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The democratic horizons of the museum

Citizenship and culture

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DOI

[10.1002/9781118829059.wbihms107](https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118829059.wbihms107)

Publication date

2015

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

The international handbooks of museum studies. - Vol. 1

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Citation for published version (APA):

Dahlgren, P., & Hermes, J. (2015). The democratic horizons of the museum: Citizenship and culture. In A. Witcomb, & K. Message (Eds.), *The international handbooks of museum studies. - Vol. 1: Museum theory* (pp. 117-137). Wiley Blackwell.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118829059.wbihms107>

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THE INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOKS
OF MUSEUM STUDIES

General Editors: Sharon Macdonald and Helen Rees Leahy

Museum Theory

Volume Editors

Andrea Witcomb and Kylie Message

(2015)

Dahlgren, Peter & Hermes, |She
"The democratiz horizons of the
museum : Citizenship and culture"
pp. 117-138

WILEY Blackwell

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THE DEMOCRATIC
HORIZONS OF THE
MUSEUM

Citizenship and Culture

Peter Dahlgren and Joke Hermes

Museums aren't what they used to be, and neither are their publics. Within the ongoing discussions about the changing circumstances and functions of museums, our chapter strives to link museums with democratic theory, more specifically with citizenship and its practices. We see the *raison d'être* of museums as situated in a force field between, on the one hand, knowledge and culture – including “popular” culture – and, on the other hand, the ambitions, rights, and duties traditionally associated with the role of the citizen. In contemporary theory, these two domains have moved closer to each other and increasingly overlap, providing an important conceptual setting for museums.

Our analytical horizon consists of two basic and largely complementary perspectives that we have been developing respectively: civic cultures and cultural citizenship. The framework of civic cultures (Dahlgren 2009) takes as its starting point the sociological question of what kinds of cultural factors can facilitate – as well as hinder – civic participation. In other words, it seeks to illuminate, both conceptually and empirically, the cultural prerequisites for people to act as citizens in the life of democracy, both in politics and in civil society more broadly. Civic cultures can provide citizens with knowledge and experience, with activities and social interaction, and with opportunities for self-creation and meaning-making, all of which serve to enhance the attributes needed for civic agency. The processes of becoming citizens, of socially and culturally developing civic identities, adds an important analytic dimension to the more formal systemic approaches to democracy. The notion of culture here resonates with anthropology and sociology: it has to do with patterns of thought, communication, and action that constitute people's everyday realities.

The perspective of cultural citizenship (Hermes 2005; 2006), our other orientation, is a trajectory that elucidates how culture offers the possibility to build and reflect on social cohesion. Popular culture, especially, can make clear to us, its users, what binds us. Key factors are its accessibility, its inclusiveness, its low-threshold offer of "community" and connection. This horizon examines cultural phenomena, and asks how and in what ways – often not obvious on the surface – these cultural phenomena might serve to enhance democracy. This perspective has its origins in cultural studies' analysis of popular culture. It focuses on everyday practices of meaning production and the inclusionary and exclusionary aspects of everyday culture. From the perspective of audiences, it becomes clear how (popular) culture assists in practices of identity and community formation, not by offering prefab brands but by focusing on issues and questions that are difficult to resolve for society as a whole. Key examples have to do with the construction of masculinity and femininity, for instance, often in relation to ethnicity, age, or, in today's world, religion, but also with notions of safety and governance and the role of the (mass) media in society (Thomas 1995; Brunsdon 1998; Mueller and Hermes 2010). While this may sound almost too obvious, it is important to note that these ideological quagmires are addressed through implied invitations in genres that offer suspense or affect. The notion of culture that is operative here is open to how the arts, in search of sustenance or audiences, will adapt to circumstance and build narratives, formats, or environments as products. These can serve class interests but they can also be critical or have democratic goals (Bennett 1995; Bourdieu 2003).

We find that our two orientations, with their different angles on culture, overlap and complement each other. Thus, if the civic cultures perspective looks at democratic participation and asks how cultural patterns, in the sense of everyday resources and environments, might support it, cultural citizenship looks at cultural products and examines in what ways they may, *de facto* and subtly, already be promoting democracy, or could be altered to do so. From the complementarity of these two analytical vistas, museums become sites that can serve to promote – or deflect – the advancement of citizenship as forms of practice that support democracy from the bottom up, as it were.

Our contribution aims to be both descriptive and analytical but also normative, arguing that museums have an important and growing role to play in the development of democracy and its civic cultures. In what follows, we first situate the museum in the context of some of the dominant currents of late modern society, as well as theories – and dilemmas – of democracy. Thereafter, museums are analytically situated within the civic cultures framework. The perspective of cultural citizenship is offered as something of a thought experiment in the section that follows. We end our discussion not so much with conclusions, but with an eye toward (possible) future developments – which are, of course, unfolding in the present.

Horizons: Democracy, citizenship, participation

Democracy: Crisis and contestation

In the contemporary world of financial, political, and social crises, democracy itself has fallen on hard times. Particularly in the past two decades – ironically enough, since the collapse of communism – its self-assurance has faltered, and research reports and public debate focus intently on “crises.” Many factors come into play here, not least the impact of several decades of neoliberal policies, whereby market logics have assumed a massively hegemonic position, facilitating the further drift of real societal power away from the accountability of democratic control and into the hands of private interests. As market dynamics dominate social development, democracy and meaningful political participation atrophy. Normative discussions about justice are subverted, as economistic values seep into and put price tags on just about all areas of human life. Trust, solidarity, and other virtues have little bearing on the bottom line of economic rationality, which Sandel (2012), more than any other philosopher, has demonstrated with a host of examples. Sandel makes clear that market logic ultimately undermines human dignity and thus the essence of democracy and democratic citizenship.

A major upshot of these developments is often a process of depoliticization, and a central feature in the dilemmas of democracy is the growing disenchantment of the citizenry with electoral politics. Subjective feelings of disempowerment and exclusion from the decision-making dynamics of political life are confirmed by objective realities, leading to not just declines in party loyalties and in engagement in elections, but in increasingly deep-rooted cynicism toward power elites.

Yet, on the other hand, there is a more encouraging counternarrative: an enormous growth in alternative politics. Civic groups, activist networks, social movements, NGOs, self-appointed civic watchdogs, and other forms of collective engagement address broad-ranging issues of local, national, and global concern. These have to do with specific contested issues, with identity politics, with normative and moral questions, and with other manifestations that indicate that citizens are finding new pathways to democratic engagement. Democracies need a robust interplay between electoral and alternative politics. While alternative politics is hardly a new phenomenon, in recent decades its character has been shaped by many of the social and cultural currents of late modernity; indeed, the realm of politics is transmuting, as citizens broaden the notion of what constitutes political issues and find new pathways to involvement, often using the affordances of digital media (see Dahlgren 2013).

Democracy is a concept that is sometimes used almost like a mantra, but we would underscore that it remains a contested notion; political philosophers dispute its true character, while in practice political systems and cultures with significant differences between them claim that they are “democratic.” For example, elite models of democracy advocate the rotation of power holders and minimal civic

input; these are in strong contrast to more participatory models (see Held 2006) which understand equal access to positions of power and the opportunity for schooling and formation for all as a basic and formative right of any democracy. Theories of democracy also usher us into the different notions of citizenship. In practical terms, citizenship has to do with the guarantees of social belonging and participation, and thus connects with the study of social inclusion and exclusion, an area of clear relevance to practices of cultural representation such as those in which museums are involved.

Versions of citizenship

Debates on the ideal notion of citizenship have been a part of the history of democracy; today, classic liberalism remains the dominant tradition, but it is increasingly challenged, especially by the republican paradigm. In the classic liberal model the citizen pursues his or her interests through rational choices, with minimal state "interference." Republicanism also puts an emphasis on the rights of individuals and groups (see Barber 1984; Sandel 1996; van Gunsteren 1998). The key dimension of republicanism, however, is its insistence on the active participation of citizens in democratic self-governance. Involvement in public life is seen not just as a duty, but as something offering its own personal rewards: people become connected to each other, and develop as individuals. Tensions are inevitable, of course: the ideal of the common good, linked to the principle of universalism, must not undermine the recognition of difference.

A particular version of republicanism is that of "radical democracy" (key texts here are Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 2001; Mouffe 2005; 2013). Informed by post-structural theory, "radical democracy" underscores the contextual nature of identity and subject positions, and views political struggle as shaped by ever shifting contingencies. There is no end point for conflict (or for democracy): we/they boundaries are continuously being redrawn as new issues and conflicts (and, thus, publics) arise. Radical democracy accentuates the centrality of difference and heterogeneity, and the importance of progressive groups building alliances to enhance their positions. It also emphasizes the concept of "the political," that is, that collective conflict can arise in principle anywhere in society, whereas the concept of politics is seen as the more delimited and formalized arena of political life. Radical democracy retains a republican quality in its emphasis on agency and in its view of the common good; it also affirms a strong commitment to democratic values and procedures.

There are no airtight boundaries, but certainly liberalism tends to tilt toward formalized politics, while republicanism and especially radical democracy resonate well with alternative politics. Moreover, we see differences in their understanding of the subject and of political processes. Liberalism has traditionally valued rationality in this regard; indeed, liberal theory has generally seen the affective dimension of the human psyche and of political expression as a threat (see, e.g., Hall

2005). Even the Habermasian ideal of the public sphere and its mode of deliberation accentuate the imperative of rationality. To the question of how we become citizens, especially good ones, the only sociological answer liberalism offers seems to be via pedagogy. The tradition of civics classes in school looms large; otherwise, the actual socialization to participatory citizenship remains somewhat of a black box in liberalism.

In the republican tradition, the subject is seen as composed of both reason and affect, and any attempt to negate one or the other results in a conceptual deformity. Participation in politics and society always involves both sides, and the democratic landscape of large complex societies must allow for many modalities of expression. Further, republicanism sees citizenship as a process of learning by doing, not least by engagement in the broad terrain of civil society through which people develop experience and identities relevant for citizenship. Also, they can be invited into participatory modes through cultural experiences (we return to these themes, from our respective orientations, below).

If we compare our horizons with the stimulating article by Chakrabarty (2002), which also links democracy and citizenship to museums, some similarities and differences emerge. Chakrabarty distinguishes between two models of democracy and politics: the pedagogic and the performative. The pedagogic is the traditional one, associated with strict rationality and with institutions that can "teach" citizenship, such as schools, libraries, and museums. This overlaps quite well with the liberal tradition as we describe it. The performative model emerged under late modernity, and has to do with affect and especially experience, as foundations for knowing and acting politically. Republican radical democracy fits quite well here. Chakrabarty is quite right in pointing out the tensions between the two in the contemporary situation, and that the emphasis on abstract reasoning as the only legitimate *modus operandi* of citizenship is a dead end.

Yet we would suggest – from our loosely radical republican horizons – that the way forward should not neglect the pedagogic dimension but, rather, include within its conceptual landscape a place for the performative, the experiential, the affective. In other words, what we need is a balance between these two perspectives. For instance, a growing number of people of indigenous origin around the world are entering the academy and doing research that challenges the premises and mind-sets of the colonial traditions of knowledge, which have framed, defined, and analyzed these people and their past. The postcolonial struggles of such scholars to reclaim their histories and offer counternarratives to new generations are obviously well served by quality archives, museums, and libraries.

More significantly, a key issue that remains largely unaddressed in Chakrabarty's perspective, as well as in liberal theory, and even to some extent in radical republican democracy, is this: How do people come to take on the role of citizenship – how is it that some people actually take the step to become active in civil society or to engage with the political? Whether it has to do with electoral or alternative politics, engaging oneself is often a difficult step. Indeed, both the decline and

resurgence in participation remain a central area of incertitude for democracy. What factors facilitate and hinder such agency? This is where, in relation to democracy and museums, our remarks enter an ongoing discussion. This problematic, which has to do with participation, can become salient in regard to both participation *in* museums and participation in larger social, cultural, and political domains *via* museums.

Participation and museums

In ways that run somewhat parallel to the concept of "television," "museum" is a signifier whose meaning has been evolving in recent decades. Like television, the museum has long been seen as a stable phenomenon. As with television, a series of institutional, organizational, financial, sociocultural, and not least technological developments have modified our understanding of what a museum is and can be. As museums respond to altered contingencies, they have come to include elements that were until recently beyond our mental maps. Museum studies has expanded rapidly in the past decades, as authors from a variety of perspectives engage with the changing circumstances and what they imply for what museums should be doing.¹

There are several elements that interplay in transforming the circumstances in which museums, as institutions of cultural memory and heritage, operate, and in shaping their more recent strategies. In the context of widespread economic difficulties, funding from both private and public sources has become problematic to varying degrees; financial strains are widespread. On a more ideological level, we witness neoliberal demands insisting on market logic in the realm of culture and the arts. Notions that resonate with such themes as public service or the cultural commons are increasingly on the defensive. Commerce is accorded a role as a democratic barometer of people's choice, putting more pressure on museums.

Further, changing patterns of leisure and cultural consumption impact on the relationship between museums and their audiences. For one thing, the expectations among museum visitors mirror the growing consumerist stance that has moved from acceptance of one-way communication, and become more inclined to interactivity and personalization, that is, accessing, adapting, and modifying materials more on their own terms. A key word in this context is "participation," as the aim of encouraging the audience to have a more active role in the museum experience takes hold. We connect here explicitly with the current research on museum communication based in Tartu, Estonia, which also explicitly underscores the links between museums and theories of democracy (in particular, Runnel and Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt 2010; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Runnel 2012).

The Tartu group indicates on its website (www.museum.edicypages.com) that the issues surrounding the possibility of participation and interaction have to do not only with the content that museums offer, the processes that shape

their activities, and the experiences of visitors, but also with how museums can play an active part as forums and catalysts. From admiring collections of curiosities in glass cases, visitors have come to reimagine themselves as participants in history, as possible owners of artwork, design, and historical artifacts (Henning 2006). The museum and the nineteenth-century department store have intersected and evolved, so much so that in today's expectations, as it were, audiences co-own parts of the world with them. Co-ownership, however, comes with responsibilities and anxieties that today's museum also needs to manage and put to rest.

These changes toward market-directed democratization are in some ways inseparable from another vector of development, namely that of the digital communication technologies. Heralded as an indispensable tool for enhancing democracy in the larger society, these media are increasingly being incorporated into the practices of museums, offering not only greater breadth and access to materials – even virtually, beyond the locale of the museums themselves – but also vastly expanding the opportunities for interaction and even participation. This places new demands on museums, while at the same time altering the character of the museum experience, the alignments of social space, and the relationships between museums and their visitors, as recent work has begun to explore (Harma 2010; Lorente i Gall and Kanellos 2010). The traditional museum visitor becomes redefined and repositioned, evoking issues of social competence and hierarchy, and of pleasure and learning as people navigate and experience the new museum environments.

Participation itself is a slippery concept, and can have varying inflections (see Carpentier (2011) for a detailed discussion). There are degrees of participation in the sense of the power balance between the interacting parties. Thus, for example, in many contexts “interactivity” is *de facto* seen as participation, regardless of the depth of shared decision-making or the imbalance of power: the mere fact of two-way communication suffices to label the encounter as participation (see Witcomb 2003 for a detailed discussion of this problem). On the other hand, participation does not *per se* have to involve perfectly symmetrical power relations, and in most cases it does not. Yet it is important to be able to gauge the depth of any participatory context if one is making a case for democracy.

In the case of museums, there are different degrees and forms of participation that are suitable with regard to the collection of materials, the mode of their display, their accessibility, their interpretation, and so on. Yet, as the literature has indicated, there are also other issues involved, such as the question of expertise. In democracy theory this has been a steadily growing theme since the early twentieth century, that is how citizens are to be included in decision-making where more and more issues require the expert knowledge of scientific and technical experts. Runnel and Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt (2010) express it bluntly in regard to museums: people generally are not able to see themselves as competent interpreters and will rely on experts. It becomes a constant democratic challenge to encourage

citizens to share in the responsibility of making sense of not just the displays, but their own experiences, and to participate in authoring their own heritage.

In this regard we might just briefly reflect for a moment on a problematic side of participation. There are groups and movements with various agendas concerning collective identities, the interpretation of history, and visions of a future society who, given the opportunity, might want to impact on museums' activities in ways that promote their particular version of reality. Such politics of representation are inevitable but, while discourses on participatory democracy sometimes cast expertise in the role of an impediment, access to expert knowledge is essential to help arbitrate. Ultimately, the expertless, fact-free museum is not an option if the museum is to maintain public accountability for its activities.

Clearly, the dominant issue is promoting participation, not screening it out. In another article Runnel and Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt (2011) affirm the importance of attaining some kind of balance between the museum, its activities, and its experts on the one hand, and the public, perceived as resource on the other. Depending on context, the public could be amateur enthusiasts or indeed (descendants of) the original owners and creators. Runnel and Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt argue that it is a question of specifying which activities or functions of the museum might support participation, while also looking analytically at the museum from varying angles as a cultural, economic, and political institution.

Democracy can never be just an abstract system; it has what we might call cultural prerequisites that must be met if it is to function. Museums can fulfill this role even as they may find that they are not attaining the degree of participation in their activities that they would like. They can influence public agendas, they can expand the actual participation of the public's activities in the museum, as well as help facilitate societal participation via the museum. They can be a space for real-life or virtual discussion, contributing to democracy via their status as cultural institutions. We will explore this further in the next two sections, first from the angle of civic cultures, then, more briefly, from that of cultural citizenship.

Museums and civic cultures

Civil society, voice, and visibility

At the normative level, the public character of museums in democratic societies means that part of their mission has to do with the defense and enhancement of democracy. That people – and since we are talking about democracy, let us use the term “citizens” – can participate more actively these days in the activities of museums is an important development. And that there are ambitions to find ways to broaden and deepen this kind of participation is indeed promising. One can make a case similar to that often made with reference to the teaching of democracy in schools, namely, that the process is as important as the content: the environment

and the relationships in the classroom need to be characterized by democratic attributes and procedures. This has been a challenge for both institutions.

Attention to process and practice does not render the actual, encoded pedagogic content superfluous. On the contrary, both form and content (to invoke a classic, if not unproblematic, distinction) have significance. It may seem superfluous to kick in this open door, but in the context of the current energized discussions about augmenting participation it might be worthwhile to say this just once: From a democracy perspective, what the museum presents, and how this is presented and interpreted, retains significance. The overall experiences that both museums and schools offer are aimed at personal development; while this clearly has a private, individual dimension, it also involves equipping citizens to deal with society more broadly. It is here that the link with democracy comes into focus, as is cogently exemplified by the exhibition *Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours* at the Immigration Museum in Melbourne.²

We mentioned at the outset that the perspective of civic cultures is concerned with the formation and enhancement of citizens' participation, of promoting democratic agency. Democracy is dependent on input from its citizens, whether they are involved explicitly in politics or more broadly in civil society. The republican version of citizenship underscores the benefits of participation both for society and for individual citizens, and, at the same time, it tries to keep a sociological eye on the degree of participation that can realistically be expected. Citizens' participation deepens the open, public character of society; it generates civic talk, which is the lifeline of democracy. For citizens, participation contributes to the democratically enhancing elements of voice and visibility. Couldry (2010) suggests that voice functions not just within but also beyond politics; fundamentally, it is a process of giving accounts of oneself and of the circumstances in which one acts. Such narrative is a basic element of our humanity, and thus to deny it to others is, at least implicitly, to deny their humanity. Voice is what intertwines the lives of collectivities, rendering them as social, as something more than a cluster of atomized personal stories.

The related notion of visibility posits different modes or regimes of visibility, based on complex social, technical, and political arrangements (see Brighenti 2010). An overarching public sphere mode of visibility, usually mediated, allows citizens to *be* in public, giving rise to the visibility that sustains democratic processes. A second mode, more pertinent to the discussion here, concerns the mode of social visibility, of interaction, where the gaze and recognition of general or significant others becomes central to the constitution of self, of identity. This "intervisibility" relates to general perspectives on how our sense of self emerges through interaction with others. Within civil society, this involves the encounter with strangers, a public mode of interaction predicated on optimal social distance, affording recognition but not intrusion. This is the terrain of civic interaction and socialization; where, not least on the Internet, strangers become visible to each other in order to find out about and cooperate in shared interests.

Such participation, or civic agency, cannot be taken for granted, a point that has been brought home in all the discussions in recent decades about the decline in civic involvement. If the basic question is what will help encourage citizens' participation in civil society, the short answer is: civic cultures. This framework offers ways to understand and probe the factors that may impact on civic agency. And museums, we would argue, through both their traditional practices and their more current focus on reaching out and engaging the public, have an important role to play in supporting civic cultures and agency. Let us look at this in some more detail.

Civic cultures: Six dimensions

We speak of civic cultures in the plural, since in the late modern world there are many ways in which participation can be accomplished and enacted. Civic cultures, to the extent that they are effective, operate at the level of citizens' taken-for-granted everyday horizons, and are shaped by an array of factors. Certainly the major structural aspects of society play a role: social relations of power, economics, the legal system, and so forth. Family and schools lay a foundation. In late modern society, the centrality of the media comes clearly into view: their form, content, specific logics, and modes of use become the most accessible carriers of civic cultures. Museums, as institutions situated somewhere between schools and the media, thus also become factors in this regard.

In some circumstances, civic cultures can be robust and shape citizens' sense of what is possible; they can serve to empower. Citizens, in turn, shape civic culture through their practices. Indeed, it is not impossible that civic cultures can develop even in circumstances that may on the surface seem unlikely, as we saw in several countries when the communist system began to collapse and as witnessed in some Arab countries recently. Alternatively, civic cultures can be at risk, blocked, impaired, or quashed by repression. The weaknesses or absence of civic cultures becomes disabling and undercuts the inclination and capacities of citizens to act, even in democratic society.

The notion of culture generally can easily appear nebulous, and civic cultures are no exception. Thus, for conceptual precision, civic cultures are modeled as an integrated circuit of six dimensions of mutual reciprocity (a more extended discussion is found in Dahlgren 2009). The six dimensions are: knowledge; values; trust; spaces; practices; and identities. A circuit metaphor underlines their interaction but there is, of course, never anything mechanical or inevitable about how culture operates.

Knowledge: New modes

That citizens must have access to reliable reports, portrayals, analyses, discussions, debates, and so forth is self-evident. Yet, such knowledge cannot be limited to current affairs and political issues; orientations to the past, to other people and

cultures, to art and religion, are important for making sense of a globalized world and one's place in it. Museums have an obvious part to play in this regard. We should note that precisely what kinds of knowledge are required for the vitality of civic cultures can never be established once and for all, but must always be open for discussion and, indeed, experimentation.

What is particularly significant regarding knowledge is the different forms that it can take, from traditional linear texts to today's most advanced interactive, multimedia virtual experiences. This gives the modern museum a broad range of communicative strategies for offering insight, a point underscored in the recent literature (see, e.g., Aganes et al. 2010). Communicative flexibility may prove especially relevant if, as many scholars are increasingly arguing, people's cognitive architecture is in fact evolving as new generations grow up with ever more advanced media technologies.

Values: Anchored in the everyday

Democracy will not function if such values as equality, reciprocity, tolerance, and the willingness to follow democratic principles are not anchored in people's everyday life. In the absence of such values, democracy is reduced to an empty formalism. Just which are the "best" or "real" democratic values, and how they are to be applied, can of course – and should – be the grounds for serious dispute. Different social and cultural groups can express civic agency in different ways, with slightly different value inflections. For example, the civic culture that might characterize a group of community activists in an immigrant neighborhood will no doubt differ considerably from that of a national environmentalist group.

Values reflect sensibilities; fundamentally, democracy is as much about how people live together and treat each other as it is about a system of formal institutions. Here, museums make a daily contribution, most often by merely following their social instincts. Democratic values are often manifested in civility, respect for opposing opinions, openness, accountability, and so on. It may be that it is in the context of newer and as yet not routine communicative contexts, where museums are using digital media, that extra reflection about values is warranted, to avoid possible inadvertent signals or situations from arising. Which is to say that the expertise and the budget of the museum may have to extend to, for example, the moderation of open discussion.

Trust: Optimal, horizontal

Trust has long been seen as an important component for democracy; it has been reiterated in theory and studied empirically. It has been presented as a self-evident "good thing" – the more trust, the better, and decline in trust signals trouble. Certain degrees of general trust in society are necessary to make life bearable, but for democracy, trust balanced with a built-in antenna for skepticism and criticism is optimal. The bearers of trust are usually seen as the citizens, and the objects of trust are the institutions or representatives of government. However, for facilitating

participation in civil society, the horizontal civic trust between citizens – the “loose bonds” often mentioned in relation to late modernity and the network society – is just as important. The capacity to extend a suitable degree of trust to strangers is a valuable element of what we might call democratic capital, which facilitates collective civic efforts. Widespread mistrust, of course, becomes debilitating for participation. Museums normally promote civic trust via the general atmosphere they generate vis-à-vis their visitors in providing a place where strangers can converge. Museums are there to serve the people. This is usually unproblematic. It is in cases where controversy arises, where rifts among the public appear, and where museums themselves engage in public debate, that extra attention to their impact on trust may be warranted.

Spaces: Communicative contexts

Democracy must take place somewhere: the participation of citizens requires the communicative spaces of public spheres, sites for civic agency and for the socialization processes of citizenship. The traditional physical space of the museum fits here in an obvious way, a spatial resource that can be put to use for civic ends. In modern democracies, of course, the Internet and its ancillary technologies are becoming the premier spaces for many citizens, and this connects directly to recent developments in the world of museums. To have a presence in the digital cultural public sphere is an immense asset – while at the same time it carries with it the imperative of the intense competition for attention. To be easily “findable” and available may be a first prerogative; the possibilities for engagement via discussion, online scrapbooking or “gamification” are a second step.

One particular feature worth noting here is the growing mobility of the web environment. With the net under the regime of Web 1.0, people could be copresent with others who were physically removed. With Web 2.0, together with the new telephony where mobile phones are developing into pocket computers that can link to the Internet, we are seeing the emergence of a new mobile publicness. This can make “space” a more malleable entity, one that can be defined, constructed, and appropriated in yet unforeseen ways in the context of participation. The capacity to send and receive Internet-based text, sound, and images while on the move may well enhance the connections between online and offline contexts, and may generally strengthen the efficacy of museums’ efforts to enhance participation. Museums can definitely benefit more from the coming into being of always-connected lightweight communities. The challenge will be to find the right repertoires and means to engage such communities. “Old-fashioned” communication and public relations means relying on sending messages. The new social media, however, require creative forms of responsiveness on the part of all players even if, from time to time, it boils down to a banal “like” button.

Practices: Embodied agency and skills

If participating in elections is usually seen as the paramount concrete practice for democracy's citizens, it is far from the only one required or the only one that civic cultures can make available. A viable democracy must be embodied in concrete recurring practices – individual, group, and collective – that are relevant for diverse situations and various civic and political projects. Such practices help generate personal and social meaning applicable to the ideals of democracy, and they convey a sense of empowerment. They must have an element of the routine, of the taken-for-granted about them, such as keeping up with the news, if they are to be a part of civic cultures (though other practices, such as street confrontation or the flash mob, may emerge more spontaneously).

Civic practices can be and are learned; they often require specific skills and (communicative) competencies. Thus, to be able to read, write, speak, organize a meeting, lead a discussion, work a computer, and get around on the Internet can all be seen as competencies important for democratic practices. New practices and traditions can and must evolve to ensure that democracy does not stagnate. We see today how the lack of civic practices and skills is an obstacle in many societies for citizens attempting to develop their democratic character. Education and learning will thus always play a key role in nurturing democracy (even if its contents and pedagogic approaches periodically need to be scrutinized and debated, and self-taught skills and knowledge need to be integrated). In this regard, museums can serve as sites – physical and virtual – for civic learning practices. They can provide skills and tools that can enrich citizens' experiences within the museum and also be applied to civil society beyond the museum. For museums, practices interplay forcefully with knowledge and (aesthetic) appreciation. They also resonate with trust and values, and allow for the careful introduction of shocking facts and (re)interpretations. Therefore, practices involve defining, using, or creating suitable spaces. Most compellingly, practices help foster civic identities.

Identities: Empowered collective agents

Identity has to do with our conception of self. In the late modern world, we see identity in a plural sense: we operate daily in a variety of different "worlds" or realities; we carry within us different sets of knowledge, assumptions, rules, and roles for different circumstances. Thus, to be able to see oneself as a citizen, to feel like an empowered agent who can act in civil and political society, is understood as one among several dimensions of the late modern self, which is activated in political circumstances. Possessing some version of a civic self is essential for acting as a citizen; people sense that they, in concert with others, can have some kind of impact on society. However, even in democracies there are a variety of mechanisms of exclusion that serve to erode civic identities. Yet, suitable knowledge, practices, values, and trust can all bolster such identity. Like all identities, it is strengthened via experience; the dimension of identity is in a sense the payoff of

the other five. Thus museums, as well as other social institutions, can directly nourish civic identities by the way they deal with people, with the democratic assumptions and modes that they embody in their communicative interaction.

Museums and cultural citizenship

A critical note

From the perspective of cultural citizenship research, the museum at first glance presents itself as an unlikely candidate for reflection. It is, after all, easily perceived as an institution that upholds distinctions of taste and class. Museums are designed to have visitors move docilely through their space. They manipulate citizens in particular modes of spectatorship that seldom allow for dialogue. The competencies, skills, and knowledges they confer would seem to go toward class segregation rather than democracy. Beyond the art museum, natural history and other museums, moreover, are difficult to see as other than thinly disguised forms of education in the sense of forced regimes of learning. This is not to say that the new museum that privileges "experience" is in any sense an improvement on the authoritarian form of the museum as holder of final expert knowledge. To some it may seem a final bow to the utter commercialization of society, of entertainment as king. To us, it is another form of withholding the possibility of dialogue, exchange, and discussion which is a crucial part of civic culture. Last but not least: The museum will, by some, be regarded with a measure of distrust. Michelle Henning points out that museums have long been looked at with a measure of suspicion: collecting and consumption practices associated with "women and with homosexuality in men point to the way in which overaccumulation, the madness of museums, has been historically regarded as a kind of deviation, a threat to normative identity" (2006, 127).

For today's museum to work as a civic space, it needs to deal with its own history and reputation. It also needs to understand how the museum may be used in very different ways from how it was and is intended to be used. Henning's view on the museum from a media and cultural theory perspective shows the parallel development of the museum and the department store from the late nineteenth century onward into the twentieth century: the use of particular types of design for both, the glass display case to underline the preciousness of what is on show. The crossover pleasure in imagining oneself the owner of what is on display, or the potential buyer, is evident, and not what museums would normally cater to. The reason they do not is born of an insistence on formal civic values and their duty to preserve cultural heritage. But, Henning also argues, the museum can hardly do real justice with what is on display, cut off as artifacts now are from their history and original context. No manner of pedagogy can fully undo the sense in which voyeurism is catered to in museums spaces. The consequence is that neither pedagogy nor voyeurism may be the way in which the museum can foster cultural citizenship.

The museum as a site for cultural citizenship

"Cultural citizenship" as a term is used by sociologists but mostly in cultural studies, in discussion of and research on popular culture. It is part of a self-reflexive discussion that emerged in the 1990s in response to the criticism that cultural studies has naively celebrated popular cultural forms and genres as loci of resistance against dominant power relations (Curran 1990). While (popular) culture may offer temporary, and perhaps sometimes idealized, opportunities for resistance against dominant views, habits, or institutions, it also disciplines us and allows us those moments of resistance within certain bounds. The qualities that popular culture especially offers have to do with its openness. Of course, the invitation to belong to a fan audience, or to become a connoisseur of a particular genre or product, is part of the market logic that motivates popular culture. Nonetheless, belonging to a group with like-minded others is on offer. In addition, popular culture offers the opportunity to fantasize about a better, or at the very least a different, world. It is potentially a utopian space that allows for both easy and more complex forms of social criticism. Third, popular culture links the domains of the public and the private; and it allows news to also be entertainment and therefore that much more attractive to a wider audience. Entertainment becomes something to learn from, whether emotional intelligence or the ability to play cognitive word games (Hermes 2005, 3).

If democracy is deliberation by many on the best life possible for all, popular culture is the place where it will happen. Here we find a minimum set of rules for such deliberation, with an open invitation to all to participate and a willingness to allow for an ongoing and unruly process. "Cultural citizenship" is the term that is used for the democratic potential of popular culture, and the question here is whether and how that potential extends to such institutional settings as the museum. It refers directly to options for and opportunities used to construct identities in everyday life, to how audiences make do with representations that are available and the moral rights and obligations that are implied in the use of popular culture. All in all, in the field of cultural studies, the utopian and the regulatory and disciplinary power of all culture is taken to be a balancing act, whether it regards the news (Gripsrud 1999), global culture generally (Stevenson 2001; 2003) or the representation of politics in entertainment genres (van Zoonen 2004).

At the core of citizenship discussion in cultural studies is the question of how we become subjects, how we are invited and incited to recognize our moral obligations (Miller 1993). We are, according to Miller (1998), subjected to continuous training and reform. We are invited to find individuality and develop a social self. We are at the center of a never accomplished project. It would seem attractive to understand discipline negatively and resistance positively, but that would be too easy. After all, discipline, like hypocrisy has its value as what Shklar (1984) calls a "daily vice." It is the underlying system of marking some areas or some people out for extreme disciplining or exclusion on arbitrary (even if often historical) grounds,

such as race or gender, that needs to be challenged. John Hartley (1999) tackles what he calls "the knowledge class" for being involved in such exclusionary practices. For Hartley, "University men" and "school inspectors" from the late nineteenth century onward defined "culture" in opposition to "what is proposed by the majority." He sees in a discourse of anxiety about popularization and modernity a quite straightforward fear of and hostility to the democratization of taste (Hartley 1999, 66). Hartley proposes that we try and undo the divide made by intellectuals between "the knowledge class" and "ordinary people," as both are relevant sites of knowledge production (58–59). Taking Hartley's argument further, the museum is as likely a place to try and accomplish this as any other. It offers the opportunity to build and reflect on identity and accept difference, the two mainstays of any type of citizenship, built as that is on mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Crucially, what is at stake is the possibility for self-determination and exploration.

All media, including the event, the concert, or indeed the museum offer such possibilities even if, at the same time, they will discipline and normalize citizens as they attend a football match, keep the required distance from artworks, or do not consume self-brought food in cinemas. In return, as individuals they will use the cultural means at hand to furnish a sense of community, social criticism, and sometimes hope. Hartley (1999) shows how popular media, from the popular press to television have allowed for a sense of "neighbourliness" to develop. Ellis (2000) speaks of how television news helps us "work through" unfinished business on a social level. Popular fiction genres such as soap opera, women's magazines, detective novels, and police series may also work from the audience's perspective as collective identity resource and a means for "scenario planning" by offering "usable stories" (Mephram 1990; Hermes 2005). All fiction, including "reality" fiction such as those offered by news narratives and museums, is in that sense a citizenship training ground and a domain for working through or for "fictional rehearsal" (Stuart Hall, quoted in Miller 1993, 79).

The question is how comfortably the museum might operate, knowing this. The museum itself, along Foucauldian lines, is an institution that uses instruments of discipline and learning; it is itself bound to several sets of rules. There are, for example, expectations of truth and verity. If the "real" thing is not on display, we need to know as we cannot expect to feel any of the "aura" of truly original art. The discovery of forged pieces upsets visitors, museum directors, and insurance companies alike. A recent sale of a painting by a Dutch museum in an open auction was felt to be upsetting in an entirely different way. The museum was seen as the keeper rather than the owner of, in this case, the artwork. Acquisition and selling are, therefore, closely regulated by the museums themselves as a group or a guild. In this case, the sale of Marguerite Dumas's *The Schoolboys* allowed the museum to do necessary work on upkeep and renovation. Had the museum played by the rules of the guild, it would have had to offer the piece first to other Dutch museums at a collegial price. These other museums played the card of indignation and daylight robbery from "the public" on behalf of the public (Lange 2011).

Not only is the museum bound by rules and expectations, but it is also more and more "disowned" by public governments. Subsidies are withdrawn; free entry to the national museums in London, instigated by the Blair government, will surely come under threat again; the Sunday opening of the Louvre is more easily interpreted as a semi-royal gesture than a sign of ownership of the collection by *les citoyens de France*, even if the Louvre was made "public property" after the French Revolution. Museums today need to find ways and means to survive in what can be called neoliberal communitarianism. Right-wing governments such as the Dutch government feel that abiding by market logic will be good for the entire cultural sector. Market logic will teach these institutions to listen to what people really want; corporate sponsorship, on the other hand, will allow private companies to show their public face, as well as groups to emerge who want to support culture. Any suggestion of returning to a notion that culture belongs to and is open only to elites is met with a degree of derision. Apparently, in postmodern times, there is no longer such a thing as either popular or elite culture, and those insisting on culture's own unique voice in society in the Netherlands are met with the accusation that they are engaging in their "left-wing hobbies," in a nice 180-degree spin away from the argument that culture will again become more and more an elite enterprise. Cutting the national subsidy of the Amsterdam Tropenmuseum (Museum of the Tropics) in autumn 2011, which documents colonial history including the Dutch slave trade and its global effects on people, institutions, and our experience of the world today, can, in that light, be seen as the most bitterly ironic misunderstanding of the term "postcolonialism."

Cultural citizenship research clearly does not help the museum much in any direct sense. That much is clear. If cultural citizenship can be built on the basis of commercial culture and can and will come from unlikely places, how to cater to it? Or call on it? Spontaneous engagement cannot, after all, be organized top-down; there has to be an unpredictable first moment in which there is a connection that can be built on. The museum carries the burden of being the almost quintessential "modern" institution (Bennett 1998), and it is not self-evident how the museum is to move forward. How not to insist on proper behavior? How to forgo claims of authenticity, truth, or the proper interpretation? Clearly, museums know this and often allow for a leisurely stroll rather than an educational excursion. Also big museums offer good coffee and good food. Their bathrooms have benefited from attention to interior decoration and display. The museum gift shops have not hesitated to sell the museum itself as a brand, a mark of distinction on small keepsakes such as pencils, and to offer a choice of designed small luxury goods. It is rare indeed, even in a small museum, to find nothing but postcards on sale – the older memento, or boastful message to send family or friends to let them know we were here and enjoyed the presence of Real Art.

The mod cons of the museum today partly spell out the very early pleasure of looking at rich people's treasures, and the exotic qualities of curiosity collections, both forms of voyeurism (Henning 2006, 12–13). In time, the pleasure of imagining

oneself to be rich by window shopping in a department store was also transferred to the museum. As this is an imagined form of co-ownership, it is not especially a source of future income for the museum but it does point to the way in which the museum might look to fostering cultural citizenship *incidentally*, almost in a tongue-in-cheek manner rather than trying to choreograph it. Beyond the realm of discipline for its own sake is where the museum needs to go. The question is whether the seduction techniques of modern commercial media could and would work well for the museum. Their civic properties, after all, were not and have not been a central concern of their manufacturers. Newspapers, television programming, book publication: all have always been expected to turn a profit.

Michelle Henning's work suggests that the museum's double heritage, both the Romantic tradition (amassing *richesse* and *curiosa*) and the Enlightenment (the explanation of the world for the public at large; see Henning 2006, 18) needs to be taken seriously here. If anything, the museum needs to seek engagement by offering the right mix of aesthetics, experience, information, and fun while doing right by the sense of community that could bind visitors and exhibits. After all, if the emotional realism of soap opera works (Ang 1985) via melodramatic identification, and if news works through contextualization and narrativity (Bird and Dardenne 1990), the museum might engage us via the backstories of acquisition, the fights over authentication, the trouble in attracting the right kinds of visitors. Whether in the form of a game (murder-at-the-museum weekend?) or by installing a small hands-on laboratory, or by concentrating on their restaurant facilities, many options are open once museum quality is no longer linked to its collection as such but to how these collections are a means to a number of ends.

Civic museums

The civic museum could be Habermas's eighteenth-century coffee house even if its lineage would appear to take it back to the even earlier seventeenth-century salon, run by ladies of good taste and strong views. The coffee house was a rowdy place, caffeine sparking strong debate and rows. The salon catered only to select groups of like-minded. We can imagine museums that might work, however, along the lines of the wonderful cooking at Books for Cooks, a London bookshop that indeed cooks from its books for lunch. One has to be early, and it is about taste rather than talk. Still, there are many examples of convivial cultural gatherings that the museum could benefit from, not least by keeping in mind the six dimensions of civic culture outlined above. Could the museum do more and move past the like-minded, the well-mannered, and the convivial? Could we have civic museums in the future that will only have collections on show as a minor part of their activities – to provide an ambiance and be a resource for the conversations they give rise to?

The challenge for the civic museum of the future would be to give up on any type of tunnel vision and to understand how its mission (to educate or inform, to show

and move its publics by allowing them to be in touch with heritage, history, science, art, design) might not always be best served by the classical museum exhibition or show. It may want to cater to authenticity or experience; it may want to collaborate with the other arts to make a particular point. It will want to come alive beyond the awe, surprise, and admiration museum exhibitions seem mostly to want to inspire.

In the circuit metaphor we suggested above, knowledge, values, trust, spaces, practices, and identities are all dimensions to take into account that need to be balanced against the authority of the power-knowledge nexus that a museum also is. Possibly conservation and curation need to be seen as entirely separate activities in a demand-driven version of the museum. Or online catalogs could invite individuals and groups to come up with their own exhibition or indeed with questions to which they would like answers, as has been done at the Museum Victoria in Melbourne which hosts a "community gallery" where communities are invited to bring their stories.³ Initiatives such as the Amsterdam project "Het Geheugen van Oost" (The memory of east), a website built on stories told by east Amsterdammers, in fact constitutes a virtual museum.⁴ As museums have managed to become brands, they can use their brand identity to bond with different communities and groups in society. Not, as the neoliberal argument would have it, to simulate or create a marketplace for exhibitions or shows, but to do their version of "show, don't tell," when it comes to history, art, and the natural sciences. Like all media, museums are storytellers. That should be the point of departure in thinking the civic museum for the world of tomorrow.

Notes

- 1 Among this rather extensive literature, see, e.g., Weil 2002; Anderson 2004; Marstine 2005; Buntix et al. 2006; Hein 2006; Macdonald 2006; Message 2006; Kalay, Kvan, and Affleck 2008; Falk 2009; Simon 2010.
- 2 See <http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/whatson/current-exhibitions/identity-yours-mine-ours/> (accessed October 13, 2014). See also Chapters 16 by Andrea Witcomb and 22 by Laurajane Smith in this volume.
- 3 See <http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/about-us/community-engagement/community-exhibitions/> (accessed October 13, 2014).
- 4 See <http://www.geheugenvanoost.nl/> (accessed October 13, 2014).

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