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Reflections on Museology – Classifications, conceptualisations and concepts at the core of museology theory and practice

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Abstract

This chapter theorises the museum as an agency or technology of classification (Fyfe 1995) to discuss and demonstrate how world views, ideologies, knowledge and power are composed and entangled in the classifications, conceptualisations and conceptual systems of museums. I argue that the analysis, deconstruction and awareness of nature and implications of conceptualisations, as well as the discourses to which they are attached, are crucial, regarding both the theory and practice of museology. Drawing from critical museology and heritage studies, I consider the concept of the museum in light of its history as a Western institution and deeply implicated in the modernist and nationalist quest for an order of things and peoples (Bennett 1995). While museums have transformed and redefined their principles and practices in recent decades, the museum institution has not abandoned its original function as an instrument for characterising and representing the world by cataloguing. Classifications and conceptual systems offer a critical key to the investigation and deconstruction of the museum's categorical legacy. This chapter presents the connection between classification and conceptualisation, as profound human activities, and the formation of concepts and discourses, as well as the intertwined dyad of knowledge and power operating and manifesting itself in the museum institution. At the operational level, I examine some examples of processes and applications, such as semantic web ontologies, through which worldviews, knowledge systems and more or less consciously pursued ideologies embedded in classifications and conceptual systems are integrated into museum practices.

Keywords: concepts, classification, theory, critical heritage studies, critical museology

Introduction

In the history of the modern museum, the concept of the museum has been fluid and debated, constantly rethought and redefined, both in museums and heritage organisations and in academic research concerning museums and heritage (Davis,

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1. This chapter has been peer reviewed.

Mairesse & Desvallées 2010; Woodham 2019). As some museums have radically transformed, adjusted and re-invented their principles, policies and practices over recent decades, ICOM stated in the aftermath of the 2016 ICOM General Conference that the museum definition from the ICOM Statutes in 2007 no longer seems to reflect the challenges and manifold visions and responsibilities of museums (ICOM 2019). ICOM has thus invited members and other interested parties to take part in creating a more current definition (see also Ehanti, this volume). The responses to ICOM's request, and the new alternative museum definition based on them, stressed the museum's institutional role as media or as a cultural service, which enables and encourages its clients to engage with their heritage and to participate in the process of heritagisation, where the past is used in the present and for the future:[2]

> Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people. (ICOM 2019)

Despite the current aspirations to redefine the concept and purpose of the museum to appear as a more inclusive, more participatory and more democratising facilitator of the critical dialogue, the decades-old characterisations of the museum as a "Classifying House" (Whitehead 1971, p. 155, p. 159; 1970, p. 50, p. 56) or "an agency of classification" (Fyfe 1995, p. 203, see also Macdonald 1996) remain accurate. Museum practices – the ways museums classify and organise space, people and artefacts – compose classifications, conceptual systems and discourses, which guide us to perceive reality and its subjects, objects, actors and their relationships in a particular manner. Within these frameworks, museums offer representations of the world, which are socially constructed and profoundly connected to their societal and cultural contexts (Shelton 2013).

However, despite their seemingly natural, normal and rational nature, these depictions of the world are not inevitable, but contingent. To allow and enable the genuinely democratised and inclusive discussion – a critical dialogue – about the past in the present, the naturalising process and ideologies embedded in

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2. The process of composing the proposition for the new definition apparently turned out to be far from unanimous. For instance, François Mairesse, a professor at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle and the chair of the International Committee of Museology, critiqued the proposal as being "not a definition but a statement of fashionable values, much too complicated and partly aberrant" (Noce 2019). The proposition for the new museum definition was intended to be put to a vote as part of the ICOM Statutes at the Kyoto International Conference in 2019. However, after a debate among ICOM members, the Extraordinary General Assembly decided to postpone the vote (based on the arguments presented in the debate, see, e.g., Ehanti, Turtiainen & Patokorpi 2019; Nelson 2019). The museum definition proposal is to be submitted for a vote again at the ICOM General Conference in 2022 (ICOM 2021).

museum practices could, and should, be made more visible and analysed critically, both at the theoretical and operational levels of museology.

It is essential to acknowledge that taking a critical perspective does not mean merely to judge the current state of affairs as problematic, but to increase awareness of the fact that the current situation that seems to be inescapable is not (Hacking 1999). Concerning museology, the critical approach has been emerging since the 1970s "in opposition to the objectivist claims, universalist pretensions, and ideological effects of operational museology", as Anthony Shelton (2018, p. 1), an anthropologist and researcher in critical museology, has put it (see also Smeds, this volume). According to Shelton (2018), and aligning with the more or less explicated goals of critical heritage studies (Smith 2012a), critical museology examines not only the practices of operational museology, but also the range of academic, administrative and professional heritage institutions, organisations and policies through which institutional narratives and discourses are mediated and regulated. The suggested purpose of critical museology is to sustain an ongoing critical dialogue that provokes a self-reflexive attitude towards museum practices (Shelton 2013, p. 18).

In the creation of the representations and displays – the museum's distinctive ways to communicate with society and address its diverse communities – classifications, concepts, terms and conceptual systems play a crucial part. They are necessary for ordering the otherwise chaotic reality and abundance of potential museum objects, the collections of artefacts and specimens. At the same time, they carry a package loaded with connotations, allusions and direct references connected to ideologies, knowledge systems and structures of power, intertwined with the development and history of Western science, societies and nation-building (Aronsson & Elgenius 2015). As one of the Western institutions, the museum is deeply implicated in the modernist and nationalist quest for an order of things and peoples (Bennett 1995; Macdonald 1996). Classifications and conceptual systems, the supporting structures of institutional discourses, thus offer one key to the investigation and deconstruction of this legacy.

Moreover, as cultural theorist and critic Mieke Bal (2002, p.13) has claimed, we should care for concepts because they "are the sites of debate, awareness of difference, and tentative exchange". Bal's thesis states that interdisciplinarity in the humanities must seek its heuristic and methodological basis on concepts rather than methods. Merely borrowing a loose term here and there would not create real interdisciplinarity. Instead, we should embrace concepts, not so much as firmly established univocal terms, but as dynamic and vague, as they are. While groping to define what a particular concept may mean we gain insight into what it can do. Bal (2002, p. 11) stresses that it is in this groping that the valuable work lies, and such groping, our fumbling efforts to analyse and define concepts, is a collective, continuous endeavour. Therefore, concepts are the backbone of cultural analysis and interdisciplinary studies, such as museum and heritage studies – not because they mean the same thing to everyone, but because they

do not. For the same reason, concepts can also work as instruments in building a bridge between museology theory and practice.

Classification and conceptualisation – Creating order

A certain Chinese encyclopaedia, a fictitious taxonomy of animals described by Jorge Luis Borges in his 1964 essay, *The Analytical Language of John Wilkins*, is often used to illustrate the contextuality, arbitrariness and cultural specificity of any attempt to categorise the world:

> Animals are divided into: (a) those that belong to the Emperor, (b) embalmed ones, (c) those that are trained, (d) suckling pigs, (e) mermaids, (f) fabulous ones, (g) stray dogs, (h) those that are included in this classification, (i) those that tremble as if they were mad, (j) innumerable ones, (k) those drawn with a very fine camel's hair brush, (l) others, (m) those that have just broken the flower vase, (n) those that resemble flies from a distance. (Borges 1964, p. 103)

Borges' fable inspired the philosopher, historian and social theorist Michel Foucault's (1966/2002) seminal work *The Order of Things*, in the foreword of which he writes:

> Out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage [in Borges], all the familiar landmarks of my thought – *our* thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and geography – breaking all up the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other. (Foucault 1966/2002, p. xvi)

Foucault (ibid., pp. xvi–xix) asserts that Borges not only demonstrated the exotic charm of another system of thought, but also the limitation of our own, the impossibility of thinking disorder, i.e., combining things that are inappropriate in terms of the prevailing classification systems and conceptualisations we have adapted. Arguing that the museum in its classifying role has been actively engaged over time in the construction of varying rationalities, museologist Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1992, pp. 4–5) quotes Borges (and Foucault) as well, noting that "the system of classification, ordering, and framing, on which such a list is based is so fundamentally alien to our western way of thinking as to be, in fact, 'unthinkable', and, indeed, 'irrational'". However, she asks how we can be sure that there is not a rationality that explains the sense of the list. As Hooper-Greenhill suggests, the whole classification process used to create museum collections, with all the exclusions, inclusions, values and priorities, also creates systems of knowledge, *epistemes* (see also Foucault 1969). Therefore, we should be aware of the fact that existing classifications and taxonomies within the museum might enable some ways of knowing, but prevent others.

The cultural, post-colonial and social theorist Couze Venn (2006) points out that museums, as cultural artefacts and documents of prevailing rationales and intellectual discourses themselves, reveal how a society or culture at a particular time in history addresses "the ordering of the orderable" (ibid., p. 36). Like Foucault (1966/2002; 1969) and Hooper-Greenhill (1992), Venn connects the question of order, on the one hand, to the idea of the knowable and orderable, and, on the other hand, to a worldview, one that is profoundly contextual, historical and contingent. The techniques and practices that museums apply to collect and interpret their objects, classifying, cataloguing and naming, can thus be defined as a distinct epistemological genre, as particular ways of understanding the world and composing a category of knowing (Robinson 2019, pp. 34–35). The aspirations to reform the museum into "democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue" (ICOM 2019), with participatory practices and shared agency in the creation of institutional heritage, evidently generate situations where diverse knowledge and knowledge systems are compared and contradicted. Especially in participatory or communal research projects, negotiations concerning these epistemologies should be part of the research subject and under analysis as well (Atalay 2010), to which classifications and conceptualisations offer considerable value. However, it is not worthwhile to evaluate the truth value of conceptions and belief systems that seem to be in contradiction to scientific knowledge and worldviews. Their value lies instead in their capacity to propose alternative conceptions of reality and to convey unfamiliar ways of being in and perceiving the world (Enqvist 2016, pp. 28–29).

The knowledge systems and rationalities embedded in a museum's ordering practices also connect these practices to the intertwined nature of knowledge and power. As Foucault (1980) argued, knowledge and power always occur together, and knowledge is power in the sense that it creates space where power can work (see also Foucault & Gordon 1980). For instance, the discipline of history, as an inspection of the past, also controls the past by knowing it (Husa 1995). Like history, other fields of research or expertise, such as heritage governance, generate spaces of knowledge, for which they position themselves as guardians and authorities. Moreover, because power is involved in the construction of truths, and knowledge has implications for power, the production, distribution and consumption of knowledge are always political, understood as workings of power (Macdonald 1998, p. 3). The anthropologist and museum and heritage scholar Sharon Macdonald (ibid.) accurately summarises that at the museum, politics lies not just in explicit policy statements and intentions, but also in implicit and apparently non-political details, such as the architecture of buildings, techniques of display or classification and the juxtaposition of artefacts in an exhibition.

Concepts, Terms and Discourses

Concepts have been studied and theorised in several disciplines. This is obviously the case in linguistics, but also in philosophy, psychology and history, as well as in the cognitive and computer sciences. Despite their varying emphases and definitions regarding the meaning of the concept, all the perspectives analysing

concepts agree that they are kinds of mental representations that categorise the world for us, creating order to an otherwise chaotic reality (Machery 2005; Murphy 2002, p. 5; Smith & Medin 1981, p. 8). As suggested by the cognitive metaphor theory in linguistics, we classify the world through our embodiment, so concepts are part of our experience as neural beings (Johnson 2017; Lakoff & Johnson 1999, p. 19). In addition to their embodied nature, conceptualisations and their linguistic forms are adapted, by growing as a member of a specific community and culture (Larjavaara 2007, p. 152; Piccinini 2011, p. 179). Consequently, the connection between conceptualisation and culture brings conceptual systems to the fore, firstly, in any attempt to study and represent cultures and cultural artefacts, one of the central ideas of the museum, and secondly, in any analysis of the past, present or future museum as a cultural institution and artefact in and of itself.

The sociocognitive approach to terminology describes concepts, the items which need definitions in a terminological sense, as units of understanding, through which it is possible to observe and dissect the interaction between the human mind, language and the world (Temmerman 2000, p. 73). Especially regarding research, it is crucial to acknowledge that boundaries of knowledge are the same as boundaries of concepts and the language used to designate them (Kivinen & Piiroinen 2008, p. 207; Raatikainen 2008, p. 11, p. 13). This does not insinuate that scholarly thinking is predetermined or delimited by some inherent and fixed conceptual frames. On the contrary, conceptual creativity is an essential trigger for intellectual innovativeness and paradigm shifts (Bal 2002).

Although language composes one aspect of the concept, concepts should not be conflated with words and language. The multidimensionality of the concept can be represented within the framework of the so-called semiotic triangle, as three aspects of the concept (Karlsson 1994; Ogden & Richards 1923):

- The mind, or meaning, which is sometimes compared with the concept itself. The concept is its meaning.
- Language, or linguistic expression (word, name, definition and sign), which designates the concept. Pictures or images are also signs, and thus belong to the sphere of language.[3]
- The world, meaning a referent, is the object or objects of the world to which the concept refers.

Discourse can be understood as the home of the concept, where its meaning emerges in relation to other concepts in the network of a conceptual system. In everyday language, discourse usually refers to a discussion, but as a scholarly

3. In terminological work, the mere designation is often called a term, which is then the linguistic form of the concept. Designations vary in different languages, and even in the same language there can be synonymous designations. That is why the starting point for terminological work is always a concept – the meaning of the term.

term, it can be defined as a coherent perspective that guides our communication and interaction. As such, discourse composes a context-specific framework for making sense of some aspect of reality (van Leeuwen 2014). Since concepts, including scientific categories, are bodily and perceptually based, metaphorical models link a language system to the world of experience and functioning of the embodied mind, our cognition and conceptual system (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 1980; Temmerman 2000). Language can thus be defined as a resource for discourses that both reflect and affect the social context in which they are created, maintained and reproduced (Fairclough 1995, pp. 40–41; Verschueren 2009, pp. 19–20).

Consequently, and in contrast to the understandings and criticisms of discourse as solely linguistic, and thus exterior to material reality, the concept of discourse can be regarded as a multi-modal, multi-semiotic and historically contingent social practice (van Leeuwen 2014). While the central role of language in human interaction and communication has to be acknowledged, the multi-modality of discourse puts alternative modes of meaning-making under analysis as well: how concepts and discourses emerge through embodiments, visualisations, physical constructions, technologies and practices. Aligning with the embodied origin of our conceptual systems, Karen Barad's (2003, 2007) theory of agential realism offers one thought-provoking theoretical framework to back up the analysis of the multimodality of concepts and discourses. In Barad's account, meaning and materiality are not separate and separable, but co-emergent in the process of creative becoming. Barad states that concepts and things do not have determinate boundaries, properties or meanings apart from their mutual intra-actions; therefore, meaning and materiality emerge in a continuous materialising performance of the world. Also, we are all part of it: "We do not obtain knowledge by standing outside of the world; we know because we are of the world" (Barad 2007, p. 185). Barad refers to this as onto-epistemology – the study of practices of knowing in being.

According to Foucault (1971, 1969), the formation of utterances in a discourse is regulated by practices of discourse, the set of socially established ways to communicate. Practices of discourse direct us to write or speak about things in a specific manner, defining what is normal and accepted interaction in particular situations (see also Fairclough 1992). Classifications and conceptualisations can be regarded as constitutive elements of discursive practices that regulate our communication. Besides language and texts, these rules can concern material reality, institutional structures and the organisation of people, tools and architecture, which can all express the prevailing practices of discourse. Foucault (1971) also described discourse as "violence against things", as he states that it is the discursive practice that guides the way we communicate, but it also alters the subject of the communication. Practices of discourse thus convey a specific ideology or worldview composing and producing ways to perceive reality and its subjects, objects, actors and their relationships. In an academic context, this worldview can be compared to a paradigm or a particular combination of theoretical and philosophical commitments.

Hence, discourse, supported by its distinct conceptual system derived from the classifications of the world, both constrains and enables what can be said, as well as how the world can be represented and signified, constituted and constructed with meanings (Fairclough 1992). It also defines what counts as meaningful statements or knowledge, referring to both the subject of knowledge and the conventions of producing knowledge (ibid., pp. 127–128). Foucault (1969, 1971) furthermore claims that the anonymous rules that guide the practices of discourse are too obvious to be detected by the people who are creating and maintaining a discourse. The action, effects or ideology of discourse can, therefore, only be examined and revealed through consistent and systematic analysis.

Nonetheless, conducting research on key concepts and the official discourse of archaeological heritage management in Finland (Enqvist 2016), I discovered features that at first glance seem to question the coercive nature and almost independent agency of discourse, as claimed by Foucault. For instance, some of the heritage officials I interviewed were both conscious of and displeased about the fact that institutional discourse concerning archaeological heritage twined so intensively around the Antiquities Act, presenting mainly juridical arguments for the protection of archaeological sites. Also, the dissonance between the conceptions written in official texts and the reflections archaeologists expressed in personal interviews was evident. In the interviews, the archaeologists articulated far more complex views and versatile understandings of the key concepts than they did in the texts they had produced while representing the institution of heritage governance. Those working as heritage officials considered the restricting of the concept of heritage merely to the material objects as a pragmatic, conscious choice they had to make, to simplify communication with their interest groups, especially when they were dealing with laypeople (Enqvist 2014; 2016, pp. 266–267).

Although the awareness of the interviewees seemed, to some extent, contrary to Foucault's assumptions about the conductive and coercive power of discourse, one might argue that this is how discourses work. They produce and maintain a world view that includes conceptual classifications, identities and roles – an ideology – that composes a coherent framework in which some choices appear to be more practical, logical, correct or even necessary than others. From this perspective, they would not really be choices at all, but more like explanations produced retrospectively for the choices the discourse makes for its participants. Besides, an authoritarian work culture, as well as controversies, tensions and insecurities caused by a lack of resources and work opportunities, have for a long time characterised the social context of Finnish archaeology. These detrimental characteristics may have created a social environment where archaeologists, especially those working in heritage management, have been likely to exercise strong self-control in order to preserve and protect not only archaeological heritage, but also the conventional discourse within which conceptualisations, such as the given meaning of the concept of heritage, are constructed and represented (Enqvist 2016).

The museum as a classifying house

While museums have transformed, adjusted and re-invented their principles, policies and practices in recent decades, the museum institution has not abandoned its original function as an instrument for characterising the world by cataloguing. The process of classifying, i.e., creating categories through distinctions and combinations, concerns not only the artefacts in museum collections, but also the museum itself as an institution, the people governing, researching, curating and visiting the displays and the physical and organisational structures, buildings and environments involved in composing the museum.

The primary questions regarding classification processes arise from the prevailing understandings of the museum and its purpose as one of the cultural institutions serving contemporary society: How do we define the museum compared to other cultural institutions or memory organisations, e.g., to libraries and archives?[4] How do we categorise different kinds of museums? (see also Oikari and Ranki, this volume) What kinds of objects are appropriate to collect and display in a museum in the first place, i.e., what makes up the heritage that a museum is supposed to preserve and represent? The distinctions we make answering these questions, such as the conceptualisations of nature and culture or art and ethnography, also turn into materialised manifestations, which both reflect and create a societal and cultural context with a particular spatial and temporal order, identity and interaction (Gordon-Walker 2019; Hooper-Greenhill 1992, p. 6; Macdonald 1996). In the following, I examine some examples of the processes and applications with which world views and ideologies embedded in classifications and conceptual systems are woven into museological practices.

The concept of ideology refers here to a general system of thinking which consists of all ontological, epistemological and ethical conceptions and beliefs about the world, not just consciously conducted political or religious ideologies. As an analytical tool, ideology connects the analysis of conceptual systems and discourses to the human mind, and the activities of individuals and communities, guided by ideologies (Fairclough 2004, pp. 9–10, 1989; Heikkinen 1999; Verschueren 2011). The underlying presumption for this analysis states that a conceptual system reflects and produces ideological meanings, i.e, elementary conceptions and categorisations concerning good and bad, right and wrong or us and them. Ideologies thus define how communities themselves, their membership or relationships to other communities or how the social hierarchies, values and rules of a particular community are represented (Heikkinen 1999, pp. 95–97). At the same time, ideologies serve power by legitimising existing social relations and positions of power (Fairclough 1989, p. 2; Heikkinen 1999,

4. It is noteworthy that one of the major targets of the opponents regarding the proposal for the new museum definition (ICOM 2019) is the proposal's claimed inability to catch the distinguishing characteristics of the museum in relation to other cultural institutions, such as cultural centres, libraries or laboratories, or to take into account the "extraordinary variety" of museums (Noce 2019).

p. 94). The conceptual systems adopted, produced and maintained by museums are not an exception in this regard.

Museums are constituted within the prevailing epistemological context. Therefore, they enable different possibilities of knowing, depending on the context, rules and structures in place at the time (Hooper-Greenhill 1992, p. 191). The emergence of the museum in the nineteenth century is linked with the development of modern ways of seeing and knowing the world, through the eyes of the detached viewer, depicted as ordered and organised representation, as "world-as-exhibition" (Bennett 1995; Macdonald 1998, p. 10; Mitchell 1991, p. 13, p. 19). Embodying the close connection between knowledge and power (Foucault 1980), museums were thus places where political power could operate to maintain the existing social order by representing the newly created nations and categorisations of people based on cultural, racial and class differences as facts and knowledge with tangible evidence, i.e., museum objects (Bennett 1998; Macdonald 1998, p. 11; Mitchell 1991, p. 7). Museum collections also offered relevant source material for research. Consequently, the arrangement of objects and displays in museums aimed to manifest the profound principles and evolutionary order revealed by science. Museums were hence not conceptualised just as containers of scientific facts, but as important actors and educators in spreading the scientific world view to the uneducated masses (Bennett 1998; Macdonald 1998, pp. 12–13).

Accordingly, this two-fold purpose of the museum, in addition to stressing knowledge as the museum's primary product, also included and required an ideological categorisation of people engaged in museum activities. This created the role of experts/educators, whose responsibility was to produce, save and share knowledge, and non-experts/learners, whose task was to obtain and acquire that knowledge. Experts, researchers and museum professionals, further classified by their disciplinary expertise, were thus granted privileged access to examine collections as their research object, as well as authority to define what knowledge is and how it is supposed to be represented.

Besides the division of people into the roles of active communicator and passive receiver, the disciplinary perspectives, with their classifications and conceptualisations, are elementary to the categorical legacies with which museums must work today (Gordon-Walker 2019). Also, they are focal instruments for so-called authorised heritage discourse (AHD), a theoretical concept coined by the archaeologist and heritage scholar Laurajane Smith (2012b, 2006), which refers to the official, traditional and mainly Western way of understanding and defining heritage in contemporary societies. Created, maintained and reproduced within the network of national and international heritage organisations, their institutional practices and key texts, AHD privileges expertise and represents heritage as an official canon of sites and artefacts that sustain the narratives of nation, class and science (Smith 2006; on Finnish AHD, see Enqvist 2016; Linkola 2015; Vahtikari 2013).

Research knowledge always includes classifications, which serve their aim if they successfully ascertain and reflect real differences and similarities in the world. A famous example of such a successful scientific classification is the periodic table of the elements (Dupré 2006). In effect, classification serves a particular purpose at all times. Different purposes, such as research and collection management, will motivate and produce different classifications. However, as Hooper-Greenhill (1992, pp. 4–5) has noted, classification in the museum often takes place within an "ethos of obviousness". This note aligns with my conclusions (Enqvist 2016) on Finnish AHD regarding archaeological heritage, i.e., it represents the world turned into indisputable and naturalised conceptual categories, as well as into quantitative measurements – exact numbers reflecting scientific rigour. Things in this world are divided into taxonomy-like categories and classes, which are then appointed, by the practice of naming, to specific expertise and experts. For instance, the category of archaeological heritage is defined as particular kinds of material entities whose physical integrity, interpretation and representation archaeologists, the experts, control as owners and guardians of heritage (see also, Smith 2006). The world, classified and named in a certain way, is thus taken as a circumstance-like condition, almost as a self-organised system following some natural order (Enqvist 2016, p. 265). Furthermore, this epistemic certainty does not concern merely the classification of physical reality and material things, but also the categories based on values and evaluations related to artefact types or individual artefacts (ibid., pp. 272–273).

The categorisation of disciplines itself is profoundly connected to one of the most pervasive distinctions in museums, i.e., the distinction between nature and culture. This distinction is based on the Western philosophical tradition and the Enlightenment, but was established even more firmly throughout the nineteenth century with the emergence of modern museums (Berger 1980). According to Caitlin Gordon-Walker (2019), museums have been instrumental in representing and reproducing the nature/culture distinction through their material collections and exhibitions, paralleling the emergence of academic disciplines. This division into separate departments, or even separate institutions, devoted respectively to natural history and human culture, came with more formalised strategies for the interpretation and care of museum collections. Understood through taxonomic systems, as a scientifically ordered entity, nature was thus conceptualised as more knowable, something which could then be mobilised for various purposes. For example, the classification of indigenous peoples as scientific specimens which belong to the realm of the natural, enabled the legitimising of colonial practices, such as slavery, the appropriation of territory and the establishment of laws and institutions intended to civilize indigenous populations. The scientific mastery of the natural world is also connected to the technological and physical mastery over what was later conceptualised as natural resources to be exploited or, with the emergence of the conservation movement, protected (Gordon-Walker 2019, pp. 251–252).

Although there is no uniformity with regard to the detailed terminology of heritage governance between countries (Ahmad 2006), the current categorisation of

institutionally managed cultural and natural heritage within AHD is internationally agreed to include tangible, intangible, digital and environments (Council of the European Union 2014; UNESCO 2003a; 2003b; 1972). This categorisation relates not only to the nature/culture division, but also to Cartesian mind/body dualism (aka substance dualism), stating that mind and matter, the mental and the physical, are ontologically distinct substances (Robinson 2017). In feminist thinking, the opposition between mind and body have been correlated with an opposition between male and female, with the female regarded as trapped in her bodily existence at the expense of rationality (Lennon 2019). As the philosopher Kathleen Lennon (ibid.) notes, such enmeshment in "corporeality" has further been attributed to colonised bodies and the lower classes (Alcoff 2006, on categories reflecting the bourgeoisie gender system; see also Sarantola-Weiss, this volume).

Nationalism, imperialism, colonialism, cultural elitism and ethnic and social discrimination represent kinds of grievances, societal control and governmentality of which critical heritage studies is aiming to neutralise and deconstruct through critical analysis and redefinition of heritage (Smith 2012a, pp. 534–535). Consequently, rethinking, recognising and dissolving modernist dichotomies, such as the division of nature and culture, mind and matter or the human and non-human worlds, has been claimed as one of the strategies of critical heritage studies, and a vital presumption in novel research perspectives based on posthumanism and new materialism (González-Ruibal 2013; Harrison 2013, pp. 44–45; Sterling 2020). In terms of museum theory and practices, a posthuman reconceptualisation of research and documentation procedures could support the analysis and description of objects as "thingness" and "socio-material compositions", as suggested and demonstrated by museum and digital heritage scholar Fiona Cameron (2018, p. 352). Nevertheless, the categorical legacies of Western science and thinking will undoubtedly continue to outline the organisation and practices of museums, as well as other cultural institutions dealing with heritage, long into the future.

Interpreting cultural heritage with ontologies and vocabularies

As demonstrated in this chapter, museums and memory organisations have a long tradition of using classifications, conceptualisations, taxonomies, term lists and controlled vocabularies to organise and interpret their collections (Hyvönen 2012, p. 57; Parry, Poole & Pratty 2010, pp. 96–97). Ross Parry, Nick Poole and Jon Pratty, museum scholars with expertise in digital heritage (2010, p. 96), elaborate further that "semantic thinking" has always been an integral part of museums; the ongoing act of making meaning with and among collected objects defines museums today and has throughout their history. In other words, museums are places where "we give or reinforce meanings to things" (ibid.). In recent decades, the automated and systematic processing of computer technology has come to support and augment this semantic project of museums. The application of the

principles and technologies of Linked Data and the Semantic Web is the newest approach to address the problems of managing and publishing syntactically and semantically heterogeneous, multilingual and highly interlinked Cultural Heritage (CH) data produced by memory organisations. This development has led to the creation of national and international portals, such as Europeana, to open data repositories, such as the Linked Open Data Cloud and to publications involving-linked library data in the USA, Europe and Asia (Hyvönen 2012, p. vi).

Ontologies, i.e., formal and explicit specifications of a shared conceptualisation, such as domain-specific gazetteers, classifications, concept hierarchies and controlled vocabularies, are integral to the structure and development of the Semantic Web. Ontologies can be processed with algorithms, so they are used for facilitating and harmonising metadata descriptions, for fostering interoperability across different organisations and domains and for data linking (Hyvönen 2012, pp. 57–62). As explicit representations of conceptualisations and conceptual systems, ontologies offer a particular, fixed and ordered selection of meanings with which objects, or their metadata, can be precise and annotated, and thus enriched. In Finland, the National Library maintains Finto, a Finnish thesaurus and ontology service, which enables the publication and utilisation of vocabularies, ontologies and classifications. The Finto service also includes the Ontology for Museum Domain and Applied Arts (MAO/TAO) combining three different ontologies, one of which is composed, maintained and updated for the description of museum objects by the Finnish Heritage Agency (Kouki & Suhonen 2017).

In the most optimistic aspirations, the Semantic Web enables global memory organisations (museums, libraries and archives) to share their collections and contents online, as open, semantically rich and connected data, with new kinds of intelligent semantic search and recommendation services (Hyvönen 2012, p. 2). Moreover, as Parry, Poole & Pratty (2010, p. 103) note, the principle of the Semantic Web to connect meaning and object resonates with museums' long-time objectives to define, classify and present. However, regarding cultural heritage data and the Semantic Web, there lie some dilemmas to solve and obstacles to overcome before this vision can become reality, if ever. The biggest problems are caused by the fact that, unlike digitisation or cataloguing, the Semantic Web is not a coherent practice or set of practices. Therefore, it is difficult for museums to make informed decisions about which technologies, platforms, models and methodologies to use (Parry, Poole & Pratty 2010, p. 104). One of the fundamental challenges to the ability of museums to make their collections semantically rich is the same lack of time and resources, which had slowed down the actual cataloguing process even before the arrival of new technologies (ibid., p. 102). The composing, maintaining and updating of ontologies and vocabularies needed in the process is not a simple task either, but requires a considerable amount of person-years and expertise, both in substance and conceptual analysis.

In addition to the practical and economic challenges, the practices of meaning-making involved in applying new technologies raise complex issues and

questions that are more deeply rooted in the foundations of the museum institution and its purpose. How do we ensure that the evolving practices and technologies, such as ontologies, align and support the paradigms, perspectives and ideals chosen for future museums? In what ways might they transform the museum institution, or the ways museum objects are interpreted, understood and accessed? (Cameron 2010, p. 80) As Cameron (ibid., p. 81) argues, collection management databases are, after all, the primary tool with which museums document, organise and interpret their objects, and at the same time, define and communicate their significance and value. Cameron stresses her point by referring to historian and museologist Gaynor Kavanagh's (1990) acknowledgement that it is in the individual object records that conventional and totalising practices take root. How an object is acquired and documented will, to a considerable extent, determine how it will be understood in the future.

Concerning the semantic future for museums, there are at least two different versions, according to Parry, Poole & Pratty (2010, p. 99). Firstly, there will be an "extreme vision of the hard Semantic Web", with prescribed and persistent ontologies based on existing collection standards and term lists predicated by the professional community of experts. Secondly, there will be a vision of a "soft Semantic Web", with user-defined ontologies and community-created solutions, composed by several communities of interest, also outside the museum institution. The vision of a softer future emerges from justified suspicions concerning the possibility to construct universally applicable ontologies, instead of localised, variable and liquid conceptualisations more suitable to capture the dynamic and contextual nature of any conceptual system.

There is, indeed, empirical evidence showing that the difficulty of prescribing categories that can be applied universally, i.e., the problem of conceptual fit, is particularly evident concerning access to and documentation of Maori and Aboriginal collections (Cameron 2010, p. 88). This observation supports the idea of considering and exploring alternative classification systems that acknowledge, for instance, indigenous knowledge models. Also, as addressed already by Hooper-Greenhill (1992, p. 7, pp. 194–196), instead of having some essential, fixed identity, the identity and meaning of material things are constituted in each case according to the articulations of the epistemological framework, the field of use, the gaze, technologies and power practices. This polysemy of objects thus means that an object's meaning and its classification is not objective, self-evident or singular, but situated and contextual (Macdonald 2006, p. 6; Robinson 2019, p. 33). Accordingly, the imposition of an artificial order and fixed categories in acquisition, documentation or object records is ill-suited to the new ways of seeing objects as polysemic entities, with fluctuating and varying meanings, open to interdisciplinary interpretations (Cameron 2010, p. 84; see also Häyhä et al., this volume).

The aforementioned idea of fluctuating and contextually constructed meanings also aligns with the most recent critical understandings and theorisations of heritage, as a cultural process composed of a series of discursive practices and

implicated in power relations and ideological constructs, i.e., a performative process of meaning-making, of doing instead of being (Harrison 2013, p. 113; Harvey 2001). At the same time, it is evident that there are in fact several concepts of heritage, the meanings of which do not have strict boundaries (on the history of heritage definitions, see, e.g., Davison 2008). Instead, they demonstrate deeply intertwined, overlapping and interacting aspects of the phenomena called heritage (Enqvist 2014; 2016). However, only one of these meanings is currently chosen to characterise Cultural Heritage regarding the development of Semantic Web technologies: the official definition, which classifies heritage within the categories of cultural and natural or tangible and intangible heritage (Hyvönen 2012, p. 1). While concentrating and building on these fixed categories, this conceptualisation misses the actual process of heritagisation, the framing and practice through which heritage is created and maintained.

Conclusion

The community of museum and heritage professionals can be considered a specialised epistemic community that shares a knowledge system and a discourse, which is organised and structured by classifications, conceptualisations and concepts, the units of understanding. Any analysis and redefinition of the societal meaning, goals and purpose of the museum institution thus require analysing and deconstructing the prevailing implicit and explicit classifications, but also the categorical legacies that frame and guide museum theory and practice.

Museums have played an essential role in creating and legitimising the scientific framework for classifying and conceptualising, for instance, the categories of nature and culture, to further support the ideals of empire, nation, gender, industry or conservation (Bennett 2004; Gordon-Walker 2019; Yanni 1999). However, this also applies to the idea of human exceptionalism in regard to other species, as well as to our detachment from nature and the environment. Challenging the existing order can enable us to be not only more aware of the manifold implications of classifications and categorisations, but also to think, literally, outside the box to create novel and innovative perspectives, and to facilitate a constructive and critical dialogue that could increase our understanding of ourselves and others. In other words, we should consciously work to be aware of the existence and the ways in which particular concepts and discourses construct our social reality and conventions, which are transmuted into an inevitable and naturalised way of organising the world (Waterton, Smith & Campbell 2006, p. 343).

Nevertheless, museums are stuck with classifications – every display is organised and constructed on a particular conceptual system, the order for which it also has the potential to re-create and redefine. Classifying concepts and specific terminologies applied to museum collections and displays reflect understandings of general concepts and profound conceptions, such as the nature of time or humanity. Therefore, conceptual analysis can serve as a useful tool for much-needed self-reflection on ontological, epistemological and ethical commitments behind

representations created at museums. As concepts and their meanings associated with museum objects are plural, cross-disciplinary, alternative and sometimes conflicting (Cameron 2010, p. 86), the role of the laypeople, museum visitors and collection users should also be recognised and appreciated in the cycle of knowledge and meaning-making.

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