2005). Today's public sphere is more accessible and democratic than its predecessors, but discourse remains the defining factor. Museums can be considered public spheres as critical places for individual development because they reflect societal norms and values; they are places where public opinions are formed and presented, and where participation and discourse are encouraged both by peers and authority figures. Museums embrace the idea of the public sphere today; they offer free days to ensure accessibility, they have free WiFi that facilitates connectedness, they host lectures to encourage dialogue, they create social groups for members to interact onsite and online, and they solicit comments from visitors to share publicly.

While the public sphere is a useful concept to emphasize the need for individual discourse, participation, and engagement on a macro level, it is still possible to talk about place, or place/experience, as socioculturally generated without needing to transform it into other terms like public sphere, space, or public space. *Public space* is a more contemporary notion of the public sphere that is used in fields such as urban design, public policy, public art, and geography. Gordon and de Souza e Silva describe public space as "a collection of minor social contracts" and refer to the urbanist William Whyte's description of "good" public space as the Seagram Building in Manhattan that encourages casual conversation. Places have not disappeared (Castells, 2001; Lefebvre, 1974/1991), but they have certainly been transformed by their inhabitants through changing cultural practices, social relations, and developments in digital technology, along with the ways in which such technologies are culturally adapted.

COMMUNITY: TO BE, OR NOT TO BE

One of the most important changes in the modern populist museum is its increasing concern for community as reflective of sociocultural changes, particularly in the Western world. The museum's desire to deliberately incorporate its local community (or communities)[1] has witnessed a parallel interest in strengthening civic engagement on the part of governmental bodies, academia, and foundations that have all invested great sums of time, knowledge, and funding into the matter. It is generally assumed that a democratic society is

based upon the active participation of its members, resulting in, if not consensus, then at least dialogue and social interaction. In his influential work from 2000, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, political scientist Robert Putnam demonstrates how social capital has been steadily declining since the 1950s and is especially worrisome with the youth of today. He proposes that the acquisition of social capital through involvement in social organizations can lead to increased participation in all aspects of society, which can strengthen the democratic process.

Despite his calls for greater civic participation, social capital, and community engagement, Putnam acknowledges the complexities of the notion of community. He traces the individualistic strain in the United States back to the Pilgrims that first came to America escaping religious persecution in seventeenth-century England and to Alexis de Tocqueville's idea of *Democracy in America* in the early nineteenth century. Putnam writes, "Community has warred incessantly with individualism for preeminence in our political hagiology. Liberation from ossified community bonds is a recurrent and honored theme in our culture" (2000, p. 24). The debate between the individual and the community, and in particular, between the individual *in relation* to the community, is similar to the debate between culture and its place within society. It is a debate that started in an analog world hundreds of years ago and continues in a digital world where critics fear the socially isolating effects of technology. As with the other debates—place and space, culture and society—this book will not argue for one position or the other, but acknowledges the importance of both the individual and of the individual becoming situated within community. This book also recognizes the ability of technology to support individual identity while concomitantly supporting communities by creating new and improved means for communication on a one-to-one basis as well as a one-to-many basis. In describing his notion of *practiced place*, de Certeau asserts, "The approach to culture begins when the ordinary man *becomes* the narrator, when it is he who defies the (common) place of discourse and the (anonymous) space of its development" (1984, p. 5). Discourse is critical to place, to the public sphere, to public space, to integrating culture into society, and most decidedly, to building social capital and community as an active form of participation.

Before engaging in a conversation about museum communities, we must first ask, when and how did the masses or the public of the eighteenth century become the *community* of the twentieth century? Our modern-day notion of community encompasses the masses that Frankfurt school philosophers Max

Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno warned about, the somewhat restrictive public in Habermas's public sphere, as well as the more inclusive counterpublics of Fraser and Warner, and it even allows for the notion of culture in the very classification or constitution of communities. The notion of community empowers its members because it depends upon public participation and formation, as in online communities with chat forums and personal recommendations. However, communities can also be restrictive when imposing rules, social norms, and expectations (explicit or implicit). Museums are increasingly concerned about their community, but how do they define that community? If there are multiple communities, how are they classified? With practically every museum today having its own website, community takes on a global perspective through the ability to reach anyone, anywhere, and at any time with an Internet connection. How does this new global community of virtual visitors relate to the local community of physical visitors?

While at the same time expanding the notion of a museum community, digital technology has also allowed museums to more efficiently serve many of their different communities that they have already classified. Teachers can download lesson plans from websites, members can renew online, students and scholars can search online collection databases, mobile tours of exhibitions offer detailed information, and those more inclined to participate can comment on blogs and social media, upload photos, tag objects on the website, and play online games. This subchapter will briefly discuss how museums have considered their community, it will describe a number of ways in which to consider community today, and it will illustrate the impact of digital technology on community. I will now briefly note different types of communities (physical, virtual, and hybrid) as used by different theorists and fields for different purposes.

Interpretive Community

The British museologist Sheila Watson (2007) writes about museums that work with and for a number of communities rather than a single one in her edited book, *Museums and Their Communities*. She refers to Dr. Rhiannon Mason's (2005, cited in Watson, 2007) typology of museum communities as a useful way to extend Hooper-Greenhill's notion of *interpretive communities*: (1) shared historical or cultural experiences, (2) their specialist knowledge, (3) demographic/socioeconomic factors, (4) identities (national, regional, local, or relating to sexuality, disability, age, and gender), (5) their visiting practices, and (6) their exclusion from other communities. Watson notes that a target audience and a

public are entirely different from the notion of a community, although they are all related. Hooper-Greenhill acknowledges the problem with museums targeting their audiences, but supports her idea of interpretive communities.

> We have become accustomed in recent years to thinking about "target audiences," and know that each target group needs to be considered separately. We tend to talk about school-groups, families, tourists, people with disabilities and so on. The concept "target group" is a marketing term which enables the division of museum visitors on the basis of demographic variables such as age, disability or life-stage. "Interpretive communities" takes this a step further by focussing [*sic*] on those varying strategies of interpretation that differentiated visitors will use to make sense of the experience of the museum. (1999, p. 8)

The complexity of community can clearly be seen here. Just as Samuel Huntington (Harrison & Huntington, 2000) said about culture, if community includes everything, it explains nothing; hence the drive to deconstruct community into target groups, behavioral groups, and even interpretive groups which themselves morph into separate (micro)communities to once again become a target. How can a community be distinguished from a group, culture, counterpublic, or more? The term community is most often used—despite its relative uselessness—to describe the nature of any group, its individual members, and how they are related.

Community of Interest

In *The Age of Access*, Jeremy Rifkin describes how corporate management and marketing professionals discovered that establishing *communities of interest* is a productive way to engage new customers and keep them loyal to the product over the long term. The strong ties between customers and the product, as well as between individual customers, are based on a shared interest in a product that in turn strengthens the overall community. Most communities of interest are online because of the Internet's ability to connect like-minded people from around the world. Rifkin states, "Private communications networks are forging new communities of interest that have fewer and fewer ties to geography" (2000, p. 224). Museums have long created physically grounded membership groups based on shared interests, and are now digitally transforming them through their websites and social media use. Jerry Watkins and Angelina Russo argue that "increasing digital literacy within cultural institutions could be integral to the further development of a co-creative relationship between institutions and communities of interest" (2007, p. 219). The Internet is enabling museums to

forge stronger connections with their online visitors, but as of yet, the ability for individuals with similar interests to develop strong ties between themselves is still developing.

Community of Inquiry

Philosopher Matthew Lipman explains a *community of inquiry* within the context of learning and educational experiences as a means of "questioning, reasoning, connecting, deliberating, challenging, and developing problem-solving techniques" (as cited in Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000, p. 91). Lipman writes,

> Inquiry is generally social or communal in nature because it rests on a foundation of language, of scientific operations, of symbolic systems, of measurements and so on, all of which are uncompromisingly social. But while all inquiry may be predicated upon community, it does not follow that all community is predicated upon inquiry. (2003, p. 83)

The ideal educational experience within this type of community is based on the overlapping factors of social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence that constitute the *community of inquiry model* (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). A community of inquiry is essentially an educational community based more on the *practice* of inquiry and learning than on a particular interest or affinity, and is most often adapted to online/distance learning as mediated by computers. An example of this type of community will be reviewed in the Museum of Modern Art's *Online Courses*.

Community of Practice/Knowledge Community

First proposed by Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave in 1991, *communities of practice* are knowledge-based, informally composed, self-organizing, and depend on deep individual commitment. Participation is not mandatory in these communities, but is encouraged by focusing on common interests, tasks, and goals. Wenger (2000) further explained these communities by stating that their effectiveness is a factor of how well they connect with other communities and constituencies, "not a matter of their internal development alone." Communities of practice are not principally educational communities, nor are they solely based on shared interests despite being compared to *affinity groups* (James Paul Gee), but are formed around common practices such as discourse

(also known as *discourse communities*) and knowledge transfer that prioritize social relations between members.

Communities of practice are also referred to as *knowledge communities*, based on the sharing of knowledge and specific topics of interest. Most knowledge communities are online (called *virtual communities of practice*) facilitated by digital communication technologies; a few examples are wikis, online forums, comments on blogs, and social media. Caroline Haythornthwaite (2011) distinguishes between *knowledge crowds* (crowdsourcing) and knowledge communities as two ends of the spectrum, the main difference being that the former comprises anonymous individuals with no defined commitment to contribute, and the latter has known participants that contribute often. Museums have experimented with crowdsourced exhibitions and now commonly use blogs and social media that solicit public comments, as well as occasional wikis for special projects. All of these participatory practices, however, do not imply that the overall structure of museums is to be considered a community of practice or a knowledge community, but that certain programs may benefit from the social, collaborative nature of these communities.

Collective

The concept of a collective is not a new one, or even one created by academics. It is simply, according to Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown (2011), "a community of similarly minded people." The collective can be perceived as an alternative to the notion of community, and Thomas and Seely Brown clearly make the distinctions. Communities can be passive (although not all are), but collectives absolutely cannot be passive as they enable agency. In communities, people learn in order to belong, and in collectives, people belong in order to learn. Communities are strengthened by creating a sense of belonging to something greater than oneself such as an institution, but collectives are strengthened by participation where there is no sense of a center. They further define collectives as "an active engagement with the process of learning" and not by shared interests, actions, or goals. Thomas (2011) describes the importance of the collective as an outcome of the growth of the networked age and imagination (largely due to the Internet and social media): "the creation of new social formations that radically transform the relationship between structure and agency." Thomas and Seely Brown's concept of a collective is not related to the idea of *collective intelligence* that is based on collaboration (collective behavior) toward achieving a common goal, or even to *collective action*

theory (Olson, 1965), which is more applicable to social movements and also dependent on group action for the collective good. While Thomas and Seely Brown position communities and collectives at opposite ends of the spectrum, they also believe the two to be compatible.

Network

The concept of the network is another alternative means of perceiving community. John Barnes was the first to study social networks in the context of a Norwegian island parish in the early 1950s. Much like Putnam's emphasis on the value of social capital, *social network theory* views social relationships in terms of nodes and links between individuals which are ultimately more important than individual attributes or agency. Social networks are structured to increase individual connections, provide information, and set policies. Again favoring the communal over the individual, Mark Granovetter (1983) proposes his idea about "the strength of weak ties" where a large network of weak ties is more powerful than a small network of strong ties in relation to innovation. From a sociological perspective, Barry Wellman and Keith Hampton (1999) claim that "communities are clearly networks . . . people usually have more friends outside their neighborhood than within it." They observe a modern shift from living in "little-box societies" that deal with only a few groups such as home, neighborhood, work, or voluntary organizations—hierarchical structures—to living in "networked societies" with more permeable boundaries, more diverse members, and more opportunities for social connections. Providing an important perspective to social network theory is Manuel Castells's idea of *networked individualism* that highlights the increased individuation of the digital age. Castells states, "Networked individualism is a social pattern, not a collection of isolated individuals. Rather, individuals build their networks, on-line and off-line, on the basis of their interests, values, affinities, and projects" (2001, p. 131).

The emergence of the Internet generated a more comprehensive study of networks and patterns of relationships. *Computer-supported social networks*, or computer networks that bring together people and machines, emerged in the 1960s when ARPANET (The Advanced Research Projects Agency Network) was developed by the U.S. Department of Defense (Wellman et al., 2000; Wellman & Hampton, 1999). Peter Lyman (2004) proposes the idea of a *network-mediated community* as a new public space that originally referred to basic Web functions such as chat groups, electronic mail, and listservs, but eventually created a sense of intimacy and belonging for its users. However, Ross Parry detects a

problem with assigning the network concept to museums in the digital age. He believes that "the modularity of the distributed network was incompatible with the singularity that had for centuries defined the museum" (2007, p. 95). While museums have for years now used the Internet to reach out, Parry is concerned that the distributed, modular nature of the Web can fragment the centrality of the institution by deepening social divides and facilitating the broadcasting and publishing of content.

There has been a tremendous amount written about motivations to join and participate in communities, the effects of belonging to communities, and how communities can best sustain themselves. The *homophily theory* (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001; Kandel, 1978) suggests that people seek out others similar to themselves, which leads to a networking effect. For these individuals to find new information or different sources they have to look outside the group, which could lead to either a weakening of the group or an infusion of new members if they are successfully brought into the group. Related to the homogenizing of networks, the *contagion effect* states that different people become more similar if they are in the same network. In 2007, Ren, Kraut, and Kiesler proposed the *common identity* and *common bond theories* as ways to predict the causes and consequences of individual social attachments. *Common identity theory* focuses on individual attachments to the group where members feel a commitment to the community's mission caused by interdependence, inter-group comparisons, and social categorization, with effects such as high conformity to group norms, newcomers feeling welcome, and generalized reciprocity. *Common bond theory* focuses on individual attachments to other individual group members, where members feel a social or emotional attachment to other people in the group caused by social interaction, divulging personal information, and interpersonal similarity, with effects such as off-topic discussion, low conformity to group norms, direct reciprocity, and newcomers feeling ostracized. The *social identity theory* (Tajfel, 1978) claims that people are motivated to join certain groups in order to develop a positive self-image. Whether an individual identifies more with other group members (interpersonal attraction) or with the community (social identification) determines how much an individual self-categorizes, also known as *self-categorization theory* (Turner et al., 1987). Personal identity becomes more pronounced when individuals have greater interpersonal attraction (similar to the *identity-based attachment theory*). If individuals are not categorized by the community, then they will self-categorize, which could lead to self-

stereotyping and de-personalization, often based on perceived characteristics of the community. A person's identity, however, can be both personal and social, with one appearing more salient than the other at any given time. Relevant to the topic of online communities and computer-mediated communication is the *social identity model of deindividuation effects* (Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995), which suggests that in virtual conditions of anonymity, a common group identity become more salient. In face-to-face, interpersonal interaction, those possessing a strong social identification with the community are more likely to develop interpersonal attractions with other members.

A review of these different concepts of community, as well as the many theories that explain motivations to join and participate, provides a basis for reconsidering the notion of museums and community that will frame the forthcoming case studies. In his book *Making Museums Matter*, Stephen Weil discusses how museums matter to community:

> The museum of the near future, as thus envisioned . . . will in essence be one of a range of organizations—instruments, really—available to the supporting community to be used in pursuit of its communal goals. As an intricate and potentially powerful instrument of communication, it will make available to the community, and for the community's purpose, its profound expertise at telling stories, eliciting emotion, triggering memories, stirring imagination, and prompting discovery—its expertise in stimulating all those object-based responses. (2002, p. 200)

Can museums be considered a community unto themselves and if so, what type of community, how do they motivate participation, and what are their rules of engagement? Is it more appropriate to talk about museums as a collective that have no hierarchy, center, or restrictions? Are museums a network of social relations or a network-mediated community? And if museums are themselves communities or networks, how do they relate to their external communities and networks on the local, national, and global levels? The answers to these questions depend largely on how each museum negotiates its changing relationship with the public.

CULTURE MATTERS TO MUSEUMS[2]

The notions of culture and the public sphere overlap because they both engage discourse, conflict, and convergence on a social level. As we briefly discussed the complexities of place in the digital age (space, nonplace, localism, mobility, virtual places, public sphere), so can we discuss the possibly even greater

complexities of culture (cultural production, cultural consumption, cultural imperialism, cultural hybridity, cultural plurality, cultural systems, cultural identity, etc.) and how the modern museum approaches the subject in relation to digital technology. Raymond Williams claims that partly due to its complicated historical development during the Industrial Revolution, culture "is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (1976/2002, p. 36). The other reason is because it is a popular term that has been applied to a broad array of intellectual disciplines, fields, and ways of thinking. This is why Samuel Huntington (2000) argues that "if culture includes everything, it explains nothing," and therefore proposes to define culture in purely subjective terms. This leads to one of the great debates in the field of Cultural Studies; the *universalist* versus the *relativist* view of culture. Is identity based on shared experiences and histories (universalist), or is it self-constructed through everyday practices (relativist)? Can diverse identities be incorporated into a larger society by indoctrinating normative values through the education system or the global economy (universalist), or can society be reshaped instead through the multiple voices that refuse to be assimilated (relativist)? These are questions not only for scholars but also for museum professionals that have discovered how difficult—and contentious—can be the treatment of culture in a modern, social institution, and in particular one focused on art.

There are various meanings of culture due to its inherent ambiguity and ubiquity. Precisely because this book studies *art* museums, it will not consider the notion of culture as high (the fine arts generally considered to include painting, drawing, and later sculpture) or low (a factor of class, income, and education as expounded by Pierre Bourdieu). The modern art museum has aptly proven its ability to rise above this restrictive dichotomy by incorporating popular culture, folk culture, and outsider art into its hallowed exhibition halls, aided by the more recently formed departments of education, public programming, and interpretation that serve to coalesce high and low culture. Rather, this book will consider culture as it describes the shared characteristics of a group of individuals (ethnic, racial, religious, and social), a physical community, or an institution. The two meanings of culture are not dissimilar, however, as we observe in Horkheimer and Adorno's (1947) concept of the *culture industry* that describes the socioeconomic system in which symbols of high art are threatened by its very popularization.[3] Early art museums encouraged interaction between the working and upper classes for the purpose of urban socialization, but they also served as important spaces that were set

apart from the mundane world, encouraging contemplation, reverence, and reserved sentiment through their art objects and sacred environment.

This book will address both the local and diverse culture of the physical communities in which each museum is situated, as well as the broader culture of museums from their historical antecedents to their current place in the digital age. It must be noted, however, that the local does not imply provinciality; nor must it be treated as antithetical to the global. More pronouncedly in the digital age, local culture is unquestionably global due to increased migration, international commerce, and digital technology that facilitates both factors, including communication and the global distribution of entertainment. Similarly, locally based museums (*Boston* Museum of Fine Arts, Art Institute of *Chicago*, *Detroit* Institute of Art, etc.) can also be considered international institutions that owe their founding and still much funding to their local communities, but are increasingly global in reach and reputation. About 200 years ago, local community leaders aspired to acquire encyclopedic collections of the highest quality from around the world to draw attention to their burgeoning cities that would rise in stature together with these great museums.

The argument of cultural studies scholars that culture is formed through social relations and individual agency was a reaction to the great nineteenth-century German theorists Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848), who instead believed that culture was purely a result of the economic system. Supporting Marx and Engels, Horkheimer and Adorno (1947/2002) wrote about the *culture industry* that they feared was impressing "the same stamp on everything." Modern capitalist societies produced culture as a commodity, and objects previously valued for their utility were now valued based on the extent to which they could be exchanged. These early debates within the field influenced later scholars that more deeply explored ideas of the hegemonic impact on culture and the extent to which culture is formed as a result of individual agency related to external forces. Raymond Williams (1980) offers an important contribution to the field with his belief that hegemony depends on a process of incorporating both residual and emergent forms, which explains how the dominant culture changes while remaining both dominant and relevant. Lawrence Grossberg suggests that people are often "complicit in their own subordination." Although people are repeatedly manipulated and lied to, Grossberg believes they are not passively controlled by the media or the capitalist system. Hegemony, he states, seeks to dominate "through consent rather than coercion, through representation rather than falsification, through legitimation rather than manipulation" (1997, p. 152).

The British cultural theorist Stuart Hall similarly discusses the *consensus theory of hegemony*. He claims, "Hegemony implied that the dominance of certain formations was secured, not by ideological compulsion, but by cultural leadership" (1982, p. 85). Hall distinguishes between the *humanities* definition of culture and the *structuralist* one which he espouses. He wants to rethink culture as a set of everyday practices that are part of what he describes as moments of encoding and decoding, and how they correspond to the potential positions of dominant, negotiated, and opposition. Writing about popular culture, Hall (2002) sees its relation to the dominant culture as "the dialectic of cultural struggle," with popular culture representing an alternative form but still subject to the forces of domination.

Raymond Williams is probably the most influential scholar to tackle the concept of culture. He views modernity as "constituted by the separation of culture and society," yet he refuses to accept such a separation. Hall also considers the separation of art from politics and everyday life to be a recent and uniquely Western historical phenomenon. Culture is a fundamental part of society and our idea of perfection must include the culture of the individual, the culture of the group, and the culture of the whole society as well. Another key area in which Williams influenced cultural studies is the discussion of culture (high and low) and the masses. In his influential book from 1958, *Culture and Society: 1780–1950*, Williams warned that "the masses . . . formed the perpetual threat to culture. Mass-thinking, mass-suggestion, mass-prejudice would threaten to swamp considered individual thinking and feeling" (p. 298). The culture he is referring to here is of the "high" nature because he describes the masses as having "lowness of taste and habit." In the new world of mass communication, Williams makes a distinction between a "physical massing of persons in industrial towns and factories" and a "social and political massing," the latter of which would lead to mass democracy and "the rule of lowness or mediocrity." Nevertheless, Williams believes there are actually no masses: "There are only ways of seeing people as masses. . . . What we see, neutrally, is other people, many others, people unknown to us. In practice, we mass them, and interpret them, according to some convenient formula" (p. 300). The masses are partly a result of a primitive desire for solidarity that Williams claims is necessary for society. He argues for a common culture and a common experience, but clearly writes that this does not mean an equal culture; in fact, he states that inequality is "inevitable and even welcome" in society.

Many of the issues that cultural studies has been struggling with are at the center of the discussion of museums as cultural institutions. If museums are cultural (and subsequently social) institutions, then how much must they reflect society's values and concerns? And which part of society, the popular masses or the power elite? Likewise, which culture must a museum represent, that of the nation or the community or certain subcultural groups (counterpublics) as defined by race, ethnicity, and religion? Are culture and society separate in modernity as Williams alleges, or if we consider ourselves beyond modernity today can we reconcile the two? Williams and most cultural studies scholars support a coming together of culture and society, but this places museums in the controversial—and hegemonic—position of representing very specific elements of both culture and society. Sheila Watson points out that "the relationship museums have with their communities must be based on the recognition that this is an unequal one, with the balance of power heavily tipped in favour of the institution" (2007, p. 9). While the relativist view of culture recognizes the diversity of people and societies around the world, refusing to make generalizations, the universalist view stresses the commonalities that bring disparate peoples together.

The early nineteenth-century European museum was not a cultural institution in the sense of high culture—despite its valuable collections of paintings, sculptures, and other treasure from around the world—but rather in its ability as an esteemed public institution to attract more educated crowds that would teach the masses proper manners, tastes, and dress. The culture of the masses was not recognized or even valued for its diversity in a pluralistic society, but instead was seen as needing to conform to a homogeneous ideal, that of civilized society. These museums were public only in that they received scholars and members of the bourgeois who were required to present their credentials upon entry. It took a while for museums to open up on Sundays and evenings to accommodate the working class, as there was still pervasive fear that the masses would disturb their precious collections and reverent atmosphere. By adopting functions of the state that catered more to the needs of the uneducated public than those of the educated bourgeoisie, the public museum soon became what Habermas called a "sphere of culture consumption," due to its promulgation of mass culture.

The modern museum inherited this difficult position that vacillates between representing interests of the state and the public(s). Today most U.S. museums exist as a hybrid public-private institution, receiving funding from both entities and responsible to both in varying degrees. The twentieth century saw a

proliferation in different genres of museums that responded to different groups: ethnic-specific museums, community museums, historic house museums, open-air museums, folk museums, maritime museums, children's museums, automobile museums, and railway museums, just to name a few. Nancy Fuller (1992) describes *ecomuseums* that started in France in the late 1960s and can now be found around the world, where the museum is seen as part of the larger landscape connected "to the whole of life." These museums are generally constituted from the bottom up, representing more the specialized interests of local constituents and public masses rather than the power elite. Nevertheless, there remain many museums today (mostly art museums) that would deny any association with mass or popular culture, despite placing great importance on populist activities such as community outreach, public programming, visitor studies, and the great equalizing force of the blockbuster exhibition. Most museums try to remain neutral, believing this to be their source of legitimacy and power, but even so, the modern museum addresses more social issues in its desire to be relevant to current issues, as well as in response to many artists who themselves address such issues in their work (e.g., agitprop art, activist art, political art, social art). British media scholar John Fiske raises the concept of *cultural distance* as a key marker of high and low culture. He believes that "the separation of the aesthetic from the social is a practice of the elite who can afford to ignore the constraints of material necessity, and who thus construct an aesthetic which not only refuses to assign any value at all to material conditions, but validates only those art forms which transcend them" (1992, p. 154).

The critical issue of how modern museums relate to society involves current social and political issues, but also the diverse people and cultures that comprise modern society, and in particular, the local, marginalized, and immigrants. In 1988, James Clifford wrote that the *predicament of culture* occurs when "marginal peoples come into a historical or ethnographic space that has been defined by the Western imagination." Whereas in the 1800s culture was viewed as a single, evolutionary process, Clifford argues that in the 1900s culture is viewed in the plural, a view shared by Michel de Certeau in his book *Culture in the Plural* from 1974. De Certeau explains that "the approach to culture begins when the ordinary man *becomes* the narrator, when it is he who defines the (common) place of discourse and the (anonymous) space of its development" (1984, p. 5). Since their inception, museums have acted in the service of the state and continue to do so to a lesser degree (yet not with the socially reformist intentions of the past), but museums have only recently begun to act in the service of their

public. In writing about the fundamental relationship between museums and community heritage in Ireland, Elizabeth Crooke declares:

> The links between museums, heritage and community are so complex that it is hard to distinguish which one leads the other—does heritage construct the community or does a community construct heritage? . . . Communities need the histories and identities preserved and interpreted in museums; and the museum sector needs the people, in the many communities, to recognise the value of museums and justify their presence. (2008, p. 1)

To rethink museums as cultural institutions in the digital age is to critically consider how they use technology to reflect and maintain their legitimacy and authority, the extent to which technologies support difference and dialogue, and how technology allows museums to reflect cultural norms and values in the pluralist sense.

TECHNOLOGY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Artists have always incorporated new innovations into their practice, starting with the invention of portable easels, canvas, and oil paint. Museums, on the other hand, have historically been more resistant to changing their practices. Museums benefited early on from technology in the 1920s such as the inventions of plate glass and electric spot lights to accommodate the working classes that visited in the evenings (Tallon, 2008), and they later embraced the development of computers and database systems for internal working purposes. Nonetheless, it was not until the emergence of the new museology in the late twentieth century that technology became utilized for visitor-centric practices that gave visitors agency in their own experiences and learning. The very large and dynamic field of digital art (also known as net art, computer art, electronic art, or new media art) visibly manifests the convergence of art and technology, and art museums are one of the main spaces for the conservation, display, dissemination, and interpretation of digital art. This book will not attempt to examine these artistic practices, however, as the sociocultural relevance of art museums in the digital age is best understood independent of their specific collections.

The new museology started museums thinking about how to best serve society and their community. Today in the digital age, museums are no longer working *for* their community but *with* their community; meaning that the participatory culture of the digital age, armed with the technology to facilitate instantaneous

communication from anywhere on the globe, inspires new museum experiences including user-generated content, crowd-curated exhibitions, personalized online collections, and social media–supported affinity and membership groups. In his introduction to *Museums and Communities*, Ivan Karp claims that "the best way to think about the changing relations between museums and communities is to think about how the *audience*, a passive entity, becomes the *community*, an active agent" (1992, p. 12). Karp distinguishes communities as demanding more active participation from their members, but by generalizing audiences as passive he denies the inherent value of a community that allows for a plurality of experiences, cultures, voices, histories, and even modalities of learning and participation that may prefer passivity. Although the new museology embraces such a plurality, it also actively seeks participation from its visitors; how to reconcile these two constitutes one of the great challenges facing museums in the digital age.

Some of the most prominent scholars working in the area of participation, learning, youth, and digital media include Henry Jenkins, S. Craig Watkins, Eszter Hargittai, Mizuko Ito, and Sonia Livingstone. A great amount of research has been supported by institutions such as the Pew Research Center (Internet and American Life Project), the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (Digital Media and Learning initiative), and the U.S. Institute for Museum and Library Services (Engaging America's Youth initiative). As described by Jenkins et al., "Participatory culture is emerging as the culture absorbs and responds to the explosion of new media technologies that make it possible for average consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content in powerful new ways" (2006, p. 8). A serious concern for these scholars and institutions is the *participation gap*, which is based on access to online spaces and experiences that enable participation, rather than the more well-known *digital divide* which concerns basic access to computers and the Internet. Jenkins et al. (2006) cite the goal of a participatory culture as to encourage families, schools, governmental policies, and media companies to persuade more youth to participate by teaching the necessary skills and cultural knowledge. John Palfrey and Urs Gasser call these youth *digital natives*. They focus on the importance of social identity for this group, where online creativity and digital creations are forms of self-expression inherently social and collaborative. According to Palfrey and Gasser, "Interaction and a sense of community are the key requests of those born digital when it comes to online learning" (2008, p. 248).

Jennifer Slack and J. Macgregor Wise (2005) propose a cultural studies view of technology with their notion of *technological culture*. Technology, they argue, is caused by culture rather than conversely being a cause for cultural change (*technological determinism*). "As culture changes," they claim, "it needs and develops new technologies to accomplish its goals." In this view, the adoption of technology in museums is a means of adapting to a changing culture that develops new technologies to serve its changing needs. Anne Balsamo (2011) proposes the term *technoculture* that addresses both technology and culture as unified rather than oppositional. Ross Parry summarizes this sociocultural constructivist view of technology:

> In every case we see a culture attempting to make sense of its material surroundings, its knowledge and its experience, by containing them within a closed, ordered and logical system. Museums belong to this history of structured knowledge. In a sense the museum project represents the endeavor of many societies, in their own time and cultural context, to extract and then give meaning to fragments of their past and present. (2007, p. 33)

While it is relatively easy to theorize about the cultural ground on which technology is used within society and about the symbiotic relationship between culture and technology, it becomes much more difficult to research and establish current technocultural practices in museums. As museums become more place-conscious due to new digital technologies, so must they remain culture-conscious in their integration of technology. Museums continue to struggle with what it means to be culturally conscious and inclusive in regards to their traditional roles and practices, but their speedy entry into the digital age is forcing them to resolve their position on the matter: what constitutes their particular *museum culture* and how that culture determines their usage of technology.

NOTES

1. The terms *community* and *communities* will be used interchangeably throughout the book, acknowledging that some museums consider community in its singularity and others in its plurality. One term is not judged to be better than the other; however, it must be noted that when museums consider their community in the singular, that entity is usually constituted by an intricate classification of subgroups that could be construed as separate communities.

2. L. E. Harrison, & S. P. Huntington (Eds.) (2000). *Culture matters: How values shape human progress*. New York: Basic Books.

3. Horkheimer and Adorno did not specifically mention the art museum in their writings, but other notable authors that have similarly approached the subject include Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbell in *The Love of Art: European Museums and their Public* (1969), Nestor García Canclini in *Hybrid Cultures* (1995), John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* (1972), and Bill Ivey in *Arts, Inc*. (2008).